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JEWISH COMMUNAL LIFE IN THE DUCHY OF MECKLENBURG,  
AS REFLECTED IN CORRESPONDENCE, 1760-1769

Lisa L. Goldstein

This thesis grew out of studies that Ms. Goldstein began in 1986 when, as an undergraduate at Brown University, she took her Junior year at the University of Rostock, at that time in the German Democratic Republic, and now in the State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in the Federal Republic of Germany. The then Librarian of the University, Dr. Karl-Heinz Juegelt, called Ms. Goldstein's attention to a collection of some 600 unpublished eighteenth and early nineteenth century letters that had been assembled by Oluf Gerhart Tychsen (1734-1815) and bequeathed by him to the University. Tychsen, a Christian Hebraist, was an enigmatic figure, in his early life a missionary to the Jews, and subsequently their self-appointed protagonist before the ducal court, sometimes their friend, more often their critic. In return the Jews heaped adulation upon Tychsen, lavishing such titles upon him as Haver, Rabbi, Gaon, that very likely had never been applied previously to a non-Jew. One can safely assume that these honorifics were bestowed in order to cultivate Tychsen's intercession. Either through the gift of the writers or through purchase Tychsen brought together this body of correspondence which languished unread in the University Library for almost two centuries. In 1989 Ms. Goldstein was sent a sampling of letters in photocopy. When she decided to edit this material for her rabbinic thesis, she requested additional letters, but the Librarian declined on the basis that the documents were too tightly bound to allow for photocopying. Consequently, in the summer of 1992 Ms. Goldstein returned to the University, where she was allowed to copy additional letters.

The subject matter of the correspondence touches upon almost every aspect of personal and communal life. A *mohel* advertises his professional skills, and provides a roster of the children whom he has initiated into the Covenant. A *kabbalah* authorizes a physician to act as *shohet*. Two invitations to weddings promise an elaborate repast, as befits the occasion. Not surprisingly, there are several piteous requests for charity, endorsed by the most prominent rabbis of the day. There are a number of pleas for intercession and financial assistance from the ducal court. There are bills rendered for merchandise delivered, and excuses for late payment of debts. There is a note to Tychsen providing details of a new Hebrew volume on the calendar which the book seller is certain Tychsen will want to add to his library. Surprisingly, there are no letters of consolation.

In her thesis, Ms. Goldstein provides translations of twenty-four letters written between 1760 and 1769. The correspondence is unfortunately one-sided; in no instance is the

original letter which provoked this response, or the response following this letter preserved (unless it is to be discovered in the body of letters Ms. Goldstein could not survey), and consequently the circumstances which occasioned the composition of the individual letters have either to be inferred or located in secondary sources. Most of the letters are written in Yiddish; some are in Hebrew, and others employ both languages. The addresses, where they exist, are in the old Gothic script. Some of the letters were transcribed by Tychsen and he must be blamed for a number of scribal errors. It may be that he did not understand everything he was copying out. In general the penmanship is poor, and the cursive script frequently defies the most persistent efforts at decipherment. The style of the letters is effusive and ponderous; the writers were obviously straining to demonstrate their command of the most obscure rabbinic idioms, and those to whom they wrote were obviously conversant with abstruse Biblical and Talmudic allusions.

To this project Ms. Goldstein brought a fine command of Hebrew and modern German, a remarkable ability to penetrate the handwriting of the various correspondents, and infinite patience to ponder over the intricacies of style in the texts until she could interpret them to her satisfaction. When a word or phrase was beyond recognition, she sought the assistance of several experts (who themselves were not infrequently baffled), but quite by herself she succeeded in construing the greatest part of the material. In order to do so, it should be said, she had to familiarize herself with eighteenth century Yiddish and German.

Ms. Goldstein possesses every quality requisite for serious scholarship. Besides her linguistic ability and her patience, she has a deep love of learning, an enquiring and critical mind, a keen intuition, and boundless energy and enthusiasm. She is always open to suggestions. Though she has many other interests, religious, intellectual, and social-welfare, her dedication to this project, often over and above the call of duty, merits the highest commendation. One hopes that she will be minded to expand her thesis into a doctoral dissertation by embarking upon a study of the remainder of the Tychsen correspondence, and by undertaking a search in the archives of the various towns of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern to determine if anything further has been preserved of the once flourishing Jewish communities, as well as by investigating the holdings of the newly opened archives of the former DDR.

I am greatly pleased to recommend to the Faculty the acceptance of Ms. Lisa L. Goldstein's thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for ordination to the Rabbinate.

Respectfully submitted,

A. Stanley Dreyfus

JEWISH COMMUNAL LIFE IN THE DUCHY OF MECKLENBURG AS  
REFLECTED IN CORRESPONDENCE, 1760-1769

LISA L. GOLDSTEIN

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
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Dr. A. Stanley Dreyfus

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So many people have helped me during the course of this work. I wish to thank Dr. Martin Guntau, my former mentor at the History Department of the Rostock University, and Dr. Karl-Heinz Juelgelt, the former Director of the University Library, for introducing me to the Tychsen letters. Dr. Lewis Barth first recognized the potential of the material and encouraged me to work on it. Rabbi Samuel Zitronenbaum and especially Dr. S. Eidelberg spent hours helping me decipher handwritings. Mrs. Marianne Dreyfus read the Gothic script and kept me well fed. But most of all, I owe my deepest gratitude and sincere respect to my advisor, Rabbi A. Stanley Dreyfus, who has been a patient teacher, an inspiring mentor, and a tireless collaborator. *Yehoshua ben Prahya omer: aseh lecha rav (Avot 1:6)*. This I have done and my cup overflows.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

## i.

In 1986 I studied at what was then the Wilhelm Pieck Universtitaet in Rostock, the largest city in the north of the German Democratic Republic. In the subsequent years I visited my East German friends on my way to and from Israel, where I had begun my rabbinical studies. In order to facilitate my obtaining a visa, the Director of the University Library, Dr. Karl-Heinz Juegelt, designated me "Hebrew Expert," and made it official university business to show me the enormous Tychsen collection. I saw volumes and volumes of Judaica, admired the rare editions, and sometimes translated a title or two.

In the spring of 1989 I received a package from Dr. Juegelt. Enclosed were copies of eight letters in Hebrew script. He wrote that these were examples of almost 150 such letters that the Library owned. Some unnamed person had begun to translate them decades ago, but had died before he had published his work. Did I know someone who might be able to read the script? "Ich glaube," he wrote, "dass die Bearbeitung dieses Materials ein guter Beitrag zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Juden in Mecklenburg sein koennte." [I believe that working on this material could result in a significant contribution to the research on the history of Jews in Mecklenburg.]

Dr. Juegelt was mistaken about one thing; the collection actually houses as many as six hundred of these letters, written between 1750 and 1815. This includes the personal correspondence of the collector, Oluf Tychsen, and other letters and documents from the Jewish communities of Mecklenburg. For the most part, the letters are not catalogued; I made a hasty and not very reliable catalogue when I returned to the Rostock University Library (as it is now called) in August, 1992. Most of the material, however, remains for future study.

The twenty-four letters here were chosen almost at random; they reflect an arbitrary sampling of subjects and writers with two guidelines. All the letters presented here except for one were written within the Jewish community. I chose to include only one letter that belongs to Tychsen's large personal correspondence. Moreover, all the letters were written in the 1760's. Again, this is an arbitrary decision, but the relatively uneventful decade reflects the everyday realities and individual elements that make up the fabric of life in between the events usually recorded in history books.

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These letters are written in Hebrew and a dialect of Yiddish called "Western Yiddish" or "Judeo-German," with a sprinkling of Talmudic Aramaic. Most Jews did not speak



standard German at this time, nor did many read German script. There is little, if any, Slavic influence in this Yiddish; most often it appears that the writers largely employed their version of the local German dialect, transcribing it in Hebrew characters. The modern reader can see some French or Latin influence; for example, one letter uses the phrase *zu rekommandieren* instead of *zu empfehlen*. Perhaps this reflects the cultural sway that the France of Louis XIV maintained over the inhabitants of Europe.

Religious and other official documents tend to be in Hebrew, while business and personal letters are most often in Yiddish. However, it is quite common to see letters that are otherwise entirely in Hebrew refer, for example, to the government in Yiddish as *ha-regierung*. Each letter will be presented with the document number, as listed in the Rostock University catalogue, and with a note specifying the language of the letter. Words that appear in other languages will be noted. A glossary of Hebrew terms appears at the end.

The style of these letters is often ponderous and stilted. Writers referred to the addressee in the formal third person and often employed Biblical or Talmudic phrases, expecting their readers to understand the allusions. Each letter begins with a long list of honorific titles, which give the impression that the recipient was a prominent scholar and community leader. However, this was a

common formula of respectful formality and reveals nothing about the status or reputation of the individual in question. I have omitted the salutations in all cases except where they are informative or unusual.

Some of the letters still bear the address and seal. Writers addressed their letters in both German and Hebrew, presumably depending on who delivered the letter. In other cases, the letter is a copy that Tychsen made for himself; he neglected to include the addresses. I have noted if the letter is the original or Tychsen's copy, and where possible, provided the addresses. It would be interesting to study the seals, as well.

All translations of the letters and of background sources in German are mine; any errors are mine, and cannot be attributed to those who kindly helped me.

iii

Jews have always been directly affected by the events in the surrounding society, and the Jews of Mecklenburg were no exception. Mecklenburg was a small, largely agricultural duchy in the north of Germany, bordering the Baltic Sea. In 1702 the Duke divided his duchy between his two sons, creating Mecklenburg-Schwerin to the west and Mecklenburg-

Strelitz to the east.<sup>1</sup> The Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin had the right to summon a joint *landtag*.<sup>2</sup> The two duchies remained closely tied and were eventually reunited in 1934.

Many of the letters here refer to "the Duke." This duke was Friedrich, also known as Friedrich the Pious, who ruled Mecklenburg-Schwerin from 1756 to 1785.

In this period, two major factors influenced the events in Mecklenburg. The first was its neighbors. The Duchy of Hannover lay to the west, Prussia to the east. The two powers did not often honor the territorial integrity of weak Mecklenburg in the middle. In 1733 Prussian and Hannoverian forces clashed over Mecklenburg. Both sides left occupying armies, and the troops from Hannover stayed two years. Finally, under pressure from the Prussians, they withdrew.<sup>3</sup>

Twenty years later, in 1756, the Seven Years War broke out between Prussia and Austria. Prussian officers crossed the border into Mecklenburg in an attempt to enlist recruits for the Prussian army. Duke Friedrich showed his outrage by supporting Marie Theresa of Austria during the war.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the war in 1763, Prussia had emerged as a major

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<sup>1</sup>William H. Maehl, Germany in Western Civilization (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 213.

<sup>2</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica, 1950 ed., s.v. "Mecklenburg."

<sup>3</sup>Michael Hughes, Law and Politics in Eighteenth Century Germany (Suffolk, England: Boydell Press, 1988), 261-3.

<sup>4</sup>C. T. Atkinson, A History of Germany 1715-1815, (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969), 204.

power in Europe, constituting a real threat to Mecklenburg.<sup>5</sup> Prussia occupied Mecklenburg again in 1786, extracting over eight million reichstaler.<sup>6</sup>

Under pressure from neighboring powers, the Dukes of Mecklenburg tried to preserve law and order within the duchies. Duke Friedrich's grandfather, Charles Leopold, attempted to follow the example of Charles XII of Sweden and to impose absolute power. He even called on Russian troops to support him. However, his attempt failed, and in 1755 he was forced to accept an *Erbvergleich*, a hereditary compromise; control was transferred from the Duke to the estates, which included seven hundred noblemen and fewer than fifty mayors of the duchy's cities. The nobility and the mayors controlled three-fifths of the land, while the duke had to be satisfied with two-fifths.<sup>7</sup>

The nobility took advantage of their new power by introducing cattle raising on a wide scale. In acts similar to the enclosure acts of eighteenth century England, the Mecklenburg Junkers evicted peasants from the land, enclosing greater and greater pasture areas for their cattle. Cities were not able to absorb the displaced population, but the nobles ignored the suffering of the

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<sup>5</sup>Atkinson, 292.

<sup>6</sup>Hajo Holborn, A History of Modern Germany 1648-1840, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 268.

<sup>7</sup>Holborn, 297.

peasant farmers.<sup>8</sup> It is not surprising that there was no urban middle class in Mecklenburg until the late nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

iv

Jews played a special role against this backdrop. They depended on the good will of the Duke, but often traded with Mecklenburg's wealthier, more powerful neighbors. They were not evicted from land holdings like the peasant farmers, although they were periodically expelled from the duchy when they were not of sufficient use to the Duke. Many Jews shared in the general poverty of the region, although some were very wealthy indeed. They occupied the place in society which would later be filled by the urban middle class.

Jews had lived in Mecklenburg at various times, only to be expelled. In 1676 Duke Christian I invited two Jews from Hamburg to his court and gave them permission to establish a tobacco monopoly. However, Duke Friedrich's father, Charles Ludwig (1747-1756), expelled all unprivileged Jews from Mecklenburg, leaving about thirty Jews in the duchy. He then invited Nathan Aaron and his brother Philip to his

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<sup>8</sup>Holborn, 297.

<sup>9</sup>Ernest K. Bramstead, Germany, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1972), 86.

court and through their influence, the Jewish community grew to the population reflected in the letters.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>The Jewish Encyclopedia (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1964), s.v. "Mecklenburg," by Isador Warsaw.

## CHAPTER 2

## "RABBI TYCHSEN"

Document 267b 45 [Tychsen's copy of the original Hebrew]

Blessed be God. Gustrow, Sunday, 7 Elul 5528 [1768]

Great peace from the holy portal to the man (1) great in might and wondrous deeds, the Rabbi, the Gaon, the great luminary, celebrated in his generation [for] his exalted wisdom and pure qualities, pious and humble in his teaching, our master and our teacher, Rabbi TYCHSEN, (may his light shine!) the Dayan of the Academy in Buetzow:

There happened to come to me the rabbi, the celebrated Dayan and sage, our master and teacher, Rabbi [?], (may his light shine!) and in his hand was a distinguished volume from the prince of Torah, Rabbi Isaac Ha-yisraeli. The book, Yesod Olam, clarifies the science of intercalation and sanctification of the new moon (2). My lord, who loves wisdom, has requested me to recommend (3) to his honor every new book that comes into my possession. Therefore, I, his servant, am now ready to serve him. I have done everything my lord has commanded me and I recommend (4) the bearer of this letter with the important volume that is in his hand to my lord. These are the words of his servant who prostrates himself before his glorious honor.

The humble Meir the son of Reb L. [?]

After his honor sees the recommendation (5), he will also find this letter from the holy congregation of Berlin the capital, specifically from the sage, our master and rabbi, Moshe of Dessau [Moses Mendelssohn] who approves of everything I have done. His faithful servant, who has signed above.

- 1) This opening phrase is in Aramaic.
- 2) Yesod Olam, by R. Isaac ben Joseph Ha-yisraeli, Berlin, 1777. The Jewish calendar is based on both a lunar month and a solar year, which requires an intricate system of leap years and months of twenty-nine and thirty days. This book explains the necessary calculations, as well as the rituals for the beginning of a new month. (Cf. Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1972 ed., s.v. "Calendar.")
- 3) Literally, *zu rekommandieren*.
- 4) Literally, *und rekommandiere*.
- 5) Literally, *Rekommaditius*.

"Rabbi Tychsen," whom the Jews of Mecklenburg deferentially addressed as *gaon*, *dayan*, and *rabbi*, was a non-Jewish Hebraist. He was a scholar, a missionary, an internationally famous personality, an avid collector of books and letters, and the self-appointed protector of the Jews of Mecklenburg.

Oluf (or sometimes "Olaus") Gerhard Tychsen (1734 - 1815) was born in Tondern, Holstein, which was then under Danish rule. He studied in Altona, where he met the controversial rabbi, Jonathan Eybeschuetz, and began to study rabbinic texts with him. After continuing his education in Jena and Halle, he became a missionary. In 1759 he made his first trip to Mecklenburg with a fellow missionary, Pastor Roeper, with the aim of converting Jews. However, their attempts failed, and Tychsen returned to Halle.

A year later he went back to Mecklenburg, settling in Buetzow. This time he sought to make connections with the Jewish communities without making his motives clear. He learned Judeo-German, and copied Jewish dress and mannerisms to such an extent that some mistook him for a Jew.<sup>1</sup> He became a Professor of Oriental Languages at the university in Buetzow. Judging from his letters alone, he was proficient in Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac and Arabic. While in

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<sup>1</sup>Leopold Donath, Geschichte der Juden in Mecklenburg von den aeltesten Zeiten (1266) bis auf die Gegenwart (1874), (Leipzig: Oskar Leiner, 1874), 144.



Buetzow, he studied with Rabbi Moses Lipschitz and received honorary haver status, the lowest level of ordination.<sup>2</sup> When the University of Buetzow merged with the University of Rostock in 1788,<sup>3</sup> Tychsen established himself in Rostock where he continued to teach, to write and to associate with Jews.

Through his correspondence with many people all over Europe, Tychsen became a celebrity. In fact, when in 1801, Lord Nelson, sailing on the Baltic Sea, docked in Rostock, he ignored the Duke of Mecklenburg and the mayor of Rostock. However, he did send a delegation of three officers to Tychsen's home to present him with a medal of honor.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of his fame, however, Tychsen was not the only or even the most learned Christian Hebraist of his time. He followed in the footsteps of Basnage, who wrote an early history of the Jews, Joannis Buxtorf, the author of Synagoga Judaica (Leipzig, 1728), and Johann Christian Wolf, whose Bibliotheca Hebraeca provided the foundation for all subsequent bibliographies. Tychsen's own work pales in comparison to these scholars of the early eighteenth century

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<sup>2</sup>Donath, 326-7. However, the certificate is full of dubious language. See Appendix 1 for a translation of the text.

<sup>3</sup>Donath, 145.

<sup>4</sup>Gottfried von Lueken, "Zur Entwicklung der Altertumswissenschaft an der Universitaet Rostock," Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universitaet Rostock - Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, vol. 2/3, (Rostock: n.p., 1964), 197.

or to his contemporaries such as Rabe, who translated the Mishnah into German.<sup>5</sup>

Tychsen's salary in 1763 as Professor of Oriental Languages was three hundred reichstaler a year. However, this stipend was not enough to support his passion: books. Eventually he married a wealthy woman several years his senior and spent all her money on his library.<sup>6</sup> He collected Judaica, mainly traditional Hebrew commentaries, prayerbooks, and other volumes in the field of rabbinics. However, he had broad literary interests. For example, he arranged for the University of Buetzow to purchase the libraries of the Dukes Johann Albrecht I, Adolf Friedrich I, and Christian Ludwig, which numbered over 12,000 volumes.<sup>7</sup>

Tychsen's love of collecting extended to letters, as well. He meticulously kept his own correspondences, noting when a letter was received and when he answered it, and often filing a copy of his response. It is not entirely clear how or why he came to collect the personal letters of Jews. Perhaps members of the Jewish community gave them to him, knowing of his interest in anything written in Hebrew or Judeo-German, or perhaps he bought them. At any rate, it

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<sup>5</sup>Jewish Encyclopedia (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1964), s.v. "Hebraists, Christian," by Richard Gottheil.

<sup>6</sup>von Luecken, 197.

<sup>7</sup>Karl Schmaltz, Kirchengeschichte Mecklenburgs, vol. 2, (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1952), 181.

is thanks to him that these letters are still preserved in the Rostock University today.

Tychsen's relationship with the Jews was a very complex one. On the one hand, he proudly saw himself as the protector of the Jews, and yet he was never able to shake off his feelings of ambivalence towards them.<sup>8</sup> Thanks to his patronage, many Jewish students were admitted to the University, especially as students of medicine. However, apparently he never gave up his missionary aspirations; he succeeded in converting at least one of his proteges, a young doctor named Marcus Moses;<sup>9</sup> Moses had been the first Jew allowed to practice medicine in Mecklenburg.<sup>10</sup> Tychsen was instrumental in convincing the Duke to grant the Jews emancipation in 1813, yet his own writings show his residual prejudices. For example, he described Jews as being "von Natur stolz" [essentially proud] because of the extensive use of honorific titles (*haver, rav*, and the like) with which the Jews addressed one another,<sup>11</sup> and debating with "orientalische Hitze" [oriental heat].<sup>12</sup> He scornfully deplored Jews' ability to speak standard German or Latin,

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<sup>8</sup>Donath, 146.

<sup>9</sup>Donath, 140ff.

<sup>10</sup>Jewish Encyclopedia (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1964), s.v. "Mecklenburg," by Isador Warsaw.

<sup>11</sup>Olaf Tychsen, Buetzowische Nebenstunden, (Buetzow, Germany: n.p., 1766-9), Part IV, 37.

<sup>12</sup>Tychsen, Part V, 2.

but suspected that they deliberately mangled certain Latin phrases. While he laughed that the Jews called him "Professorum Tollogi" instead of "Professorum Theologiae,"<sup>13</sup> the substitution of "Avengeljon" (scroll of sin) for "Evangelium" angered him.<sup>14</sup> Tychsen was also outraged when he discovered the phrase "For they bow to vanity and emptiness" in the Aleinu prayer in a Portuguese prayerbook of 1739.<sup>15</sup> Tychsen enjoyed his reputation of a scholar in Judaica and a friend to the Jews, but he clearly maintained the superiority of Christianity and could not quite forgive the Jewish community for their stubbornness in remaining what they were: Jews.

The Jewish community felt ambivalence towards Tychsen, as well. On the one hand, they appreciated his interest and political support. Like Meir, the author of the letter above, they wrote to him in obsequious terms. They informed him of new books and perhaps even supplied him with their own letters. Because they probably wrote with Tychsen in mind, and because he is the major source of information

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<sup>13</sup>He apparently failed to associate "Tollogi" with the Hebrew *toleh* [the hanged one], a derogatory name for Jesus.

<sup>14</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 13.

<sup>15</sup>Tychsen, Part II, 39. A fourteenth century apostate pointed out that *yeshu* (Jesus) and *va-rik* (and emptiness) have the same numerical value. Consequently, the phrase was censored from many Ashkenazi prayerbooks. In Prussia the line was banned in 1703, 1716 and 1750. The Sefardic tradition, however, always maintained the sentence. (Cf. Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971 ed., s.v. "Aleinu Le-Shabbe'ah.")

about the Jews of Mecklenburg, it is difficult to know what they really thought of him. However, there are two independent sources that bear on the matter. One is the memoirs of Aaron Isaac, of whom we shall hear more shortly. Although Aaron carried on an extensive correspondence with Tychsen, he did not mention Tychsen even once in his autobiography.<sup>16</sup> This is a curious omission if Tychsen really had the influence he claimed. Also, the renowned Moses Mendelssohn,<sup>17</sup> who is referred to as Moses of Dessau in Meir's letter above, mocked Tychsen's learning in a letter dated February, 1774. Mendelssohn wrote:

"... er, der so viel von rabbinische Gelehrsamkeit spricht, [ist] des Talmuds voellig unkundig... so wird Ihnen dennoch gleich in die Augen fallen, wie falsch Hr. Tychsen uebersetzt, wie gar unrichtig er exponiert hat."

[He, who speaks so much about rabbinic wisdom, is totally unfamiliar with the Talmud... It will be immediately obvious to you how falsely Mr. Tychsen

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<sup>16</sup>Aron Isak, Denkwuerdigkeiten des Aron Isak, trans. Z. Holm (Berlin: Welt Verlag, 1930), 14.

<sup>17</sup>Mendelssohn is associated with the Jews of Mecklenburg because of a ducal order in 1772 that prohibited immediate burial; to avoid premature interment, a period of three days had to pass between death and burial. The Jews appealed to Mendelssohn, who advised them to comply with the order.

translates, how utterly incorrect his exposition  
is!]<sup>18</sup>

Mendelssohn observed that since Tychsen understood Yiddish,  
he could easily find a teacher; any Jewish *melamed* could set  
him aright.

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<sup>18</sup>Siegfried Silberstein, "Mendelssohn und Mecklenburg,"  
Zeitschrift fuer die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland, vol. 2  
(1930): 165-6.

## CHAPTER 3

## COMMUNAL STRUCTURES

Document 267b 35 [Hebrew]  
[Address in German:] Herrn  
Herrn Gottschalck  
Jew presently studying  
in Buetzow  
postage paid

Blessed be God! Schwerin, Eve of the Holy Sabbath, 34th  
day of the Omer [Iyyar 19] 5529 [1769]

May God give an answer of peace (1) to my beloved and dear  
young man, the distinguished student of natural science and  
philosophy. To ... ELIAKIM, a student in Buetzow:  
The primary thing is reverence of God.

We received his letter of last Tuesday and we found  
that which we desired. We saw in it that he spoke with the  
Rabbi, the Professor [Tychsel] and found him to be a great  
and just sage. Only [?] etc. His words are truthful;  
according to what is related of him, he has always sought  
the welfare of the Jews in the past (2).

His Excellency [Eliakim] wrote that he heard that R.  
Manis is here. It is true that he was here from last Friday  
until last Monday and then he went his way.

His Excellency was surprised about the deputy ... R.  
Nata, who said to him that he would send the Protocol there.  
We asked him [Nata] directly and he said that more than  
twelve days ago they delivered the Protocol to the  
government (3) to send it there and he didn't know what  
would be done with it. His Excellency has gone to great  
trouble on our behalf. May he obtain due acclamation! (4)  
May God reward him generously! The appointed time will yet  
come (5) to serve him.

We were surprised that his Excellency mentioned nothing  
of his good standing. Therefore, we hope to see soon in his  
letters that all is well.

Because everything is pressing, I will be brief and conclude with saying these words are those of his cherished friend, the faithful MENDEL KATZ from Metz.

The great, honorable gaon, our teacher Rabbi Joshea [Joshua] Spira, Rosh Av beit din here seeks his well-being and prosperity.

- 1) Genesis 41:16.
- 2) Ezra 5:11.
- 3) Literally, *Regierung*.
- 4) Zachariah 4:7.
- 5) Habakkuk 2:3.

Although a stranger might think that the Jews of Mecklenburg were scattered through the remote towns and villages of the duchy, they were actually very tightly organized, and it was this organization that helped regulate all their activity, both within the Jewish community and in relation to the surrounding Christian world. The organization of the Jewish community provided Jews and gentiles alike with clear expectations and roles, and helped secure a sphere within which the Jews could live with relative safety.

The Jews codified their community organization by approving various "Protocols" or statutes that were then approved (and sometimes even originally authored) by the Duke. There is not yet any independent evidence for the



Protocol to which Mendel Katz referred in his letter. However, the most authoritative document in this period was approved in February, 1764. Jews from all over Mecklenburg-Schwerin met in Schwaan and signed a sixty-six article Protocol, prepared by Duke Friedrich. Articles 1-24 described the role of the deputies. Articles 25-29 detailed the responsibilities of the privileged Jews (*Schutzjuden*, literally "protected Jews"). Articles 30-33 provided for future meetings. Articles 34-41 stipulated the taxes each Jew had to pay, and articles 41-66 described the functions of the Jewish courts.<sup>1</sup>

The deputies were the most powerful members of the Jewish communities. Mecklenburg-Schwerin was divided into four districts: Buetzow, Pentzlin, Rhena and Wahren. Each district had one resident deputy (Article 1), who was elected by a majority vote and served for three years (Article 3). The Protocol does not specify the qualifications of the deputies or who was allowed to vote. The deputies held the ultimate authority over the community. They resolved conflicts involving less than fifty

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<sup>1</sup>Donath, 128-134.

reichstaler (Article 13) and were permitted to use any power to enforce their laws (Article 23). Anyone who disobeyed a deputy was fined ten reichstaler (Article 17). The deputies were allowed to use Jewish law to settle disputes and keep the Jewish community under control (Article 14). The Jews were not allowed to bring the deputies into conflict with one another; they could only consult the deputy of the district in which they lived (Article 6). However, they were guaranteed "due process" with their local deputy (Article 15). We shall see presently how this guaranty took shape in reality.

In return for their powers, the deputies were held directly responsible for law and order in their respective districts (Article 18). They made sure that no foreign Jews moved into Mecklenburg without permission (Article 19) and that no stolen goods came into the possession of the Jews (Article 20). If those who were not already privileged Jews wished to attain that status, the deputies were responsible for determining the suitability of the candidate and then guiding him through the process (Article 24). The four deputies in turn voted for a "chief deputy" or "primus" who was required to live in Schwerin, the seat of the

Mecklenburg-Schwerin duchy, and who was held to account for the work of the deputies (Article 8).

Mendel Katz mentioned the deputy Nata. According to Tychsen, he was known as Nata Cohen, Nathan Hirsch, Schlechtweg Hirsch, or Nathan Meseritsche.<sup>2</sup> A native of Meseritz, Poland, he served as the deputy of the Buetzow district. He was not a learned man, although he received the title *haver* and paid four reichstaler for it. He was extremely wealthy and made his living as a merchant. He and his wife, Sheva, had two sons, of whom we shall hear more. In spite of his wealth, he was not known as a generous man; Wolf Rintel of Courland complained of an occasion when he stayed with Nata on his way to Amsterdam. Although it was a holiday, the first night of Sukkot, Nata offered him only a herring and a glass of water.<sup>3</sup>

The chief deputy in Schwerin was the court Jew, Nathan Aaron. He was the son of Isaac Aaron of Frankfurt-on-the-Oder. A banker, he was invited by Duke Charles Ludwig to

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<sup>2</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 6-7.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. Tychsen approved of this behavior, believing that being frugal with one's impoverished guests keeps the host from becoming poor himself.

come to Schwerin and serve in the Duke's court.<sup>4</sup> Nathan Aaron built a house at the cost of ten thousand reichstaler. In the cornerstone he placed several coins of Mecklenburg;<sup>5</sup> he clearly understood the foundation of his security. He was pious, if not learned; he maintained a chapel in an old house next door, complete with fourteen prayerbooks and a *ner tamid*. He was a generous man; Tychsen reported that the Jews called Nathan Aaron *melech moshiah* [Messiah King] and his wife, Vogele, was addressed as "queen."<sup>6</sup>

A privileged Jew was one who had written permission from the Duke to settle and work in his specific trade. In return for this document, the Jew was required to pay a specified amount annually to the Duke. This amount ranged from over fifty reichstaler (such as Abraham Moses in Wahren

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<sup>4</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 63-5.

<sup>5</sup>Selma Stern, The Court Jew, trans. Ralph Weiman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1950), 229.

<sup>6</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 63-5. Tychsen notes further that Vogele was "eine der vernuenftigsten Juedinnen in Schwerin [one of the most reasonable Jewesses in Schwerin]." It is also interesting to note that Nathan of Gaza, a disciple of Sabbatai Zevi, was also called "Nathan Hamoshiah."

who paid 51 reichstaler<sup>7</sup>) to half a reichstaler. From the Duke's perspective, sponsoring privileged Jews was a way to control the Jewish population within his duchy and to make sure that the Jews who did reside there were useful; they could afford to pay their yearly fee. However, wealth and privilege did not mean a status comparable to that of the Mecklenburg nobility. The Protocol of 1764 specified that privileged Jews had to show proof of their status to the deputy as often as the deputy demanded to see it (Article 25). This seems to be a precaution against outsiders posing as privileged Jews, and also emphasizes the greater power of the deputy over the other privileged Jews. Furthermore, privileged Jews were not allowed to have bondsmen or servants who depended on them for wages or bread (Article 28), and if there were any change in their activity - new wares or increased volume of trade - the privileged Jew had to appear in person before the authorities to obtain the proper permission; he could not send a proxy (Article 29).

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<sup>7</sup>Karl-Heinz Oelke, "Aus der Geschichte der Juden in den staedten Waren, Roebel, Malchow und Penzlin," Bildungshefte Ueritzkreis, (Malchow, Germany: Schuboth Druck, n.d.), 7.

We have already noted that there were only thirty privileged Jews in Mecklenburg before 1752. However, through the efforts of Nathan Aaron, the court Jew of the Schwerin court, and Lippmann, the Duke's engraver of seals and precious stones, 170 more Jews received their *privilegium* by 1769.<sup>8</sup> We shall see a similar pattern of a particularly important court Jew's bringing other Jews into privileged positions when we look at the story of Aaron Isaac. However, maintaining the status was often more difficult than receiving it. Many Jews found themselves unable to continue to pay their yearly fees, due to poverty.<sup>9</sup> The Protocol does not specify what happened to privileged Jews who were too poor to pay for their privileges. One may presume that they lost their status.

The third subject of the 1764 Protocol was the establishment of a framework for future meetings of the Jews

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<sup>8</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 4-6.

<sup>9</sup>Tychsen, Part V, 13 and Part VI, 3. Tychsen attributes the end of the Seven Years War as one reason that Jews were in greater poverty; Jews served as suppliers during the war. However, as the general population of Mecklenburg grew poorer because of enclosures, the Jews, too, were affected.

of the duchy.<sup>10</sup> These meetings were to take place every year or two at the determination of the deputies (Article 30-31), although the deputies themselves could meet in between to confer among themselves (Article 33). All Jews had to take responsibility for informing themselves about the proceedings at any meeting they themselves did not attend (Article 32). Here, again, we can see how the Protocol served as a controlling device; there were specific times when the Duke through the deputies or the deputies themselves could distribute information or laws among the spread-out Jewish communities, and hold all Jews responsible for that knowledge.

We shall return to the last two subjects of the Protocol, the realms of taxes and courts, in subsequent letters.

Joshea Spira, who is mentioned in the postscript of the letter as the *rosh av beit din* in Schwerin, was a Talmudist from Poland. Tyachsen spelled his first name "Josua" or "Joschea." Spira served for many years as the family rabbi

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<sup>10</sup>Donath, 131.

for Nathan Aaron;<sup>11</sup> in 1773 he became the chief rabbi of Mecklenburg-Schwerin.<sup>12</sup>

Presumably this letter came into Tychsen's possession because of the grateful praise it accords him for his helpfulness. The writer does not disclose whether Tychsen spoke on the Jews' behalf on the issue of the new Protocol or on another issue. The addressee, Eliakim, is unknown in external sources, although we shall encounter him again in these letters. The letter addresses him as a student; elsewhere we learn that he was a doctor. Perhaps he studied medicine under Tychsen's protection at the University of Buetzow.

Nothing further is yet known about R. Manis, although there are many letters in his hand in Tychsen's collection that have yet to be studied. Nor do we have more information about the author, Mendel Katz of Metz.

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<sup>11</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 61.

<sup>12</sup>Donath, 153.



Document 267b 18 [Yiddish]  
 [Address in German:] Herrn  
 Herrn Nathan Hersh [sic]  
 privileged Jew  
 in Buetzow

I have set the Lord always before me (1). [?] 14 Shevat  
 5521 [1761]

To ... the deputy NATA:

I duly received his letter of last week. As he requested, the answer follows without any delay. [I give] my most obedient apologies, but R. Nathan Halberstadt is not willing to follow the compromise that we made between R. Nathan and the youth Samuel, son of R. Leib of blessed memory, of Buetzow. R. Nathan [?] expressed several times that he was not satisfied that his father-in-law, R. David, should be the third arbiter for the compromise. Also, R. Nathan said he had changed his mind before the transaction ever took place, because the compromise didn't please him. Then he came to appeal to the high beit din in Schwerin. So his Excellency writes [asking] about the real issue, [and says] that I should be asked about laws of excommunication and the law of oaths according to the Torah. R. Nathan was satisfied at the beginning that R. David should be the third arbiter for the compromise; it was known to him. Also R. Nathan and the youth Samuel were asked before the transaction took place if they would accept the compromise that we made. They both answered and declared: We will accept the compromise and want to come to a settlement therewith. The transaction immediately took place according to the laws of Torah.

[side 2]

And since the transaction took place, they have accepted the compromise. God forbid that one of them should be lying or even speaking idly. And if I should take sides, I hope that no one will attribute a shameful thing or a lie to me. Because [I have] much to do, I will cut short [my words] and conclude with wishes of peace. These are the words of his faithful servant,  
 the humble ARYEH LEIB GLOGAU, melamed, son of R. L.

Deliver my [greetings] to his wife, the eminent, valorous Mistress Sheva, (may she live long!), and to his dear children, the brothers, the young groom R. Gumprecht, and his young but clever brother, R. Meir (may they live long!). Greet them 200,000 times.

With regards to his request, I wish to share the news with the deputy that I have profited from our lottery. When I can serve my lord with something else, let him command me. It will be done at any time with the greatest pleasure.

1) Psalm 16:8.

Document 267b 64 [Hebrew and Yiddish]  
[Address in German:] Herrn  
Herrn Aaron Isaac  
Privileged Jew  
in Buetzow

Blessed be God! Schwerin, Erev Yom Kippur 5527 [1767]

To ... the deputy AARON,

Herewith he [Aaron] will receive an summons on behalf of Nathan as he requested, except that his Excellency's request was for the coming week, which is impossible, because everyone is busy with the holidays. Therefore, I have set the summons as mentioned above for immediately following the Festival of Sukkot. The summons will be delivered through their *melamed*. I await an answer [naming] any day that would be convenient to come here when his Excellency is also here. There is no [other] news.

You shall rejoice on your feastedays! (1)

Signed, ISAAC JEREMIAH who dwells here in the sacred congregation of Schwerin and the vicinity, may his Rock and Redeemer guard it!

1) Deut. 16:14.

The Jewish communities of Mecklenburg were allowed to resolve their differences according to Jewish law, as long as the conflicts were between Jews; if a Jew had an argument with a gentile, they had to go to the secular courts.<sup>13</sup> The Protocol of 1764 went into great detail regarding the authority of the Jewish courts; even they were supervised by the Duke. The Protocol called for a court of the chief rabbi and two "Assessoren" [dayanim]. While the deputies were allowed to settle all cases involving less than 50 reichstaler without consultation with the *beit din*, any larger conflict came under the jurisdiction of the *beit din*.<sup>14</sup>

The Protocol treats at length of respect for the court, fines and appeals. Contempt of the court resulted in a fine of ten to twenty reichstaler (Article 44). Fines could not be reduced or dismissed (Article 46); half of all monies raised through fines went to the duke and the other half went into a fund for the Jewish poor (Article 45). Each

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<sup>13</sup>Donath, 126.

<sup>14</sup>Donath, 132.

person was responsible for his (or presumably her<sup>15</sup>) own legal expenses (Article 47).<sup>16</sup>

Appeals could be made to the chief rabbi of Altona, Strelitz, or Frankfurt-on-the-Oder.<sup>17</sup> The appellant had to go in person to the chief rabbi to have the case reviewed (Article 52). If the chief rabbi deemed the appeal to be frivolous or to involve new evidence, the appellant had to pay a fine (Article 57).<sup>18</sup> Tychsen reported the fine as being six reichstaler in Danish currency.<sup>19</sup> If the chief rabbi approved the appeal, it was immediate and oral (Article 50), and the original court was permitted to send a witness (Article 51). The verdict from appeals court was then sent back to the first court (Article 59). Only a single appeal was permitted (Article 61).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>See, for example, the case of Hayyim Parchim's wife, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup>Donath, 132.

<sup>17</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 118.

<sup>18</sup>Donath, 133.

<sup>19</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 18.

<sup>20</sup>Donath, 133-4.

Our two letters do not describe fines or appeals. The first one is concerned with the integrity of the law, but in a very different way than the Protocol understands it. The Protocol is a secular document, defining the jurisdiction of the Jewish courts, while Aryeh Leib's letter is addressing a specific problem of Jewish law: what to do when one party wants out of a settlement which has already taken effect. The aggrieved party, Nathan Halberstadt, argued, after the unknown transaction had already taken place, that the agreement should be nullified because the third arbiter, Nathan's father-in-law, had not been impartial, and that Nathan had had doubts the entire time. Nata, who was responsible for the peace in his district, apparently had written to Aryeh Leib, the local teacher and expert on Jewish law, to find out if Nathan could legally make that argument. Aryeh Leib believed that Nathan had been aware of the full situation at the time he agreed to the settlement, and therefore, should be held to it. However, perhaps in deference to Nata's authority, he does not state his conclusions explicitly, leaving the final answer to Nata.

Nathan Halberstadt, who was also known as "Alexander with the long beard," was a privileged Jew who lived in

Buetzow. He was not one of the more affluent Jews; he paid only one reichstaler for his privileges and had to ask for community assistance when his daughter got married. Tychsen described him as illiterate, which perhaps explains his lack of understanding of the transaction with Samuel ben Leib. His wife was Breindel, the daughter of Salman Hirsch of Friedberg.<sup>21</sup>

Aryeh Leib greeted Nata's wife and sons in his letters, as common custom demanded. Curiously, Aryeh Leib referred to Gumprecht as the bridegroom; yet, according to Tychsen, Gumprecht had not yet married by 1769.<sup>22</sup> He routinely dismissed all the matchmaker's suggestions. Perhaps he wished to avoid having to contribute to the community's fund-raising; as a single man, he was exempt from paying fines or buying privileges. Instead, Gumprecht spent his time playing the flute and improving his ice-skating. Tychsen noted that he preferred novels to prayers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 13-4.

<sup>22</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 16.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

Aryeh Leib mentioned his success in the lottery. Although Jewish law frowns on the professional gambler, there are responsa from this period that determine that if one donated at least a portion of the winnings to charity, infrequent gambling was permitted. By the eighteenth century the lottery was a very popular game of chance that was sponsored by some synagogues.<sup>24</sup>

The second letter describing court process is even briefer. That is not surprising inasmuch as the author was the chief rabbi, and the date, the afternoon before Yom Kippur. We do not know why Aaron was summoned as a witness for Nathan, nor even which Nathan he was. However, it is clear that the process was both formal and informal; the tutor was to deliver the summons to appear in court with the proper ceremony, but the date of the appearance was to be determined by the mutual convenience of the parties.

The author of the letter is a man with some mystery attached to his name. Tytsen gave his name as Yitzchak Yimye or Jeremias Israel, the son of Jeschaia of Hamburg. He lived in Schwerin and taught Jewish studies in his house.

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<sup>24</sup>Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), s.v. "Gambling," by Leo Landman.

Supplies were so limited that three students had to share one *humash*.<sup>25</sup> Several sources gave him the title of chief rabbi of Mecklenburg; Donath wrote that he was seventy-three years old when the Duke recognized him as the chief rabbi of Mecklenburg in 1763,<sup>26</sup> while another source described Jeremias Israel's responsibilities as chief rabbi as including "the authority to settle controversies, indite [those who broke the law] and adjudicate all religious and conflicts of rights between Jews."<sup>27</sup> It concludes, however, with the note that the Duke rescinded Jeremiah Israel's power in 1769. Not everyone agrees that he ever held the title in the first place; Siegfried Silberstein claimed that Donath was mistaken and that a man by the name of Marcus Lazarus Jaffe was the chief rabbi in Schwerin.<sup>28</sup> However, in this letter from 1766, Jeremias Israel signed his name the way a rabbi would: "So-and-so who dwells here in the sacred congregation of such-and-such a place and the

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<sup>25</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 60-1.

<sup>26</sup>Donath, 125.

<sup>27</sup>Oelke, 5.

<sup>28</sup>Silberstein, 165.



vicinity." This gives us reason to believe that for at least a time he was the chief rabbi of Schwerin.

The Protocol on 1764 provided that the chief rabbi should receive a stipend of 150 reichstaler a year from the community in addition to various fees (Article 63). The fee schedule was set up as half of the rabbis' fees in Altona and Hamburg (Article 65).<sup>29</sup> Again, we can see the influence of the Altona community on the residents of Mecklenburg. The chief rabbi received one percent of the settlement for each judgment he gave in the *beit din* and at least three reichstaler for granting someone *haver* status.<sup>30</sup> We shall learn of other fees that supplemented the chief rabbi's income as we continue to explore other facets of Jewish life.

For many years, the chief rabbi worked out of his own home. The first synagogue of Mecklenburg was built in Strelitz in 1763, at a cost of ten thousand reichstaler; the ark alone cost three thousand reichstaler. It was donated

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<sup>29</sup>Donath, 134.

<sup>30</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 9.

by Abraham Marcus.<sup>31</sup> Another synagogue was built in Schwerin in 1773.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Donath, 137.

<sup>32</sup>Jewish Encyclopedia (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1964), s.v. "Mecklenburg," by Isador Warsaw.

Document 267b 35 [Side 2] [Hebrew. No address]

May God who establishes a path through the mighty waters (1) keep him from waters of strife (2) and lift his fortune with a sure hand.

To the deputy ... R. NATA:

Before I begin to speak, let me come to implore my lord that he not be so angry that he should say "Who is this, who presumes to trouble me with empty words that have no substance?" (But I said, Behold, this is the day I hoped to see [?]) (3). I have turned this way and that, and I saw that there is no one (4) in the land who can do the good deed of returning me to my desired haven (5) except my lord. Therefore, I have come with these words which have already been written to the government (6) and from there to the Prince, the Duke, may his majesty be exalted, as my request that the Prince, the Duke, may his majesty be exalted, will give me money for food. (\_\_\_) I humble myself and tremble lest perhaps the government will ask my lord and he will not know how to give his opinion about my nature and my purpose. Therefore, I request that he say no evil about me, but rather [speak] for the sake of my welfare. (It is possible that I shall come to his residence this week) and I will make known the ordinances they have not known. (7) May God let me find favor in the eyes of the Prince, Professor Tychsen and if this comes from God, I will bless the One who is good and does good (8). It is possible that I will come ... (9)

- 1) Isaiah 43:16.
- 2) See Numbers 20. Also Numbers 27:14. Deut. 32:51, 33:8, Ez. 48:28, Psalms 81:8 and 106:32.
- 3) This letter is clearly a draft that was written on the back of a letter from Mendel Katz, but in a different hand. The phrases in parenthesis are crossed out in the original.
- 4) Exodus 2:12.
- 5) Psalm 107:30.
- 6) Literally, *Regierung*.
- 7) Psalm 147:20.
- 8) The blessing that is recited at a joyous event.

9) The letter is not finished. There is no signature.

Document 267b 52 [Tychsen's copy of the Hebrew original]

This man, WOLFF SCHMALKALDEN, is a wanderer and a fugitive in the land (1) and has no right of permanent settlement because he was banished from Courland. Now the Duke, (may his majesty be exalted!) was successfully persuaded to order that these people may return to their own borders (2) and among them, Wolf, mentioned above, [may also be free of] the yoke of exile (3) and return to his land. However, every last penny in his pocket for provision and temporary sustenance has been used up. Therefore, I earnestly appeal on his behalf to all those who willingly provide for this generation to assist the refugees and to aid those who have been banished. You have no mitzvah greater than this and may you be worthy of seeing the return to Zion in mercy.

11 Tamuz 5524 [1764] JONATHAN, who dwells here in Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbeck.

- 1) Genesis 4:14.
- 2) Jeremiah 31:17.
- 3) Baba Batra 15a.

Document 267b 17 [Tychsen's copy of the Hebrew original]

Blessed be God.

I write the complete truth (1) concerning the eminent R. WOLF RINTEL, a native of [?], a city near Hamburg. He took to wife the maiden daughter of the exalted, prominent Moshe Cohen of blessed memory, one of the residents of our community. Every day he [Wolf Rintel] engaged in trade and commerce honestly and provided for others from his own earnings. But when times became difficult (2), [the situation] turned to his disadvantage. The wheel of fortune has brought him down, where he remains in ever greater want (3). Therefore, let the charm of our rhetoric be pleasing; let those not related to him draw near, and as for his relatives, the nearer the connection, the greater the

responsibility (4), [whether] on his side or on his wife Blumkah's side. Their hands reached towards God, who [provided] all good for them, and all the more so now that the hand of God has punished them, condemning them with banishment and sending them away from their city. They are compelled to trudge along until they find a place of refuge, a place to rest and recuperate. Let your compassion be stirred; bring them in and gladden them with funds from the charitable fund. The reward is very great for this deed. I come on behalf of myself and those [others] who come to sign. Today is Thursday, 25 Marcheshvan, 5523. [1763] The humble JOEL from Glogau, Dayan in Berlin, may God defend him.

The humble Jeremiah son of Reb Sh.

The rabbis of the *beit din* in Berlin declare that they recognize and attest to these signatures, and that these words are [still] true. Therefore, my hand will be established with them (5). These are my words, here in our congregation of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbeck, Monday, Rosh Hodesh Av 5525 [1765], the humble ISAAC the Levi ISH HOROWITZ

- 1) Berachot 14b.
- 2) Daniel 9:25.
- 3) Niddah 2b. Also, the emphasis of *hoser* (in want) resonates with Deut. 28:48, 57.
- 4) Kiddushin 21a. This is a word play on *kerovim* (relatives) and *lekarev* (to draw near).
- 5) Psalm 89:22.

The final part of the Protocol of 1764 describes the responsibility of each Jew to contribute to a fund for *Necessarien*. The deputies determined the levy upon each person (Article 36), made sure the payments were on time (article 38), and promptly delivered the money to the chief

deputy (Article 39).<sup>33</sup> Part of this money was intended to help the poor. Destitute Jews required a letter attesting to their need from the deputy of their district; the letter had to be counter-signed by the chief deputy in Schwerin.<sup>34</sup> With the letter in hand, the suppliant would return to the local deputy, who would direct the district's treasurer to pay the desired funds;<sup>35</sup> the treasurer of each district could not spend money without the consent of the deputy. However, the deputy could not allocate money without discussing it with the treasurer.<sup>36</sup>

The unknown author of the first letter (#35, side 2) did turn to the deputy for help, but not in accordance with the guidelines in the Protocol. He hoped to obtain aid from outside of the Jewish community, the Duke himself. He did not request a letter affirming his need or a signature from the chief deputy; instead he asked that Nata attest to his good character, should the Duke ask his opinion. Moreover,

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<sup>33</sup>Donath, 132.

<sup>34</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 35.

<sup>35</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 27-8.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

although the two letters of recommendation were circulated after the Protocol of 1764 had been approved, neither one was written by a deputy; both were written by rabbis. This raises interesting questions about the enforceability of the Protocols, especially in internal Jewish affairs.

The author of the first letter of recommendation (#52), Jonathan, was the controversial Jonathan Eybeschuetz, who became the rabbi of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbeck in 1750. He was suspected of interest in Sabbatianism. Sabbatai Zevi (1626-1676) was a false messiah who first captured and then dashed the hopes of world Jewry. When he declared himself the Messiah in 1665, thousands of followers prepared to flock to Jerusalem in readiness for the end of the world. However, in September, 1666, he was captured by Turks, whereupon he converted to Islam. His apostasy sent his followers reeling into conversion, suicide and the glorification of sin. Sabbatai Zevi greatly damaged the stability of the Jewish world, and the leaders after him tried to condemn and suppress his system as much as possible.<sup>37</sup> Thus, when Eybeschuetz' bitter rival, Jacob

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<sup>37</sup>Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), s.v. "Shabbetai Zevi," by Gershom Scholem.

Emden, accused him of writing tractates and amulets of Sabbatian significance, the charge was very serious. Emden, however, could never prove his claim. In 1760 some of Eybeschuetz' students openly declared themselves to be supporters of Sabbatai Zevi; Eybeschuetz's own son, Wolf, claimed to be a prophet of the false messiah. The yeshiva was closed down as a result of the ensuing scandal. Jonathan Eybeschuetz, himself, signed a *herem*, excommunicating all followers of Sabbatai Zevi, but he was never fully able to free himself from the association of Sabbatianism with his own name.<sup>38</sup>

Isaac Levi Horowitz (1715-1767) succeeded Jonathan Eybeschuetz as the chief rabbi of Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbeck, thanks to the patronage of Jacob Emden;<sup>39</sup> Emden believed that Horowitz supported him in his claim about Eybeschuetz' links with Sabbatai Zevi; indeed, in 1766 Horowitz excommunicated Eybeschuetz' followers.<sup>40</sup> However,

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<sup>38</sup>Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), s.v. "Eybeschuetz, Jonathan," by Gershom Scholem.

<sup>39</sup>Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), s.v. "Horowitz, Isaac Ha-Levi ben Jacob Jokel," by Yehoshua Horowitz.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*



to Emden's displeasure, he never repudiated Eybeschuetz' legal rulings. The two were reconciled when they supported the same side of a controversial issue concerning a doubtful bill of divorce.<sup>41</sup> According to Tychsen, the Jews were not fond of Horowitz.<sup>42</sup>

The second letter of recommendation was written for Wolf Rintel, who complained about Nata's lack of hospitality.<sup>43</sup> He was banished from Courland in September, 1760, by order of Duke Karl. However, soon afterwards, the Jews were allowed to return, provided they could pay an annual tax of 400 Albertus thaler.<sup>44</sup> Rintel, however, was penniless and could not afford to return without the help of the Jewish community. Beggars and vagabonds from eastern

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid. This bill of divorce was the famous Cleves Get; Isaac, son of Eliezer Neiber of Mannheim, gave his new bride, Leah, a get, so that he could emigrate to England without leaving her an agunah. However, his being of sound mind was in doubt and the validity of the get was heatedly debated by the Ashkenazi rabbinate. (Cf. Encyclopaedia Judaica [Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971], s.v. "Cleves Get," by Shlomo Tal.)

<sup>42</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 27.

<sup>43</sup>See page 19.

<sup>44</sup>Jewish Encyclopedia (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1964), s.v. "Courland," by Herman Rosenthal.

Europe were not an uncommon sight in Germany during this period.

Both letters show the stark contrast between the comfort and wealth of Mecklenburg Jews like Nata or Nathan Aaron and their neighbors who lived in great need. This reflects the general society as well; the difference between the Mecklenburg nobility and the peasants who were forced off their land to make room for cattle pastures was a glaring one indeed.<sup>45</sup> We do not know how helpful these letters were to their bearers. It is significant that Wolf Rintel's situation had not improved in the two years between his first endorsement by the representatives of the community in Berlin and the second by the chief rabbi of Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbeck.

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<sup>45</sup>Holborn, 145.

Document 267b 50 [Hebrew]  
 [Address in Hebrew:] To my beloved, the learned lord,  
 exalted and eminent, the honorable master and teacher, Rabbi  
 Manis.

I have set the Lord always before me (1) Parchim, Tuesday,  
 5 Av 5529 [1769]

To ... R. MANIS:

I will not be lengthy. I come with the earnest request (2)  
 that he will deal kindly toward my wife, with a word of  
 goodness or a word of advice with regard to the security  
 money that my wife wishes to ask there from our lord the  
 Duke (may his majesty be exalted!). Perhaps God will cause  
 him to be merciful and he lighten for us the burden of the  
 sum of money mentioned above; it is impossible for a man  
 like me to bear in these times. Therefore, I earnestly  
 request that he will do this favor for me in as much as it  
 is possible, since R. Nata is my great enemy and I cannot  
 overcome him. Were it not for this, I would not have come  
 to deal with the government (3) with regard to this matter.  
 With this I conclude my letter. [I am] his good and  
 faithful friend with whom my hand will be established (4)  
 and who agrees with him. For this is the principle: Any  
 scholar who does not take revenge or bear a grudge like a  
 snake is not a scholar (5).

The humble HAYYIM PARCHIM

- 1) Psalm 16:8.
- 2) Berachot 9a; Rashi on Gen. 22:2. The word NA means that  
 it is a request.
- 3) Literally, *Regierung*.
- 4) Psalm 89:22.
- 5) Yoma 22b.

We have already noted that Jews were guaranteed due  
 process and fair access to their local deputies. Here is a  
 case that shows how the system failed.

Hayyim, who was also known as Heuman, came originally from Lissa, Poland. He was a parchment maker in Parchim, and paid one and a half reichstaler as a privileged Jew. His wife was the daughter of R. Suesskind of Strelitz.<sup>46</sup> We do not know specifically why she needed money, but it was not unusual for Jewish women of this period to be involved in trade.<sup>47</sup>

Normally, if a Jew needed money, he would go to his local deputy.<sup>48</sup> However, in this case, Hayyim did not believe that Nata would help him. The Protocol of 1764 gave him no other recourse, but he found a way nonetheless. Hayyim was prepared to go straight to the Duke. Unfortunately, we do not know what role Manis played in the political structure of the Jewish community; perhaps he was a deputy in another district. If this were the case, Hayyim directly disobeyed Article 6 of the Protocol which forbade

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<sup>46</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 40.

<sup>47</sup>See, for example: Gluekel. 1977. The Memoirs of Gluekel of Hameln. Translated by Marvin Lowenthal. New York: Schocken Books.

<sup>48</sup>As apparent in this letter, women had their husbands or male relatives intercede for them.

Jews from going to any but their local deputy. Perhaps Manis had other connections with the Duke.

Hayyim made it clear that he was not at ease with turning directly to the non-Jewish authorities; doing so was against Jewish custom and law. However, he felt he had no other choice. This shows that the barrier between the government and the Jews was more porous than one might at first imagine. It is significant that the possibility to seek aid at the hands of the Duke existed, regardless of the results of Hayyim's petition.

## CHAPTER 4

## RELIGIOUS LIFE

Document 267b 53 [Hebrew]  
 [Address in German:] Herrn  
 Herrn Gimpel, Deputy  
 Privileged Jew and Elder  
 in Buetzow  
 postage paid.

I have set the Lord always before me (1). Wednesday, 6  
 Kislev 5529 [1768], Schwaan

God has bestowed a good gift upon this man: To his left and  
 right are wealth and honor: Like Simon ben Shetah (2) he  
 judges for himself. To ... the deputy R. DAVID, may his  
 light [shine]!

Before I take up my pen, I will come in prayer and  
 supplication to God, who is revered in holiness: May God  
 keep him and grant him life free from the evil eye; may He  
 cause his enemies to be downtrodden. May he be glad and  
 rejoice in delight and happiness with his three children and  
 with food for eating and satisfaction. Behold, for thus  
 blessed is the one who fears God (3) and from Him receives  
 blessing (4). May this be God's will!

These letters (may they be for a blessing) will go and speak  
 justly in the case that my lord has need of a *mohel*. I ask  
 then that my lord hire me as a *mohel* if he should, in good  
 fortune, have a son. Certainly he will not find a *mohel*  
 more worthy than I. Although the sages have said: Let a  
 stranger praise you and not your own mouth (5), in a place  
 where you are not known, it is permitted to say, I am a  
 student of the sages (6). I officiated as a skilled *mohel*  
 in Wittstock, Pritzwalk, Rassi (?), Schoeneberg, Roebel,  
 [and] Fuerstenburg. According to the list below:

Thursday, 8 Sivan 5522, I performed a circumcision for the  
 boy Samuel ben R. Ezra in Wittstock. Wednesday, 17 Kislev,  
 I performed a circumcision for the boy Zevi Hirsch ben R.

Nechemia in Pritzwalk, two miles from Wittstock. Monday 24 Adar I 5524 I performed a circumcision for the boy Samuel ben R. Baruch Ari (who is called Bendit Leib) here in Rassi, one mile from Wittstock. Wednesday 10 Adar II 5524 I performed a circumcision for the boy Dov Bear ben R. Baruch here in Rassi, one mile from Wittstock. Monday the seventh day of Passover I performed a circumcision for the boy Zevi Hirsch ben R. Shmaya here in Schoeneberg, 5524, two mile from Wittstock. Monday, the 11th day of the counting of the Omer, I performed a circumcision for the boy Menachem Mendel ben R. Solomon here in Schoeneberg, 5524, two miles from Wittstock. Wednesday 10 Av 5524 I performed a circumcision for the boy Moses ben R. Joel here in Girtz (?) three miles from Wittstock.

[side 2]

What would it serve to lengthen my writing? Thus, I lift my hand higher and higher in prayer, requesting before the Lord of all, the Ancient One, that God will deliver him from evil and all distress and will lengthen his days and years of life. May his sons and daughters be planted in his house surrounding the table like olive saplings (7) and may there be joy together at all times. For these things I pray day and night in great compassion. [I am] the smallest of the small of all people and of all *chaverim*. These are the words of BARUCH, son of R. A. from Dabri, *shohet*, inspector and *melamed* here in Schwaan.

They pass a cup to a woman by way of her husband (8). Greetings to his modest wife, Tzirrel, and all of his offspring.

May God spread peace to the deputy, who leads the people gently and willingly, not by force. He girds his loins in reverence for God. He brings the hungry and also the thirsty into his house. This is ... the deputy R. Nata, honor to his name.

We will bring a palanquin for the scholarly prominent one, the excellent and the eminent, the one learned in Torah for whom hidden things are revealed, that is, Hayyim, may the Merciful One preserve and deliver him.

A thousand greetings on a small parchment to the leader of a thousand (9), that is, ... R. Aaron, may the Merciful One preserve and deliver him.

These two honorable and erudite ones will shine radiantly and are pure as the essence of the heavens (10) - I turn to you. May you have peace like a river (11) - the eminent youths R. Gumprecht and R. Meir.

Greetings to all who ask after my good health.

On the fast of Esther I performed a circumcision for the boy Judah Leib ben R. Menachem here in Petzeren (?), one mile from Fuerstenburg, 5528. Rosh Hodesh Iyyar 5528 I performed a circumcision for the boy Moses ben R. Isseril here in Dannenwald, one mile from Fuerstenburg. My lord can write to Wittstock or to Fuerstenburg to R. Meir. I have a horse at my disposal. (13)

- 1) Psalm 16:8.
- 2) Writer of the first ketubah.
- 3) Psalm 128:4.
- 4) Psalm 24:5.
- 5) Proverbs 27:2.
- 6) Nedarim 62a. Raba said, "A rabbinical scholar may assert 'I am a rabbinical scholar; let my business receive first attention.'"
- 7) Psalm 128:3. The author gives his own Aramaic translation. The previous sentence is also in Aramaic.
- 8) See Rashi on Gen. 18:9.
- 9) This is a word play on *elef* (thousand), *klaf* (parchment) and *aluf* (leader of thousands).
- 10) Exodus 24:10.
- 11) Isaiah 48:18.
- 12) The last two sentences are in Yiddish.

Besides the chief rabbi, the *melamed*, or tutor, had the authority to perform religious ceremonies. We have seen that a tutor delivered a summons for the convening of a



court session.<sup>1</sup> Here we see that Baruch was a *mohel*, a circumciser, and a *shohet*, a ritual slaughterer. Tutors were also allowed to officiate at weddings, if a rabbi were not available or if the couple could not afford the services of the rabbi.<sup>2</sup> Payment for these additional services supplemented the tutor's income.

Both the pleading tone of the letter and the fact that tutors were compensated on a lower scale than rabbis point out how difficult it was for a tutor to earn his livelihood. Some tutors were hired by the deputy for the education of the children of the district. Every Friday each man was required to put half a shilling into the tutor's box, which was opened every three months and sent to the deputy.<sup>3</sup> Wealthy Jews also hired private tutors for their children. Aaron Isaac and David, mentioned in this letter, shared a tutor for their children; the tutor was famed for fasting twice a week. His practice soon became the standard by

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<sup>1</sup>See page 28.

<sup>2</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 10.

<sup>3</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 16.

which other tutors were measured.<sup>4</sup> One does not know if his fasting was a sign of piety or poverty.

The tutor who wrote this letter was Baruch Kolwasser. Tychsen believed that he was a native of Laast in Greater Poland,<sup>5</sup> although here Baruch says that he is from Dabri. His surname, which means "voice water," derives from his attempt to improve the sound of his voice by using special water from a German pharmacy. He had a red beard and black hair.<sup>6</sup> His Hebrew letter is liberally interspersed with Aramaic phrases which he apparently translated himself, and attest to his learning.

Unfortunately, Baruch was less successful as a *mohel*. Although he provided an impressive list of circumcisions at which he had officiated, several weeks after the writing of this letter he performed a faulty circumcision on an infant. When a month later the child had not properly healed, the father was obliged to correct the procedure himself.

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<sup>4</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 12. Tychsen comments that Aaron and David's tutor was "ein rechter *chammor*, wie sie selbst sagen [a real ass, as they themselves say]."

<sup>5</sup>Tychsen, Ibid, 16.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

Shortly thereafter, another father invited Baruch to attend a circumcision, but engaged someone else to be the *mohel*; nonetheless, Baruch appeared with his instruments to perform the circumcision. He was caught, and apparently a panic ensued. Instead of earning three or four reichstaler and money for his traveling expenses, Baruch had to pay a fine of thirty-six shillings. Subsequently, he had great difficulty finding work as a *mohel*, but he remained in his position as the tutor of Schwaan.<sup>7</sup>

David, to whom the letter is addressed, was also known as David Heuman or Salomon. Originally from Polzien in Hinterpommern, he earned a living in Buetzow as a "metal worker;" perhaps he worked with precious metals. He had the status of *haver* and was the treasurer of the district under his father-in-law, Nata. He was a privileged Jew who paid two reichstaler a year.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 52-5.

<sup>8</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 11-12.

Document 267b 37 [Tychsen's copy of the Hebrew original]

Blessed be God

Upon examining (1) this beloved man, the doctor, the scholar, the prominent Eliakim Gottschalk, the descendant (2) of the author of Turei Zahav (3), I have found he speaks fittingly (4) and is properly learned in the laws of ritual slaughter and inspection, the laws and their classes. He can see a blemish in the knife the size of a hairsbreadth (5) and can aim at a hair and not miss. Although I have always been among the modest who withhold their hands from granting authorization for ritual slaughter, I will not [keep my] vow [not to give authorization] since I speak as one who knows this man well. He occupies himself with medical wisdom, but in spite of this, he doesn't withhold himself when he is here in the holy congregation of Frankfurt-on-the-Oder from frequenting the instruction of Torah [that I offer]. He serves God in truth and integrity, as all the other *gaonim* of the land will attest and declare concerning him. Therefore, I come to announce that he is to be given authority (6). We are permitted to eat what he ritually slaughters and inspects. Today is the third day of Nissan, 5529 [1769].

The junior among the great of Israel, SAUL [Levin], who dwells here in Frankfurt-on-the-Oder and the district.

- 1) Baba Batra 22a.
- 2) Isaiah 14:22.
- 3) Turei Zahav is a commentary on the Shulchan Aruch by David ben Samuel Ha-Levi (1586 - 1667) that gives the reasons for the rulings and Talmudic sources. (Cf. Encyclopaedia Judaica [Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971], s.v. "David ben Samuel Ha-Levi," by Shmuel Ashkenazi.)
- 4) Proverbs 25:11.
- 5) Shabbat 30a.
- 6) Sanhedrin 14a.

According to Tychsen, a rabbi earned two reichstaler for giving a *kabbalah* or authorization to function as a *shohet*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 9.

Document 267b 11 [Tychsen's copy of the Hebrew original]

Buetzow, 14 Menachem [Av] 5526 [1766]

May the One who dwells in the highest heavens turn from His place in compassion (1) and sow His love in his heart forever; may he spend his days and years in pleasantness! To... HAYYIM:

I received his letter. I am grieved at his saying that the leaders (2), that is, R. Nata, his [Hayyim's] brother-in-law, and R. David, acted improperly regarding this matter. At the beginning they acted against their will and he said [it] under compulsion. I know well that this matter approaches the doctrines of Sabbatai Zevi, may his name be blotted out! But this does not come under the category of compulsion, as it is said: One must allow one's self to be killed rather than violate three things: idolatry, incest and murder (3) but not anything else, for it is written, "Live through them" (4). Nata talked about it but did not express it as a belief in public.

R. Ifinam went on Sunday to Rostock. With him at the government office in Rostock was his son Meir [?]. He went to Secretary of War and wants to take [?] out of the city. How will he earn a living during this time? Therefore, I ask that he be not angered by this matter, for I said it under compulsion. I have disclosed this matter only to him [Hayyim], but after [?] And with this I will conclude my words. May God grant that his enemies fall before him. Answer a fool according to his folly (5). From me, HAYYIM FR[iedberg]

From me Manis Israel, the insignificant (6)

- 1) from the *Kedushah* prayer of Sabbath *musaf*.
- 2) Literally, ministers and wise ones.
- 3) Sanhedrin 74a.
- 4) Leviticus 18:5. One should live by the commandments, not use them as an excuse for martyrdom.
- 5) Proverbs 26:5.
- 6) I Samuel 24:15. (Literally, [running] after a flea.)

The circumstances which occasioned this letter are not known, nor are the contents clear, but it is apparent that the legacy of Sabbatai Zevi continued more than a century after his death. This letter was written six years after Jonathan Eybeschuetz's yeshiva was closed down because of Sabbatean activities. Here Nata made a comment about Sabbatai Zevi that left him open to communal condemnation, although Hayyim Friedberg asserted that it was not a statement of belief. Jewish law stipulates that if one is forced to choose between breaking a commandment and accepting death, one may break any commandment except for three: prohibitions concerning idolatry, incest and murder.<sup>10</sup> Hayyim Friedberg did not think that Nata had violated one of these three cardinal commandments, although it is not known how or if Nata was put into a position of forced choice. It is also not known what Friedberg himself said under onus. Perhaps the hint of Sabbateanism was so explosive that Hayyim did not dare to write explicitly.

It is of interest that Meir went to Rostock to speak with the Secretary of War. Jews were not allowed to live in

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<sup>10</sup>Sanhedrin 74a.

Rostock at this time; they were permitted to enter the city only to attend the spring fair.<sup>11</sup> Jews did supply goods for the armed forces during wartime; however, the Seven Years War ended three years before this letter was written. Perhaps Meir hoped to provide supplies to the standing army.

It is surprising that the official should have been in Rostock, since the seat of the duchy was in Schwerin. However, Rostock is the harbor city of Mecklenburg; perhaps he was particularly interested in the navy.

The author of this letter, Hayyim Friedberg, came from Friedberg, Brandenburg to Mecklenburg as a young man.<sup>12</sup> He was the first Jew who received permission to settle in Buetzow. In 1738 he became the court Jew to the dowager duchess, Sophia Charlotte, but he subsequently lost the position and his business. His wife was Hannah, the daughter of Leib Bamberg of Berlin, and they had one son who died. Friedberg himself once slipped on ice and became lame; according to Tychsen, the Jews attributed this

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<sup>11</sup>Tychsen, Part III, 15.

<sup>12</sup>Tychsen, Part III, 12.



misfortune to his having sworn a false oath.<sup>13</sup> His learning brought him into an especially close relationship with Tychsen. Tychsen boasted that Friedberg once managed to arrange a *mi she-berach* for him on Hoshanah Rabba, an honor usually reserved for the chief deputy.<sup>14</sup> Friedberg was familiar with Christian texts, assuring Tychsen that one does not have to believe everything one reads. He once showed Tychsen a copy of Toldot Yeshu, a medieval polemic against Christianity, disavowing the contents.<sup>15</sup> Tychsen, perhaps basing himself on the rumors from the Jewish community and perhaps again showing his own ambivalence, commented that Friedberg, who was also known as Heuman Gumperts or Jochen Gumpricht, had two names so that when he was forced to swear in court, he could swear by a Christian name and feel no compunction about committing perjury.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 9.

<sup>14</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 28-9. A *mi she-berach* is a public prayer for the welfare of a community member. If Tychsen is telling the truth, it is an extraordinary occurrence.

<sup>15</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 8-10.

<sup>16</sup>Tychsen, Part I, 43-44.

## CHAPTER 5

## FAMILY

Document 267b 20 [Yiddish]

[Address in Hebrew:] To the holy congregation of Buetzow  
To my beloved brother-in-law, the deputy,  
the sage who fears God, the honorable master and  
teacher, Rabbi Nata  
From the holy congregation of Friedland.

[in a different hand] To the exalted sage, our master  
and teacher, Rabbi Tyhsen.

Blessed be God. Sunday, 21 Menachem [Av] 5526 [1766]

To ... my brother-in-law R. NATA and his wife:  
The primary thing is fear of God.

I received your letter. Thank you for the wares as  
promised. Do a favor for my son Samuel (may he live long!)  
which concerns [also] the son of my brother Koppel of  
blessed memory. I consider him as one of my sons. Let him  
also learn to write galohish (1). He is a handsome young  
man, but small by nature. Concerning his son Gumprecht (may  
he live long!), I will see what is suitable for him. I  
believe there will be a match made with Reb Fischel  
Friedberg when I speak with him, if God so wills. I will  
see what there is to be done there. There is no news.  
These are the words of his brother-in-law, who seeks his  
well being always, URI (?), rabbi of the congregation F.

My wife (may she live long!) sends greetings to all. Also  
the youth Hirsch sends greetings. Greetings to his sons,  
the youths Gumprecht and Meir (may they live long!).  
Greetings to his father-in-law, ... David, and his wife and  
his sons (may they live long!).

- 1) German, or less likely here, Latin. The word galohish  
means the non-Hebrew script used by galahim [clean-  
shaven], the medieval Jewish term for the tonsured  
Catholic clergy.

According to Jewish law, men are responsible for the education of their sons. The author of this letter was concerned both for his own son and for his nephew. It is significant that the young men were to study German or Latin in addition to their Jewish studies.

Marriages were arranged by the parents of the prospective couple or by a professional matchmaker. In this case, it seems that the author of the letter was trying to make a match for Nata's son, Gumprecht. However, as already noted, if Tychsen were correct, Gumprecht steadfastly refused all those suggested to him at this time.

Document 267b 48 [Hebrew. No address.]

Strelitz, Wednesday, 10 Adar 5526 [1766]

Voice of gladness  
Voice of the groom  
(1)

Voice of joy  
Voice of the bride

The voice of the messenger who greets ... the deputy R. NATA, may his light shine forever more!

Now I come as a messenger and say that the time of singing has come (2), my wedding with my peer, the maiden bride Mistress Blumkah, the daughter of ... R. Feibusch. The wedding will be at an hour of blessing and prosperity on Wednesday, Parasha Vayakhel, which is the 24 of Adar. Therefore, I earnestly request (3) that he will come with his wife (may she live long!) and all the members of his family to the feast which will take place. Meat will be prepared (4) as Raba prepared (5). We shall honor them as is appropriate and correct. I am confident that he is among those who are zealous to do mitzvot expediently. Let them not be prevented by any rain or snow. Let them do me this favor of rejoicing with bride and groom. I shall depend on this. I have nothing to add. I take my leave and say farewell.

The humble MORDECAI from F[ried]B[erg]

- 1) Jeremiah 7:34, 16:9, 25:10, 33:11.
- 2) Song of Songs 2:12.
- 3) Esther 7:3. This is a word play: Mordecai changed the text from "My soul for my wish and my people (ami) for my request" to "His soul for my wish and with him (imo) (i.e., his wife) for my request." Thus he ingeniously invites both Nata and his wife.
- 4) Genesis 43:16.
- 5) Beitzah 2b. (i.e. ahead of time.)

Document 267b 23 [Hebrew]  
 [Address in Hebrew:] To my beloved lord,  
 my brother-in-law, the exalted deputy,  
 the honorable R. Nata.

I have set the Lord always before me (1). Tuesday, 13  
 Cheshvan, 5526 [1765]

Voice of gladness, voice of joy, voice of the groom and the  
 voice of the bride (2)! To ... my brother-in-law, NATA (may  
 his light shine!)  
 And to ... his wife, my sister, Mistress SHEVA (may she live  
 long!)

Behold, the time of the voice of the dove (3), blessing and  
 rejoicing is heard in my house, because the time of the  
 wedding of my daughter, the maiden bride Mistress Mindel  
 (may she live long!) has arrived. A match has been made  
 with her peer, the young man, the honorable Abraham son of  
 R. Fischel, the deputy. The wedding will be, for good  
 fortune, Rosh Hodesh Kislev, Sunday and Monday. I have said  
 that I will call to my beloved so that he should surely come  
 with blessing, he and his household, that is, his wife (4).  
 Come and rejoice with me in gladness that [the words of the  
 blessing] "You will cause loving companions to rejoice" (5)  
 may be fulfilled for us. And now I have cleared the house  
 (6) for those who do good deeds and I will seat him at the  
 head of all the guests. And let not rain or snow prevent  
 them, for who knows the day of repayment [when I shall]  
 repay you in return for this good deed? I am certain he  
 will hear my words. And with this I take my leave with  
 wishing you peace. From me, his brother-in-law and your  
 brother, who seeks your well-being, JUDAH ZEVI from Rassi  
 (?)

(7) Dearest Sister, your son, the young man, R. Gumprecht  
 (may he live long!) has arrived safe and sound. It will be  
 the same, but [it's] better to talk [personally], if it is  
 possible for you, if God so wills, [to manage] to come for  
 the wedding. [I pray] from the bottom of my heart that it  
 will be well, especially since we have not seen each other  
 for a long time. In any case, it will also be

[convenient] for you if you [manage] to come to this *simhah* to visit the cemetery. It will be a great source of joy for me and for all of our families. I assure you that our sister Mistress Shainke (may she live long!) will certainly come, too. Concerning the [?] I promise to bring [?]. Because the way is contrary to me (8), I will be very brief. In great haste.

- 1) Psalm 16:8.
- 2) Jeremiah 7:34, 16:9, 25:10, 33:11.
- 3) Song of Songs 2:12.
- 4) Mishnah Yoma 1:1.
- 5) From the sixth of the seven wedding blessings.
- 6) Genesis 24:31.
- 7) The letter continues in Yiddish.
- 8) Numbers 22:32 (i.e., There are obstacles in my way.).

Before paved roads and instant communication, weddings provided a precious opportunity for family reunions, feasting, private conversations, and joyful celebration. They also supplemented the rabbi's income; it was costly to marry! The officiating rabbi received one percent of the wedding expenses, and one reichstaler for the *ketubah*. In addition, the poor had to pay six reichstaler for the witnesses, while the rich paid twelve reichstaler. The rabbi also expected other unspecified gifts.<sup>17</sup>

Both of these invitations are addressed to Nata. Couples had to receive permission from the local deputy

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<sup>17</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 10.

before they could marry.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this is the reason Mordecai invited Nata; having authorized the wedding, the deputy could expect an honored place at the celebration.

Other letters exchanged by Mordecai and his father-in-law, Feibusch, can be found in Tychsen's collection. However, without further work we know nothing more about them or about Judah Zevi.

Tychsen tells a remarkable wedding story about Israel Abraham of Ribnitz. His neighbor, Nissim Berend, was "unsterblich verliebt" [undyingly in love] with Israel's wife, Voegel, and offered him one hundred ducats for Voegel's hand in marriage. Israel consulted with his wife, who agreed to marry Nissim in exchange for half of the money. The wedding took place, but the bride was unhappy in her second marriage and finally ran away.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 35.

<sup>19</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 49. Tychsen used this story as a scandalous example of what Jews would do for money.

Document 267d 145 [Yiddish. No address.]

Buetzow, Thursday, Parashat Chayei Sarah 5530 [1769]  
The primary thing is reverence of the holy God.

To my dearest sister-in-law ... Mistress Esther:

My dear sister-in-law will not take offense that I refer my writing to her, understanding that her husband (may his Rock and Redeemer keep him!) is in Magdeburg (?). I have taken courage and taken care of the commission. I will be able to provide for myself after this. A letter follows. If it is too difficult [for you], my dear sister-in-law, it will be delivered to my brother-in-law, R. Zussel or my brother Abraham and he will inquire what the most reasonable price will be. Send me an answer with the early post. She could send me a sample from each one. It would be very convenient. I earnestly request an answer to the letter. Ask her husband. Let her dear children all be healthy. It is kind [of you] to be receive [this letter].

As for myself, I don't want to say anything. My wife (may she live long!) has not been out of bed since Passover, because of our many sins. I wrote on behalf of my young and pleasant son, R. Abraham, for the purpose of making a match with the daughter of ... the deputy, R. Nata of Schwerin, but there's no sound or letter [from him.] R. Nata of Schwerin wants to give his daughter eight thousand reichstaler and take him [the son-in-law] into his business, as a member of his household and one of his sons. Let her write me a final answer.

I remain her true brother-in-law, HAYYIM F[ried]B[erg]  
from Buetzow.

When she writes to her husband, I wish to greet [him]. I greet all her dear children, also. My wife, Hannah, (may she live long!) also sends greetings. I had much to write concerning her, but I didn't wish to do so. My brother-in-law (may he live long!) is convinced that he could not stand what I take from her. However, I accept this from God, may His Name be blessed. I ask again to help me with this and respond with the first mail. Dear sister-in-law, I wrote after Shavuot. They want me in a filigree factory. They have many people who earn a living



through their business. My brother-in-law (may he live long!) in Rostock, does not think me worthy. So please, is it possible that I go to Stettin or Magdeburg (?) ? So, dear, an answer will come. Adieu. In haste.

[side 2]

1. Examples of square letters and Rashi script with the last remnant of a hundred weight of new letters
2. How many of each kind of letter is necessary to set one page in type?
3. Which rakes are most needed and which are more seldom used?
4. How much does a hundred weight of letters and vowels cost?

This is one of no more than five letters in all of Tychsen's collection that is addressed to a woman; none was written by women. Because of the paucity of material, we know very little about the Jewish women of Mecklenburg in this period other than whom they married and who their fathers were. Here we learn that ~~Nata's~~ daughter received a substantial dowry and that business concerns were a significant factor in choosing a mate. Apparently some women did read, if not write, Yiddish, although we do not know the extent of their education. Hayyim was clearly uncomfortable in writing to his sister-in-law; married women did not often have private contact with men besides their husbands. We have seen this before when Hayyim Parchim

wrote to Manis on behalf of his wife or when Baruch, the teacher, stressed that greetings to a woman must be sent through her husband.

Helping one another with business was a family affair. Hayyim considered two businesses in his letter, work at the filigree factory and printing. It is not clear what he would have done at the factory. However, printing Hebrew texts was an established industry by this time. A large press, operated by two Jews, Ephraim Heckscher and Aaron ben Elijah Kohen, was located in Altona. German Christians also printed Hebrew books, notably in Frankfurt-on-the-Main and Frankfurt-on-the-Oder.<sup>20</sup> Hayyim also mentioned the city Magdeburg in his letter, where a Hebrew press was founded in 1607.<sup>21</sup> The square letters and Rashi script referred to in the letter are two standard typographies of the Hebrew alphabet.

It is surprising that Hayyim's brother-in-law was in Rostock since at this time Jews were not allowed to reside in that city.

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<sup>20</sup>Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1972 ed., s.v. "Printing, Hebrew."

<sup>21</sup>Jewish Encyclopedia (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1964), s.v. "Typography," by Joseph Jacobs.

CHAPTER 6  
BUSINESS AND TRADE

Document 267b 46 [Yiddish]  
[Address in German:] Herrn  
Herrn Nathan Hirsch  
Privileged Jew  
in Buetzow [sketch of a Star of David]

I have set the Lord always before me (1). Schwerin,  
Wednesday, 12 Nissan 5525 [1765]

To ... the deputy R. NATA:

I have received his letter. I send herewith according to  
request 10 1/2 flagons of wine because I have no barrels  
from Ch. (2) Consume it in good health. From me, the  
humble PINCHAS from Driesen. Herewith follows his account:  
10 1/2 flagons at 36 schillings [each]

10 1/2	[?]	7	42	Sh.
	[+]	16	[?]	
		8	10	Total (3)

If he also wants wine another time, just let me know right  
away what kind. When he wants it, he can get all kinds from  
me: including schnapps for Passover and vinegar. If  
something else is desired, just let me know right away. My  
greetings to his wife and his entire household. Many  
greetings to R. Mordecai.

- 1) Psalm 16:8.
- 2) Could be person or place.
- 3) The right side of the column is schillings; the  
denomination of the left side is unknown. See below.

The Jewish communities of Mecklenburg did not regulate each other's commerce; each Jew had to obtain permission from the duke to carry on his or her particular trade. The only communal rule, which no doubt also came from the duke, was that *ne'arim* [minors] were forbidden to engage in business with wares or money unless they had permission.<sup>1</sup>

We have already seen areas of Jewish commerce: provisioning troops, printing, filigree work, and book dealing. Because of the dietary laws, Jews supplied one another with food and beverage. Dealings in kosher meat and wine depended on the size and demands of the Jewish community, and often extended over distances; Pinchas operated his business in Schwerin and provided for Nata who lived in Buetzow, twenty-five miles away.

The value of various currencies in this period is difficult to ascertain. Because their trade often crossed borders, Jews used many different kinds of money. Here, forty-eight schillings make up one unit of larger currency, perhaps a reichstaler. The schilling was not a common denomination at this time; by the late eighteenth century

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<sup>1</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 21-22.

the most common north German coins were talers and groschen.<sup>2</sup> However, in the late sixteenth century one reichstaler was twenty-seven schillings and six pfennigs;<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Bernd Sprenger, Das Geld der Deutschen (Munich: Ferdinand Schoenigh, 1991), 138.

<sup>3</sup>Meyers Enzyklopaedisches Lexikon, ed. 1977, s.v. "Reichstaler."

Document 267b 33 [Yiddish. No address.]

Buetzow, Wednesday, the fourth day of Hol Hamoed Sukkot,  
5527 [1766]

To ... R. ABRAHAM:

I send enclosed 12 louis d'or [equivalent to] 32 florins.  
At 2/3 35 2/3 florins convert to 31 1/2 louis d'or.  
Ibid 2.20 florins in old money convert to 3 louis d'or.  
Ibid 15.10 14.20 in Herrn money in a special  
wallet

Reichstaler 85 18 groschen converted to louis d'or.

Let my lord (may he live long!) try not to be angry that I cannot send him the entire balance. It is surely known that these are hard times for repayment. It is beyond description. Also, please do not take it amiss that I make such observations. I just can't help myself. Otherwise there is no news. I wish you a good trip. These are the words of his friend, the humble HIRSCH son of R. Hayyim, of blessed memory.

NB Surely it is already known to you that I am a bridegroom; for that one requires much money. Adieu.

Many greetings to his modest wife (may she live long!) and especially to Rubensohn from me.

[side 2]

Buetzow, Wednesday, Hoshanah Rabba (1) 5527 [1766]

To ... my relative by marriage, R. ABRAHAM:

I enclose in gold 105 reichstaler besides this [object] that the [?] have presented to me. I want 10 reichstaler in gold [for it], but my brother-in-law (may he live long!) wants me to let him have it for 35 reichstaler. You can be certain in believing me that a man from Hamburg offered me 40 gold [pieces] so that he should have it. The remainder of the 105 reichstaler belongs with my son Gumpert. Unfortunately

in haste, these are the words of his good friend, NATA  
HIRSCH from Meserich.

You shall rejoice on your feastdays! (2)

Many greetings to his eminent wife (may she live long!) and  
his son.

[side 3]

Buetzow, Wednesday, Hoshannah Rabba 5527 [1766]

To ... my relative by marriage, R. ABRAHAM:

There is nothing new. Only please do not be aggrieved that  
I cannot manage [to make good] on the shipping payment  
within the designated time [?]. I would have written to my  
in-law (may he live long!) sooner, but I have always made a  
great effort to collect my debt. Up to now this has been  
impossible, because it depends on the income from the  
[ware?]houses. I can assure you that I have brought in no  
more income. Sender (3) from Frankfurt from my household,  
the son of my relative by marriage, can consult with the  
groom Hayyim Joash, who is now with me. This man has been  
the middleman for my wares. My in-law can ask him what he  
has managed for me during this time. Therefore, I request  
that my in-law doesn't take this amiss; it can't help him.  
Should the in-law suppose that I am not trustworthy for him,  
then people in Frankfurt will give him wares as a payment.  
If my in-law (may he live long!) does not want to agree to  
this, please, leave me a few months time. Then I should  
have his payment for him, since the times then will be  
better for traveling in the land. Therefore, I wait for an  
answer with the first post. These are the words of the  
in-law DAVID son of R. Hayyim of blessed memory.

You shall rejoice on your feastdays! (2)

My wife and sons send greetings with wishes for good  
fortune. Greetings to his eminent wife (may she live  
long!).

1) Hoshanah Rabba is the day following the fourth day of Hol  
Hamoed Sukkot.

- 2) Deuteronomy 16:14.
- 3) A proper name.

These three letters were written by three men who lived in Buetzow and dealt with Abraham Isaac of Schwerin; after each wrote his report, the three pages were bound together and sent off at once. We shall hear more of Abraham Isaac and his famous brother shortly. From these letters it is clear that he was a wealthy money lender who was willing to help his fellow Jews on their business adventures, but who expected prompt repayment.

Hirsch apparently owed Abraham money; perhaps he had changed money for him and could not provide the full balance or Abraham had lent him the money to do business abroad and he wanted to be repaid in louis d'ors. The louis d'or was a French gold coin which was commonly used in the German states during the first half of the eighteenth century. It was worth four or five reichstaler at that time,<sup>4</sup> although by the time this letter was written, its value has decreased to two and a half reichstaler.

Nata, unlike Hirsch and David, was able to pay Abraham the money for the goods they exchanged. In addition, he

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<sup>4</sup>Sprenger, 131.



sent an unidentified item to Abraham, requesting payment of ten gold reichstaler. Abraham had offered thirty-five reichstaler for it. The reichstaler was usually a silver coin that weighed 23.4 grams;<sup>5</sup> thirty-five silver coins were worth less than ten gold ones. Nata explained that he was giving his brother-in-law Abraham a bargain; someone else had offered forty gold coins! The reference to his son is unclear.

David was evidently a vendor who owed his wealthy relative by marriage a sum that he could not afford to repay. These small merchants depended upon unreliable means of transportation to deliver their goods. David shipped by sea and land; from the southern coast of the Baltic Sea wares could be easily shipped to Denmark, Sweden, Poland, and Russia. However, marine transport was expensive, and in the winter the Baltic can freeze. Roads were unpaved and impassable in muddy weather. Although he wrote in the autumn, David hoped that he could soon resume his travels by road in order to sell his merchandise.

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<sup>5</sup>Sprenger, 147.

These three letters were written during the holiday of Sukkot. According to Tychsen, the deputy was responsible for procuring etrogim for the community's ritual use during the holiday. Each city was required to buy an etrog from the deputy for two reichstaler. Individuals could also buy them for four Danish marks; they had to give the deputy a month's notice. The money went to the duke. Tychsen further noted that the best etrogs cost between four and eight reichstaler, but they could be purchased for as little as one or two.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Tychsen, Part IV, 15.

## CHAPTER 7

## AARON ISAAC: A PORTRAIT

Document 267b 21 [Yiddish]  
[Address in German:] Herrn.  
Herrn Aaron Isaac  
in Buetzow.

I have set the Lord always before me (1). Schwerin, Monday,  
22 Sivan 5529 [1769]

To ... my brother, R. AARON:

Have you received the thirty reichstaler that I sent to R. Nata? I can do no more now. I will not give two reichstaler for feather quills. I will give no more than five marks, and for feathers I will give no more than nine. Concerning Jacob, I will not help with his trip because he has no letter of reference. So he has nothing to ask for. I don't know why you haven't written to me about the clock that I want. With God's help, you and Jacob must have received my letter and you should send the clock with Jacob. These are my words, from his brother ABRAHAM son of R. Isaac, of blessed memory.

1) Psalm 16:8.

Document 267b 65 [Yiddish. No address.]

I have set the Lord always before me (1). Schwerin,  
Wednesday evening, 2 Tamuz 5522 [1762]

Greetings to ... my relative by marriage, R. AARON!

I received his letter and attached, the [precious] stones. Everything is duly received. The crystals to be returned also follow. His excellency will certainly (?) notice the difference. Each cut has been copied. His excellency must leave a minimum deposit of one gold piece. It is truly earned. Concerning Gumprecht (?), I am satisfied that he

[Aaron] told him that and for me to have seen it. It should result in no damage to his excellency. I have also written to R. Nata; my son wrote to his son. But they have not done right in having already accidentally sent it. I had wanted to give them the equipment first, but what is done, is done. With God's help the matter will still be fruitful. I also wanted to request from R. Hayyim that he should still make the [?] for me; he had ordered it last winter to send to Rostock. These are the words of ... ELIEZER LIPPMANN who asks that his [Aaron's] wife and all who belong [to the household] be greeted by way of her husband - and especially my brother R. Itzik. Let him write me an answer as to what I should send him by way of his brother-in-law R. Nata. My brother Abraham sends greetings.

1) Psalm 16:8.

Aaron Isaac was born in 1730 in Treuenbruetzen, Mecklenburg. He was known alternatively as Arendt Isaac, Aron Bruetzen and Aron Isak.<sup>1</sup> He was one of eighteen children, only five of whom survived childhood. He and his wife, Haendelche, had twelve children of their own, including two sets of twins. Tyachsen described him as a poet<sup>2</sup> and a learned man,<sup>3</sup> although Aaron himself protested

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<sup>1</sup>Aron Isak, Denkwuedigkeiten des Aron Isak 1730-1817, trans. Z. Holm (Berlin: Welt Verlag, 1930), 8. For an excerpt in English, see: Isak, Aron. 1945. "Pioneer in Sweden." In Memoirs of My People, ed. Leo W. Schwartz, 166-81. Philadelphia: Jewish Publishing Society, 1945.

<sup>2</sup>Tyachsen, Part V, 3.

<sup>3</sup>Tyachsen, Part VI, 11.

that he was not a man of words or great knowledge.<sup>4</sup> He began as a small business man in Buetzow, and eventually founded the first Jewish community in Sweden. He wrote his memoirs in 1801 at the age of seventy-one.<sup>5</sup> His book is an invaluable source of information about Jewish life in Mecklenburg, the development of the community in Stockholm, and the western dialect of Yiddish.

Aaron left his mother's house in Treuenbruetzen not long after his father's death. He was nineteen and could not tolerate his authoritarian brother, Abraham.<sup>6</sup> Years later they still quarreled, as can be seen in the above letter. Abraham never approved of his younger brother's behavior. He discouraged his business ventures, and was scandalized when Aaron went to Sweden. Aaron reported the following reaction:

Nun hast du es weit genug gebracht in der Welt,  
dass du die Frau und Kinder sitzen laesst.  
Solches haette nicht geglaubt, dass du in solche  
schlechte Umstaenden bist. Und hast so viel  
Dummheiten in dein Leben gemacht, aber dieses  
Vornehmen ist die groesste Dummheit, zu reisen, wo

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<sup>4</sup>Isak, 33.

<sup>5</sup>Isak, 33.

<sup>6</sup>Isak, 42.

niemals ein Jude gewesen ist und niemals kommen darf, wo man keine Sprache nicht kann. Ich glaube, du bist desparat ... als ein unsinniger Mensch. ... Du hast mir niemals hoeren wollen, nun hoere mir und komm zu Hause.

[Now you've taken it so far that you're leaving your wife and children. I wouldn't have believed that you are in such a terrible situation. You have done many stupid things in your life, but this undertaking is the stupidest - to go where no Jew has ever been and has never been allowed, where you don't speak the language. I believe you are a desperate, irrational person. You have never wanted to listen to me. Listen to me now and come home.]<sup>7</sup>

Escaping from his brother's domination, Aaron settled in Buetzow,<sup>8</sup> where he tried his hand at several businesses. He sold fancy goods to Prussian soldiers during the Seven Years War, although Mecklenburg supported Austria, not Prussia.<sup>9</sup> He taught himself to engrave seals and studied further with the court engraver, Eliezer Lippmann, the author of the second letter above.<sup>10</sup> He tried selling

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<sup>7</sup>Isak, 68.

<sup>8</sup>Isak, 44.

<sup>9</sup>Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), s.v. "Isaac, Aaron," by Hugo Mauritz Valentin.

<sup>10</sup>Isak, 61. Eliezer Lippmann of Hamburg was one of the first Jews to receive privileges from Duke Christian Louis. He arranged for other Jews to follow in his path, as well.

goats, but did not know how to herd them.<sup>11</sup> With some money from his brother and the partnership of his wife's cousin, Gumprecht, he began selling feathers, wax and quills.<sup>12</sup>

However, his talents lay in his work as a seal engraver and jewel cutter. His business in precious stones and wax seals made him wealthy enough to become a privileged Jew, paying two reichstaler a year.<sup>13</sup> When Lippmann was replaced by his brother Abraham as the court jeweler and engraver, Aaron worked with both brothers.

He acted as the secretary of the community in Buetzow; he had to report the arrival of foreign Jews to the local police and the mayor of Buetzow, and pay for permission for them to stay, if they could not afford the fee themselves.<sup>14</sup> He prided himself as being a generous man, perhaps in contrast with his brother, and he shared the privileges he procured for himself. Tychsen credited Aaron

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<sup>11</sup>Isak, 56ff.

<sup>12</sup>Isak, 101.

<sup>13</sup>Tychsen, Part VI, 11.

<sup>14</sup>Isak, 49-50.

with obtaining permission for himself and other Jews to trade in Rostock.<sup>15</sup>

Aaron repeated this pattern when he went to Sweden in 1774. He had heard that the Swedish crown had no one at the court who could cut jewels, so Aaron traveled to Stockholm and offered his services. He then applied for permission to reside permanently in Sweden, although Swedish law prohibited Jewish settlement.<sup>16</sup> At first, King Gustav III agreed, provided Aaron renounce his Judaism.<sup>17</sup> Aaron refused, and the king finally gave him full privileges in September, 1775. However, Aaron was not content; he explained that since he had permission to live as a Jew, he would require eleven or twelve other male Jews, a synagogue and a cemetery.<sup>18</sup> The king acceded and Aaron brought over his business partner, two brothers (not Abraham), and other Mecklenburg families to found the first Jewish community in Sweden.

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<sup>15</sup>Tychsen, Part V, 3.

<sup>16</sup>Isak, 86.

<sup>17</sup>Isak, 83.

<sup>18</sup>Isak, 91-3.



## CONCLUSIONS

Because Mecklenburg of the eighteenth century was a weak, agricultural duchy and its Jewish population unknown and small in number, some have questioned the wisdom of studying its history. These twenty-four letters clearly demonstrate the importance of doing exactly that. History is more than wars and philosophers; history is trying to reconstruct the everyday lives of men and women in their communities and as individuals. Just as Jewish sages found truth in the smallest details, so, too, can we construct a more complete picture of our past by examining the communal structure, religious activity, family life, and local business of ordinary people. The results are not only fascinating for their own sake, but they also give us greater insight into the truth.

This paper, however, is a mere beginning. Hundreds of letters still remain untranslated in the University Library in Rostock. Clearly, much is left to discover about the individuals of the Jewish communities of Mecklenburg and their lives together. It is my hope that others will join

## APPENDIX 1

## TYCHSEN'S HAVER CERTIFICATE

Tychsen traveled from a distant land, left his home and went from strength to strength (1), from academy to academy, studied and sat at the feet of many geonim of his people, engaged in the work of Heaven, using pilpul and reasoning. This is the excellent, dear young man, Mr. Oluf Gerhard Tychsen of Holstein. When this young man came here to me, I rejoiced when I saw him (2), and although he is not a Jew (3) in this world, he has already drunk water from deep wells: the wisdom of the sages and the commandment of God "You shall love your neighbor as yourself (4)." I took it upon myself to crown him, to honor him and to grant him the title of wisdom, for this is the Torah and this is his reward (5) from the Heavens to be called

The haver Reb Tychsen.

In regard to all holy things, whoever keeps the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof (6); this is the praiseworthy fruit of holiness (7) that is in his hands for the glory and honor of the Torah and learning. And in order

## APPENDIX 1

## TYCHSEN'S HAVER CERTIFICATE

Tychsen traveled from a distant land, left his home and went from strength to strength (1), from academy to academy, studied and sat at the feet of many *geonim* of his people, engaged in the work of Heaven, using *pilpul* and reasoning. This is the excellent, dear young man, Mr. Oluf Gerhard Tychsen of Holstein. When this young man came here to me, I rejoiced when I saw him (2), and although he is not a Jew (3) in this world, he has already drunk water from deep wells: the wisdom of the sages and the commandment of God "You shall love your neighbor as yourself (4)." I took it upon myself to crown him, to honor him and to grant him the title of wisdom, for this is the Torah and this is his reward (5) from the Heavens to be called

The haver Reb Tychsen.

In regard to all holy things, whoever keeps the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof (6); this is the praiseworthy fruit of holiness (7) that is in his hands for the glory and honor of the Torah and learning. And in order

that the truth not be lacking (8), I have duly written my words in lead, for honor and glory (9), to be engraved on his heart (10) and on his hand as a sign and keepsake (11).

These are the words of the one who speaks concerning the honor of the students. Today is Sunday, 26th day of the Omer [11 Iyyar], 5519 [1759] Parashat *Eleh Ha-devarim asher diber*. (12)

Moses, son of our teacher and rabbi Zevi Hirsch Lipschitz, (may God protect and defend him!) who dwells in the sacred community of Korchheim in the duchy of Hessen (may God protect it!)

- 1) Psalm 84:8.
- 2) Judges 19:3. This is the dreadful story of the rape-death of the Levite's concubine.
- 3) Literally, circumcised.
- 4) Leviticus 19:18.
- 5) Menachot 29b. This phrase is the bitter cry of the students of the ten great rabbis who were martyred at the hands of the Romans: This is Torah and this its reward?
- 6) Proverbs 27:18.
- 7) Leviticus 19:24. The verse refers to fruit which may not be touched.
- 8) Isaiah 59:15. The verse states that truth is lacking.
- 9) Exodus 28:2, 40.
- 10) Proverbs 3:3, 7:3.
- 11) Numbers 17: 25.
- 12) Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22. There is a discrepancy between the dates cited here; while the Omer is counted in the late spring, the portion *Devarim* is read in late

summer, on the Sabbath preceding the Ninth of Av, the day which commemorates the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. By extension, this day also commemorates all other national tragedies which have befallen the Jews. This discrepancy is undoubtedly deliberate and has the effect of invalidating the entire document. It appears that this document was not intended to be taken seriously, except by Tychsen who proudly assumed the title it apparently bestowed him. Moses Lipschitz probably wrote this certificate to find favor with the increasingly influential Tychsen, but through his allusions, managed to convey his own shame at having been compelled to confer the title haver upon a non-Jew. This may well be the only time that a non-Jew received this title.



[illegible][illegible]

Herrn  
Herrn Gottschalk  
Jude Julio Sudent

ה'תש"ח  
בבית ה'תש"ח  
י"ג יאיר

*Buttace*  
*franco*

செவ்வாய்

von Zick  
Johann 1769

*[Handwritten signature]*





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 הכי כיוון נקל האמנם על פני פסוקים כי נ  
 פור את על שפז הפז וועל אי אברה איה  
 וניבא כי אתה טרבת כי האט על כל הארץ האמנם  
 על הניק נשעלל נשעלל לומר כי דספוט ווערט מר  
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 וספד אה ווערט/ כי יום שישל אה אפון  
 בש יום טווא יום יום פון איה ומה אה  
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הנהגת המערכת  
הממשלתית

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האגדה החדשה

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הענין כחל ואלה כחל ואלה כחל  
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Handwritten notes:

- 2051
- עכשיו
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ה'תש"ח  
אשר לא ידענו  
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Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a medieval manuscript. The text is written in a dark ink on a light-colored parchment or paper. The script is dense and fills most of the page. There are some large, decorative initials or headings at the top, possibly in a different script or color. The text appears to be a continuous narrative or a list of items. The handwriting is somewhat irregular, suggesting it was written by a scribe. The overall appearance is that of an old, well-preserved manuscript page.



267b 46

1123/10/1001  
C. D. 1001/1001

Handwritten signatures and text, including "C. D. 1001/1001" and "C. D. 1001/1001".

Handwritten text in a script, possibly Telugu, located at the bottom left of the page.

Handwritten text in a script, possibly Telugu, located in the middle left of the page.

Handwritten text in a script, possibly Telugu, located in the middle right of the page.

Handwritten text in a script, possibly Telugu, located at the bottom right of the page.

ה'תש"א א' חשוון

33

לוקר אהבה חתן יצחק יהודה הלוי ז"ל

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ה'תש"א א' חשוון 12:32

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ביטל יום ד' הולענען רב רחמי  
 ליום אהובי אהובי מומת מלכות היול והלן איו כלת רב רחמי  
 איינע זיך אהב קה רט נעלעט דין חלוקי העט זיי פריגלעט  
 אי זיך ווארט העכע יודעט אהב מומת ל' ויל חיל איהם אהב פ  
 אה מומת רט עין זיי זיכ פ גאובן אן אייך הומעטירט זיי געטן  
 פאט פ' אהב אינדעסין זואן זוא ע' זיין האבן ויל אהב אהב  
 דאז איינעלע רעסט פון קה רט זיט ביי איהם ע' זיך אהב  
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Herrn Herrn  
 Abraham Haas  
 a son

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Herm Aaron Isaac

Bischof

267b 21

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a letter or document. The text is written in a dark ink on a light background. The script is highly stylized and difficult to decipher. The text is written in a cursive script, likely a letter or document. The text is written in a dark ink on a light background. The script is highly stylized and difficult to decipher.

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a letter or document. The text is written in a dark ink on a light background. The script is highly stylized and difficult to decipher.



## GLOSSARY OF HEBREW TERMS

Agunah. A woman whose husband is missing or refuses to give her a bill of divorce. She may not remarry until she receives the bill of divorce or proof of her husband's death.

Beit Din. Jewish court.

Etrog (pl. etrogim). Citron, or citrus fruit used as a ritual symbol during the holiday Sukkot.

Gaon (pl. geonim). A learned scholar. This was the title of the head of the Babylonian academy and remains a title of respect.

Get. Bill of divorce.

Haver (pl. haverim). Lowest level of rabbinic ordination or a title of respect.

Herem. Excommunication.

Humash. The Pentateuch used for study.

Ketubah. Marriage contract.

Melamed. Teacher of children. Often a replacement for a rabbi in villages without a rabbi.

Mi She-berach. A public prayer for the welfare of a community member, said on special occasions.

Mitzvah (pl. mitzvot). Commandment.

Mohel. One who officiates at a circumcision.

Ner tamid. "Eternal light" that burns continually in a house of worship.

Omer. A period of forty-nine days between the festivals of Passover and Shavuot.

Parasha. The weekly Torah portion.

Pilpul. Debate, argumentation over details.

Rav. Rabbi.

Rosh Av Beit Din. Presiding judge.

Rosh Hodesh. The first day of a new month.

Shohet. A ritual slaughterer.

Simhah. Joyous event.



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