

MAKING SENSE OF A RUIN: NINETEENTH-CENTURY
GENTILE IMAGES OF THE OLD JEWISH CEMETERY
IN PRAGUE

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This study analyzes texts that revolve around the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague. Specifically, it focuses on travelogues and travel guides by Bohemian German-language authors, mostly from the first half of the nineteenth century (Herloßsohn, Klutschak), and comparable Czech texts from the latter decades of that century (Svátek, Jirásek, Herrmann). While the former tend to a distanced, if not excorporating, attitude towards the Jewish minority, the latter reveal a gesture of incorporation. These differences correlate with specific cultural and political agendas of the periods and groups under consideration. While German-language texts before 1848 show a general exclusionist quality – Herloßsohn reads the Cemetery as a ruin that illustrates the petrified nature of Jews and their religion – Czech texts reveal an empathy that is ultimately linked to a very specific political agenda, namely the Czech “struggle for Bohemian Jews,” a phenomenon that is characteristic of Czech nationalism of the late nineteenth century. As a result, Czech authors typically have no problems incorporating the Cemetery into Prague’s history and topography.