

Banned from Nature: The Jewish Search for Privacy in the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

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In the years between the Nazi occupation of March 1939 and the moment when they were summoned for transport to enclosed ghettos, the Jews of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia experienced a tightening vise of antisemitic regulations that aimed to isolate them from the territory's non-Jewish majority. These measures, which expelled Jews from the public sphere, also transformed their private spaces, both those in their own homes and those that they had frequented in and around their communities. In particular, the authorities' efforts to preclude Jews from access to green spaces and the countryside removed opportunities to engage in what had been a central element of life in the region: finding privacy and communing with nature via strolls in parks, relaxation in gardens, trips out to rural cottages, and hikes along a myriad of trails. At a time of unimaginable stress, at a moment when Jews' homes had become overcrowded through evictions and resettlement, the loss of the opportunity to find privacy outdoors greatly impoverished the daily lives of Jews, especially of children, who found themselves banned from playgrounds. In response Jews sought means to evade the regulations, by trying to pass as "Aryans," by seeking out private gardens and city forests that had not yet been declared off limits, or by carving out new areas for privacy in the few remaining "Jewish" spaces, including the community's cemeteries.