The texts compiled here were selected for their support of a larger topic, namely *Jewish influences on Eastern Europe from the turn of the twentieth century through World War II, particularly as they relate to Prague and to the author Franz Kafka*. Information represented considers regional historical and mystical information as influencing the political, social, and religious climate. A few key texts on the narrower tropic of Franz Kafka have been identified. Prague is the geographical center of Europe, and for over a thousand years, all roads moved across its territory. It is documented as one of the oldest civilized regions, became a center for intellectual and scientific thought, and a home to displaced Jews. Following World War I, creative artistic activity flourished, and the author Franz Kafka played a major role in the modern and post modern canon.

Special appreciation for the development of this document goes to Sylvia M. Meloche, Outreach Coordinator for the Center for Russian and East European Studies, Elliott Ginsburg, Associate Professor of Jewish Thought, Scott Spector, Department of History, Professor Ralph Williams, Department of English Language and Literature, and Janet I. Crane, Senior Associate Librarian, The University of Michigan; each gave of their time and offered me guidance and insightful direction.

An Annotated Bibliography

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This 288 page volume is a catalogue for the traveling museum exhibition of Judaic objects from the State Jewish Museum in Prague. Philip Morris, Inc. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer writes, “‘L’Chain!’ That ageless Hebrew toast—‘To Life!’—comes from a people who have survived for 3500 years and more. In the works of art and artifact in this exhibition, the irrepressible life force that has sustained a people bursts forth, a tribute to the indomitable human spirit” (14). Among its five sections researched and written by various authors is “Autonomy and Independence: The Historical Legacy of Czech Jewry” by Hillel J. Kieval, which discusses the Prague Jewish community from the Middle Ages, through the Renaissance, the Modern Community, and “the Holocaust and Beyond” (47-109).

One should either be a work of art or wear one,” proclaimed Oscar Wilde at the end of the nineteenth century. “I am made of literature, I am nothing else, and cannot be anything else, Franz Kafka proclaimed a brief decade later. Between these two claims lies the largely unexplored region in which the European decadent movement turned into a modest avant-garde.

In this original historical study, Mark Anderson explores Kafka’s early dandyism, his interest in fashion, literary decadence and the “superficial” spectacle of modern urban life as well as his subsequent repudiation of these phenomena in forging a literary identity as the isolated, otherworldly “poet” of modern alienation. Rather than post a break between these two personae, Anderson charts historical continuities between the young Kafka and the author of The Metamorphosis and The Trial. The book demonstrates how clothing functions as a semi-private code of meaning in his literary works and the extent to which the anesthetist notion of becoming the work of art haunts Kafka’s conception of writing throughout his life. The result is a startling unconventional portrait of Kafka and Prague at the turn of the century, involving such issues as Jugendstil aesthetics, Otto Weininger’s “egoless” woman, the Vienesse critique of architectural ornament, the clothing-reform movement, anti-Semitism and the question of Jewish-German writing (Cover).


A concise series of essays that covers the topics of Jewish assimilation, anti-Semitism, Zionism, Yiddish culture, and Eastern Judaism’s political revival as related to Franz Kafka’s life and writings as a function of political and cultural forces in his time. Kafka’s claim for the general validity and importance of his work was that it represented the negativity of his time.

“That Kafka was not immune to such tendencies emerges all too clearly from the disturbing passages of his letter and diaries…. His self-critical attitude was a common feature of Western European Jews in a period of extreme collective self-doubt—a period in which they were still subject to allegation of ritual murder and physical assault..., were vilified as ‘bedbugs,’ dogs,’ ‘apes,’ and ‘rats by the Czech nationalist majority—but were without the support of a vital religious community. Assimilation, conversion to Christianity, and suicide were all too common reactions.” (Introduction, pg. 9)


This edition of Gershom Scholem’s work on the history of Jewish mysticism highlights Scholem’s position on the pluralistic character of Jewish theology, the place of the Kabbalah in debates over Zionism versus assimilation, and the interpretation of Franz Kafka as a Jewish writer.

Based on an exhibition created for the Jewish Museum, New York, this complex compilation of information and images of the golem legend explores and examines how and why a legendary theme develops and how it is used over the centuries. This volume includes a “Forward” by Isaac Bashevis Singer and essays by Moshe Idel, Emily D. Bilski, and Elfi Ledig.


Originally printed in 1917, this text is a compilation of the Golem legends “fitted for the enlightenment of those non-Jewish circles who still believe in the use of blood by the Jews” (12).


This text includes twenty-one articles and essays from a variety of perspectives and are compiled to give understanding to the experience and identity of Jewish men and meaning to men’s Jewishness and masculinity.


This book on angelology from the Judaic, Islamic, and Christian traditions includes in its discussion metaphors of angels in the writings of Dante, Rilke, Kafka, and others.


This volume is based on an exhibition initially created for the Centre de Cultura Contemporania de Barcelona (1999) and then installed at The Jewish Museum, New York (2002-03). As summary to this work, Helen Goldsmith Menschel Director Joan Rosenbaum writes, “*The City of K.* offers a unique opportunity to delve into the vertiginous world of Kafka’s imagination particularly with respect to his relationship to Judaism and his ties to the Yiddish Theater of Prague. With its stunning exhibition design, *The City of K.* presents documentary material, photographs, and first editions of books….The insightful essays…move readers to return to Kafka’s fiction and to reinterpret his work in light of the influence of Prague and its Jewish writers and dramatists” (n. pag.).


In this study, the author unravels a conviction that Jews throughout the world are considered as conspiring to ruin and dominate the rest of mankind. This myth, which takes root in the Middle Ages, is the under-current of anti-Semitism and Hitler’s rationale for the Holocaust.


The messages and articles in this document reflect the close association shared between the Bohemian Czechs and the Jews of Czechoslovakia. Written as reflective first person accounts, the authors artfully describe and discuss various aspects of the relationships prior to and through World War II. Included among the articles are “Bohemian Jewry in the Nineteenth Century,” by Hugo Bergmann; “Spiritual Sources of Czechoslovak Jewry” by Friedrich Thieberger; and “The Bohemian Jew: An Attempt at Characterization” by Felix Weltsch. Articles written in either Czech or English.


Changes in religious conviction, family life, and economic security are topics considered in this collection of essays centering on the East European Jews in crisis, challenge, and creativity from the end of the eighteenth century until the end of the Second World War. Preceding the essays, Dawidowicz included background notes on the authors.


This text begins with a discussion of the irrational views made against Jews as shaped by Hitler and then explains the national response toward German nationalism and anti-Semitism, couching its presence in the current anti-Semitic sentiments. Dawidowicz further develops the discussion through a description of the life of the Jew in the ghettos of Eastern Europe, a complex variety of institutions in place long before the war, and argues that the Jewish experiences left them unequipped to recognize the process undertaken toward their extermination.

In the nineteenth century Czechoslovakian region, superstitious anti-Semitism kept Jews and Christians strange to each other, and Thomas Masaryk, the eventual founder of the Czech Republic, believed the blood lies he was told of the Jews in school and in church until he left home for his studies. Much of this book is devoted to the struggle with the ritual murder superstition.


This book contains two volumes of literature, the mystical autobiography of Rabbi Hayyim Vital, *Book of Visions*, and Rabbi Yizhak Isaac Safrin of Komarno’s *Book of Secrets*. Safrin was “an important Hasidic master of the nineteenth century … who saw himself as a potential messianic figure who had direct access to the mysteries of heaven (Forward xii).


An historical account of the city of the one thousand year old Prague generously supported with 147 illustrations seeks to unearth the “specific atmosphere which is transformed in Kafka’s works into an expressive field of poetic tension” (8).


Although it is possible to understand the world without its Jews, Gay argues, “it is impossible to understand its Jews without their larger world” (Preface ix). Gay develops his argument of Jew in historical, social, and political context through this collection of his pre-published essays that focus on the German as Jew trauma.


The topics of race, illness, and gender are developed on the person of Kafka. He is the Jewish patient.


This study is a Kabbalistic discussion of the historical significance of the Sabbath from the late twelfth to the early sixteenth centuries. The topic rests on three factors: the centrality of the Sabbath within classical Judaism, the centrality of the Sabbath within the Kabbalistic mythos, and the Kabbalists’ influence on the popular understanding of the Shabbat in later Judaism.


This text of Martin Buber’s, includes twelve lectures divided into the early and late periods of his life. The first set of addresses deal with the phenomenon of Judaism as a
religious reality, and the first three of these were presented in Prague in 1909-11 to the Jewish student organization Bar Kochba. Published in 1911 as “Three Addresses on Judaism,” they emphasize essence over observance of Orthodox Judaism teachings.


This discussion of the Golem stories explains their context to history and includes metaphysical interpretation.


In this text Grozinger compares particular writings and themes of Kafka’s with the writings of various Kabbalists and Hasidim.


This volume of essays on the Kafka debate include those by authors Camus and Buber.


This volume rich with photographs, generously laced with quotations from Franz Kafka, provides a glimpse of the public and private places that shaped the author and provides insights into the enchantment of Prague, situated beneath the shadow of the castle.


Guistino’s careful study of local politics and architecture in Prague around 1900 centers on the clearance project of the Jewish ghetto as central to the effects of modernization, anti-Semitism, and fragmentation of middle class politics.


This collection of essays carefully explores Kafka’s texts and examines their images, metaphors, events, and language. An early chapter in the collection sets the context with Johannes Urdazil’s “Kafka’s Prague.”

The Hebrew language and its magical and mystical powers conferred an elite status on the leadership who understood it. This text discusses the story of the Golem from within an historical and intellectual frame and focuses on the techniques necessarily understood to give it creation.


A study of mystical Judaism of Eastern Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that significantly links ecstasy and magic as two phases of spiritual development. The text is carefully constructed on foundational ideas of Jewish mystic leaders, Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem.


Beginning in January 1968, a Slovak Communist and new party leader, Alexander DubCek, began to introduce sweeping reforms to make the government more democratic in a movement later termed “Prague Spring.” When this paper was written (30 June 1968), the citizens of Czechoslovakia had enjoyed a few months of independence which were lost in August 1968 with invasion of Soviet troops. This Paper recounts Czechoslovakian Jews optimism of “changes in the country’s political, economic and social life and in its foreign policy, [which] have aspects of particular Jewish interest” (1). Written with a particular focus on the impact this event had on the Jewish community, this document reflects the strong support Czech Jews offered their host country.


“The Torah,” designed to regulate activity of a Jew’s everyday life, is the basis for Jewish mysticism, and in this work Joffen sets out to prove that the Jewish mysticism which underlies Kafka’s work produces within the reader an almost religious experience. To omit references to Jews and religion, had the potential, for Kafka, to obliterate the Law, yet it pursued him. This text deconstructs the mystical source of Kafka’s material.


Johnson’s single volume spans a four thousand year history of the Jews. Divided into seven parts, he initiates his quest by asking “Who was Abraham,” then proceeds to develop the response with clarity and carefully documented research. Over half the book is devoted to the Modern period, especially to the last two centuries, the Enlightenment, the Holocaust and Zionism.

Kaplan’s book includes the Hebrew text along with clear commentary, explanation, and many illustrations.


This biography is a vivid and authoritative picture of the historical, cultural, and artistic influences on Franz Kafka.


This text trails the historical process of Jewish survival from its breakup of traditional society through the transition from the closed ghetto-like existence to a more congenial environment. Broken into essays that focus on ten countries of origin, Jewish life and survival is expertly and insightfully explored, and Katz’s introduction provides central focus to their lessons. Chapter 4 holds Hillel J. Kieval’s essay titled, “Caution’s Progress: The Modernization of Jewish Life in Prague, 1780-1830.”


This study explores the history of Sabbath worship and concludes that Sabbath gatherings were initially intended for the study of law rather than time for worship and prayer. Historically, Sabbath worship was family centered and did not focus around specific community activities.

The book draws from known evidence relevant to the central and eastern Mediterranean region until 200 CE.


The Jewish social, intellectual and political experience in Bohemia and Moravia from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century is developed in this text in a collection of carefully researched essays. Kieval defines the Jewish “experience” as “how reality presents itself to human consciousness and is, in turn, structured by received cultural categories and social memories” (Introduction 3).


This text interprets and explains “the multi-ethnic character of the region [of Prague], the linguistic dexterity and cultural ambiguity of its Jewish population, and the decisive impact of national conflict on the creation of Jewish attitudes and behavior in the twentieth century” (Introduction 3). The focus is on the Jewish assimilation to the Czech
nation with its aim to restructure Jewish life and reorient Jewish culture and on Prague’s Zionists and the Young Bohemian literary movement in collaboration with philosopher Martin Buber.


Bohemian author Komensky wrote his story before 1620, and it appeared on a list of “dangerous and forbidden” books assembled in Moravia in 1749 (Introduction 12). The story imagines the world as a city and man as a pilgrim who beholds and examines it. According to Bohemian researchers, the episodes of this story influenced the works of later writers.


This is a volume of scholarly works on the history of the Jewish family and its development from marriage and children; to the family and its relationship to the community; and as represented in Jewish literature, primarily the works of Kafka, Agnon, and Bellow. The essays are based on papers delivered at the Jewish Theological Seminary in May 1985.


Reflecting on the testimonies of Auschwitz survivors recorded by Langer, the essays in this text connect literature to testimony. They discuss first person accounts and provide insights into the horrors of the holocaust experience. Among the essays by Langer is “Kafka as Holocaust Prophet: a Dissenting View.”


An interest in the Yiddish language was resurrected in Russia in the mid to late 1800s. During that time Jewish creativity flourished as Yiddish literature restored vibrant life to its people. This exuberant interest in the Yiddish language developed a literary field that abruptly ended in 1926, but not without spilling into other countries and throughout Eastern Europe. This collection of stories reflect the culture through “desolate echoes of torture, imprisonment, and mass-murder”; they also “show how the human spirit transcends despair with fortitude, humour (sic) and fellowship” (Introduction 10).

This text includes “The Golem” by Isaac Leib Peretz (1851-1915) and “A Friend of Kafka” by Isaac Bashevis Singer (b. 1902).

Macartney’s comprehensive text is an exhaustive, well-researched history of a European monarchy. Its record includes data on demographic, agricultural, and economic trends and the politics, diplomacy, and events of the Hapsburg family.


This text documents the passion of philosopher and historian and first president of Czechoslovakia, Thomas Garrigue Masaryk. Written as he engaged in building up the state, it reflects on his drive to liberate the nation from three centuries of servitude to the Hapsburgs after the Battle of White Mountain in 1620 as Jan Hus and the Bohemian Brotherhood had envisioned. A comment in the introduction is that this text is a resource “indispensable to an understanding of the Europe which the war transformed and of the process of transformation itself” (14).


This richly documented book mounts a judicious critique of the deflationary theory of German-Jewish dialogue…. Restricting his evidence to the years preceding 1933, Mendes-Flohr convincingly argues that German Jews had always been divided between social aspirations and ethnic attachments, historical diversity and cultural imperialism, which permitted no easy reconciliation.” (From a review by Gregory Kaplan, Stanford Humanities Center and Department of Religious Studies, Stanford University. Published by: H-Judaic March, 2000)


The essays in this volume center on the climax of European industrialism and the rise of the bourgeoisie and loss of individualism. The response of German nationalism and Jewish identity permitted individuals to free themselves from the dilemma and to seek solutions. Rejecting the bourgeois society and materialism for idealism, these groups of intellectuals became the “third force” and paved the way for the artistic movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.


Norris uses the post-Darwinian age and places her discussion of the theoretical intentions of the artists as “self-reflexive metaphors of recognizing the animal in oneself” (Introduction 21). “The point I wish to emphasize is that the question of the status of the animal has meaning only in the context of the social realm, the Symbolic Order, in which it has value, and in which it enjoys only negative prestige” (21-22). Two of her essays, “The Fate of the Human Animal in Kafka’s Fiction” and “Kafka’s ‘Josephine’: The Animal as the Negative Side of Narration” are included in this volume.

In this work, Prawer discusses the poetry of Heine, the nineteenth century German poet born a Jew. Prawer writes about Heine that he conveys “certain aspects of nineteenth-century experience more powerfully than any other writer—and among these aspects the Jewish experience looms large….Heine was a poet truly alive in his own time and place, sensitive to social and intellectual currents, aware of the historical forces which had made Europe what it was and … what it was yet to become.” (Prologue 2)


This study centers on the final two years of the war and its significance to the political leaders of Prague and Vienna, placed in the economic, social, and political context. Of particular significance is the question of the Czech-German struggle in Bohemia and Moravia and the material deprivation that undermined the Czech’s support for the war effort and for the Monarchy.


Robertson discusses Kafka in the contexts of Judaic religion and culture, politics, and literature and raises objections to some of the common views of Kafka’s writing. Franz Kafka writes from irony, not perplexity; he is subtle and profound—a master of literature who was also consumed by everyday affairs of life and did not recluse, even as his writing suggests.


A collection of works prepared by a variety of writers in celebration of Elie Wiesel. Selections include Ariel Dorfman’s “What I Always Knew,” a story which “depicts a world in which everything—words, gestures, events—are oppressive secrecy, and authority regiments daily life (Introduction xvii). Many stories center on themes of the Holocaust. Also included is Maurice Friedman’s work, “Kafka and Kundera: Two Voices from Prague.”


This book closely examines the interaction between Jewish culture, medicine, and science during Europe’s “Scientific Revolution” from the late sixteenth through the late eighteenth centuries. Ruderman argues “that during this era Jewish culture and society became increasingly aware of medicine and scientific advances, and that a new Jewish scientific discourse evolved that had significant repercussions for Jewish religious concerns” (cover). Circles of Jewish scholars in Central and Eastern Europe
supplemented their rabbinic study with scientific learning, especially in astronomy, physics, and life sciences, and the interaction of Jewish culture, medicine, and science impacted cultural values and ideals. The proof that these areas of study had not been ignored during the extended Jewish Middle Ages is demonstrated in the number of Jewish scientists throughout the Western world and the high percentage of Jewish Nobel Prize recipients.


Sharot, Stephen. Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic: A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1982. In the last decades of the nineteenth century it became apparent to the German Jews that total assimilation to German society remained impossible in spite of a stress on German nationality and culture. This text focuses on folk religion of medieval and early-modern Europe and analyzes the sociological approaches to the three major religious orientations that emerged (magic, millenarianism, and mysticism).


Spector, Scott. Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka’s Fin de Siecle. Berkeley: U of California P, 2000. This text draws from a creative time in Prague’s history. It references a small group of German-Jewish intellectuals in the years immediately proceeding and following World War I. The chapters progress from a discussion of the language of these Prague “Germans” to the modernist literature of Franz Kafka and Franz Werfel and explore the cultural Zionism of Hugo Bergmann and Max Brod. The last chapter uncovers the layers of the Middle Ground, as individuals such as Brod, Otto Pick, and Rudolf Fuchs mediate between the German and Czech cultures and Jewish communities.

Stavans, Ilan, Ed. The Oxford Book of Jewish Stories. New York: Oxford U.P., 1998. The story selections in this text represent authors engaged in valuable aspects of the Jewish experience. The stories reflect themes of anti-Semitism, assimilation, interreligious relations, mysticism, and the tension between politics and faith. The earliest story is from “circa 1860, when Sholem Jacob Abromovitsch, the grandfather of
Yiddish letters, began writing novels for the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe” (Stavans preface xi). Included in the collection is Franz Kafka’s short work, *Before the Law* part of *The Penal Colony* (1919). Although the secret behind the door is hidden forever, its quest for discovery and understanding must continue.


By the early 1900s, Europe was transformed. People moved to the cities and railways and subways created suburban options. New printing techniques brought an explosion of reading matter, economic patterns were strong, and generally, people were well educated. Yet, as six European powers were vying for leadership, the era until 1914 became politically, socially, and morally complex. Norman Stone is Professor of Modern History at Oxford and was awarded the Fontana History of Europe Prize (1983) for this informative and well-written text.


This text comprises extractions from Rabbi Loew’s life and work and includes a collection of old legends, including the legend of the Golem.


The first edition of Tonnies work was published in 1887, but when republished fifteen years later, the sociological theories achieved an international audience as it attempted to answer the questions, “What are we?” “Where are we?” “Whence did we come?” “Where are we going?” Tonnies’ work analyzes man’s social nature and its results.


This well-organized and clearly developed text explores religious forms such as legends of Jewish sorcery and beliefs about the evil eye; spirits of the dead and powers of good; procedures for casting spells, how to battle spirits, and the legend of the Golem; the use of gems and amulets, interpretation of dreams, astrology, and herbal folk medicines; and the ritual of circumcision. In the “Preface,” Joshua Trachtenberg comments that to “understand a people—and through it, humankind—is to see its whole” (xxvii). This text discusses folk traditions of the Jewish people and adds to an understanding of their experience and history.

This text defines the contributions of men and women who lived and worked from the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. Included among these are authors Fyodor Dostoevsky, Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke; philosophers Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre; and political leaders Karl Marx, Joseph Stalin, and Adolph Hitler.


This text examines the significance and effect of the Neo-Slav movement, which flourished briefly before the First World War. The movement was instigated by Czech national leadership.


This translation of the Golem chronicled by R. Yitzchak ben Shimshon HaKohen Katz, from the stories of the Maharal of Prague (1513-1609) develops traditional accounts of the Katz document with personal and historical data along with dramatization and dialogue to capture the enduring charisma of the Golem of Prague. Part Two contributes background of scientific, kabbalistic, and historical understanding.


The enlightened philosophy of Emperor Josef emancipated the German-speaking Jews in Prague and brought on an unprecedented literary renaissance at the turn of the twentieth century. German culture was nurtured in Prague by the cultural German majority, by the Jews, and from the Prague School of writers from which Rainer Maria Rilke and Franz Kafka emerged, among others. Rilke and Kafka turned to art from their parent’s materialism, and Kafka focused on the limits of emancipation. This volume of commentary and images juxtaposes the variety of competitive cultures in this Bohemian capital set at the edge of empire and rooted in the Hussite belief in truth.