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# Prague Jewry during the Civil War – the *Passauer Kriegsvolk* in 1611 as reflected in Contemporary Hebrew Sources

By Abraham David\*

## Abstract

*Im Mittelpunkt des folgenden Artikels steht die Berichterstattung einer anonymen Hebräischen Chronik über den bis heute als Passauer Kriegsvolk bekannten Bürgerkrieg in Prag 1611. Von wenigen zeitgenössischen Bussgebeten abgesehen, ist die Hebräische Chronik die einzige jüdische Quelle, die davon handelt. Wie der Vergleich ihrer Schilderung der Ereignisse mit anderen zeitgenössischen Quellen belegt, muss ihr Autor Augenzeuge der Ereignisse gewesen sein. Wenn er in seiner Darstellung auch immer wieder die Rolle Kaiser Rudolfs II. als Beschützer der Prager Juden hervorhebt, ist er in seiner sachlich-fairen Berichterstattung dennoch durchweg unparteiisch und gibt nicht zu erkennen, mit welcher der Bürgerkriegsparteien er sympathisiert.*

One of the most dramatic events in early seventeenth century Bohemia in general, and in Prague in particular, is undoubtedly the civil war known as the *Passauer Kriegsvolk* because of the involvement of the citizens of Passau, a Bavarian town near the Bohemian border.

In 1611, the Passau army led by their Bishop Leopold, engaged the Bohemians in a battle in Prague. The reason for this bloody military engagement was the struggle for the Bohemian royal crown, which began on April 17, 1608. An earlier agreement between Emperor Rudolf II<sup>1</sup> and his brother

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1 Rudolf II was born in Vienna on July 18, 1552, and died in Prague on January 20, 1612. – A lot has been written about him, including monographs like: GERTRUD VON SCHWARZENFELD, *Rudolf II. der saturnische Kaiser*, München 1961; ROBERT JOHN WESTON EVANS, *Rudolf II and his World. A Study in Intellectual History 1576–1612*, Oxford 1973; STEFAN EHRENPREIS, *Kaiserliche Gerichtsbarkeit und Konfessionskonflikt. Der Reichshofrat unter Rudolf II. 1576–1612* (Schriftenreihe der Historischen Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. 72), Göttingen 2006.

King Matthias,<sup>2</sup> sovereign of Hungary, Moravia, and Austria, stated that Matthias would rule Bohemia after the emperor's death. However, contrary to this agreement which was reached on May 1, 1609, in the Bohemian town of Brod, close to Prague, Rudolf sought to install his cousin, the aforementioned Bishop Leopold,<sup>3</sup> on the kingly throne. The ensuing military engagement lasted for several months, during which Leopold's forces captured parts of Bohemia in the beginning of January 1611. The Prague quarter *Kleinseite* (*Malá Strana*), i.e. the small quarter west of the Vltava River near the Hradčín Castle, was occupied by the Passauer army on February 15, 1611, which subsequently destroyed several monasteries there. In connection with these events, the first legal Union of Lutheran and Calvinist was established in the city of Prague. Finally, Matthias' army supported by Moravian and Hungarian militaries under his rule, defeated Leopold's forces, and on May 23, 1611, and Matthias was crowned king of Bohemia during his brother's lifetime. At that time, Rudolf II politically was powerless and isolated and a half year later, on January 20, 1612, he died in his Prague castle, and Matthias succeeded him as Emperor.

This civil war has been the subject of a few studies<sup>4</sup> that offered different explanations of it. Thus, it has been argued that the civil war in Prague in 1611 was the result of the changes in the religious map of Bohemia in general, and in Prague in particular since the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Along with them and in accordance with the demands of the Hussite Revolution hundred years earlier and the ideas of the Protestant reformation

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2 Matthias was born in Vienna on February 24, 1557, and died in the same town on March 20, 1619. In 1608, he became the sovereign of Hungary, Austria and Moravia. On May 23, 1611, he succeeded his brother Rudolf II as king of Bohemia. After Rudolf II died in the beginning of 1612 he succeeded him as the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. On him, see: BERND DIETER RILL, *Kaiser Matthias. Bruderzwist und Glaubenskampf*, Graz 1999.

3 Leopold V was born in Graz on October 9, 1586, and died in Schwaz on September 13, 1632. In 1607, he became Bishop of Passau and seven years later, he was also Bishop of Strasburg. He was a cousin of the Emperor Rudolf II.

4 See: FRANZ KURZ, *Der Einfall des von Kaiser Rodolf II, in Passau angeworbenen Kriegsvolkes in Oberösterreich und Böhmen (1610-1611)* (Bericht über das Museum Francisco-Carolinum, Jahresberichte 53-55), Linz 1897; ANTON CHROUST, *Vom Einfall des Passauer Kriegsvolkes bis zum Nürnberger Kurfürstentag* (Briefe und Acten zur Geschichte des Dreissigjährigen Krieges in den Zeiten des vorwaltenden Einflusses der Wittelsbacher, vol. 9), München 1903; JAMES R. PALMITESSA, "The Prague Uprising of 1611: Property, Politics and Catholic Renewal in the early Years of Habsburg Rule," in: *Central European History* 31 (1998), pp. 299-328.

movement which spread in the Holy Roman Empire, a renewal and restitution of ecclesiastical properties was developed. Emperor Rudolf II himself was open minded and not opposed to those new trends. He even issued a decree that declared freedom of religion in Bohemia.<sup>5</sup>

A brief, but accurate description of these events is found also in a Hebrew chronicle from the early seventeenth century, which gives an overview over important events in the history of the Jews of Bohemia with focus on Prague. The manuscript of this text was discovered by myself in the beginning of the eighties of the last century at the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York.<sup>6</sup> The author of this *Hebrew Chronicle* is unknown and, thus far, unidentified. He wrote his chronicle in Ashkenazi Hebrew typical of that time and place. From the text itself, we learn virtually nothing about its author, nothing about his family's identity, or his profession, or his cultural baggage. All that certainly can be taken for granted is that he lived in Prague at the turn of the sixteenth to the seventeenth century and apparently was an eyewitness of various contemporary events in Prague. Very recently, Alexander Putik from the Jewish Museum in Prague, suggested to attribute the *Hebrew Chronicle* to two authors assuming that these two were the communal scribes who recorded special events that happened in Bohemia, and particularly in Prague. The first one, he identified as Petaḥya b. Josef Sofer who recorded the events of the period from 1389 to 1581 (entries 1-65), and the other one as Abraham Josef Yequtiel Kaufmann (Kafmann) SeGaL (Ha-Levi) who authored the records of the years 1598 to 1611 (entries 66-76).<sup>7</sup>

In the present study, I focus on that *Hebrew Chronicle*, for it sheds light on the Jewish aspects of this conflict. The author was after all an eyewitness of various contemporary events in Prague, the *Passauer Kriegsvolk* included.

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5 This point is clarified by EVANS, *Rudolf II* (note 1), pp. 84-115; PALMITESSA, "The Prague Uprising of 1611" (note 4), pp. 300-304, 314 ff.; EHRENPREIS, *Kaiserliche Gerichtsbarkeit* (note 1), pp. 214-243.

6 Ms. Mic. 3849. – I have published this chronicle under the title: כרוניקה עברית מפראג מראשית המאה הי"ז, Jerusalem 1984; English version: *A Hebrew Chronicle from Prague, c. 1615*, translated by Leon J. Weinberger and Dena Ordan, Tuscaloosa / London 1993; Czech version: *Anonymní hebrejská kronika z raně novověké Prahy*, transl. by Markéta Pnina Rubešová, Praha 2013.

7 Cf. ALEXANDER PUTIK's review of the Czech version of my edition of the *Hebrew Chronicle from Prague* (mentioned above in note 6), in: *Judaica Bohemiae* 48/2 (2013), pp. 133-134, 136-137.



First, a few words on the *Hebrew Chronicle* which is arranged in chronological order. The entries begin with the year in question and, then, recount events related to Bohemian Jewry. Despite the natural emphasis on Jewish matters, the *Hebrew Chronicle* also sheds ample light on general events. Interspersed among the entries, we find information concerning Bohemian kings and Habsburg Holy Roman emperors, starting with the year 1471. Thus, the author mentions, *inter alia*, major events of the history of the kings and emperors, beginning with Charles V (1500/1520–1555) and ending with Rudolf II (1552/1576–1612) and his brother Matthias (1557/1612–1619).

The author describes the endless warfare over the throne – internal and external conflicts, such as: the Ottoman (Turkish) advancement into Hungary, which ended with the Ottoman victory at Mohács in August 1526, followed by the Bohemian King Ferdinand's I annexation of several territories of western Hungary a year later, and the unsuccessful Ottoman attempts to conquer Vienna in 1529 and 1532.

The chronicle also takes notice of revolutionary currents in western and central Europe in the sixteenth century, such as: the *Bauernkrieg* (peasant revolt) of 1525, the Lutheran reformation, and the Anabaptist movement, which spread throughout Bohemia and Moravia, too. He even briefly describes the persecution of the Anabaptists by King Ferdinand I in 1528 and 1535.

As an observer of general history, the chronicler is as reliable as accurate. In his later, more elaborated paragraphs, he provides explanations of the historical background and an eyewitness' account of contemporary events. The account of the *Passauer Kriegsvolk*, he begins with the year 1608:

שנת שס"ח בר"ח אייר, היה סיכסוך ומהומה גדולה פה פראג בין אדונינו הקיסר רודאלף יר"ה ואחיו [...] דוכס מאטיאש [...] שבא במדינה זו סמוך לפראג, ושכן בעיר פעמשיין ברויד, והיה עמו שם רב אנשי חיל רוכבי רכש, והולכי רגלי' עם כלי זין מן אנשי מלחמה ממדינת איסטרייך, מעהררין, אונגרין, טאטרין, ועשו היזק גדול במדינ' זו. גזלו וחמסו והגרו ושרפו היזק גדול יותר מן ד' פעמי' מאה אלפי', ורצה דוכס מאטיאש למלוך בחזקה על מדינות פיהם, אונגרין, מעהררין ואיסטרייך, וגם אדונינו הקיסר יר"ה אסף גם עם רב במדינות פיהם ובאו לכאן בפראג לערך כ' אלפי איש אנשי חיל עם כלי זין, והיינו בדאגה גדולה.<sup>8</sup>

[72] 5368 [1608] -- On Rosh Ḥodesh Iyyar [17 April 1608] there was contention and commotion here in Prague between our ruler Emperor Rudolf, may he be exalted, and his brother [...] Duke Matthias [...] who came to a city near Prague, residing in the city of Böhmisches Brod. With him there were great numbers of brave men mounted on steeds [Esther 8:10, 14] and armed infantry from the

8 DAVID, כרוניקה עברית (note 6), No. 72, p. 20.

[ranks of the] warriors [Num. 31:49] of the countries of Austria, Moravia, Hungary, and Tatty. They did great damage to this city, stealing, rampaging, killing, and burning – inflicting damage of more than four times one hundred thousand. Duke Matthias desired to rule over the countries of Bohemia, Hungary, Moravia, and Austria by force. Our ruler, the emperor, may he be exalted, also gathered a great force from the cities of Bohemia, and a force of about twenty thousand brave armed soldiers, came here, to Prague. And we were extremely disturbed.<sup>9</sup>

The author goes on to note that the Jews of Prague remained unharmed during these disturbances, since they enjoyed special protection provided by the town council: ונתנו העצה שומרים ברחוב יהודים לבל יזיק לשום יהודי, וזה היה "The town council posted guards in the Judenstrasse to make certain no Jew was harmed. This [state of affairs] lasted for about four weeks, and God, blessed be He, delivered us from their hands".<sup>10</sup> As we will see, the protection granted to Prague's Jews during the armed struggles that took place in the time of Rudolf's II reign is a recurrent theme in the chronicle. Concerning negotiations between the kingly brothers, the chronicler adds:

ונתפשרו, שנתנו למאטיאש כתר מלכות של אונגריין. וימלוך על אונגריין ומערהרריין ואיסטרייך, ולאחר מות אדונינו יר"ה ימלוך ג"כ על מדינת פיהם, ונסעו לדרכם לעיר ווין בשלום, וגם אנשי פיהם כל אחד לביתו.<sup>11</sup>

And they reached a compromise – Matthias was granted the royal crown of Hungary, [and it was agreed] that he would rule Hungary, Moravia, and Austria, and that after the death of our sovereign, may he be exalted, Matthias would rule over Bohemia as well. And they went peacefully on their way to Vienna, and the people of Bohemia returned to their homes.<sup>12</sup>

However, this did not bring the fraternal struggle to an end. In April 1610 a *Reichstag*, attended by the dukes and archbishops of the Holy Roman Empire, whose names the chronicler lists, was convened in Prague in another attempt to reach a settlement between the two brothers. Once again, a compromise was reached, as the chronicle reports:

9 DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), p. 59.

10 DAVID, *כרוניקה עברית* (note 6), No. 72, p. 20-21; DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), pp. 59-60. As we see here and below the two brothers, the emperor Rudolf II and the king Matthias kept good relationship with the Jewish community in Prague and gave the Jews in their neighbourhood full defence and commanded to avoid any harm against them.

11 DAVID, *כרוניקה עברית* (note 6), No. 75, pp. 21-22.

12 DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), p. 60.

[בשנ]ת ש"ע, היה פה פראג וועד גדול הנקרא רייך טאג, ובאו לכאן בראשון דוכס מהרעריין הנקרא קורפירש מזקסין עם אחיו, והגמון מן קעלין, והגמון ממענץ ערכי הרצוג מאקבלאנץ, אחיו של אדונינו יר"ה ובישוף מפאסי נקרא לייפלט דוכס משטייאר מרק, ודוכס מברונשוויג, ושני אחים לנדקרביין מהעסין [...] ושאר [...] ושליחות משאר דוכסים ומכל מקומות רייך, והיו הוצאות הכל מאדונינו, יר"ה [...] ושאר כל, והיה ערך ההוצאה יותר מן ק"ן אלפי.<sup>13</sup>

[75] In the year 5370 [1610], an important meeting, called the *Reichstag*, was convened here in Prague. The first to arrive were the duke of Moravia named Kurfürst of Sachsen with his brother, and the archbishop of Köln, and the archbishop of Mainz, archduke of Koblenz, our sovereign's, may he be exalted, brother, and the bishop of Passau named Leopold, duke of Steiermark, the duke of Braunschweig, and two brothers, counts [*Landgrafen*] of Hessen [...] and delegates from other duchies in all parts of the Holy Roman Empire. The expenses were paid by our sovereign, may he be exalted, [...] as well as everything else, costing him more than one hundred and fifty thousand.<sup>14</sup>

The chronicler then goes on to add how several participants in this *Reichstag* continued on to the court of Matthias in Vienna in order to negotiate an agreement between the warring brothers:

ואח"כ נסעו בשליחות לעיר ווין למלך מאטיאש הגמון מקעלין, ודוכס מברונשוויג ובישוף מפאסי ועשו פשרה בין אדונינו יר"ה ואחיו מלך מאטיאש יר"ה מחמ' המלכות ושאר סיכסוכים שהיה ביניהם, וגם תיקנו הרבה ענייני' ושאר ענייני' אודות הרייך והמלחמות שהיה ביניהם, ואח"כ נסע כל אחד לביתו בשלום.<sup>15</sup>

Subsequently, a delegation to King Matthias left for Vienna, [consisting of] the archbishop of Köln, the duke of Braunschweig, and the bishop of Passau, and they negotiated an agreement between our sovereign and his brother King Matthias, may he be exalted, regarding questions of sovereignty and other issues; they issued several decrees and [settled] matters regarding [sovereignty] in the empire and other disputes. Later each one returned safely to his home.<sup>16</sup>

The terms of this agreement remained unknown, as the chronicler writes: "And no one knows what the agreements were; everything was kept secret between them."<sup>17</sup>

This agreement barely lasted a year. As noted earlier, the struggle was reignited when Emperor Rudolf tried to install his cousin Leopold, bishop

13 DAVID, *כרוניקה עברית* (note 6), No. 75, pp. 21-22.

14 DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), pp. 61-62.

15 DAVID, *כרוניקה עברית* (note 6), No. 75, p. 22.

16 DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), p. 62.

17 DAVID, *כרוניקה עברית* (note 6), No. 75, p. 22; DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), p. 62.

of Passau, as king of Bohemia, rather than bequeath the crown to his brother Matthias, in direct contradiction to the agreement reached three years earlier, in 1608. Matthias refused to give up the crown of Bohemia, sparking a bloody war that lasted for several months. For his part, the bishop of Passau began to gather an army to implement the imperial promise.

And typically, the chronicler goes into great detail regarding the events related to this civil war in his hometown of Prague. He describes how Leopold's forces gathered in Passau, planning to invade Prague in order to capture the crown for Leopold. In the course of the journey they fell upon and destroyed various Bohemian towns.

שע"א [1611] לפ"ק, היה מהומה ומלחמה גדולה פה פראג שאדונינו הקיסר יר"ה בקש למלוך אחרי מותו את ליפולטוס בישוף מפאסי בן דודו ודוכס גריטוס משטייאר מרק על מלכות פיהם בידיעת קצת דרכם הבהירה, והכל בסודי סודות. ובישוף ליפולטוס אסף עם רב, בעלי מלחמות לאלפים לערך ט"ז אלפי מובחרים, והניחם בעיר פאסי נגד שנה, ועשו שם היזק גדול, ובכל סביבות ואין אדם ידע על מה הם שם בפאסי, ויחזרו העם כי אין להם שם מה לאכול ולשתות, לפי שהיו הכל מכלה [...] ויסעו משם למדינת פיהם, ובאו בערמה ובתחבולה לעיר בודוויץ, ועשו שם היזק גדול גזלו וחמסו ולקחו מזומני' וכסף וזהוב לערך מאה אלפי', ומהם הרגו עיקר עירוני המקום [...]. ובכל מדינות פיהם מקום שידם מגעת עשו היזק גדול.<sup>18</sup>

[76] 5371 [1611] -- There was strife and fierce fighting here in Prague for our sovereign, the emperor, may he be exalted, wanted to have his cousin Leopold, bishop of Passau, rule after his death, and Duke Grotius of Steiermark on the throne of Bohemia. This [conspiracy] was known only to a few, and everything was done in utmost secrecy. Bishop Leopold gathered a multitude, men of war by the thousands, approximately sixteen thousand chosen men, stationing them in the city of Passau for a year. And they did great damage there and in the surrounding area, and no one knew why they were in Passau. And the people returned [to their homes] for there was nothing to eat or drink there, for they had consumed everything [...]. From there they went to Bohemia, attacking the city of Budweis treacherously and with trickery, doing great damage – stealing, rampaging, taking money, gold, and silver worth approximately a hundred thousand and killing many of the townspeople [...]. Wherever they went in Bohemia, they did great damage.<sup>19</sup>

In what follows the chronicler describes the invasion of Prague by the Passauers, where they confronted local forces loyal to Matthias. Some Prague residents, however, joined the invaders, thus causing the outbreak of civil war. During these battles many casualties fell on both sides. On the one

18 DAVID, כרוניקה עברית (note 6), No. 76, p. 22-23.

19 DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), pp. 63-64.

hand, the invaders were pushed out of the city; on the other, their artillery continued to threaten the city and its fortresses:

וכששמעו אנשי פיהם, דהיינו שלשה שטענדן שרים ופריצים ומקומו' אספו גם הם במהרה עם רב, לערך י' אלפי' עם אנשי עיר, הכל בעלי מלחמה, רוכבי רכב והולכי רגל, איש חרבו על ירכו, ושאר כלי מלחמה המשחיתים, הם קני השריפה שקורין בל"א ביקסין. וביום ג' ב' אדר בעלות השחר באו אנשי פויסאד בחזקה לערך ו' אלפי' וחצי ושיברו השער של אויס ויאיצו לקטן, הנקר' קליין זייד והרגו השומרים ושרפו בתינו. ואנשי פראג מהרו ובאו כנגדם כאיש אחד לערך ה' אלפי' וערכו מלחמה כנגדם, והשאר העם היו משמרים המבצר והראטשין וישן וחדש מקום, ונהרגו על אויס על ק"ז משני הצדדים תוך ג' שעות, לערך ח' מאות וקצת מעם ק"ז היה ידם עם אנשי פויסאד ושפכו עם קני השריפה, ועם זפת ומים חמים שפכו מהחלונות על עם פיהם, ונהרגו עם רב, לולי זאת לא נשארה פרסה מעם פויסאד, ועם פיהם חזרו לאחור למקום ישן וסגרו השער על הגשר, ומשמרים המקום, ואין יוצא ואין [בא] מק"ז למקום ישן. ועם פויסאד היו שוכבים על אויס וק"ז ועל הבחורים אחורי המבצר ולקחו גרוש גישיץ כלי המשחית, ועמדו נוכח המקומות, והיה בדעת לכלות המקומות.<sup>20</sup>

When the news reached the people of Bohemia, the three classes—the lords, the squires, and the local rulers – quickly gathered a multitude of about ten thousand [men] including the townspeople, all soldiers, [both] mounted [men] and infantry, each with his sword on thigh [Exod. 32:27], and other destructive weapons of war, firearms called *Büchsen* in German. On Tuesday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Adar [15 February 1611], at dawn, the people of Passau, numbering approximately six and a half thousand, came in full force, and broke the outer gate [*ausse*], and hurried to the small [quarter] called Kleinseite [or Mala Strana, joined to the Old City by a bridge], killing the guards and burning our houses. And the people of Prague hurried, rising as one to oppose them. About five thousand [men] did battle with them while the remainder of the people guarded the citadel [Wysehrad] and the Hradcin as well as the Old and New Towns [Altstadt and Neustadt]. Casualties fell on both sides for approximately three hours in the fighting for the outer gate and the Kleinseite. Some eight hundred or more of the residents of the Kleinseite were in league with the Passauers and fired their rifles, and poured tar and hot water from the windows onto the Bohemians, killing many. If it had not been for this [conspiracy], none of the Passauers would have had a foothold [in Prague]. The Bohemians retreated to the Old Town, closing the gate to the bridge, guarding this place so no one could leave or [enter – Josh. 6:1] the Kleinseite for the New Town. And the Passauers prepared to attack the outer gate and the Kleinseite, and [...] behind the citadel. They placed a large cannon [*gross Geschütz*], a weapon of destruction, opposite these places, intending to destroy them.<sup>21</sup>

20 DAVID, כרוניקה עברית (note 6), p. 23-24.

21 DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), pp. 64-65.



This last action of the Passauers took place without Rudolf's knowledge. Upon learning that artillery had been placed outside the city, he feared that matters would blaze out of control, resulting in the destruction of Prague. He therefore commanded the Passauers to withdraw their artillery:

והיה בדעת לכלות המקומות, ובפרט רחוב יהודים [...] ובתוך כך נודע הדבר לאדונינו יר"ה וציוה תיכף ומיד [...] ושלא יעשה שום היזק להמקומות, ובפרט על היהודים שם עיניו, וציוה לבל יזיקו ליהודים, ושלא יעשו להם שום רעה ושינצרהם כאישון עין, שדעת עם פאסואד ח"ו לכלותינו ולגזול ולשלול אותנו, והשם ית' הציל אותנו מידם.<sup>22</sup>

Intending to destroy them, especially the Judenstrasse [...]. When this was made known to our sovereign, may he be exalted, he immediately ordered [...] that no damage be done to those places, and he [specifically] ordered that no harm or injury should be inflicted on the Jews. [He] guarded them as the pupil of his eye [Deut. 32:10], for the Passauers intended, Heaven forbid, to destroy, rob, and take spoils, Heaven forbid, and God, Blessed be He, saved us from them.<sup>23</sup>

The civil war came to an end when forces loyal to Matthias and their reinforcements defeated the Passauers. This paved the way for Matthias to claim the Bohemian throne, though not without further struggle. On 23 May 1611 (11 Sivan 5371) Matthias was crowned king of Bohemia, instead of his brother the emperor, who until then held both the throne of the Holy Roman Empire and of Bohemia:

ובתוך כך שלחו עם פיהם לעיר ווין למלך מטיאס לעזרה, ושלה לעם פיהם ט' אלפי אנשי חיל רוכבי רכב והולכי רגל עם כלי זין, ואח"כ בא המלך בעצמו עם ד' אלפי אנשי חיל ושרים נכבדים, יום ה' י' ניסן שע"א, וקבלו בכבוד גדול, והיה דירתו בישן מקום [...] ואח"כ נסע על ראשטין [...] והיה כאשר ראה ליפולטיס ושריו ויועציו ועמו הפאסויד שהיו, אספו הפיהם עם רב מכל מדינות פיהם וגם עם מאטיאס שהיה בעזרם, והיה בלילה בלילה וינו[ס]ו לפולטיס ועמו קודם שידעו עם הפיהם דבר, בדרך שבאו לעיר בודוויץ. והיה בבקר וירדפו עם הפיהם אחריהם, ולא השיגו אותם וישבו לפראג [...] יו' ב' י"א סיון שע"א נכתר אדונינו מאטיאס למלך על כל מדינות פיהם ושלעזיא בכבוד גדול.<sup>24</sup>

At this time, the Bohemians sent [messengers] to Vienna, asking King Matthias for help, and he sent the Bohemians nine thousand brave mounted soldiers and armed infantry, later arriving in person accompanied by four thousand soldiers and nobles. On Thursday, the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan [24 March 1611], he was received with great honours, taking up residence in the Old Town [...], later moving to the Hradcin castle [...]. When Leopold, [along with] his lords, advisors, and the

22 DAVID, כרוניקה עברית (note 6), p. 24.

23 DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), pp. 65, 4<sup>th</sup> line from the bottom to p. 66, line 12.

24 DAVID, כרוניקה עברית (note 6), p. 28.

Passauers, saw that the Bohemians had gathered a multitude from all the cities of Bohemia, and that Matthias's followers supported them, Leopold and his supporters fled at night without the knowledge of the Bohemians, coming to the city of Budweis. In the morning, when the Bohemians gave pursuit, they were unable to overtake them, and returned to Prague [...]. On Monday, the 11th of Sivan 5371, our sovereign Matthias was crowned king of all the cities of Bohemia and Silesia with great pomp and ceremony.<sup>25</sup>

It goes without saying that the situation of the Jews of Prague during this bloody civil war was of prime interest to our chronicler. On the one hand, he notes that the Passauers intended to harm the Prague Jewish neighbourhood, based on the mistaken assumption that the Jews were loyal to the opposing camp. In any event, Rudolf restrained his forces, preventing them from harming the Jews of Prague. Perhaps this was due to Rudolf's close ties with the Jews of Prague, his cultural contacts with them in particular. Rudolf was very much interested in Jewish mysticism, and another contemporary witness, the historian David Gans (1541–1613)<sup>26</sup> testifies to direct contacts between the emperor and the outstanding leader of the Jewish community, the Maharal (Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel; c. 1525–1609).<sup>27</sup> The chronicler describes how Rudolf protected the Jews of Prague upon hearing that his forces have targeted the Judenstrasse, as we have seen above.

The chronicler notes another attempt by the invading Passauers and by local Prague residents to do harm to the Jews in the time of the fighting in the city. It was on the same day, Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> Adar [1611] that four monasteries, or “cloisters,” were totally destroyed. Once again, Emperor Rudolf came to their defence:

עוד נס גדול אספר כהוצאנו ממצרי' וכקריעת ים סוף, בו ביום הנ"ל [...] קמו המון עם לאלפי' והחריבו ארבע קליסטר פה פראג [...] ואח"כ היה בדעתם ג"כ בדעת לרעת ליהודים כן, ח"ו להרוג ולאבד את כל היהודי' לגזול ולשלל את ממונם ול[ה]חריב את רחוב יהודי', לולי השם צבאות ריחם עלינו, ושלה מלאך בתוך המון העם ושמעו קול, שאל ישלחו יד ביהודי' בשם אדוננו

25 DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), pp. 68, lines 2-3.

26 On his historical work *ספר צמח דוד* (*Sefer Tsemah David*) has been written quite a lot. For a list of selected references, see: ABRAHAM DAVID, “Four Traumatic Events in Prague's Jewish Community in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century as seen through the eyes of David Gans, the author of *The Hebrew Chronicle from Prague*, and Joseph ha-Cohen,” in: *Judaica* 72 (2016), pp. 368-369, note 2.

27 On Maharal, a lot has been written. It is impossible here to give an overview over all these studies including numerous monographs. Nevertheless, it may be worthwhile to mention the recent publication of ELCHANAN REINER (ed.), *מהר"ל: אקדמות. פרקי חיים, משנה. השפעה*, Jerusalem 2015.



הקיסר יר"ה, וגם השרים ראשי העם באו לעזרת יהודי, ולא היה להם רשות ליגע ביהודי. והיינו בפחד ובמורא גדול, מצד אחד מחמ' המון עם, ומצד שני מהעם פאסאוד שהיה ג"כ ח"ו דעתו עלינו לשלול ולבוש אותנו, ועשינו תשובה תפילה צדקה גדול עד מאד, וגזרו תענית ומתפללים כל הלילה בב"ה, ועשינו ב' ימים צום כיפור.<sup>28</sup>

I shall recount another miracle as great as the Exodus from Egypt and the splitting of the Red Sea. On the aforementioned day [...] the masses arose by the thousands and destroyed four monasteries here in Prague [...]. Afterwards, they intended to harm the Jews as well – to massacre and exterminate [Esther 3:13] all the Jews, to rob, and plunder all their money, Heaven forbid! – If it had not been for the mercy of the Lord of Hosts, who sent an angel into the midst of the crowd, and they heard a voice [proclaiming], “Do not raise your hands against the Jews, by order of our sovereign the emperor, may he be exalted.” The lords, the leaders of the people, came to help the Jews, for [the masses] had no right to harm the Jews. We were terror-stricken, [being at the mercy] of the masses on the one hand, and of the Passauers on the other, who also, Heaven forbid, intended to rob and plunder [the Jews]. We repented greatly, prayed, and performed works of charity, declaring a public fast-day, and praying in the synagogue all night long; for two days we fasted and sought pardon for our sins.<sup>29</sup>

Our chronicler adds that the Jews took an active part in their own defence, that armed Jewish guards patrolled the Jewish quarter. In his words:

וגם היהודים עשו חוזק ברחוב יהודי בכל השערי סוגר ומסוגרי אין יוצא ואין בא דרך השערים, ומשמרים את הרחוב עם ב"ה בעלי מלחמות בפקודת הראש גראב מטוניא ככל עם אחר, עם כלי זיין ושיריון על הוצאות קהל סך גדול, וגם היהודים הלכו בכלי מלחמה, ונוצרים יום ולילה.<sup>30</sup>

And the Jews fortified the Judenstrasse, closing all the gates; no one could leave or enter through the gates. The streets with synagogues were guarded by soldiers under the lead command of the Graf [Count] of Tonia, [who guarded the Jews] like any other nation, with weapons and armour purchased at great cost at communal expense, and even the Jews bore weapons, guarding by day and by night.<sup>31</sup>

The chronicler further emphasizes in the same paragraph: ואפילו בשבת היו “Even on the Sabbath, [the Jews] bore weapons.” Here we have a testimony to armed defence of their neighbourhood on the part of Prague Jews alongside the local militia that is reflected in royal documents as well. Moreover, although it appears that arms bearing by Jews in self-

28 DAVID, כרוניקה עברית (note 6), pp. 27-28.

29 DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), pp. 67-68.

30 DAVID, כרוניקה עברית (note 6), p. 24.

31 DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), p. 66.

defence was not so rare, however, it was outlawed from the thirteenth century on in Germany and elsewhere in Europe.<sup>32</sup>

The Chronicler reported that after the Passauer army was defeated in Prague and the whole country, the political conflict between the two brothers was put to an end by a compromise has been done between them, however, the details were kept in secret. According to the agreement them, Rudolf II gave his brother Matthias the kingdom on Bohemia and Silesia, as he writes:

אח"כ היה וועד על המבצר, ולא יוכלו להשוות מחמת המלכות, והיה סיכסוך וחלוקים גדול ביניהם עד שנעשה פשרה בן [!] אדונינו הקיסר יר"ה ואחיו מלך פ' מטיאש כידוע, ואסור להעלות על הכתב. יו' ב' י"א סיון שע"א נכתר אדונינו מאטיאש למלך על כל מדינות פיהם ושלעזיא בכבוד גדול. והיינו אנחנו היהודים, וגם להבדיל הרעלים במורא ופחד גדולה מחמת עם המון ושאר בעלי מלחמה שלא יבא עלינו ח"ו, ולא לגזול ולחמוס אותנו. וגם הרעלים ואדוני המלך מאטיאש צויה בעצמו לשריו וליועציו שיעשו שמירה, ובפרט על יהודים, שלא יגע אחד מהם ונתן ו' מאות בעלי מלחמה עם כלי זין ברחוב יהודים מעמו, וגם שרי פיהם נתנו ג"כ כמה מאות לשמריו ולהצילנו.<sup>33</sup>

Afterwards there was a conclave in the citadel, but they could not reach an agreement regarding the monarchy, and there was discord and controversy between them until a compromise was reached between our sovereign the emperor, may he be exalted, and his brother Matthias of Bohemia, as is well known but cannot be recorded. On Monday, the IIth of Sivan 5371 [23 May 1611], our sovereign Matthias was crowned king of all the cities of Bohemia and Silesia with great pomp and ceremony. And we, the Jews as well as the Christians, were greatly afraid of the of the masses and soldiers, lest they attack, rob, and plunder us, Heaven forbid, and the Christians. King Matthias himself commanded his lords and advisors to guard the Jews especially, [to ensure] that not a single one be harmed. He assigned six hundred armed soldiers from among his supporters to [guard] the Judenstrasse, and the lords of Bohemia assigned several hundred men to protect and guard us as well.<sup>34</sup>

We see here that Matthias like his brother felt the obligation to protect the Jewish neighbourhood in Prague, because the Prague Jews were afraid of an attack by the local mob after the coronation of Matthias as king of Bohemia and Silesia on 23 May 1611.

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32 This topic was briefly discussed by DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), p. 64.

33 DAVID, *כרוניקה עברית*, No. 76, p. 28.

34 DAVID, *A Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), p. 69. – An official Privilege for preventing the Bohemian Jews' rights has been issued from the king Matthias' office on August 1611, see BOHUMIL BONDY / FRANTIŠEK DVORSKÝ, *K historii židu v Cechách, na Moravě a v Slezsku 906 až 1620*, 2 vols, Praha 1906, vol. II, no. 1041, pp. 801-803 = GOTTLIEB BONDY / FRANZ DWORSKY, *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien von 906 bis 1620*, 2 vols. Prague 1906, vol. II, no. 1041, pp. 821-822. It might be that this act is mentioned by the author.

In connection with the events described above, three סליחות (*seliḥot*, penitential prayers) for the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Adar, prescribed for recitation by the Prague rabbi Solomon Ephraim b. Aaron of Łęczyca (in Yiddish/Hebrew: לונטשיץ; 1550–1619)<sup>35</sup> at that time, were printed as an appendix to the book of penitential prayers, published in Prague in 1613.<sup>36</sup> The first prayer which begins with: אלה אזכרה ואשכח עלי נפשי, contains a brief description of how Prague's Jews were saved in the course of these terrifying events, praising God for their rescue. The details that emerge from the prayers are consistent with what is reported by our chronicler, including the attack on the city by the Passauers, the noise of the cannon, the fear experienced by the Jews, and the prayers offered for deliverance, which were answered.<sup>37</sup> As the composer R. Solomon Ephraim of Łęczyca writes:

בזכרי התלאות אשר עברו ראשי, גברו עתקו בשנת שע"א בחדש אדר בשני בו ביום שלישי [...] מרחוק בא גוי כאשר ידאה הנשר. נקראו חיל פסויאר אשר באו דרך הגשר. סללו להם דרך שם לכבוש העיר בכושר. ערכו מערכה מול מערכה בלי פשר. פח ופחת סער מתחולל. צר ומצוק מכל צד ביום שפכו סולל. קודר הלכנו מקול רעמים המחרידים איש שיבה, גם יונק ועולל. רעדה אחזתנו חיל כילודה מן מוליך יועצים שולל [...] מלא רחמים ברחמיו העצומים חמל על עמו היושבים עגומים.

35 This sage together with R. Isaiah Horowitz (*Ha-Shlah*) (c. 1555–1630) led the Jewish community in Prague after the passing of R. Judah Loew (*Maharaḥ*) in 1609. He passed away in 1619 and left several rabbinic writings, including a commentary on the Pentateuch, called *כלי יקר* (*Keli Yaqar*), and collections of sermons. – On him and his works, see *inter alia*: MAX GRÜNWARD, *Rabbi Salomo Efraim Luntschitz. Oberrabbiner in Prag von Jahre 1604-1618: ein Lebensbild*, Frankfurt am Main 1892; MAX GRÜNWARD, in: *Illustrierter israelitischer Volkskalender*, Prag 5653 [1892/3], pp. 99-128; ISRAEL BETTAN, "Sermons of Ephraim Luntschitz," in: *Hebrew Union College Annual* 8-9 (1931/32), pp. 443-480; ISRAEL BETTAN, *Studies in Jewish Preaching*, Cincinnati 1939, pp. 273-316; HAYYIM HILLEL BEN-SASSON, עושר ועוני במשנתו של המוכיח ר' אפרים איש לונצ'ץ, in: *ציון* (*Zion*), 19 (1954), pp. 142-166; HAYYIM HILLEL BEN-SASSON, הגות והנהגה, Jerusalem 1959, index; OTTO MUNELES, כתובות מבית-העלמין היהודי העתיק בפראג, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 282-284.; MARK SAPERSTEIN, *Jewish Preaching 1200-1800. An Anthology*, New Haven / London 1989, pp. 401-405.

36 A very rare copy of that edition is located at the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, in New York (Rare room, 1760: 9); facsimile of the first page p. 19 below. – I want to express my gratitude to Mr. Avraham Frenkel of Nof Ayalon for letting me know about this text and generously giving me photo copy of those *Seliḥot* more than ten years ago.

37 The significance of this source was discussed by RACHEL GREENBLATT, *To Tell Their Children. Jewish Communal Memory in Early Modern Prague*, Stanford 2014, pp. 120, 122-126.

When I recall the tribulations I have experienced, which worsened in the year [5]371 [1611], on the second of Adar, a Tuesday [...]. From afar came a nation, as the eagle flies. They were called the Passauer Army and came by way of the bridge.<sup>38</sup> They paved themselves a path there to conquer the city with skill. Army was drawn up against army, with no resolution. A trap and a pit, a storm whirling. Anguish and distress from every side on the day they threw down ramparts. We went about gloomily due to the terrifying thunderous noises, elderly and also nursing babes and youngsters. Trembling took hold in us, anguish like a woman in childbirth, at the one who led the councilmen in plundering [...] may the merciful one, in his unbounding mercy, take pity on his people who wallow in misery.<sup>39</sup>

The second prayer which begins with: תולעת יעקב אל תראי כי אתך גואלך וצורך, stresses that the Jews of Prague instituted a yearly day of remembrance on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Adar, to commemorate their rescue, as the composer writes:

לכן קבלנו עלינו מדור לדור ועל זרעינו לאשר ישנו פה ק"ק פראג ואגפיה ואשר איננו אתנו. כל שנה ושנה לספר חסדי יי' אשר עשה לנו.

Therefore, we accepted upon ourselves for all generations and for our descendants. Who will be here in the holy community of Prague [...]. Every year to tell of God's loving kindnesses that he did for us.<sup>40</sup>

To sum up: The Hebrew chronicle from Prague contains an authentic account of traumatic events afflicting Bohemia in general, and Prague in particular, in the beginning of the second decade of the seventeenth century. With regard to the events in Prague, as described, it is evident that the author was an eyewitness himself of the bloody struggle until today known as the *Passauer Kriegsvolk*. A comparison of the chronicle with what is known from other Bohemian sources, including royal documents, proves the high degree of accuracy in the details and data as well as the historical thinking and scholarly work done by its author. To the best of my knowledge, with the exception of the data found in the above-mentioned penitential prayers, the chronicle is the only Jewish source that deals with these events. But our author remains always impartial and does not give any hint to which camp he feels loyalty, although he stresses time and again that and how Rudolf protected Prague Jews during the battles in the city. Nevertheless, we cannot conclude that he himself supported Rudolf.

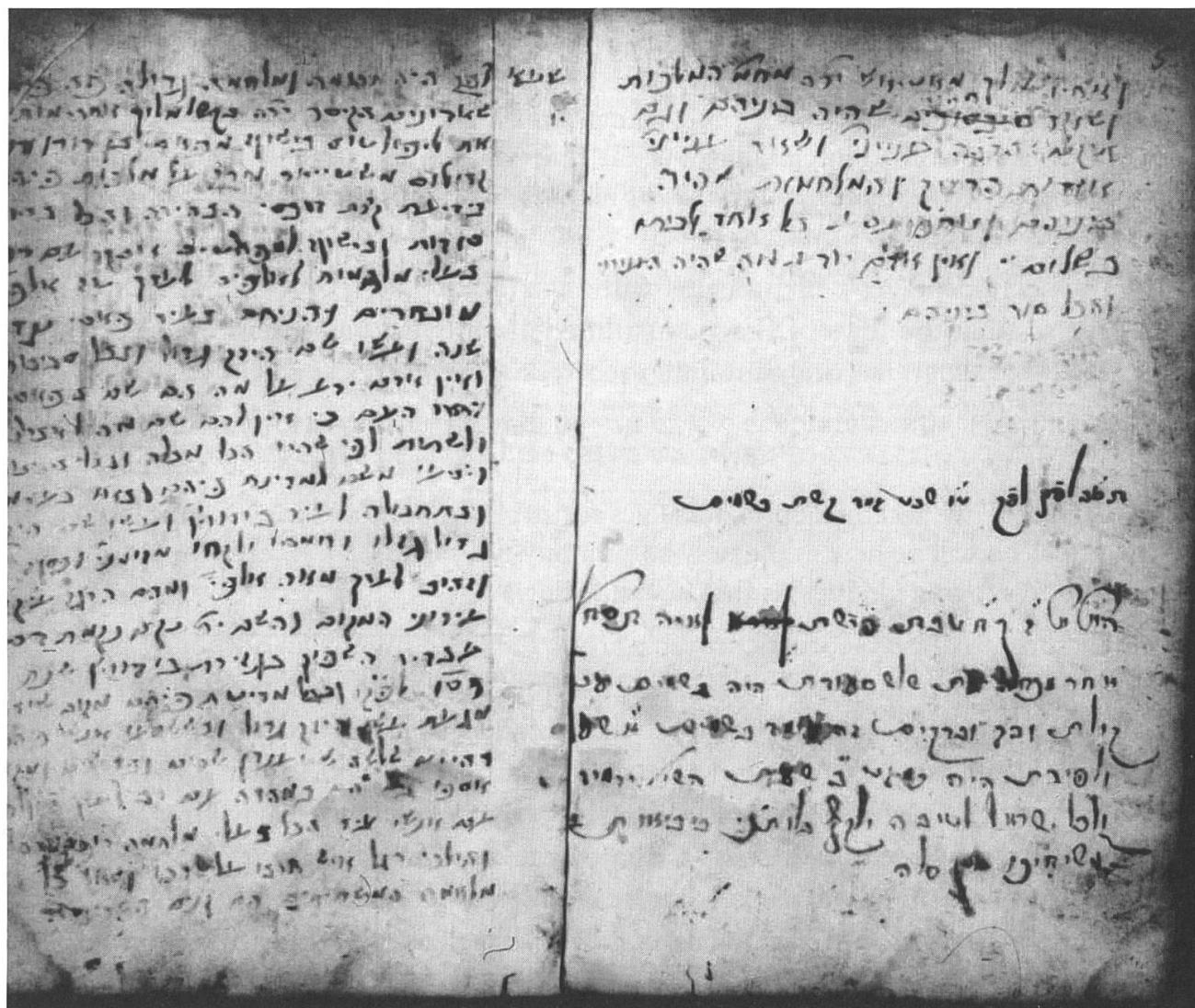
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38 This is the Charles Bridge.

39 This paragraph, except the first and the last sentences was translated into English by GREENBLATT, *To Tell Their Children* (note 37), p. 124.

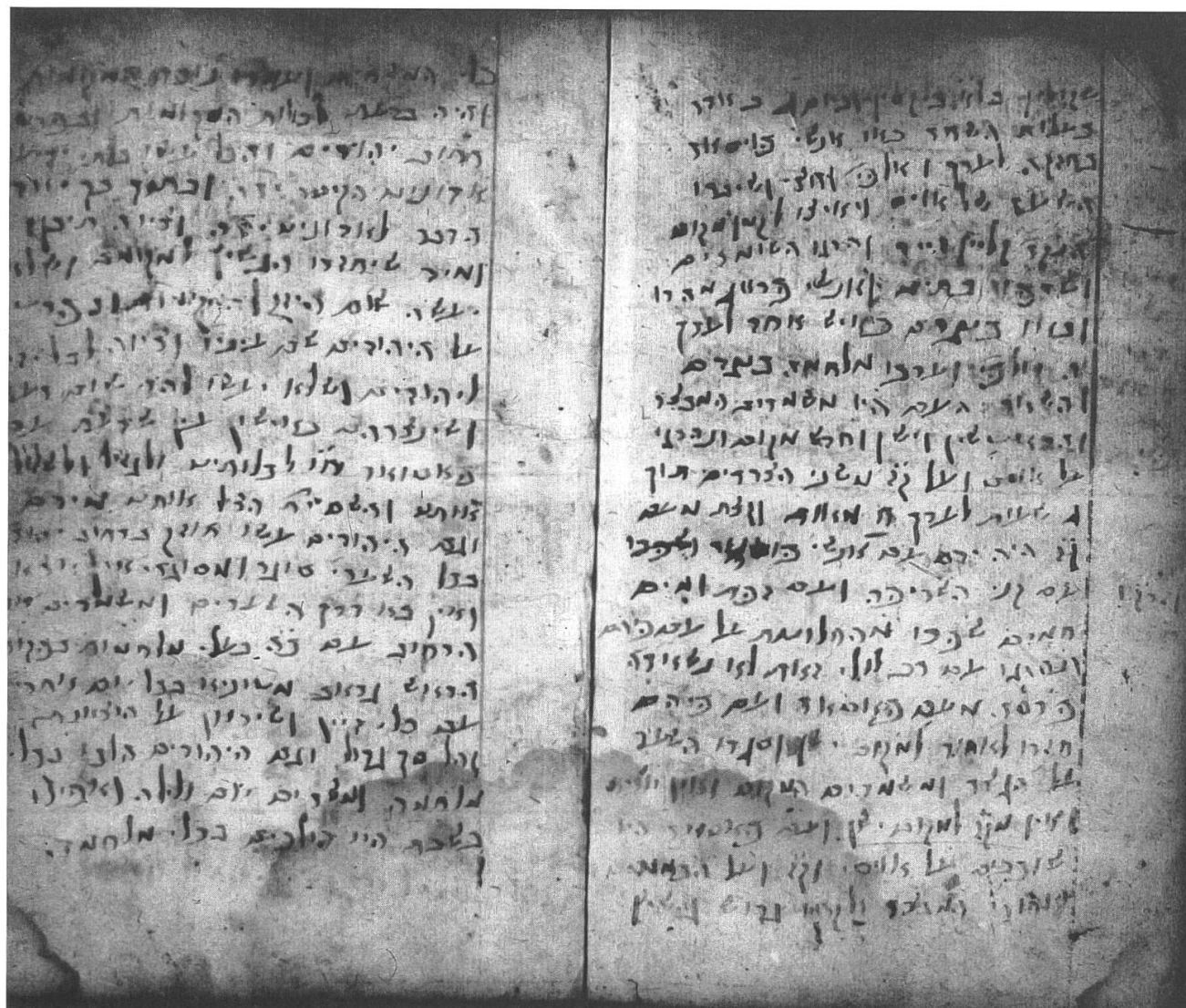
40 This paragraph was translated into English by GREENBLATT, *To Tell Their Children* (note 37), p. 125.

Appendix:



A paragraph from the Prague *Hebrew Chronicle*  
 Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York  
 Ms. Mic. 3849, fol. 16v-17r  
 (cf. p. 3 note 6)





A paragraph from the Prague Hebrew Chronicle  
 Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York  
 Ms. Mic. 3849, fol. 17v-18r  
 (cf. p. 3 note 6)



A paragraph from the Prague Hebrew Chronicle  
 Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York  
 Ms. Mic. 3849, fol. 18v-19r  
 (cf. p. 3 note 6)





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 (cf. p. 3 note 6)



The first page of the first penitential prayer for the second day of Adar 1611, by R. Solomon Ephraim b. Aaron of Łeczyca (cf. p. 13, note 36)