

# Johann Christoph Wagenseil and his relationship with Jewish scholars in the second half of the 17th century

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# Johann Christoph Wagenseil and his relationship with Jewish scholars in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century

By *Abraham David*\*

## *Abstract*

*In the Library Albertina at the University of Leipzig is located a collection of seventy-seven original Hebrew and Yiddish letters (Ms. B. H. 18), addressed to the great Christian scholar Johann Christoph Wagenseil, orientalist, jurist and Hebraist in Nürnberg and Altdorf (1633–1705). The letters were written between 1640 and 1687 by Jewish scholars and communal leaders from the territories of the Holy Roman Empire, who kept up a friendly relationship with Wagenseil. The Jewish correspondents felt free to share with Wagenseil even their personal problems, including their request for financial assistance. Wagenseil was greatly interested in all kinds of Jewish culture as we can see from his publications on Judaism. Furthermore, we find some letters in which the writers responded to Wagenseil's questions about Jewish topics, such as: Messianism according to Jewish tradition, pedagogical methods in Jewish education, Synagogue customs or notes on Hebrew bibliography.*

*Several scholars have published a small part of that collection already in the last century. In this study, we briefly will discuss this great Christian scholar's interest in Jewish tradition as well as his connection with Jewish scholars and rabbis. The discussion focusses on the correspondence between him and the four Jewish figures: R. Samuel Issachar Beer Eibeschutz Perlhefter, his wife Bella Perlhefter from Prague, R. Haggai Hanoach ha-Levi Fränkel from Hanau and R. Menachem Sundel who was expelled from Vienna in 1670.*

*Die Bibliothek Albertina der Universität Leipzig beherbergt eine Sammlung von siebenund-siebzig originalen, hebräischen und jiddischen Briefen (Ms. B. H. 18), die an den bedeutenden christlichen Gelehrten Johann Christoph Wagenseil, Orientalist, Jurist und Hebraist in Nürnberg und Altdorf (1633–1705), gerichtet sind. Geschrieben haben sie zwischen 1640 und 1687 jüdische Gelehrte und Gemeindevertreter aus verschiedenen Regionen des Heiligen Römischen Reiches, die zu Wagenseil in freundschaftlichen Beziehungen standen. Die jüdischen Briefschreiber fühlten sich frei, Wagenseil selbst persönliche Probleme mitzuteilen, einschliesslich ihn um finanzielle Unterstützung zu ersuchen. Wie seinen Werken zu entnehmen ist, war Wagenseil an allem, was jüdische Kultur war, sehr interessiert. Zudem finden wir einige Briefe, mit denen ihre Verfasser auf Fragen Wagenseils zu jüdischen Themen antworteten, zum Beispiel:*

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*Messianismus nach jüdischer Überlieferung, pädagogische Methoden jüdischer Erziehung, synagogale Bräuche oder Bemerkungen zur hebräischen Bibliographie.*

Einen kleinen Teil dieser Sammlung haben verschiedene Forscher im letzten Jahrhundert bereits veröffentlicht. Nach einem kurzen Blick auf den christlichen Gelehrten, seine jüdischen Interessen und Beziehungen zu jüdischen Gelehrten und Rabbinern, stehen im Mittelpunkt dieses Artikels folgende vier Brieffpartner: R. Samuel Issachar Beer Eibeschütz Perlhefter, seine Frau Bella Perlhefter aus Prag, R. Haggai Hanoah ba-Levi Fränkel aus Hanau und R. Menachem Sundel, der 1670 aus Wien vertrieben worden ist.

Johann Christoph Wagenseil, the renowned Christian Hebraist, theologian, historian, orientalist, and jurist, was born in Nürnberg in 1633 and died in 1705 in Altdorf, a small town in the same area. He was one of the late Renaissance polymaths and held various academic positions. From his youth, he was greatly interested in Judaism and was on friendly terms with a large circle of Jewish scholars in Germany and abroad.<sup>1</sup> A small part of the correspondence between them has been preserved. It shows in some ways his sympathy with Jewish people and Judaism (we will come back to this point later). He studied Judaism intensively, especially theology, philosophy, and Hebrew and taught those subjects at the *Academia Norica* in Altdorf, founded in 1575 and turned into a University in 1622.<sup>2</sup> From 1667, Wagenseil was professor at that University, where he also learned Yiddish and studied its literature.

A series of at least ten of his writings in Latin and German were devoted to Jewish culture. Four of them, we will discuss in the following article:

(A) His first publication is an edition of the Hebrew text with Latin translation of the Mishnah tractate *Sotah*: *Sota, Hoc est: Liber Mischnicus De Uxore Adulterii Suspecta: Una cum Libris En Jacob Excerptis Gemarae Versione Latina, & Commentario perpetuo [...] Accedunt Correctiones Lipmannianae*, which appeared in Altdorf in

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1 In the last decades, two monographs on his attitude toward Jews and Judaism have been published: PAUL GERHARD ARING, „*Wage du, zu irren und träumen...*“ *Juden und Christen unterwegs: theologische Biographien, biographische Theologie im christlich-jüdischen Dialog der Barockzeit*, Leipzig 1992, and PETER BLASTENBREI, *Johann Christoph Wagenseil und seine Stellung zum Judentum*, Erlangen 2004. – See also HARTMUT BOBZIN, *Der Altdorfer Gelehrte Johann Christoph Wagenseil und seine Bibliothek*, in: PETER SCHÄFER / IRINA WANDREY (eds.), *Reuchlin und seine Erben* (Pforzheimer Reuchlinschriften, vol. 11), Ostfildern 2005, pp. 77-95.

2 HANS RECKNAGEL, *Die Nürnbergerische Universität Altdorf und ihre großen Gelehrten*, Altdorf 1998; HANS CHRISTOF BRENNECKE / DIRK NIEFANGER / WERNER WILHELM SCHNABEL (eds.), *Akademie und Universität Altdorf, Studien zur Hochschulgeschichte Nürnbergs* (Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte, vol. 69), Köln / Weimar / Wien 2011.

1674. As indicated in the title, in the same volume he also included midrashic and aggadic material selected and excerpted from *עין יעקב* ('*Ein Ya'akov*'), the well-known collection of midrashic and aggadic material from the Babylonian Talmud, compiled by Ya'akov b. Shelomoh Ibn Ḥaviv (Zamora c. 1445–1515 Saloniki), completed and edited by his son Levi b. Ya'akov Ibn Ḥaviv (Zamora c. 1480–c. 1545 Jerusalem). To these treatises, he added philological corrections to *ספר נצחון* (*Sefer Nisṣaḥon*) by Yom Tov Lipmann b. Shelomoh Mühlhausen (late 14<sup>th</sup>/early 15<sup>th</sup> c.),<sup>3</sup> which was published in 1644 in Nürnberg by Theodor Hackspan, one of Wagenseil's teachers.<sup>4</sup> The author of this polemical work was a famous Jewish scholar, kabbalist and authority on halakhic matters in Prague and Erfurt<sup>5</sup> in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> This edition of *ספר נצחון* was the first of many Hebrew anti-Christian polemics to be published.

(B) In 1699, Wagenseil published in Königsberg an anthology of several texts in Yiddish:<sup>7</sup> *Belehrung der Jüdisch-Teutschen Red-und Schreibart : Durch welche Alle so des wahren Teutschen Lesens kundig, für sich selbst, innerhalb wenig Stunden zu sothaner Wissenschaft gelangen können [...]; Zur Zugabe Wird ein Bedencken beygefüget, wodurch die viel und lang höchst-strittig gewesene Frage: Ob die Heil. Schrift einem Mann erlaube zwey Schwestern nacheinander zu heyrathen? Dermaleins zu bescheiden und die Bejahung allerdings fest zu setzen gesucht wird.* The book appeared a second time in Frankfurt am Main in 1715 and includes *inter alia*: Passover songs; the *Megilles Vintz* of Elhanan son of Abraham Heln (17<sup>th</sup> c.), describing the uprising under Vinzenz Fettmilch (Büdesheim

3 On him and his polemical *ספר נצחון*, see: YEHUDAH KAUFMANN, *ר' יום טוב ליפמן*, מילהויון בעל הניצחון, החוקר והמקובל, New York 1927, pp. 1-71; FRANK E. TALMAGE, Introduction to *ספר נצחון* (1644 אלטדורף-נירנברג), Jerusalem 1984; ISRAEL JACOB YUVAL, *חכמים בדורם: המנהיגות הרוחנית של יהודי גרמניה בשלהי ימי הביניים*, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 152-157.

4 On him, see: BOBZIN, *Der Altdorfer Gelehrte* (note 2), pp. 80-82.

5 On his life in Erfurt (Thüringen), see: ABRAHAM DAVID, *Jewish Sages in Medieval Erfurt*, in: *Judaica* 70 (2014), pp. 121-138, esp. pp. 130-135.

6 A short survey of his writings in KAUFMANN, *ר' יום טוב ליפמן מילהויון* (note 3), pp. 71-89. – In some writings, his name appears as *Tavyomi*, i.e. Yom Tov in Aramaic, see: bSanh 97a; bBB12b; bQid 14b etc. – Some other of his writings were discovered and published by EPHRAIM KUPFER, *ספר הברית וכתבים אחרים*, in: *סיני / Sinai* 56 (1965), pp. 330-343; EPHRAIM KUPFER / DAVID SHMUEL LOEWINGER, *"תיקון ספר תורה" של ר' יום טוב ליפמן מילהויון*, in: *סיני / Sinai* 60 (1967), pp. 237-268; ISRAEL WEINSTOCK, *דרשת "תורת ה' תמימה" לר' יום-*, in: *סיני / Sinai* 84 (1979), pp. 126-132; ISRAEL WEINSTOCK, *פירוש ספר יצירה לרבי יום-טוב ליפמן מילהויון*, in: *טמירין / Temirin* 2 (1981), pp. 93-121.

7 On his interests in Yiddish as attested by this anthology as well as his correspondence with some Jewish sages, see: AYA ELYADA, *A Goy Who Speaks Yiddish. Christians and the Jewish Language in Early Modern Germany*, Stanford 2012, pp. 26-27 and index.



1565/70–1616 Frankfurt a. M.) in Frankfurt in 1614;<sup>8</sup> a Yiddish version of the Arthurian legend etc.

(C) Wagenseil's best known publication was (and still is), however, his *Tela ignea Satanae : hoc est Arcani, & horribiles Judaeorum adversus Christum Deum, & Christianam religionem libri Anekdotoi : sunt vero R. Lipmanni Carmen memoriale, Liber Nizṣachon vetus auctoris incogniti, Acta disputationis R. Jezielis cum quodam Nicolao, Acta disputationis R. Mosis Nachmanidis cum fratre Paulo Christiani, et fratre Raymundo Martini, R. Isaaci Liber Chissuk Emuna, Libellus Toldos Jeschu*, which was printed in two volumes in Altdorf in 1681 (reprint in 2 vols. Farnborough 1970). As can be learned from its baroque title, it is a collection of some Medieval Hebrew polemical treatises, which never were printed before. To publish such polemical literature by Jews in Christian countries had just been impossible. However, two of them, the תולדות ישו (*Toldot Yeshu*) and ספר נצחון (*Sefer Niṣṣahon*) of Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen were very well known, since each one was copied in some dozen manuscripts. It seems that Wagenseil – by publishing these texts – wanted to show that, and how, Jews throughout the generations blasphemed Christianity. In this comprehensive publication, Wagenseil also sharply criticized the Jewish faith in general and the above-mentioned ספר נצחון in particular. In his *Tela Ignea Satanae*, Wagenseil dedicates more than five hundred pages to criticism of Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen's theological theories. Nevertheless, Wagenseil displayed some sympathy with Judaism and thought of converting Jews to Christianity, an important missionary task, which could not take place, however, unless Christians treated Jews kindly.

(D) In addition to them, Wagenseil published *Benachrichtigungen Wegen einiger die Judenschafft angehendenden wichtigen Sachen* (“Notifications about some important matters concerning the Jewish community”), which came out in two parts in Leipzig in 1705. Likewise a collection of treatises on various topics related to Jews and Judaism, its first part (220 pp.) contains: (1) *Die Hoffnung der Erlösung Israelis oder klarer Beweis der grossen / und wie es scheint / allgemach herannahenden Juden-Bekehrung / sammt unvorgreiflichen Gedancken / wie solche nechst Verleibung Göttlicher Hülfe / zu befördern* – a “Hope for the Redemption of Israel”, in which

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8 The first edition of the מגילת וויניץ (Hebrew and Yiddish) came out in Amsterdam 1648. For a critical edition, see: RIVKA ULMER, *Turmoil, Trauma and Triumph, The Fettmilch Uprising in Frankfurt am Main (1612-1616) according to Megillas Vintz. A Critical Edition of the Yiddish and Hebrew Text including an English Translation* (Judentum und Umwelt / Realms of Judaism; vol. 72), Bern / Frankfurt a. M. [etc.] 2001. – Cf. further MAX WEINREICH, שטאַפּלען פיר עטיודן צו דער יידישער, שפראַכוויסנשאַפּט און ליטעראַטורגעשיכטע מגילת וויניץ, א (pp. 140-192); and CILLI KASPER-HOLTKOTTE, *Die jüdische Gemeinde von Frankfurt/Main in der Frühen Neuzeit. Familien, Netzwerke und Konflikte eines jüdischen Zentrums*, Berlin / New York 2010.

he declares “Therefore, where the Jews are tormented and harassed, one can do nothing fruitful toward their conversion;” (2) *Wiederlegung der Unwarheit daß die Juden zu ihrer Bedürffniß Christen-Blut haben müssen* – a “Refutation of the Untrue Argument that the Jews use the blood of Christians” (Blood libel); (3) *Anzeigung / wie leicht es dahin zu bringen / daß die Juden forthin absteben müssen / die Christen mit Wuchern und Schinden zu plagen* – “Advice on how to prevent the Jews from Oppressing the Christians and profiteering by their usury”. Its second part (published under the slightly different title *Benachrichtigung Wegen einiger die gemeine Jüdischheit betreffenden wichtigen Sachen*; 302 pp.) includes: (4) *Bericht von dem Jüdischen Gebeth Alenu* – “Report (explanation) on the Daily Jewish Prayer *Alenu* [*le-shabeach*]”; (5) *Denunciatio Christiana, wegen der Jüden Lästereien* – “The Slander of Christianity, because of the Jews’ blasphemies”, and as an appendix *Rabbi Mose Stendels / in Jüdisch-Teutsche Reimen gebrachte Psalmen Davids*.

Much has been written about Wagenseil’s attitude towards the Jewish people, in recent years by Paul Gerhard Aring<sup>9</sup> and Peter Blastenbrei.<sup>10</sup> Both authors conclude that Wagenseil was a “philo-Semite”, but we cannot agree with them. It is all but convincing, if not absurd, to consider someone a philo-Semite who for religious reasons – despite of his intensive studies of Judaism – is not prepared to accept Jews as Jews. Furthermore, the mere publication of the *Tela Ignea Satanae* and its goal is the best proof of Wagenseil’s negative attitude towards Judaism. It might be that at the beginning his attitude towards Jews and Judaism was tactically more positive as we can judge from his writings before the 1680s and his positive correspondence with Jewish scholars in Germany and abroad between the years 1640 and 1687.<sup>11</sup>

Part of Wagenseil’s *Judaica collection* has been preserved in the library of the Erlangen-Nürnberg University, another part in the University library (Albertina) in Leipzig, which also includes some dozens of Hebrew manuscripts.<sup>12</sup> These manuscripts were catalogued in Latin by Franz Delitzsch (Leipzig 1813–1890 Leipzig) with some additional notes in German by Leopold Zunz (Detmold 1794–1886 Berlin).<sup>13</sup> Three of these manuscripts

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9 See note 1 above.

10 See note 1 above.

11 On this point, see below.

12 On Wagenseil’s library, see: BOBZIN, *Der Altdorfer Gelehrte* (note 2), pp. 85-95. – On the collection in the Erlangen-Nürnberg University library, see also: EVA-MARIA DEGEN, *Die “Sammlung Wagenseil” an der Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen-Nürnberg*, in: *Bibliothekforum Bayern (BFB)*, 24 (1996), pp. 334-340.

13 FRANZ DELITZSCH, *Katalogus Librorum Manuscriptorum qui in Bibliotheca Senatoria Civitatis Lipsiensis Asservantur*, Grimma 1838, pp. 271-328; LEOPOLD ZUNZ, *ibid*, pp. 314-328.

contain collections of correspondence. The most important is the manuscript Ms. B. H. 18,<sup>14</sup> which contains seventy-seven original Hebrew and Yiddish letters, written between the years 1640 and 1687 and addressed to Wagenseil by Jewish scholars and communal leaders from the territories of the Holy Roman Empire, who kept up friendly relationships with Wagenseil.<sup>15</sup> Large part of these letters was copied by a later hand and preserved there in manuscript B. H. 34. In addition to that, manuscript B. H. 18 comprises short miscellaneous Hebrew and Yiddish texts, *inter alia* transcriptions of tombstones in Amsterdam and Italy, poems, sermons, a *Purim Shpil* in Yiddish.<sup>16</sup>

Among the preserved letters,<sup>17</sup> there is quite a number written by individuals, which illustrate the close relationship between the Jewish writers and Wagenseil. Of these writers however, a few only are known from other sources. In the following, I will focus on four of them:

(1) Shmuel Issachar b. Yehudah Leyb Moses Eybeschuetz Perlhefter – Beer Perlhefter (Prague 1650–1713 Prague) and his wife Bella Perlhefter (d. 1710 Prague).

This couple were among Wagenseil's closest friends. Some biographical details can be obtained from their correspondence with Wagenseil in the years 1674 to 1676, and 1681 to 1682. Decades ago already, at least ten letters from him and two from her were published by Bernard D. Weinryb (Turobin 1905–1982 New York).<sup>18</sup>

Shmuel Issachar Beer Perlhefter was a member of the famous Eybeschuetz family of Prague, where he married Bella, the daughter of R. Jacob Perlhefter, also of Prague. He adopted his wife's family name, which is no

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14 Hereafter: Ms. Leipzig.

15 A short description is included in ABRAHAM DAVID, *Die Hebräische Handschriftensammlung der Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig – Bibliotheca Albertina*, in: STEPHAN WENDEHORST (ed.), *Bausteine einer jüdischen Geschichte der Universität Leipzig* (Leipzig Studies of Jewish History and Culture, vol. 4), Leipzig 2006, p. 314.

16 This *Purim Shpil* was published by CHONE SHMERUK, *מחזות מקראיים בידיש*, Jerusalem 1979, pp. 155-210.

17 In his monograph on Wagenseil, PETER BLASTENBREI (note 1), pp. 102-118, lists these letters as part of Wagenseil's correspondence with his colleagues and friends, amounting to more than four hundreds letters.

18 BERNARD D. WEINRYB published seven letters in his "Historisches und Kulturhistorisches aus Wagenseils hebräischem Briefwechsel," in: *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 83 (1939), pp. 325-341. An augmented version of this article in Yiddish, which includes seventeen letters: BERNARD D. WEINRYB, *העברעאיש-יידישע קארעספאָנדענץ צווישן פראָפּעסאָר וואַגענזייל און יידן*, in: *געדאנק און לעבן* 2 (1944), pp. 109-137. Ten of them were written by Beer Perlhefter.

doubt a rather unusual phenomenon, and became known afterwards as *Beer Perlhefter* or *Beer of Prague*. From Beer and Bella Perlhefter's letters to Wagenseil, we can learn something about the biography of this pair as well as about Wagenseil's personality. Both of them wandered through several localities in Europe, such as Hamburg (in 1669) and Vienna, where they stayed a short time only, because of the expulsion of the Jews from there in 1670.<sup>19</sup> Afterwards, they returned to Prague, and after another four years, in 1674, Beer Perlhefter settled for a short while in Altdorf, where he became Wagenseil's teacher in Judaism. His wife Bella, however, stayed in Schnaittach, a little town not far from Altdorf, where she dealt in foodstuffs. Later she is supposed to have joined her husband in Altdorf, for teaching Wagenseil's daughter dancing and music.<sup>20</sup> In 1676, as we learn from two of Beer Perlhefter's letters, they moved to Schwabach, a town in Bavaria not far from Nürnberg.<sup>21</sup> After a short time, Beer Perlhefter was appointed Rabbi and teacher at the Yeshivah in Modena (Italy).<sup>22</sup> In Modena, Beer Perlhefter joined the Sabbatean believers and played an active role in their circle.<sup>23</sup> Six

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19 On the expulsion from Vienna in 1670, see: DAVID KAUFMANN, *Die letzte Vertreibung der Juden aus Wien und Niederösterreich, ihre Vorgeschichte (1625-1670) und ihre Opfer* (Jahresbericht der Landes-Rabbinerschule in Budapest; vol. 11), Wien 1889; BARBARA STAUDINGER, "Die Vertreibungen der Juden aus Wien und Niederösterreich 1669-1671," in: EVELINE BRUGGER / MARTHA KEIL / ALBERT LICHTBLAU / CHRISTOPH LIND / BARBARA STAUDINGER (eds.), *Geschichte der Juden in Österreich* (HERWIG WOLFRAM [ed.], *Österreichische Geschichte*, supplement), Wien 2006, pp. 330-337, 613-615.

20 Bella Perlhefter sent two letters to Wagenseil from Schnaittach. One is dated December 1674/January 1675 and the other November/December 1674. In addition to them she wrote two more letters to her husband from Prague to Altdorf, where he settled at that time (Ms. Leipzig, fol. 199, 90, 91, 201; see WEINRYB, *העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ* [note 18], nos. XIII-XVI, pp. 132-136). On Beer and Bella Perlhefter, see: NATHANAEL RIEMER, "Zwischen christlichen Hebraisten und Sabbatianern – der Lebensweg von R. Beer und Bila Perlhefter," in: *Aschkenas* / אשכנז 14 (2004), pp. 163-201; NATHANAEL RIEMER, "The Genesis and Manuscripts of Beer Sheva by Bella and Beer Perlhefter," in: *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 4 (2010), pp. 43-89.

21 See: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 189-90, 135 (WEINRYB, *העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ* [note 18], no. III-IV, pp. 123-126). See also RIEMER, "Zwischen christlichen Hebraisten und Sabbatianern" (note 20), pp. 179-181.

22 See: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 187, 170 (WEINRYB, *העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ* [note 18], no. V, X, pp. 126-127, 129-130).

23 On him as a radical Sabbatean believer, see: ISAIAH TISHBY, *המגיד השבתאי הראשון*, in: *בבית מדרשו של ר' אברהם רויגו*, in: *ציון* / *Zion* 22 (1957), pp. 21-55 (= ISAIAH TISHBY, *נתיבי אמונה ומינות. מסות ומחקרים בספרות הקבלה והשבתאות*, Ramat-Gan 1964 [1994],

years later, however, the Perlhefters left Modena after a vigorous struggle between Beer Perlhefter and Modena's Jewish community, for he strongly opposed his "friend" from Prague, Mordechai b. Ḥayyim Eisenstadt Ashkenazi, who also resided in Modena at the same time and claimed to be the Messiah,<sup>24</sup> as he writes:

ונוסף על זה שנאה אחרת, והוא כי היה יהודי אחד באשכנז ושמר רבי מרדכי אייזנשטאט עשה את עצמו לנביא ואח"כ אמר שהוא משיח, והאמינו בו האשכנזים, וזה שנה אחת כתבתי לזה ר' מרדכי שיבא לאיטליא, כי כך צוו עלי היהודים שם [...] וכאשר בא זה רבי מרדכי לאיטליא האמינו בו כלם שהוא משיח, ועשו לו כבוד גדול. וכאשר בא לעיר מאדיני שאני עמדתי קבלוהו כל היהודים שם בכבוד גדול, והיו קורין אותו משיח. הלכתי גם אני שם לראותו, וראיתי שהוא איש משוגע ובדקתיו והכרתי בו מעשה טומאה ומעשה כישוף. מיד הלכתי ממנו לחוץ, והזהרתי לכל היהודים שלא יאמינו בו, כי הוא שוטה ומכשף, וכאשר שמעו היהודים כך הטילו שנאה עלי [...] וכיון שראיתי כך אמרתי לילך משם, ושלא אדבר עוד על משיח.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to that, there is one more reason for their enmity, because there was a Jew in Germany, Rabbi Mordechai Eisenstadt his name, who declared himself a prophet and afterwards claimed to be the Messiah. Ashkenazi Jews believed him. One year ago, I wrote to this Rabbi Mordechai at the request of the Italian Jews, asking him to come to Italy [...]. When this Rabbi Mordechai came to Italy, all people believed that he is the Messiah, and they treated him with great honour. Moreover, when he came to city of Modena, where I stayed, he likewise was received with great honour, and they called him Messiah. I too went to see him, and I realized that he was a crazy person. I investigated him, and saw that he was involved in acts of impurity and witchcraft. I immediately left him and warned all Jews not to believe in him, because he is a fool and a sorcerer. When the Jews heard this, they began to hate me [...]. As a result, I decided to leave my position and not speak any more about the Messiah.

From Modena, the Perlhefters left for Schwabach, from where he and his wife were expelled by the local Jews who had an argument with him on the same matter:<sup>26</sup>

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pp. 81-107); RIEMER, "Zwischen christlichen Hebraisten und Sabbatianern" (note 20), pp. 181-194.

24 On him see: GERSHOM G. SCHOLEM, חלומותיו של השבתאי ר' מרדכי אשכנזי. על דבר ר' מרדכי אשכנזי, תלמידו של ר' אברהם רוויגו, Jerusalem 1938; GERSHOM G. SCHOLEM, פרקים אפוקאליפטיים ומשיחיים על ר' מרדכי מאיזנשטאט, in: ספר דינבורג, Jerusalem 1949, pp. 237-262 (= GERSHOM G. SCHOLEM, מחקרי שבתאות, ed. Yehudah Liebes, Tel-Aviv 1992, pp. 530-563); TISHBY, המגיד השבתאי הראשון (note 23).

25 See: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 170 (WEINRYB, קאַרעספּאַנדענץ [note 18], no. X, pp. 114-115, 129-130).

26 He briefly described his adventures in Modena and Schwabach in his letter to Wagenseil, which was sent from Ottensooos in March 1682. This letter was published by ADOLF BÜCHLER, "Die Grabschrift des Mardochai Mochiach," in:



באתי לעיר שוואבך, ביני וביני נשתגע משיח זה וברח מאיטליא עד פירד ומפירד לפולניא. בכך אמרו היהודים שבאיטליא, שבשביל צער מה ששמעו שדברו רע עליו נשתגע וברח. על כן הסכימו כולם כאחד לכתב אל היהודים שבעיר אנשבאך כמה דברים רעים לגרשני, ואמרו שאינו עון ביד יהודים, למי שעושה לי רעה או מי שמעיד עלי עדות שקר או מי שגוזל אותי בשביל ששחתתי את משיחם.

I came to the city Schwabach. In the meantime, this Messiah person became truly crazy and ran away from Italy to Fürth, and from there to Poland. Whereupon the Jews in Italy claimed that it was because of the sorrow that I caused him by falsely speaking against him that he became crazy and ran away. They all decided together to write evil things about me to the Jews in the city of Ansbach, so that they would banish me, and they claimed that it is not sinful to treat me badly, or to testify falsely against me, or to steal from me, for the reason that I destroyed their Messiah.

In 1682, Beer and Bella Perlhefter re-settled in Prague, where Beer Perlhefter was appointed דיין (*dayyan*) and became a member of the rabbinic court. From other sources, he is known also as a Halakhic authority, kabbalist and, as mentioned above, an active member of the Sabbatean movement.<sup>27</sup> The letters cited above reflect a strong relationship between the Perlhefters and Wagenseil. They started their letters to him with respectful formulae, as one would do when writing to a great, learned man. For example:

“The revered master and exceptionally learned and honourable, Rabbi Yochanan, the Christian,”<sup>28</sup> or [...] החכם הגדול “The Great sage, Rabbi Yochanan Carriage Rope.”<sup>30</sup>

They also shared with Wagenseil very personal information related to their daily life, sensitively written in beautiful Hebrew. One of Beer Perlhefter’s

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MARCUS BRANN / FERDINAND ROSENTHAL (eds.), *Gedenkbuch zur Erinnerung an David Kaufmann*, Breslau 1900, pp. 455-456; re-published by WEINRYB, “Historisches und Kulturhistorisches” (note 18), pp. 337-338; WEINRYB, העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ [note 18], pp. 129-130. A facsimile of this letter was published by ABRAHAM DAVID, “Die Schwabacher Korrespondenz Wagenseils mit Beer Eibeschutz/Perlhefter und Bella Perlhefter,” in: *Der Rabbinatsbezirk Schwabach* (Franconia Judaica, vol. 4), Ansbach 2009, pp. 43-46. – On the struggles between Beer Perlhefter and the Jewish communities in Modena and Schwabach regarding the conflict between him and Mordechai Eisenstadt Ashkenazi, see the articles by Nathanael Riemer and Isaiah Tishby mentioned in notes 20 and 23 above.

27 See: RIEMER, “Zwischen christlichen Hebraisten ” (note 20), pp. 194-201.

28 See: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 131 (WEINRYB, העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ [note 18], no. IX, p. 129)

29 The Hebrew term עבות עגלה is the exact translation of the name Wagenseil, the German term for “carriage rope”.

30 See: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 85 (WEINRYB, העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ [note 18], no. II, p. 123).



letters from February 1676 contains a short explanation of the idea of Messianism and its significance in Jewish tradition, for which Wagenseil had asked him.<sup>31</sup> In another letter from October 1681, written after his departure from Modena, Beer Perlhefter informs him of his efforts to prepare answers to Wagenseil's questions, but he does not specify what kind of questions Wagenseil had asked him.<sup>32</sup> In the same letter, the writer requests his addressee's intercession helping him to obtain permission from the authorities, probably, to settle in Altdorf. In another letter from March 1682, Beer Perlhefter complains that Jews in Ansbach had an argument with him, because he was learning together with the addressee (i.e. a Christian), and because Wagenseil interfered to help the writer to obtain a rabbinical position. In Beer Perlhefter's words:

אל הלמדן המופלג מאד נעלה כבוד הרב רבי יוחנן יכונה אדון וואגין זייל יצ"ו [...] לא אוכל להאריך מרוב התלאות, כי קמו עלי אנשי בליעל מהיהודים אשר באנשבאך השחיתוני העלילו עלי בשביל שאני לומד עם אדוני, ואשר ביקש אדוני לעזור לי בענין הרבנות.<sup>33</sup>

To the very distinguished scholar, the honoured R. Yochanan who is called Sir Wagenseil, may God, the Almighty, bless him [...] I am unable to write at length due to the many troubles that have fallen upon me from the evil people among the Jews of Ansbach. They have attempted to destroy me with libellous accusations, because I am studying with you, Sir, and because you are assisting me to get a rabbinical position.

However, I have doubts whether this was the case indeed, for it would not make any sense that a Christian interferes in a rabbinical nomination. It is more likely that the Ansbach Jews opposed Beer Perlhefter as a reaction to "his friend's" book *Tela Ignea Satanae*, which came out in 1681. In the same letter, the writer describes very briefly also the reason why he was forced to leave Modena and Schwabach, as mentioned above.

The two letters, which Bella Perlhefter had written to Wagenseil from Schnaittach, one is dated end of 1674 and the other beginning of 1675. At that time, her husband Issachar Beer was in the nearby Altdorf serving as Wagenseil's a teacher. In the first letter, written in December 1674,<sup>34</sup> she

31 See: Ms Leipzig, fol. 135 (WEINRYB, העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ [note 18], no. IV, pp. 125-126).

32 See: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 132 (WEINRYB, העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ [note 18], no. IV, p. 127).

33 See: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 170 (WEINRYB, העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ [note 18], no. X, p. 129).

34 See: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 199 (WEINRYB, העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ [note 18], no. XIII, pp. 132-133).

expresses appreciation of Wagenseil's invitation to join her husband who was staying at Wagenseil's house. She apologizes that she cannot move to Altdorf with two small children, but promises to move there in a more auspicious occasion. She also appreciates how generously Wagenseil treats her husband at his house. In another letter to Wagenseil, dated January 1675,<sup>35</sup> Bella, the foodstuff dealer, offers to sell Wagenseil wheat and beef.

(2) Another friend of Wagenseil was Haggai Hanoch ha-Levi Fränkel (Prague 1620–1690 Hanau), rabbi in Austria and Germany.

Haggai Hanoch Fränkel was born in Prague and held rabbinical position in Vienna until 1670, when he together with other Jews was expelled from this town, and settled in Fürth. In 1674, he was nominated rabbi in Bamberg. From there, in 1678, he moved to Hanau in Hessen, near Frankfurt a Main, where he served as a communal rabbi until his death in 1690.<sup>36</sup>

Two of his letters have been preserved and were published in the original language by Leopold Löwenstein.<sup>37</sup> The first one was sent from Fürth in January 1673 and is mostly written in Yiddish. R. [Haggai] Hanoch Levi [Fränkel] answers Wagenseil's questions regarding some unclear issues in the Pentateuch, according to the Jewish tradition. The writer bases his interpretation mainly on the Talmud and Rashi's commentaries.<sup>38</sup> No doubt, the nature of the explanations and the flowery style testify to the great ability of the addressee to understand the significance of the explanations. It seems also that Wagenseil could understand Yiddish well.

The second letter was written in Hanau in March 1683 as a reaction to Wagenseil's changing attitude towards Judaism. The writer sharply criticizes Wagenseil because of the publication of his *opus magnum* against the Jews: the *Tela ignea Satanae* (1681) accusing the Jews of being the great enemies of

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35 See: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 90 (WEINRYB, קאַרעספּאָנדענץ [note 18], no. XIV, pp. 133-134).

36 On him, see: LEOPOLD LÖWENSTEIN, "Zur Geschichte der Juden in Fürth," in: *Jahrbuch der Jüdisch-Literarischen Gesellschaft (Frankfurt a. M.)* 6 (1908), pp. 154-233, 8 (1910), pp. 66-213, and 10 (1913), pp. 2-144 (reprint in 1 vol. Hildesheim 1974), here: 8 (1910), pp. 90-92; ISAK NETHANËL GATH, *Der Hexenmeister von Schwabach, Der Prozess gegen den Ansbachischen Landesrabbiner Hirsch Fränkel*, Ansbach 2011, pp. 29-38, 65-66, 70-71; ISAK NETHANËL GATH, המכשף היהודי, משואבך, משפטו של רב מדינת ברנדנבורג – אנסבך צבי-הירש פרנקל, Tel-Aviv 2013, index.

37 MS. Leipzig, fol. 171, 136, see LÖWENSTEIN, "Geschichte der Juden in Fürth" (note 36), 8 (1910), pp. 207-212.

38 Ms. Leipzig, fol. 171, published by LÖWENSTEIN, "Geschichte der Juden in Fürth" (note 36), 8 (1910), pp. 207-210.

Christianity, eager to slander the Christian faith.<sup>39</sup> In view of the *Tela ignea Satanae*, Rabbi Haggai Hanoch ha-Levi felt obliged to criticize Wagenseil, even despite and after their longstanding friendship. He opened his letter with an apology for writing this letter angrily, saying:

כי מרוב צרות לבבי והדאגה אשר בלבי אנכי עושה את הדבר הזה כדי לקרר מר נפשי ורוחי כי לעצור במילין מי יוכל לקול השמועה אשר שמעתי גם בעיני ראיתי חרון אף של מעלתו, עשה רושם בכתב הספר אשר און וחקר ותקן הוא מחדש. בתוכו הראה גודל שנאתו על אחינו בית ישראל הנפוצים בארבע רוחות השמים, כאשר אמרו בעלי התלמוד שלנו גדולה היא השנאה, שהיא מקלקלת את השורה.

It is because of my many troubles and the worry that is in my heart that I do this, in order to cool down the bitterness of my soul and spirit. For who, indeed, would be able to hold back his words regarding the rumours, which I heard. I saw with my own eyes the anger of his honour, which made an impression upon the writing of the book, which he composed, researched and corrected anew. In it he showed the greatness of his hatred towards our brothers, the house of Israel, who are scattered to the far corners of the heavens. As our sages of the Talmud wrote, "great is hatred, because it corrupts the order of the world".

He then continues by pointing out the reason:

כן אדוני בחבורו הנזכר בשנאתו היה מקלקל עלינו את שורת הדת, בהזכירו דברי דופי ושמצה, מה שלפי דבריו נמצאו בספרנו. אמנם לא כן הדבר, ובמחילה הפריז על המדה, כי לא היו ולא נהיו ולא נמצאו ענינים ההם בשום אחד מספרינו.

So my master, in his aforementioned writing, because of his hatred, corrupted his proper judgment concerning us, when he mentioned lies and false accusations regarding words that he says are found in our holy books. Indeed, this is not so, and forgive me, he has exaggerated beyond measure, because these things do not exist, and were never found in any one of our books.

He also claims that he was surprised to realize that Wagenseil had completely changed his attitude to Judaism. He had been known as a philo-Semite and had become a real anti-Semite:

והנה מאד אתמה לנפשי בזכרי הימים הראשונים ושנים הקדומים, מיום היותי מכיר ויודע בטיב מעלתו מדי דברי בו מאחינו בית ישראל מצאתי את שאהבה נפשי, שהיה דורש טוב על כלל עדת ישראל. גם באזני שמעתי הנה מפיו תצא ואלי יקרא איך ידו נטויה להטיב עמנו לחבר חבור מיוחד המורה על שבח היהודים, כדי להסיר מעלינו קנאת המון עם החורקים שניהם עלינו בכל יום תמיד ולהוציא מלבם שנאתם. אלה דברי פי חכם ולשונות של חיבה שמעו אזני מפי מעלתו. לא פעם ולא שתים, רק שלשים ורביעים. וחיבה יתירה נודעת לי ממ"כ, שהוא מצד עצמו יצא ללמד זכות על הכלל כולו. ואדם אין אשר בקש זאת מידו. אז אמרתי בלבי מה נפלאות אהבתו עלינו, והייתי שמח וטוב לב. שמחתי ושמחתי אחרים

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39 MS. Leipzig, fol. 136, published by LÖWENSTEIN, "Geschichte der Juden in Fürth" (note 36), 8 (1910), pp. 210-212. A German translation of this letter was published by FRANZ KOBLER, *Juden und Judentum in Deutschen Briefen aus drei Jahrhunderten*, Wien 1935, pp. 35-37.

בהזכיר נגדם ממדת טובו דמעלתו. את כל אלה אזכרה ואשפכה עלי נפשי. מדוע נהפך מעלתו לנגדינו מטובה לרעה ומאוהב לאויב?

I am extremely surprised about all this, especially when I remember the early days and years when I recognized and knew well the excellence of his honour. Everything I heard about him from our brothers, the house of Israel led me to believe that I had found a true friend, one that my heart loved, who sought only good for the entire community of Israel. I also heard with my own ears the words that came out of his mouth, when he said to me, how his arm was outstretched to do good things for us; how he wrote a special essay that expressed praise for the Jews in order to remove from us the jealousy of the masses who gnash their teeth against us on a daily basis, and to remove that hatred from their hearts. These were the words of a wise man, and it was an expression of love that my ears heard from his honour. This happened not once nor twice, but at least three or four times, and he showed an even greater love in that he himself wrote that he went out of his way to defend the entire nation of his own desire, since no man asked this of him. Then I said to myself, how wondrous is his love for us, and I was happy and inwardly pleased. I was happy and I brought happiness to others when the extent of your honour's goodness was mentioned. All these things I remember, and I pour out my soul, asking, why has his honour changed his attitude towards us from good to bad, from being a friend to being our enemy?

From this paragraph, we can assume that the writer had a close relationship with Wagenseil and they had met several times.

(3) One more part of the correspondence is a series of letters written to Wagenseil between the years 1658–1677 by R. Menachem Sundel son of Jacob.<sup>40</sup> R. Menachem Sundel resided in Vienna until he was expelled from there in 1670 together with all other Jews.<sup>41</sup> Afterwards he wandered around, staying in Prague,<sup>42</sup> Nikolsburg in Moravia (today Mikulov),<sup>43</sup> Schnaittach,<sup>44</sup> and

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40 In Ms. Leipzig are preserved from him fifteen letters: fol. 100, 102, 103, 105, 107, 109 -114, 116, 118, 173, and 198.

41 As he mentions in some letters, such as fol. 103, 114, and 173.

42 In 1672, Ms. Leipzig, fol. 114.

43 In 1672, Ms. Leipzig, fol. 109. – On its Jewish community, see: BRUNO MAURITZ TRAPP, "Geschichte der Juden in Nikolsburg," in: HUGO GOLD (ed.), *Die Juden und Judengemeinden Mährens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart – ein Sammelwerk*, Brünn 1929, pp. 417-450; ISAAC ZEEV KAHANE, "ניקולסבורג," in: YEHUDAH LEYB MAIMON (ed.), *ערים ואמהות בישראל, מצבת קודש לקהילות ישראל שנחרבו בידי עריצים וטמאים במלחמת העולם האחרונה*, 7 vols. Jerusalem 1946-1960, vol. IV (1950), pp. 210-313. – It seems that his father, R. Jacob, resided in Nikolsburg, but see Ms. Leipzig, fol. 110.

44 In 1673, Ms. Leipzig, fol. 198. On the Jewish community in Schnaittach in that period, see: MEIR HILDESHEIMER, *פנקס קהילת שנייטאך*, Jerusalem 1992.

Fürth,<sup>45</sup> both towns in Mittelfranken (Germany). His economic situation must have been very bad, as we can learn from several letters to Wagenseil, in which he requested financial support.<sup>46</sup> In one of these letters,<sup>47</sup> sent from Vienna in April 1670, shortly after Leopold Kollonitsch, Bishop of Wiener Neustadt and later Archbishop of Vienna had issued the expulsion decree on 28. February 1670,<sup>48</sup> the writer says that he does not know where to go, to Nikolsburg or Jamnitz (today Jemnice),<sup>49</sup> both in Moravia. We know that many Jews after their expulsion from Vienna took their way to Bohemia and Moravia and found refuge there, including those towns.<sup>50</sup> R. Menachem Sundel writes:

והנה אודיע למעכ"ת מרוב צער ובכי וטרדות הזמן שעברו עלינו [...] מחמת הגירוש [...] יגרש אותנו העברים מק"ק ווינא [...] אני עני ואביון. והנה בודאי מוכן אני ליסע משם ביום א' הבע"ל לק"ק נ"ש במדינ' [ת] מערין או ק"ק יעמניץ ט"ז פרסאות מק"ק ווין.

With this, I will make known to the very honourable sir, with much sorrow and pain, the difficult times that have befallen us [...] because of the expulsion [...] We Hebrews have been expelled from our holy community in Vienna [...] I am poor and needy. I am certainly prepared to move from here this coming Sunday, to the holy community of Nikolsburg, in Moravia, or to the holy community of Jamnitz, 16 parasangs from Vienna.<sup>51</sup>

In the rest of the letter, he requests Wagenseil to help him to find a job as a teacher or rabbi anywhere in Germany, saying that he can study, can teach, and can conduct the Jewish marriage ceremony, a procedure, which is usually done by officiating rabbis.

והנה בקשתי אם אמצא חן בעיני אדוני, והיה לי מכ"ת לעזור ולסיועה, שתתן לי עיצה הגונה אם דעתו יש ליסע אני ובני ביתי למדינותיכם אשכנז. ואיזה הדרך אשר אני הולך, ועל איזה מקום מנוחתי להביא טרף לבני ביתי, כי יש לאל ידי ללמוד וללמד ולשמור ולעשות את כל הדרך, ומנהג בני ישראל בכלל ובפרט כידוע למכ"ת בפרט לתת קידושין לכל בני ישראל. לכן נא... שכתב לי מכ"ת ע"י מוקדם איך ומה לעשות לפנות לימין או לשמאל.

45 In 1677, Ms. Leipzig, fol. 173. – On the Jewish community in Fürth at that time, see: LÖWENSTEIN, “Geschichte der Juden in Fürth” (note 36).

46 For example, Ms. Leipzig, fol. 103, 105, 109, 110, 112, 114, 173.

47 Ms. Leipzig, fol. 103.

48 See: STAUDINGER, “Die Vertreibungen der Juden” (note 19), p. 332.

49 This town is located in southwest Moravia, not far from the Austrian border. On the Jewish community of this town, see: RUDOLF HRUSCHKA, “Geschichte der Juden in Jamnitz,” in GOLD (ed.), *Juden und Judengemeinden Mährens* (note 43), pp. 251-266.

50 See: STAUDINGER, “Die Vertreibungen der Juden” (note 19), pp. 334-335.

51 David Kaufmann mentions this point in Menachem’s letter; see: KAUFMANN, *Die letzte Vertreibung* (note 19), pp. 176-177.



Here is my request, if I find favour in your eyes, that the highly honourable Sir would be of help and assistance that you would give me proper advice, if it were his opinion that my family and I should travel to your country, Germany. What is the right road to take and where can I find respite to enable me to feed my family? I am capable of studying and teaching, observing and doing all that is necessary, as is the custom of the Jewish people in general and in particular, as is known to the very honourable sir, in particular to officiate at weddings for all the Jewish people. Therefore, please, I would ask that you write to me soon, as far as what to do and how, and whether to turn to the right or to the left.

A similar request has been recorded in one of Beer Perlhefter's letters, as mentioned above. In two other letters, the writer expressed how he was impressed by two of Wagenseil's publications: The Latin translation of *The Mishnah, Tractate Sota*,<sup>52</sup> which appeared in 1674 (as mention above). The writer also refers to Wagenseil's grammar of the Hebrew language, which is said to have been published a little bit earlier.<sup>53</sup> However, I could not find any information about that publication.

From this correspondence, too, we learn about Wagenseil's good relationship with Jewish leaders, most of whom resided in the Principality of Ansbach, which includes also Altdorf, where Wagenseil lived. With some of them, he had correspondence for many years. These letters are also a source for the study of the spirituality and spiritual life of Ashkenazi sages in the early modern period. It seems that they were not limited to Halakhic perspectives only. They were open to dialogue with Christian theologians, mostly Hebraists, such as Johannes Reuchlin (Pforzheim, Baden 1455–1522) and Johannes Buxdorf the Elder (Kamen, Westfalen 1564–1629 Basel) etc. However, the phenomenon of the close relationship between Jewish sages and Wagenseil was nevertheless unusual in Germany. Wagenseil was honoured by his Jewish correspondents, who referred to him as:

נשיא אלקים הלמדן המופלג וחכם גדול ראש לשיבת האומות – Almighty prince the great sage, the head of the yeshivah (academy) of the nations,<sup>54</sup> or הרב הנכבד כבוד רבי יוחנן – The Honourable Rabbi Yochanan.<sup>55</sup>

In the Hebrew language, such titles were used for distinguished Jewish sages.

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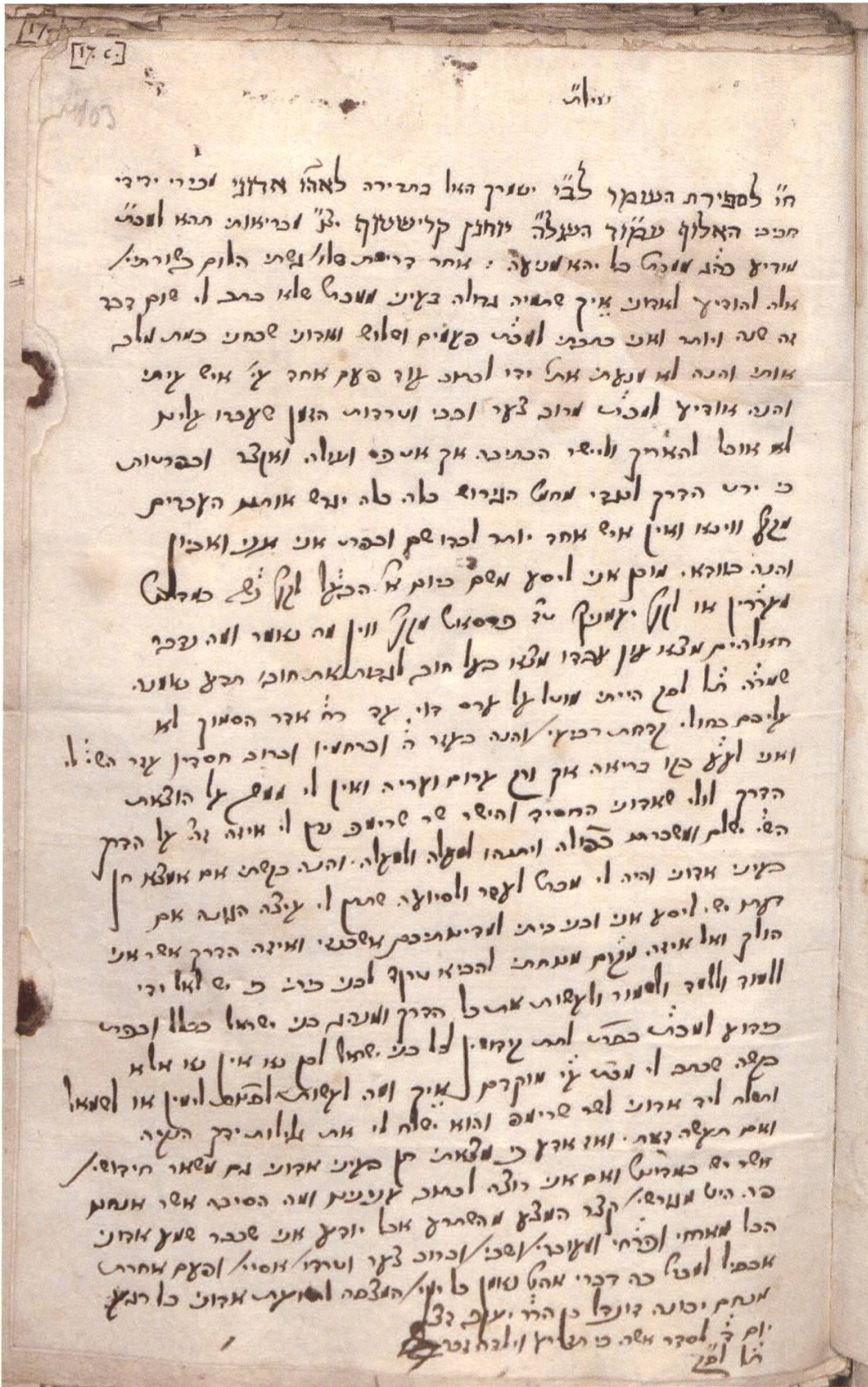
52 See: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 113.

53 See: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 198.

54 Ms. Leipzig, fol. 85 (WEINRYB, העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ [note 18], no. II, p. 122).

55 Ms. Leipzig, fol. 187 (WEINRYB, העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ [note 18], no. V, p. 126).





One of R. Menachem Sundel's Letters to Wagenseil (see appendix (III)  
 Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, B. H. 18, fol. 103r.

My thanks are due to Dr Christoph Mackert, director of the special collection department at that library, for giving permission to publish the letter.

The Jewish correspondents felt free to share with Wagenseil even their personal problems. We find requests for financial assistance. Wagenseil was greatly interested in all kinds of Jewish culture as we can see from his numerous publications on Judaism. Furthermore, we find some letters in which the writers responded to Wagenseil's questions on some Jewish topics, such as: Messianism according the Jewish tradition,<sup>56</sup> Pedagogical methods in Jewish education,<sup>57</sup> Synagogue customs<sup>58</sup> or notes on Hebrew bibliography.<sup>59</sup>

## Appendices

(I) *Letter written by R. Beer Eibeschütz-Perlhefter and sent to Johan Christoph Wagenseil from Ottensoos on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1682:*<sup>60</sup>

To the very outstanding scholar, the honoured R. Yochanan who is called Sir Wagenseil, may God Almighty bless him and place peace in all his borders.

After these greetings, I am unable to write at length due to the many troubles that have fallen upon me from the evil people among the Jews of Ansbach. They have attempted to destroy me with libellous accusations, because I am studying with you, Sir, and because you are assisting me concerning the matter of a Rabbinical Position. In addition to this, there is a different reason for their enmity, because there was a Jew in Germany, named Rabbi Mordechai from the city of Eisenstadt, who declared himself a prophet and afterwards claimed to be the Messiah. Ashkenazic Jews believed him. One year ago, I wrote to this Rabbi Mordechai at the request of the Italian Jews, asking him to come to Italy, so that they, too, could see him. When Rabbi Mordechai came to Italy, everyone believed that he is the Messiah, and they treated him with great honour. When he came to city of Modena where I have stayed, he was also received with great honour and they called him Messiah. I went there to see him, and I realized that he is a crazy person. I investigated him, and saw that he was involved in acts of impurity and witchcraft. I immediately left him, and warned

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56 In a letter of Beer Perlhefter in 1676, see: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 135 (WEINRYB, *העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ* [note 18], no. IV, p. 125-126).

57 Asher Enselen's letter from Schnaittach in 1669, see: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 194. – On him, see: HILDESHEIMER, *פּנקס קהילת שנייטאך*, (note 44), p. 31.

58 Asher Enselen's letter from Schnaittach in 1680, see: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 197.

59 Menachem Sundel's letter from Vienna in 1658, see: Ms. Leipzig, fol. 110. Cf. also Samuel Senwil's letter from Fürth, Ms. Leipzig, fol. 176.

60 Ms. Leipzig, fol. 170 (WEINRYB, *העברעאיש-יידישע קאָרעספּאָנדענץ* [note 18], no. X, pp. 129-130).



all the Jewish people not to believe in him because he is a fool and a magician. When the Jews heard this, they began to hate me, gnashed their teeth, and wanted to devour me. As a result, I decided to leave my position and not speak any more about the Messiah. They sent me away in peace, and wrote me a nice farewell letter of *Abschied*, as you, Sir, have seen. However, they made a condition with me, that if they hear that I would again speak badly about their Messiah, all the Jews will agree to testify against me, saying that I caused evil because I spoke against their Messiah. When I left the community, and continued speaking against the Messiah, some Jews listened to my words and no longer believed in this Messiah. I continued to do this until I came to the city, Schwabach. In the meantime, this Messiah person became truly crazy and ran away from Italy to Fürth and from there to Poland. Whereupon the Jews in Italy claimed that it was because of the sorrow that I caused him by falsely speaking against him that he became crazy and ran away. They all decided together to write evil things about me to the Jews in the city of Ansbach, so that they would banish me, and they claimed that it is not sinful to treat me badly, or to testify falsely against me, or to steal from me, for the reason that I destroyed their Messiah. To Rabbi Shimshi from the city of Schwabach, I had given a loan of hundred Reichstaler. The Jews of Ansbach commanded him not to return the money, and to state publicly that he does not owe me anything at all. They took the hundred Reichstaler, and fined Rabbi Shimshi an additional two-hundred gold coins because he had assisted me in trying to obtain the Rabbinical position. They also banished me from the city of Schwabach. It is amazing to hear how they chased me out, and at another time, Sir, I will write and tell you everything. However, right now I am seeking the witnesses who saw that I gave the loan of one hundred Reichstaler to Rabbi Shimshi, as I mentioned above. When I return, I will come to you, Sir, and tell you everything, despite the fact that they threaten me by saying that even you, Sir, wish to pursue me to treat me badly. That is why I am not coming to you now, but will do so upon my return. I do not believe these evil reports about you, Sir, since I have known you as a man of kindness who has done much good for me. Therefore I am sending you now, by the hand of Moshe Ottensoos who has treated me well, his book on the interpretation of dreams.

Therefore, I will conclude my words, and will speak only of peace from myself and my wife to you, Sir, and to all your family.

From me, the young Beer from Prague.

Ottensoos, on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> of Adar II [5]442 (29.03.1682)

(II) *Letter of R. Haggai Hanoch Ha-Levi Fränkel, sent to Johan Christoph Wagenseil from Hanau on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1683:*<sup>61</sup>

May there be great peace to the great and honoured one who is my good friend, my master, the remarkable and wonderful Johan Christoph Wagenseil, may his God watch over him.

Before I begin to speak before his honour these things, which I will write, I will request of you, my master, please do not place blame upon me regarding the things, which I will write here. It is because of my many troubles and the worry that is in my heart that I do this, in order to cool down the bitterness of my soul and spirit. For who, indeed, would be able to hold back his words regarding the rumours, which I heard. I saw with my own eyes the anger of his honour, which made an impression upon the writing of the book, which he composed, researched and corrected anew. In it he showed the greatness of his hatred towards our brothers, the house of Israel, who are scattered to the far corners of the heavens. As our sages of the Talmud wrote, “great is hatred, because it corrupts the order of the world.” We can prove this from the story of Balaam the Magician. It is written about him, “And he saddled his donkey [...],” which would indicate that he saddled his donkey himself, despite the fact that he had several servants, since it says; “His two servants were with him.” In any case, because of the greatness of his hatred to Israel, and because he was in a great hurry to curse them, he corrupted the usual order of his actions and saddled his donkey himself. So my master, in his aforementioned writing, because of his hatred, corrupted his proper judgment concerning us, when he mentioned lies and false accusations regarding words that he says are found in our holy books. Indeed, this is not so, and forgive me, he has exaggerated beyond measure, because these things do not exist, and were never found in any one of our books. It would seem from this that the intention of your honour was only to stir up the jealousy of the people upon us, as well as their great anger. In this, he, too, is added to our enemies. It was also not enough for his honour that he dared to speak in the name of our sages, may their memory be a blessing, things that never entered their minds. In addition, he caused us heartbreak and grief by composing a treaties describing all our punishments, our suffering and our troubles, one to the other, as well as the decrees that were made against us, from the day we were exiled from our land. All of this he brought out in his book, with the intention that the eye of the reader will see these things, and learn from them, God forbid, to treat us badly. If his honour thought otherwise, he would have occasionally mentioned the many positive things that are found in our books, for the good and welfare of the nations that rule over us. Just one of them would be what the sages of the Mishna stated,

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61 Ms. Leipzig, fol. 136, published by LÖWENSTEIN, “Geschichte der Juden in Fürth” (note 36), pp. 210-212.

that when we are in exile, we are obligated to pray for the peace of the nation in which we reside. We have this custom in every Jewish community, to pray to our God in heaven every Shabbat, that He will lengthen the years of the kings, the officials, and those who rule over us, and He will make them successful in all their endeavours. This prayer is inserted and kept in all of our prayer books, even in the small prayer books that schoolchildren use to read and pray. Similarly, many other matters are found in our books regarding the welfare of the people among whom we are scattered. Yet regarding all of these great things about us, he was silent. He restrained himself and turned away from these matters, and acted as though he knew nothing about them. I am extremely surprised about all this, especially when I remember the early days and years when I recognized and knew well the excellence of his honour. Everything I heard about him from our brothers, the house of Israel led me to believe that I had found a true friend, one that my heart loved, who sought only good for the entire community of Israel. I also heard with my own ears the words that came out of his mouth, when he called to me, how his arm was outstretched to do good things for us; how he wrote a special essay that expressed praise for the Jews in order to remove from us the jealousy of the masses who gnash their teeth against us on a daily basis, and to remove that hatred from their hearts. These were the words of a wise man, and it was an expression of love that my ears heard from his honour. This happened not once nor twice, but at least three or four times, and he showed an even greater love in that he himself wrote that he went out of his way to defend the entire nation of his own desire, since no man asked this of him. Then I said to myself, how wondrous is his love for us, and I was happy and inwardly pleased. I was happy and I brought happiness to others when the extent of your honour's goodness was mentioned. All these things I remember, and I pour out my soul, asking, why has his honour changed his attitude towards us from good to bad, from being a friend to being our enemy? Wagenseil – the ropes that pull the wagon – that were bonds of love – were removed from us. We no longer see the goodness of my master, and his bad actions are very hard for us, since it seems that an entirely different spirit has come over him. He has dressed himself in garments of revenge to chase after a dead dog like us, scattered sheep. In his hatred, he stirs up strife and enmity, which had been suppressed for more than a thousand years, and reawakens it upon us, the fugitives from our land.

I certainly admit the truth, and recognize my lowly and humble status, and that I am not worthy to argue with his honour. Indeed, all my years I am accustomed to remove myself from disputes, as my master knows from when he first spoke to me, it is against my ways and my nature. Also my noble master of the honoured name Christoph Arnold, from the city of Nürnberg, will certainly bear witness and justify the claim that I always refused to engage in disputes. Even now, I have not come to openly criticize what his honour did to

us, because I know that he dwells in high places, quiet and tranquil, with nothing to fear, while I, insignificant and the youngest of the house of Levi, of lowly value and station, who am I that I would go so far as to rebuke his honour who is noble, uplifted and valiant. How can one who is weak claim to be a hero – to deal with things that are far greater and more wondrous than his abilities. In addition, the deed has already been done, the books have already been sent in the hands of the runners to each and every city, and to every country, and I do not have the power, your honour, to bring them back. He who cries out about an event that has already occurred is like one who prays in vain. This is what enters my spirit and thoughts, that our good and welfare is no longer in the hands of his honour. Since he already decided to treat us badly, it is as though he no longer knows how to correct himself... Indeed, the end of his actions prove his intention from the beginning, for even if I had come with a written manuscript a long time ago, before his honour completed the words that he wrote in the aforementioned book, and had I begged and pleaded before him to have compassion upon the remnants of Israel and not spread his springs (= thoughts) to the entire world, even if my words were good and correct, his honour would not have paid attention to me. I will therefore not go on at length to relate these things, which will not be of any help. From this point, we will place our hope on our Father in heaven who helped us until now. He will place compassion in the hearts of the kings, the officials and rulers, so that they will not listen to the whisperers and those who form groups, which threaten us with the whip of their tongues, which are like a sharpened sword. But my heart says me, maybe one or two from a town and from a family from the community of Israel sinned against his honour, and for this reason, he got angry at the entire community. However, hatred that depends upon one particular thing can surely be nullified. I know that in the place of his honour's greatness, there I have found his humility, for he has clarity of language, and he speaks gently with others, and answers properly to all who question him. Therefore, I have come forward boldly to petition my master with one question: to please make known to me the reason for this great anger, and why he has turned to become cruel to us, by changing his behaviour and his good attributes. As for me, I will stand on guard, looking forward with hope and great yearning to see his writing, answering my request to know what is in his heart regarding this matter. Then I will know that my life is precious in his eyes, and that a remnant of his past love for me still exists. And if indeed my soul is precious to him, and my request stated above, and his honour will give his attention to reply to me, he can send the letter with the reply to the hands of my son, R. Elchanan, may his God watch over him, who lives in Fürth, or to the hands of R. Salman Schneor. It will then surely and easily come into my possession, and I will be prepared to serve him, and to repay him according to what God, in His goodness will allow. With this, I bow down and prostrate myself from afar, and offer greetings from



the Master of Peace as the prayer of the little one from the house of Levi, Chaggai Chanoch Levi, who stands on guard here Hanau, the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the week, the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Adar 5483 (5.3.1683). I send warm regards to the honourable master, Christoph Arnold from Nürnberg.

The address: to Altdorf, to my beloved master, the wise, learned and greatly honoured is his name, Johan Christoph Wagenseil, may his God watch over him, from Hanau.

(III) *A Letter written by R. Menachem Sundel son of Jacob to Johan Christoph Wagenseil in 1670*

I place God before me at all times

The 18<sup>th</sup> day of the *Omer* [3<sup>rd</sup> Iyyar], may God watch over you constantly, to my beloved master, acquaintance and dear friend, the revered "wagon-pole" [Wagenseil] Johan Christoph, may God guard his coming and going, May I make known to my glorious master that my wish is that his health be like mine, with no obstacle. After seeking your welfare, I have approached here, in these few lines, to make known to my master how great is the wonder in my eyes that his glorious honour has not written anything to me this past year, and even more. I have written to his glorious honour twice and three times, and my master has forgotten me as though I were dead. Therefore, I did not withhold my hand from writing one more time, through a person at hand.

I am herewith making known to his glorious honour, that due to the great sorrow, tears, and troubles that happened to us, I cannot write at length, nor correct the writing, but I will jump right to the point, I will be brief and specific. The road before me is fearsome due to the expulsion. He is absolutely determined to expel us, the Jews from the holy community of Vienna, there is no man alone left there, and there is food only like the bread of the poorest of the poor.

I am certainly ready to travel from there on this coming Sunday, may it arrive upon us for good, to the holy community of Nikolsburg, in Moravia, or to the holy community of Jamnitz, 16 parasangs from the holy community of Vienna. What can we possibly say, God has found the sin of His servant, and He has found the creditor to repay His debt. You must know the truth, that from Rosh Hashana of the year 430, counting from the Creation [1670], I was painfully confined to bed, until this past Rosh Chodesh Adar, may it never happen to you, with the sickness of malaria. With the help of God and His compassion, and His great kindness, God, may He be blessed, helped me. And I am, at present, in a state of health, but totally naked and bare. I do not

have anything at all for travel expenses, unless my master, the pious and upright, the prince of Schrimpf, gave me some gold for the road. God, may He be blessed, will repay, and his payment will be double, and may He give him more and more. And I herewith ask, if I have found favour in the eyes of my master, that his glorious honour will be for me a help and support, that you will give me proper advice as to whether it is his opinion that I should travel with my family to your state, Ashkenaz (Germany) and what is the best route for me to take, and to which place I should stop, to bring provisions to the members of my family. I am fully capable of learning and teaching, observing and fulfilling all the ways and the customs of the Jewish people, in general and in particular, as is known to his glorious honour, in particular to perform marriages for all the children of Israel. Therefore, please, and the word **אני**, as you know, is used only for requests, that his glorious honour should write to me at the earliest opportunity, how and what to do, whether to turn right or left, and you will send to the hand of my master, the Prince of Schrimpf, and he, in turn, will send me the letter from your pure hand. If you will do this, then I will know that I have found favour in the eyes of my master, despite the other new things that have developed in our country. And if I want to write about our concerns, and what is the reason that we are here, in this position, is it possible for those who are exiled, for the bed is shorter than the man can stretch himself. But I know that my master has already heard everything from wanderers and travellers who go to and fro. With much sorrow and trouble, I will now end this letter, and at another time, I will double my words for he who understands. These are the words of your loved one, who is forever faithful, and who awaits the salvation of my master at every moment. Menachem, who is called Sundel, son of the R. Jacob, may his memory be a blessing. The fourth day of the Parasha (portion) “Tazria”, the year 430 [3<sup>rd</sup> of Iyar] after the Creation [23<sup>rd</sup> April 1670].