

REVIEWS

KONEČNÝ, Michal. *13 snů o svobodě. Osudy židovského Brna ve třech stoletích.* (Thirteen Dreams of Freedom. The Fates of Jewish Brno Across Three Centuries). 192 stran. 2024. Host.

The city of Brno is associated by the broader public with the Jewish community primarily through the villas of prosperous entrepreneurs linked to the textile industry at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet the full history of Brno's once-thriving Jewish community is far less widely known. The book *Thirteen Dreams of Freedom* seeks to provide a more authentic representation of this topic by examining the lives of individuals who shaped the history of Jewish Brno from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

Through thirteen life stories, each associated with a month of the Jewish calendar, the book describes various episodes in the lives of Jewish inhabitants, whose destinies were intertwined with the Moravian metropolis. The book narrates the story of the Jewish merchant Moses Dobruschka and his descendants, who benefited from the issuance of Emperor Joseph II's Edict of Tolerance, which permitted Jews to own land, pursue formal education, and engage in any trade. It further examines the abolition of ghettos and the early activities of the Jewish community following its emancipation in the second half of the nineteenth century, including the construction of a representative synagogue and the public role of the politician and merchant Julius Gomperz. The narrative also addresses the life of Baruch Jakob Placzek, the rabbi of Brno and later the chief rabbi of Moravia, who was a key initiator in the development of Jewish education in Brno; the patron and supporter of the arts Arnold Skutetzky; the architect Ernst Wiesner; the human-rights advocate Nora Lustigová; the painter Oskar Spielmann; the communist politician Otto Šling; and the rabbi Richard Feder, whose life is currently presented in an exhibition housed within the interior of Brno's Arnold Villa.

As a significant contribution of the book could be considered its elaboration of the diverse life stories of the Jewish population connected with Brno, highlighting the broad range of their life trajectories—shaped by their talents, professional achievements, and, regrettably, by the persecutions they endured under nondemocratic regimes. The structure of the narrative in the individual chapters also deserves recognition, as the author succeeds in effectively interweaving the various life histories with major social events and prevailing historical trends. The book acquaints the reader, for instance, with the consequences of the French Revolution; it highlights the significant role played by the emancipation of the Jewish community and the constitutional order of Austrian empire; it reflects the workers' unrest in late-nineteenth-century Brno and the related labor movement and social questions; and it addresses modern architecture, the communist coup of February 1948, the decolonization

of Algeria, and, of course, the events associated with both world wars. The book's graphic design also deserves appreciation. Each chapter is supplemented with illustrations in a uniform color scheme. Concluding section of every chapter includes photographs and additional materials related to the specific topic.

The book thus offers the reader a coherent perspective on the winding historical trajectory of the Jewish community in Brno. In this context, it also provides an essential overview of key social tendencies that shaped public life more broadly, while exerting specific impacts on the Jewish population. At the same time, the fates of the individuals portrayed in the book serve as a source of inspiration, reflecting the many achievements they attained in artistic and scientific fields and, not least, their contributions to the spiritual life of this region.

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