

# Four traumatic events in Prague's Jewish community in the 16th century as seen through the eyes of David Gans, the author of The Hebrew Chronicle from Prague, and Joseph ha-Kohen

Autor(en): **David, Abraham**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Judaica : Beiträge zum Verstehen des Judentums**

Band (Jahr): **72 (2016)**

PDF erstellt am: **28.06.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-961498>

## **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.

Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.

Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

## **Haftungsausschluss**

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

# 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-Kohen

By *Abraham David*\*

## *Abstract*

The following article analyses the reports given by the three 16<sup>th</sup> / 17<sup>th</sup> century Jewish historians (mentioned above in the title) on (a) the expulsion of the Jews from Bohemia in 1541/2, (b) an edict issued in 1559 to expel the Jews from Bohemia a second time, (c) the conflagration in the Jewish quarter of Prague that occurred on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1559, and (d) the confiscation of Jewish books in Prague following a decree issued in 1560.

The historiographical work ספר צמח דוד (*Sefer tsemah David*) by David b. Shelomo Gans (1541–1613) is well known to the Hebrew reader and available in numerous Hebrew printed editions, beginning with its *editio princeps*, which appeared in Prague in 1592. The most recent critical edition of this book has been published by Mordechai Breuer (1918–2007).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, several scholars have researched this work from various perspectives.<sup>2</sup> *Tsemah*

---

\* Dr *Abraham David*, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 89/4 Derekh Hebron, Jerusalem 93390, Israel; abraham.david@mail.huji.ac.il. – I would like to express my gratitude to my good friends Rabbi Aron and Mrs. Perl Borow who helped me translating some sources into English. The article is based on my lecture: *Between Tsemah David and the Hebrew Anonymous Chronicle from Prague on the Jewish Life in Prague in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*, delivered at an International Conference on *David Gans (1541-1613) after Four centuries: The Legacy of an Early Modern Jewish Polymath*, which was held in Prague, May 27-29, 2013.

1 MORDECHAI BREUER (ed.), (1592–ב"ש"ג) פרעגא דוד גאנז, Jerusalem 1983.

2 E.g., MORDECHAI BREUER, "מגמותיו של 'צמח דוד' לדוד גאנז," in: *המעין (Ha-Ma'yan)* 5 (1965), pp. 15-27; MORDECHAI BREUER, "קווים לדמותו של ר' דוד גנז בעל 'צמח דוד'," in: *בר אילן (Bar-Ilan)* 11 (1973), pp. 97-118; MORDECHAI BREUER, "Modernism and Traditionalism in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Historiography: A Study of David Gans' Tzemah David," in: BERNARD DOV COOPERMAN (ed.), *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1983, pp. 49-88; JIŘINA ŠEDINOVÁ, "Non-Jewish Sources in the Chronicle by David Gans 'Tsemah David'," in:

*David* is compiled as some annals are in chronological order and divided into two parts. The book was also translated into Latin (Leiden, 1644), and half a century later into Yiddish (Frankfurt on Main, 1698). A few paragraphs of the general history (i.e. the second part of the book), covering the years 1240 to 1454, were translated also into German by Gutmann Klemperer (Prague, 1890). A Czech translation by Jiřina Šedinová is in preparation.

The first part of the book contains a chronological list of selected Biblical figures from the beginning of humanity, which is based on *Seder 'Olam Rabbah*.<sup>3</sup> It continues with a list of selected people from the second Temple period, Mishnaic and Talmudic times as well as the period of the Geonim and the Middle Ages (based on *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* written by Abraham Ibn Daud ha-Levi in 1160<sup>4</sup>), up to the author's time. As to the people selected from Medieval times, the author added some details on their personalities and works. In that section, he also inserted brief descriptions of several historical events that were of interest to him.

The second, much more comprehensive part of the book is dedicated to the rulers of the four kingdoms: Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and the Roman Empire and its successors in Christian Europe until his time. In this part, the author paid special attention not only to historical events and several leading figures, but also mentions some climatic and astronomical phenomena that occurred in his time, and explained their astrological significance.

---

*Judaica Bohemiae* 8 (1972), pp. 3-15; JIŘINA ŠEDINOVÁ, "Czech History as reflected in the Historical Work by David Gans," in: *Judaica Bohemiae* 8 (1972), pp. 74-83; JIŘINA ŠEDINOVÁ, "Old Czech Legends in the Work of David Gans (1592)," in: *Judaica Bohemiae* 14/2 (1978), pp. 89-112; BEN-ZION DEGANI, "המבנה של ההיסטוריה העולמית וגאולת ישראל ב"צמח דוד" לר' דוד גאנו," in: *ציון (Zion)* 45 (1980), pp. 173-200; REUVEN MICHAEL, הכתיבה ההיסטורית היהודית מהרנסנס עד העת החדשה, Jerusalem 1993, pp. 72-83; ANDRÉ NEHÉR, *Jewish Thought and the Scientific Revolution of the Sixteenth Century: David Gans (1541-1613) and his Times*, Oxford 1986; ABRAHAM MELAMED, "A Legitimizing Myth: Ashkenazic Thinkers on the Purported Jewish Origins of Philosophy and Science," in: *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 8 (2009), pp. 304-308; GAD FREUDENTHAL, "Dossier: Georg Alter (1891–1972) on David Gans (1541–1613)," in: *Aleph* 11 (2011), pp. 56-59; DANIEL LASKER, "The Karaites Reception of David Gans' Work," in: *Judaica Bohemiae* 51/1 (2016), pp. 149-159.

3 See: CHAIM JOSEPH MILIKOWSKY, פירוש ומבוא, מהדורה מדעית, 2 vols. Jerusalem 2013.

4 See: GERSON DAVID COHEN (ed.), *Sefer ha-Qabbalah (The book of Tradition) by Abraham Ibn Daud. A Critical Edition with a Translation and Notes*, Philadelphia, PA 1967 [London 1969].

In the first part of his book, the author recounted some historical events from 16<sup>th</sup> century Jewish life, but few of them only are related to Bohemia and Moravia. These events are also described, briefly but accurately, in a contemporary *Hebrew Chronicle from Prague*, which I have published in its original language in Jerusalem in 1984.<sup>5</sup> An English version of the chronicle came out in 1993,<sup>6</sup> followed in 2013 by a Czech translation.<sup>7</sup>

A few words about the *Hebrew Chronicle*: The author of the *Hebrew Chronicle*, an anonymous Prague resident, wrote his book in Ashkenazi Hebrew typical of that time and place. Virtually nothing is known about the author himself: neither his family's identity, nor his profession, nor his cultural baggage. All that is known, is that he lived in Prague at the turn of the sixteenth to the seventeenth century and was an eyewitness of various contemporary events in Prague. Very recently, Alexander Putik of the Jewish Museum in Prague attributed the *Hebrew Chronicle* to two authors assuming that the two authors were the communal scribes who recorded special events that happened in Bohemia in general, and in Prague in particular. The first one is identified as Petahya b. Joseph Sofer who recorded the events of the period from 1389 to 1581 (entries 1-65). The other one is identified as Abraham Joseph Yekutiel Kaufmann (Kafmann) SeGaL (Ha-Levi) who authored the records of the years 1598 to 1611 (entries 66-76).<sup>8</sup>

The *Hebrew Chronicle* 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 (1552/1576–1608) and his brother Matthias (1557/1612–1619).

---

5 ABRAHAM DAVID (ed.), כרוניקה עברית מפראג מראשית המאה הי"ז, Jerusalem 1984.

6 ABRAHAM DAVID (ed.), *A Hebrew Chronicle from Prague, c. 1615*, transl. by LEON JUDAH WEINBERGER with DENA ORDAN (most of the translation work has been done by D. Ordan), Tuscaloosa / London 1993.

7 ABRAHAM DAVID (ed.), *Anonymní hebrejská kronika z raně novověké Prahy*, transl. by MARKÉTA PNINA RUBEŠOVÁ, Praha 2013. The Czech edition has been reviewed by ALEXANDER PUTIK in: *Judaica Bohemiae* 47/2 (2013), pp. 129-137.

8 PUTIK, Review (note 7), pp. 133-134, 136-137.

In this study we will discuss four traumatic events that befell the Bohemian Jews between 1541 and 1560, and are recorded in *Tsemah David*, in *The Hebrew Chronicle from Prague* as well as in other sources. *Tsemah David* and the *Hebrew Chronicle* are similar in their content, but the latter tells the stories in shorter versions. Additional details completing the picture can be obtained from other Hebrew sources. Their reliability is well attested by Bohemian *Royal Documents*, which have been collected and analysed by the two scholars Gottlieb (Bohumil) Bondy (1832–1907) and Franz Dworský (František Ivan Dvorský) (1839–1907).<sup>9</sup>

### I. *Expulsion from Bohemia in 1541/2*

The first Bohemian expulsion dates from 1541 following an edict of Ferdinand I (1503–1564), at that time king of Bohemia and Hungary (1526) and king of Croatia (1527), who later became Holy Roman Emperor (1558–1564). David Gans writes:

שרפות רבות וגדולות היו בכל מדינת בעהם בשנת א"ש לפ"ק, ולא נודע מי המבעיר. ויעללו על רועי הבהמות ועל היהודים לאמור אתם עשיתם את הדבר הרע הזה. [...] ורדיננדוס מלך ביהם, בעבור תלונות העם גירש את כל היהודים ממלכות ביהם, רק בעיר פראגה השאיר עשרה אנשים לזמן מועט. אך לאחר ימים מעטים טרם כלות שנה, נתברר למלך ולכל עם הארץ בשל מי היתה הרעה הגדולה וששקר ענו על היהודים, אז דבר טוב על היהודים [...] וישבו אל ארצם ואל מולדתם כבתחילה.<sup>10</sup>

There were many large conflagrations throughout Bohemia in the year [5]301 [1541], [set by] an unknown arsonist. The shepherds and the Jews were denounced, the people saying, “You committed this evil.” [B]ecause of the accusations of the people, Ferdinand, king of Bohemia, expelled the Jews from the entire kingdom of Bohemia, allowing only ten [Jewish] men to remain in Prague temporarily. But after a short time, within less than a year, the king and the people discovered on whose account this misfortune had come upon them, and realizing that the Jews had been accused falsely, spoke favourably of them [...] and [the Jews] returned to their country and birthplace as before.<sup>11</sup>

On this event we learn from the *Hebrew Chronicle*:

---

9 GOTTlieb (BOHUMIL) BONDY / FRANZ DWORSKÝ (FRANTIŠEK DVORSKÝ), *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien von 906 bis 1620*, 2 vols. Prague 1906. Its Czech version *K historii Židů v Čechách, na Moravě a v Slezsku. 906 až 1620*, was published in Prague in the same year.

10 BREUER (ed.), צמח דוד (note 1), p. 139.

11 Translation by Dena Ordan in the introduction to DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), p. 11.

ש"א לפ"ק עשה המלך ורדנניס יר"ה גירש בכל מדינות פיהם, ולא נשארו פה פראג, רק עשרה בעלי בתים ואח"כ החזירם בעז"ה יתעלה.<sup>12</sup>

[The year 5]301 [1541] King Ferdinand, may he be exalted, expelled [the Jews] from all the cities of Bohemia, and here in Prague only ten [Jewish] householders remained. Subsequently, he allowed them to return, with the help of God.<sup>13</sup>

The expulsion edict was issued by King Ferdinand on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1541, after massive pressure exercised by the civilian people of Bohemia who accused the Jews and poor shepherds of causing massive burnings around the country in the summer of 1541 (as we will see below). The last day for the Jews to stay in Bohemia was April 23<sup>th</sup>, 1542.<sup>14</sup>

Both sources have preserved the account about ten householders who were permitted to stay in Prague after the expulsion. From the Bohemian *Royal Documents*, we learn that the king allowed fifteen Jews to remain in Prague for one year to take care of the Jewish property in the Jewish quarter of the town.<sup>15</sup>

This event is also reflected by two other sources, which neither are dependent on each other nor do rely on the above mentioned sources:

1. The first one is the memoirs of Joseph (Josel[man]) of Rosheim (in Alsace, c. 1480-1554), written around the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was a communal leader in Alsace and beyond, who in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century served his brethren in the German territories of the Holy Roman Empire as diplomat, advocate and intercessor.<sup>16</sup> Joseph of Rosheim left reports about his diplomatic activities. As we can learn from them, he was

---

12 DAVID (ed.), כרוניקה עברית (note 5), no. 51, p. 12.

13 DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), no. 51, pp. 44-45. Czech version: DAVID (ed.), *Anonymní hebrejská kronika* (note 7), no. 51, pp. 83, 118-119.

14 On the documents related to this expulsion, see: BONDY-DWORSKÝ, *Geschichte der Juden* (note 9), vol. I, no. 459-471, pp. 336-343. On the expulsion and its background, see: SAMUEL STEINHARTZ, "גירוש היהודים מביהם בשנת 1541," in: *ציון (Zion)* 15 (1950), pp. 70-92; J. HERMAN, "The Conflict between Jewish and non-Jewish Population in Bohemia before the 1541 Banishment," in: *Judaica Bohemica* 6 (1970), pp. 39-54; CHAVA FRAENKEL-GOLDSCHMIDT, *The Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim*, Leiden 2006, pp. 249-256, 332-334.

15 See: BONDY-DWORSKÝ, *Geschichte der Juden* (note 9), vol. I, no. 467, pp. 341-342; STEINHARTZ, גירוש (note 14), p. 88.

16 On him see: SELMA STERN, *Josel von Rosheim*, Stuttgart 1959; SELMA STERN, *Josel of Rosheim, Commander of Jewry in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation*, Philadelphia 1965; CHAVA FRAENKEL-GOLDSCHMIDT, *Historical Writings of Joseph*

also deeply involved in making this expulsion not happen, as he himself relates and explained how he tried to no avail that the decree be cancelled, as he writes:

בשנת ש"ב לפ"ק מדת הדין היית' מתוח' נגד כל בני המדינ' פייהים וק"ק פראג [...] וגרוש מר ונמהר על כולן ועל פי הפצרת רב' באתי ונגשתי כאח לצר' עם שאר אנשי בעלי מעשה בק"ק פראג לחלות פני המלך יר"ה, וראה השם ית' בגודל צום ועינוי נפש' [...] עד לסוף זכיתי שראיתי ש"ל שחזרו הבני' לגבול' ורבו ובנו ההריסו'.<sup>17</sup>

In the year [5]302 [1542] the attribute of justice was outstretched against the [Jews] of Bohemia and the holy community of Prague [...] and a bitter, hasty exile above all. In response to mass appeals, I joined my comrades in misfortune, men of action in the holy community of Prague in their appeal to the king, may he be exalted, and I was finally privileged to witness sons returning to their country, increasing in number and rebuilding what had been destroyed.<sup>18</sup>

2. The second source is Joseph ha-Kohen, the famous 16<sup>th</sup> century historian and physician from northern Italy. In his comprehensive historiographic work *דברי הימים למלכי צרפת ובית אוטומאן התוגר* (*History of the French Monarchy and the Ottoman Sultanate*),<sup>19</sup> he records this event, as follows:

אז תפשע בואימיאה במלכה ובאלהיה, מפני חמת הלוטירו ויגרשו את היהודי' ממדינת בואימיאה ומפראגה עיר המלכות בימים ההם, ויסעו משם בעגלות בחדש אדר ש"ב לפ"ק, וילכו אל פולוניאה וישבו שם וימותו רבים בדרך ורבים הוכו לפי חרב [...] ויהי לימים וישוב מלך פירדינאנדו על כסאו הראשון וידבר טוב על היהודי' להשיבם. וישבו רבים אל ארצם ואל מולדתם כבתחילה.<sup>20</sup>

---

of Rosheim (note 14); CHAVA FRAENKEL-GOLDSCHMIDT (ed.), *Joseph of Rosheim*, ספר המקנה (*Sefer ha-Mikneh*), Jerusalem 1970.

17 See: CHAVA FRAENKEL-GOLDSCHMIDT, כתבים היסטוריים, ר'יוסף מרוסהיים, Jerusalem 1996, pp. 304-305. This account is discussed *ibid*, pp. 230-236.

18 See: FRAENKEL-GOLDSCHMIDT, *Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim* (note 14), pp. 332-334. For a discussion of this account, see: *ibid*, pp. 249-256. Translated by Dena Ordan, see: DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), p. 10-11.

19 A short survey of his life and writings is given by DAVID ARIE GROSS (ed.), יוסף, ספר דברי הימים למלכי צרפת ומלכי בית אוטומאן התוגר, הכהן, 3 pts. Jerusalem 1955, pt. III, introduction, pp. 3-26, 75-93; ABRAHAM DAVID, היסטוריון בסערות רוחו, Jerusalem 2004; ABRAHAM DAVID, "Joseph ha-Cohen and his Negative Attitude toward R. Meir Katzenellenbogen (Maharam Padova)," in: SHLOMO SIMONSOHN / JOSEPH SHATZMILLER, *The Italia Judaica Jubilee Conference*, Leiden 2013, pp. 59-68; MARTIN JACOBS, *Islamische Geschichte in jüdischen Chroniken* (Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism, vol. 18), Tübingen 2004, pp. 82-108, 185-220.

20 JOSEPH HA-KOHN, *דברי הימים למלכי צרפת ומלכי בית אוטומאן התוגר* (*History of the French Monarchy and the Ottoman Sultanate*), pt. II, Sabbioneta 1554, fol. 268r-268v. The same paragraph with some differences and lacunas is included in Joseph

Then Bohemia sinned against its king and its God, expelling the Jews from Bohemia and the royal city of Prague in those days because of the wrath of the Lutherans. [The Jews] departed from there on carriages in the month of Adar of the year [5]302 [March 1542]; they went to Poland and settled there. Many died on the way and many were put to the sword [...] After a time Ferdinand returned to his throne [...] and spoke well of the Jews [inviting] them to return, and many returned to their land and birthplace as before.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to them, we have four more accounts, as pointed out by other Jewish scholars. The first two of them rely on Joseph ha-Kohen's account:

1. Gedalya Ibn Yahya<sup>22</sup> in his book *Shalshelet ha-Qabbalah*,<sup>23</sup> and
2. the ex-Portuguese *converso* Samuel Usque (c. 1500–c. 1555), who in his historical work *Consolação às tribulações de Israel*, written in Portuguese, likewise refers to this event, as we can see in part III, paragraph 35.<sup>24</sup>

---

ha-Kohen's other book עמק הבכה (*Emeq ha-bakhab*), see: KARIN ALMBLADH (ed.), *Joseph Ha-Kohen, Sefer 'Emeq ha-bakha (The Vale of Tears) with the chronicle of the anonymous Corrector* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis – Studia Semitica Upsaliensia, vol. 5), Uppsala 1981, pp. 75-76. This paragraph from *Emeq ha-bakha* was also discussed by STEINHARTZ, גירוש (note 14), pp. 89-90. To my opinion, Steinhartz's assumption that David Gans learned about this event from *Emeq ha-bakha* is unacceptable.

- 21 Translated by Dena Ordan, see: DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), p. 10-11. The *Emeq ha-Bakha* version was translated earlier by HARRY S. MAY, *The Vale of Tears (Emek Habakha)*, The Hague 1971, p. 81.
- 22 Gedalya Ibn Yahya, born in 1526 in Imola, northern Italy, was scion of a distinguished Portuguese Jewish family. He served as Rabbi in several communities in northern Italy and spent his last years in the city of Alessandria, Piedmont, until his death in 1587. On him, especially, as an historian, and his writings, see: ABRAHAM DAVID, מפעלו ההיסטוריוגרפי של גדליה אבן יחייא, PhD dissertation, Jerusalem, The Hebrew University 1976; ABRAHAM DAVID, "Gedalia Ibn Yahya, auteur de *Shalshelet ha-Qabbalah*," in: *Revue des Études Juives* 153 (1994), pp. 101-132. On his family, see: ABRAHAM DAVID, "משפחת אבן יחייא באיטליה, מהעשור האחרון של המאה החמש-עשרה עד סוף המאה השש-עשרה על פי רשימותיו של גדליה אבן יחייא," in: *Italia*, XXIII (2015), pp. 15-39 (Heb. Section).
- 23 See: Gedalia Ibn Yahya, שלשלת הקבלה (*Shalshelet ha-Qabbalah*), Ms. Moscow, Russian State Library, Ginzburg collection 652, fol. 213r. An abbreviated version can be found in the printed edition, Venice 1587, fol. 117r.
- 24 *Editio princeps* Ferrara 1553. A facsimile edition of Samuel Usque's *Consolação às Tribulações de Israel*, *Edição de Ferrara, 1553*, containing two introductory studies by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (1932–2009) and José Vitorino de Pina Martins (1920–2010), the editor of the edition, has been published in Lisbon in 1989. A (partial) English translation of the work (third dialogue) was prepared by



3. The third additional source worth to be mentioned here is a סליחה (*Selihab*, Penitential prayer) composed by Abraham ben Avigdor from Prague, which begins with the words: *אנא אלקי אברהם, אלקי יצחק ואלקי יעקב*.<sup>25</sup>

4. The fourth is an elegy by Jacob b. El'azar Ulma, which begins with the words: *יער שדה ציון עיר משכני עליון*.<sup>26</sup>

From these first four Hebrew sources as well as from *Royal Documents* we learn that the Jews returned after a short time.<sup>27</sup> David Gans, but not the author of the *Hebrew Chronicle*, mentions that the return was allowed after the king became aware that the accusation against the Jews was false.

As to the background of the accusation, we have found different explanations. According to David Gans and Joseph ha-Kohen as well as to the *Royal Documents*, the accusation against the Jews was based on acts of arson committed by Jews in various parts of Bohemia.<sup>28</sup> Samuel Usque points to the blood libel,<sup>29</sup> but this explanation has no support in general or Jewish sources, making its accuracy doubtful. Other contributing factors were intense pressure in various counties in Bohemia to move out the Jews, and the often repeated accusation of Jewish aid to the Ottoman Turks in their military

---

GERSHON I. GELBART, *A Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, PhD dissertation, New York 1964, pp. 404-406. Another English edition has been done a year later by MARTIN A. COHEN, *Samuel Usque's Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, Philadelphia, PA 1965 (<sup>2</sup>1977), pp. 212-213. For a French edition of Samuel Usque's book with Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's abovementioned study and updating annotations by Carsten L. Wilke, see: *Consolation aux Tribulations d'Israel*, Paris 2014, document in question on pp. 421-422, 582-583. – Samuel Usque mistakenly dated the decree to the year 1306. Cf. also Joseph ha-Kohen's account.

25 This *Selihab* repeatedly has been published in editions of Prague Penitential prayers, see: ISRAEL DAVIDSON, *אוצר השירה והפיוט*, 4 vols. New York 1924, vol. I, p. 279, no. 6111. It has been published in a German translation by LEOPOLD ZUNZ, *Die Synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters*, Berlin 1855 (Frankfurt am Main <sup>2</sup>1920; reprint Hildesheim 1967), p. 57. Some verses in English translation have been published by FRAENKEL-GOLDSCHMIDT, *Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim* (note 14), pp. 253-255.

26 Published by YEHUDA LAIB BIALER, *מן הגנוזים*, 3 vols. Jerusalem 1967, vol. I: *תאור של כתבי יד ופיוטים*, pp. 63-69.

27 See: BONDY-DWORSKÝ, *Geschichte der Juden* (note 9), vol. I, no. 472, pp. 343-344, no. 478, p. 346; FRAENKEL-GOLDSCHMIDT, *Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim* (note 14), pp. 253, 255-256.

28 See: STEINHARTZ, *גירוש* (note 14), pp. 83, 89-91. However, in the *Hebrew Chronicle*, no reason is given for that expulsion.

29 COHEN, *Samuel Usque's Consolation* (note 24).

engagement with Ferdinand.<sup>30</sup> Salo W. Baron (1895–1989) thinks that the accusation was probably based on anti-Semitic feelings that the king inherited from his grandparents, the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand II of Aragón (1452/1474–1516) and Isabella I of Castile and León (1451/1474–1504) who ordered the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.<sup>31</sup> Recently, it has been suggested that Ferdinand's true motive for the expulsion was his fear that a continued Jewish presence in Bohemia would enhance the already strong influence of the Jews on radical Protestant sectarian movements, like the Anabaptists and Sabbatarians, who had many followers in Moravia and Bohemia,<sup>32</sup> as mentioned also in the *Hebrew Chronicle*.<sup>33</sup>

This view finds support in Joseph ha-Kohen's account: אז תפשע בואימיאה "Then Bohemia sinned against its king and its God, because of the wrath of the Lutherans, and they expelled the Jews from the country of Bohemia and [the royal city of] Prague."

## II. *An Edict of expulsion from Bohemia in 1559*

Between the years 1559 and 1560 a series of traumatic events occurred in Bohemia as we can learn from *Royal Documents*. On July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1558,<sup>34</sup> an edict of expulsion from there was issued to be implemented until April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1559.<sup>35</sup> Another edict of mass expulsion from Bohemia was issued by the

---

30 STEINHARTZ, גירוש (note 14), pp. 85, 91. The same accusation against the Jews in the Habsburg Empire, dated to 1529, is recorded in the *Hebrew Chronicle*, see: DAVID (ed.), כרוניקה עברית (note 5), no. 34, pp. 9, 37-38; DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), no. 34, pp. 37-38; DAVID (ed.), *Anonymní hebrejská kronika* (note 7), no. 34, pp. 78, 114-115; FRAENKEL-GOLDSCHMIDT, *Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim* (note 14), pp. 172-176, 321, see also: SALO WITTMAYER BARON, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 18 vols. Philadelphia, PA 1952-1983, vol. XIII (1969), pp. 258-262, 444-446.

31 See: BARON, *A Social and Religious History* (note 30), pp. 446-447, note 63.

32 See: STEINHARTZ, גירוש (note 14), p. 79; HERMAN, "The conflict" (note 14), pp. 41-45; FRAENKEL-GOLDSCHMIDT, *Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim* (note 14), p. 251.

33 DAVID (ed.), כרוניקה עברית (note 5), no. 30, pp. 8, 35-36; DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), no. 30, pp. 32-33; DAVID (ed.), *Anonymní hebrejská kronika* (note 7), no. 30, pp. 77, 112.

34 Shortly after, i.e. after the death of his brother Charles V on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1558, he was crowned as Emperor of the Reich.

35 BONDY-DWORSKÝ, *Geschichte der Juden* (note 9), vol. I, pp. 430-431, no. 590. See also: BARON, *A Social and Religious History* (note 30), vol. XIV (1969), pp. 158, 363.

same emperor on August the 27<sup>th</sup>, 1559,<sup>36</sup> but its implementation delayed. From both, the *Tsemah David* and the *Hebrew Chronicle* as well as from Joseph ha-Kohen it seems that the second edict was fully observed, but shortly after the Bohemian Jews were permitted to return to their homes, as we will see below. David Gans writes about it:

בשנת שי"ט יצא הקצף מאת הקיסר ורדיננדוס ז"ל על כל היהודים אשר היו פה עיר פראג, אשר בעבור זה יצא דבר מלכות ונתגרשו כל היהודים ממלכותו ולא נשאר איש אחד בכל מלכות בעהם, רק פה פראג נשארו לימים מעטים שנים עשר בעלי בתים. אך לא ארכו הימים נכמרו רחמי הקיסר על היהודים וחנום וקרא להם לשלום וישבו אל ארצם ואל אחוזתם כבתחילה וישבו עליה לבטח עד היום הזה.<sup>37</sup>

In the year [5]319, the Emperor Ferdinand became enraged with the Jews that were in the city of Prague, and as a result, a royal decree was issued and all the Jews were expelled from his kingdom, and not one Jew remained in the whole kingdom of Bohemia. Only in Prague, twelve householders remained for a short time. Not long afterwards, the compassion of the Emperor was stirred on behalf of the Jews. He pardoned them, and called to them in peace to return to their land and their property as in former times, and they dwelled there in security until this day.

A similar description of this traumatic event can be found in the *Hebrew Chronicle*:

שי"ט לפ"ק, חזר ועשה בעו"ה גירש בכל מדינות פיהם, ולא נשארו פה פראג רק י"ב בעלי בתים.<sup>38</sup> [5]319 [1559]. Due to our iniquities, there was another decree expelling [the Jews] from all the cities of Bohemia, and here, in Prague, twelve [Jewish] householders only remained.<sup>39</sup>

In those two sources we see more or less the same details. As we see also the same description has been done by Joseph ha-Kohen:

ויגרש פירדינאנדו הקיסר את היהודים ממלכות בואימאה בשנת תשע עשרה ושלוש מאות וחמשת אלפים, היא שנת תשע וחמישים וחמש מאות ואלף. וישאיר להם שארית בארץ. וישבו בפראגה כמאתים בתים. והנשארים הלכו לדרכם.<sup>40</sup>

---

36 BONDY-DWORSKÝ, *Geschichte der Juden* (note 9), vol. I, pp. 421-424, nos. 582-583.

37 BREUER (ed.), *צמח דוד* (note 1), p. 141.

38 DAVID (ed.), *כרוניקה עברית* (note 5), no. 52, p. 14.

39 DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), no. 52, p. 46.

40 GROSS (ed.), *יוסף הכהן, ספר דברי הימים* (note 19), pt. III, p. 59. A slightly different version is found in the British Library manuscript Ms. Or. 3656 (see p. 386 below). The same paragraph in ALMBLADH (ed.), *Joseph Ha-Kohen, Sefer Emeq ha-bakha* (note 20), p. 90.

In the year 5319 [1559], the Emperor Ferdinand I, expelled the Jews from the Kingdom of Bohemia. Yet, he permitted a remnant to stay in Prague where about two hundred families remained. The others were forced to emigrate.<sup>41</sup>

From the first two texts, we learn that after the expulsion twelve householders remained in Prague. The *Royal Documents* mention “ten to twelve householders”.<sup>42</sup> According to Joseph ha-Kohen, however, no less than two hundred Jewish householders remained in Prague; that means that certainly not all Jews were expelled from Prague.

A brief description of this event can also be found in another contemporary Hebrew chronicle, which was composed by an anonymous corrector of Joseph ha-Kohen's *Emeq ha-bakhab*. It is appended to the printed editions of *Emeq ha-bakhab*.<sup>43</sup> Here we read:

ויבקש פירדינאנדו הקיסר לגרש את כל היהודים אשר בבואימיאה ובפראגה ובכל ערי מלכותו, וישבע על הדבר הזה, וילכו היהודים להתחנן מלפניו על הדבר הזה, וגם יושבי פראגה התנפלו לפני רגליו, ויבקשו מלפניו כי לא ירע להם לעשות כזאת [...] וידבר אתם קשות ולא אבה שמוע [...]. וישלחו היהודים אל האפיפיור פיאן בעל מנת שימצא לו פתח להתיר לו את נדרו ושבועתו, ויעש כן, ובכל זאת לא שב אפו.<sup>44</sup>

Emperor Ferdinand [I]<sup>45</sup> now wished to expel all the Jews living in Bohemia, Prague and all the other cities in his empire; and he had already sworn to do so, when the Jews appeared before him and presented a petition. The Jews of Prague prostrated themselves before him and asked that he not do them any harm [...]. He turned at them furiously and refused to listen to them [...]. Thereupon, the Jews sent a message to Pope Pius IV,<sup>46</sup> asking him to find the motive behind the Emperor's decision and to absolve him from this oath and solemn promise. This he did, but despite all this, the Emperor's ire was not quieted, and he still held up his hand.<sup>47</sup>

---

41 Translated by MAY, *The Vale of Tears* (note 21), pp. 96-97.

42 See: BONDY-DWORSKÝ, *Geschichte der Juden* (note 9), vol. I, no. 594, p. 434.

43 The corrector's text is preserved in a manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Ms. Opp. Add. Qu. 180). On it, see: ALMBLADH (ed.), *Joseph Ha-Kohen, Sefer 'Emeq ha-bakha* (note 20), introduction, pp. 31-32, 36; edition of the text *ibid*, pp. 98-125. English translation in MAY, *The Vale of Tears* (note 21), pp. 106-138.

44 ALMBLADH (ed.), *Joseph Ha-Kohen, Sefer 'Emeq ha-bakha* (note 20), p. 98.

45 May mistakenly calls him “II”, see the next note below.

46 Pope from 1559 to 1565. On his positive attitude to the Papal States Jews at that time, see: ISIAH SONNE, מפאוולו הרביעי עד פיוס החמישי, Jerusalem 1954, pp. 165-175.

47 MAY, *The Vale of Tears* (note 21), pp. 106-107.

From this paragraph we learn that a delegate of the Prague Jewish community went to the emperor's palace for pleading before Ferdinand to revoke the expulsion edict, but the emperor refused to do so. Then the Bohemian Jews sent another delegate, this time to Pope Pius IV in Rome requesting from him to intercede and demand to annul the emperor's edict.<sup>48</sup> The Pope, however, tried in vain to convince him to change his mind.

On the other hand, David Gans reports that shortly after the expulsion the emperor changed his mind and allowed the Bohemian Jews to return to their homes.

Though the implementation of the expulsion edict is reported in four independent Hebrew sources, there are no evidence of the expulsion of the Jews in the extant *Royal Documents* related to that year (1559). Meticulous examination of the *Royal Documents*, however, seems to indicate that it was Ferdinand's son Maximilian and his wife, who successfully delayed the implementation of the edict until 1561.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, following the entry on the year 1559 in the *Hebrew Chronicle*, two events that occurred in the intervening years and are recounted in the *Chronicle*,<sup>50</sup> suggest that the Jews indeed remained in Bohemia until the year 1561.<sup>51</sup> On the expulsion of the Jews in that year, the *Hebrew Chronicle* reports:

---

48 According to a note of Solomon b. Mordechai Katz, publisher of the first edition of *Tsemah David* (Prague 1592), his father Mordechai Tsemah Katz was head of the Jewish community of Prague and delegate to the Emperor and to the Pope, see: BREUER (ed.), *צמח דוד* (note 1), p. 141. – His activities as intercessor of the Jewish community of Prague are mentioned also in the inscription of his tombstone, quoted by HEINRICH GRAETZ, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, 11 vols. Leipzig <sup>3</sup>1891, vol. IX, p. 366, note 1. – Hebrew version: *דברי ימי ישראל*, transl. (from German) by Shaul Pinhas Rabinowitz, 9 vols. Warshe [Warsaw] 1902, vol. VII, p. 266, note 2.

49 See: BONDY-DWORSKÝ, *Geschichte der Juden* (note 9), vol. I, no. 611, pp. 449-451. Evidence for the cancellation of the expulsion decree of 1559 we also have found in the Hebrew source preserved in the testimony of the publisher of *Tsemah David*, which is mentioned above in note 48. From it, we can learn that the Pope indeed successfully convinced the emperor to revoke the decree.

50 They will be discussed below.

51 This view was held by GRAETZ, *Geschichte der Juden* (note 48), vol. IX, pp. 364-366; BERNHARD BRILLING, "Eine Eingabe der böhmischen Judenheit von Jahre 1560," in: *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Juden in der Tschechoslowakei* 5 (1938), pp. 59-62; BARON, *A Social and Religious History* (note 30), vol. XIV, pp. 158-159, 363. In any case, Joseph ha-Kohen tells us that the emperor's decree of

שכ"א לפ"ק גזרו [מ]ל[כות] הרשעה שמד במדינת פיהם [...] או יצאו ממלכות פיהם ולקחו הרבה [...] ועמדו בנסיון ונסעו ממדינות פיהם בין יום כיפור לסוכות שכ"ב לפ"ק, וכל זה אירע ע"י ורדינגדס קיסר.<sup>52</sup>

[5]321 [1561] – There was an evil royal decree [requiring] forced conversion [of the Jews] in the cities of Bohemia [...] or their departure from the kingdom of Bohemia, and taking much [...] they withstood the temptation [to convert], leaving the cities of Bohemia between Yom Kippur and Sukkot in [5]322 [September 1561].<sup>53</sup>

On the one hand, we thus can conclude that the royal decree concerning the expulsion of the Jews from Bohemia, issued in 1559, apparently was not implemented in that year, but delayed until 1561. On the other, we may not overlook or even ignore the significance of the four Hebrew sources that contradict this conclusion. But, how to explain this paradox and reconcile the contradicting reports, still remains a question with no answer.

### III. *Conflagration in the Jewish quarter of Prague on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1559*

In 1559, shortly after the expulsion edict was issued, the Jewish quarter was severely damaged: Fire broke out in the Jewish neighbourhood in Prague, thus illustrating the further deteriorating situation of the Jews. David Gans and the author of the *Hebrew Chronicle* as well as Joseph ha-Kohen mention this traumatic event. David Gans laconically writes:

בעת ההיא יצאה אש ברחוב היהודים ונשרפו ע"ב בתים ביום שבעה עשר בתמוז.<sup>54</sup>

At that time,<sup>55</sup> a fire broke out in the *Judengasse* (Jews' Street), and seventy-two houses were burnt down on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Tammuz.

The *Hebrew Chronicle* gives some additional details:

שי"ט לפ"ק, היה שריפה ברחוב היהודים ונשרפו פה פראג ע"ב בתים, וגם בעו"ה ב"ה הגבוה נשרפה, והיה זה שבעה עשר בתמוז, ונשרפה ג"כ בעו"ה אשה ושמה וריידל ניחש.<sup>56</sup>

[5]319 [1559] – Due to our iniquities, there was a fire in the *Judengasse* (Jews' Street) here in Prague, in which seventy-two houses were consumed by the flames, as well as the Hochschule. This occurred on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz

---

1559 did not stipulate a total expulsion; he writes: "He permitted a remnant to stay in Prague where about two hundred families remained."

52 DAVID (ed.), *כרוניקה עברית* (note 5), no. 56, p. 14.

53 DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), no. 56, p. 48-49.

54 BREUER (ed.), *צמח דוד* (note 1), p. 141.

55 In the year [5]319, i.e. 1559.

56 DAVID (ed.), *כרוניקה עברית* (note 5), no. 53, p. 14.

[22 June]. A woman named Freidel Niches perished in the fire as well due to our iniquities.<sup>57</sup>

Still more details can be found in the writings of Joseph ha-Kohen:

ויהי בשבעה עשר יום לחדש תמוז ותצא אש ברחוב היהודים ותלהט כששים בתים, כמעט רגע. ותעל לבת האש השמימה ויחרדו מאד. ותהום כל העיר ויהרסו כל העם עליהם כדובים כזאבי ערב, ויקחו את שללם, והיהודים ברחו למו, כי יראו לנפשם. וגם מהנשים השליכו אל תוך השריפה בעת הנמהרה ההיא. ותעל שועתם השמימה, וישמע פירדינאנדו הדוכוס, בן פירדינאנדו הקיסר וירץ ויעמוד בפרץ ותעצר המגפה. ויהי אחרי כן ויתנו אל היהודים לשבת עוד בפראגה ימים אחדים.<sup>58</sup>

A fire broke out in Jews' Street [*Judengasse*] on June 22<sup>nd</sup> (17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz), and in a short time, some sixty houses burned down so that the flames rose up to the Heavens. The whole town was in an uproar and the populace stormed against the Jews like bears and wolves of the night and took all their possessions; the Jews fled, fearing for their lives. During that fateful event, several women were also thrown into the fire and their cries went up to Heaven. When Duke Ferdinand, the son of the Emperor,<sup>59</sup> heard this, he hurried to the scene, and acted as mediator, and turned the plunderers to flight, whereupon the plague ceased. Later on, the Jews were permitted to remain in Prague for a limit time.<sup>60</sup>

As all three sources confirm, dozens of houses in the *Judengasse* were destroyed by fire on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz of that year. Whereas Joseph ha-Kohen reports that “approximately sixty houses” were destroyed, according to David Gans and the author of the *Hebrew Chronicle*, the loss amounted to “seventy two houses”. In addition to that, the *Hebrew Chronicle* discloses that the *Hochschul* was consumed by the flames as well. Later it was rebuilt by the philanthropist Mordechai Maisel.<sup>61</sup> The author of the *Hebrew Chronicle*

---

57 DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), no. 53, pp. 46-47.

58 GROSS (ed.), ספר דברי הימים, יוסף הכהן, (note 19), pt. III, p. 59; A slightly different version is found in the British Library manuscript Ms. Or. 3656 (see p. 386 below). ALMBLADH (ed.), *Joseph Ha-Kohen, Sefer Emeq ha-bakha* (note 20), p. 90 (with some lacunae).

59 Ferdinand II (1529–1595), son of the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I (1503–1564) and Archduke of Further Austria and Tirol (1564) had good connections with Prague, see: VÁCLAV BŮŽEK, *Ferdinand von Tirol zwischen Prag und Innsbruck*, Wien 2009.

60 Translated by May, *The Vale of Tears*, p. 97.

61 BREUER (ed.), צמח דוד (note 1), p. 146. Mordechai Marcus Meisel (1528–1601), was the communal leader of the Prague Jewish community in the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He donated a lot to the Jewish community. Probably, David Gans was his protégé; he praises him as a great philanthropist, see: BREUER

also stresses the loss of lives resulting from the conflagration, even mentioning the name of a female victim, and Joseph ha-Kohen adds: “several women were also thrown into the fire”.

#### IV. Confiscation of Jewish books in Prague in 1560

Royal documents indicate that in response to pressure from anti-Jewish clerical circles, Ferdinand I ordered the confiscation of Jewish books in Prague on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1560. The books were sent to Vienna for inspection by Church censors to find out whether there is any blasphemy in them against Christianity.<sup>62</sup> The decree was implemented some three months later. In August 1560 the emperor ordered that the books be loaded on two carriages for returning to Prague, duty free.<sup>63</sup> The final approval of this was given by the emperor a few months later, on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1561.<sup>64</sup>

From the three sources, we learn something about this decree. David Gans notes:

שי"ט: כל ספרי הקודש אשר בקהילתנו ק"ק פראג נלקחו ברשיון השררה, כאשר עללו עלינו באמרם שאנו מתפללים נגדם, אשר בסיבת זה כל סדורי התפילות עם שאר ספרים משקל שמונים ככרות ספרים נשתלחו לעיר וויאן, באופן שאפילו החזנים התפללו בבתי כנסיות בעל פה, עד אשר התודע ונתברר למלך ששקר עללו עלינו, הוחזרו כל הספרים אשר לקחו, והיה כל זה בשנת שי"ט.<sup>65</sup>

[Year 5]319 [1559]: All holy books in our holy community, Prague, were confiscated by royal permit, in consequence of the false accusation that we prayed for the [non-Jews] harm. For this reason, all the prayer books, along with the remaining books, weighing eighty talents, were sent to Vienna; therefore, even the *ḥazzanim* [cantors] had to pray from memory in the synagogue, until it became clear and was made known to the king that the accusation was entirely false. All the books were returned. This occurred in the year [5]319 [1559].<sup>66</sup>

A shorter description of this event can be found in the *Hebrew Chronicle*, too; it reads:

---

(ed.), *צמח דוד* (note 1), pp. 146-147. – On him, see: DAVID KAUFMANN, “La synagogue de Mardochee Maisel et Jacob Segré,” in: *Revue des Études Juives* 20-21 (1890), pp. 143-145; OTTO MUNELES, *כתובות מבית-העלמין היהודי העתיק בפראג*, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 265-268; RACHEL L. GREENBLATT, *To Tell Their Children*, Stanford 2014, pp. 25-29.

62 See: BONDY-DWORSKÝ, *Geschichte der Juden* (note 9), vol. I, no. 611, pp. 449-451.

63 See: BONDY-DWORSKÝ, *Geschichte der Juden* (note 9), vol. I, no. 619, p. 455.

64 See: BONDY-DWORSKÝ, *Geschichte der Juden* (note 9), vol. I, no. 622, p. 457.

65 BREUER (ed.), *צמח דוד* (note 1), p. 141.

66 DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), introduction, p. 12.



ש"ך לפ"ק, נעשה המלך ורדנניס קיסר יר"ה וציוה ליקח כל הספרים שנמצא בפראג, והחזנים התפללו בבית הכנסת על פה, ויום ב' ט"ז סיון שלחום לעיר ווין. והמשקל של הספרים נ"ז כיכר, וזה היה בילבול משומדי[ם], ומעט מהספרים החזרו.<sup>67</sup>

[Year 5]320 [1560]: King Ferdinand, may he be exalted, was crowned emperor.<sup>68</sup> He ordered the confiscation of all the [Jewish] books in Prague, and the *ḥazzanim* [cantors] prayed from memory in the synagogue. On Monday, the 16<sup>th</sup> of Sivan [10<sup>th</sup> of June] he sent [the books] to Vienna; their weight was fifty-seven talents. This was the result of accusation by apostates, and only a few books were returned.<sup>69</sup>

Joseph ha-Kohen writes on this case:

גם שמה הלך אשכנזי אחד איש בליעל בשנה ההיא, אשר יהודה מאודינה לפנים בישראל שמו וידבר סרה על היהודים, ויקחו בפראגה את כל ספרי הקודש מידם. וגם את ספרי התפלה דרוש דרש, לא השאירו עוללות וישאום בעגלות אל חצר המלך אשר בוויאנה בעת ההיא, כי לא פורש מה יעשה בהם. ויחרדו היהודים מאוד [...] ויצעקו אל ה' ויתנם ה' לרחמים בעיני המלך, וישיבו הספרים אליהם ויתנו תודה לאלהים ויעלצו מאד.<sup>70</sup>

In that year [5319 (1559)] an Ashkenazi apostate, a scoundrel – Judah from Udine<sup>71</sup> was formerly his name in Israel – went and spoke perversely of the Jews. [In consequence] all the holy books in Prague were confiscated. They demanded the prayer books as well, leaving no gleanings, taking [the books] on carriages to the king's court which was situated in Vienna at that time. For, it had not been specified what should be done to them, and the Jews were greatly afeard [...]. They cried out to the Lord, and God made the king kindly disposed to [the Jews], and the books were returned to them and they gave thanks to God and expressed great joy.<sup>72</sup>

The background of this event is clarified by the *Royal Documents*, as we mentioned above. The same explanation can be found in all three sources. David Gans writes: “as a consequence of the false accusation that we are praying for the [non-Jews] bad luck.” The author of the *Hebrew Chronicle* says: [ם] וזה היה בילבול משומדי[ם] “This

67 DAVID (ed.), כרוניקה עברית (note 5), no. 54, p. 14.

68 Actuality, Ferdinand I ruled the Holy Roman Empire from 1556, during the lifetime of his brother Charles V, who died on September 21 1558.

69 DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), no. 54, p. 47.

70 GROSS (ed.), יוסף הכהן, ספר דברי הימים (note 19), pt. III, p. 60. A slightly different version is found in the British Library manuscript Ms. Or. 3656 (see p. 386 below). The same paragraph is included Joseph ha-Kohen's other work, see: ALMBLADH (ed.), *Joseph Ha-Kohen, Sefer Emeq ha-bakha* (note 20), pp. 90-91.

71 This is *Udine* in northern Italy, not *Udena*, as mistakenly spelled by the translator.

72 DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), introduction, p. 12-13. The last twelve words of the Hebrew text are not included in that translation.

was the result of accusations put forward by apostates.” And Joseph ha-Kohen states that this edict was instigated by the incitements of the Ashkenazic apostate, Judah of Udine: יהודה מאודינה לפנים בישראל שמו וידבר סרה על היהודים “Judah of Udine, that was his formerly name in Israel, went and spoke perversely of the Jews”.

As to the quantity of confiscated books, both Prague sources likewise differ from each other. Whereas David Gans speaks of “eighty talents”, the *Hebrew Chronicle* mentions “fifty-seven talents” only. In addition to that, David Gans and Joseph ha-Kohen mistakenly date this event to the year 1559, but the author of the *Hebrew Chronicle* correctly says that it happened in the year 1560. Whereas all three sources confirm that the confiscated books were returned to the Jewish community in Prague, the author of the *Hebrew Chronicle* adds, however, that “Only a few books were returned.”

To sum up: In this article we focussed on four traumatic events that occurred in the history of Bohemian Jewry in general, and in Prague in particular, in the sixteenth century as reflected in the works of three famous historians: David Gans, the anonymous author of the *Hebrew Chronicle*, and Joseph ha-Kohen, the great historian from Italy. Though most of the details are recounted rather laconically by those historians, they are corroborated and can be verified by official documents preserved in the royal archives. No doubt, that the Jewish community *Pinkas* (“minute book”), which the *Hebrew Chronicle*<sup>73</sup> refers to as one of its sources, was also one of the sources, which David Gans drew upon in his *Tsemah David*. Joseph ha-Kohen may have used some Bohemian sources as well, probably written in Latin, but maybe also in Hebrew, sources, however, that are unknown or did not survive and, thus, are no longer extant.

---

73 See: DAVID (ed.), כרוניקה עברית (note 5), no. 70, p. 20: ונכתב בפנקס דמתא פה פראג  
“As recorded in the minute book of the Prague [Jewish] community”, see: DAVID (ed.), *Hebrew Chronicle* (note 6), no. 70, p. 58).

ש"א לפק עשה האלק וידועים ירה וצדק בבל אדוני הים  
 ולא שאמרתי כיוון רק עשה על בני יוסף  
 החזירים בלעם חמלה

ש"ת לפק חזק ועשה מעשה ויבטל מדינות כדלג  
 נשאו פה כיוון רק יבטל ברעם

ש"ת לפק הנה ארצה כרחוב היהודים ולשון פה  
 כיוון עבד ברעם וקם בלעם בה נפלה לשון  
 אלה זה שבעה עשר ברמון ונפלה פה אלה  
 ומה ארדל נחש

ש"ת לפק עשה האלק וידועים יוסף יהו וציוה ליקח  
 הספרים שנמצא בקרון והחטיב ורפלו נבנה  
 הכנסה על פה ויום ב' ל' סיון שלחם לעיר וזין  
 והמקל של הספרים פני כפר וזה הנה בלעם חמלה  
 ועל מהספרים חמלה

ש"ת לפק עשה האלק וידועים יוסף יהו וציוה ליקח  
 הספרים שנמצא בקרון והחטיב ורפלו נבנה

Hebrew Chronicle from Prague  
 New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, Mic. 3849, fol. 9r

5310  
1557

ואני שולימין - אחור נאור - נוחל שלם ומחד לעת ההיא : ויק  
בחרוש - ויבחרו עשרה שולימין - קשה להם מרוב צעקות  
והקוץ העליון - וקבלום אחור דלי - ואני בחורפת - שפי  
ויטלו (בם חלום אורג) בשפת ההיא :  
וילך פורד נענו - הקיטר באת היהוה ושעל סבב בנחש  
וכשתה קשע עשלה ושלנו תמיד ומשעה אלפיס : ויק  
הזע וחמדים ומגש ועצת ואלף : וישאר מהם שאר היה  
כשראג - וישבגם ששעהם ברש - ומשאלים הלם לדרכם :  
ויהי בשעה שער יום לדת השט - והקץ אם צמוב האוהים  
וקלהם כמזיזים ברש כשעמ רש - וישל לבת האם המעמרה :  
וקבוס כל העש - ויקרמו כל הנוש עליהם כדוסס כחאט עורב ויקחו  
אם שלם והיהודי ברחו לש - כי יראו לקבוס : ויש פה נאסי  
השלים אל תוך השלפה - צעה נפילה ההיא וישל שועת המשיעה :  
וישעמוהו הנלבו יקובוס - בן פורדנענו הקיסר - ויהי וישעד  
בש - והמור פוס ברחו למו - ודעל המעמרה : ויהי אחת סן זיקבו  
אל הקודם למסר שר בצבאג - וישל אחדם :  
אם בעל היהוש - לבן את היהודים והוש הו - וישל צעה  
ההיא - וילכו לור באשר תכלו ש קוס :  
אם שעה הק אטכתי את איש המלעל בשעה ההיא - אשר  
יהודה מצוהיע - למעם בטרת שמו - וידם סיה על הקודם :  
ויקחו בצבאג - אהרן כל ספר הקדש - ויש את ספרי המלה דחש  
חש - לך השליחו עוללהו - ויקחום בשעות אליהו סה הולך  
אשר בואלעה : צעה הקדש - כי לך פועם וזה יעשה בים : ויחורו  
היהודים ויקץ - ויהי למם אשה מלעה - וישענו אל ה : ויקחם  
הלחשו בעיני הולך - וישבו את המסרים אליהם - ויקחו יהודה  
לקלהם : זיעל מלד :  
וצולו הקובוסים - בשעה שעה אינות לני זעורה - באל השבת  
ביום השלישי - לדש וישח ויעלו אל הכלה בצחלען - צרון האשערה  
הקטנה : ויהוה כל העש שלום נחמק לקלות ולת נלמו יהוה אם חושק  
נשתי נשים ושל במר - ויקח השב שמו - וישלחו אינעם מלכה : ויש  
מחוינש לקחם יקם בלמה ההיא : וילכו לקום :  
ויהי אחיה אשר השליח הולך לבסר ויקח ספר צעהו וילך היהודים  
דקוסק קלה - בצב אינותו דקמה - לקרה אה אישאלה - בך  
הולך לבסר - אל פוליש הולך אינוט למה - נכססיה הולך אינלי  
ושרו מלד : ויה פתח למסר הין - ויחוש הולך - וילכו נח המקום  
לכסי שלין ולבס - וישחק למבני - וישאו קמד הולך ויהוה לעב -  
הולך והשלים דב ווס עווש - וקסנע הולך לקח - ויעלג מלד :  
(קדי בוס השט לדש קלינו - וישלו ששים - נורם בפתח איש לקח  
ועד משמחם - למע הולך והשלים - כאשר בלחושם צום קרב -  
והשר פוליש - סלה ושחיה : ויהוה אפ הולך אינלי - ללם ולת יער  
ס קרב ויק אחר - והולך למס שלין נשתי קל - ללם המורה ההיא :  
ויהוה לקחם בן עושיתור ס עולין - ויהוה אם צב הולך לקחם  
וקי ית הולך מעל ומעבו צווש - ויקחה - וישל הולך העהר חיה  
אילה - ויהוה שחמקם למל סשעם נוש - ויהוה מלד : ויהוה הולך  
מלד - ויק לבית - ויקדי את בן סבלא שקר - הוש על סולו אל  
דלום מלך ספר - וילך דומס שחיוני - והולך בן סט עשלה שיה

Joseph ha-Kohen, Divrei ha-Yamim [autograph]  
The British Library Ms. Or. 3656, fol. 163r.  
(printed with permission of The British Library, London, U.K.)