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Megilas Vintz (The Scroll of Vintz)

Rivka Ulmer

Bucknell University, rulmer@bucknell.edu

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The Posen Library of
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bath, the 9th of Av [27 July], they arrested the renowned luminary, the learned rabbinical authority, our teacher Rabbi Loew, may God protect and preserve him, and Manisch Schick, head of the *kehillah*, and R. Hayyim Wahl, head of the *kehillah*, putting them under arrest in the *Rathaus*. On Monday, the 11th of Av [29 July], all the synagogues here in Prague were closed and sealed, and [the Jews] were unable to pray in any synagogue for more than four weeks. And others were arrested in order to testify regarding the aforementioned matter. [Days] of repentance and fasting were decreed in all the communities of Israel, and two days of Yom Kippur were observed here, until God, Blessed be He, had mercy on us. At great expense, and after much intercession, the [prisoners] were released on bail for a large sum. Then these two informers of accursed memory told the authorities that R. Israel Henlisch had requested that they poison a non-Jew named Nikolas Preiss, and they arrested R. I[srael] on Shemini Azeret [7 October].

5363 [1602]: Three days later, he was severely castigated and tortured twice regarding this matter [of poisoning], and the other aforementioned matters, until he died. But God, Blessed be He, was with him, and he withstood the torture, making no confession. And it came to pass that the two informers were arrested, and both Jews and Christians testified that they deserved [to be sentenced] to death. And they were taken to the castle under arrest. They were imprisoned there for more than half a year; then they were taken to the *Rathaus* [in the Old Town]. During the period of their first imprisonment [in the castle], they were castigated and tortured, but they remained intractable nonetheless, sending evil missives about the [Jewish] community and God's people to the emperor's chamber, may he be exalted, and to other lords, making evil accusations against the Jews, [the likes of which] had not been heard from the day the land was founded [Exod. 9:18], and which cannot be recorded explicitly. And we were terror-stricken, [living in] fear of expulsion, Heaven forbid, and other evils, if it had not been for God's help, and our master the emperor, may he be exalted, who had mercy on us. During this time, Shimon Leib, of accursed memory, died in prison and was buried where dead dogs and other carcasses are thrown by the hangman. And Moses Trantik secured his release from jail by bribery and inter-

cession, but he had to swear that he would never enter Prague, but stay seven parasangs from there, as recorded in the minutes book of the Prague [Jewish] community.

NOTE

Words in brackets appear in original translation.

Translated by Leon J. Weinberger with Dina Ordan.



Plunder of the Ghetto. Following the 1612–1616 Fettmilch Riots against the Jews of Frankfurt am Main. Matthäus Merian (engraver), Illustration from *Émeute de Fettmilch dans la ghetto juive de Francfort* (1628, repr. 1674).

Elhanan Helen

Dates unknown

Elhanan ben Abraham Helen was an eyewitness to the Fettmilch uprising in Frankfurt am Main (1612–1616). *Megilas Vintz* (*The Scroll of Vintz*), named after the leader of the uprising, Vincentz (Vintz) Fettmilch, is a long poem, written in Hebrew and Yiddish. It gives detailed and vivid descriptions of the persecutions against the Jews during those years. It was probably first published in Frankfurt in 1616.

Megilas Vintz (*The Scroll of Vintz*)

1616

7

Every day they took from us whatever their hearts desired. They said to us, "We are needed to protect you from the mob." We had no choice but to believe them. We had to take being cheated. They constantly threat-

ened our lives telling us to give them whatever they wanted, "Or we'll let the fellows loose on you."

8

We had a time of great distress as had never before been the case in our time, because there were no legal authorities to turn to in order to file a lawsuit against someone. The rioters were in the ruling majority. They wanted to kill us. No one said anything against them and so we suffered plenty.

9

Everywhere in town where they found Jews, adults as well as children, they attacked them, beating them and throwing stones. They were also throwing dirt and filth. And (used) unnecessary words and curses, yelling "bitch" and the like day and night.

10

Many Jews were taken away and held. They (the rioters) wanted to indulge in their riches. They lied to the (Jews). We had no idea what to do. Also, they told everyone not to pay the Jews, not to pay them any interest. In Speyer they wanted to post that publicly at the courthouse. [...]

15

The harassment really intensified now, the accusations and the beatings. It was endless. Complaints were useless. They had total power over us. We were miserable. In the morning we wished for the night and at night for the morning.

16

On Shevuos in 374 [1614], we really got scared. Our worries seemed to overwhelm us. Rumor was the rioters were coming, that they were up to something, that they intended to break through the gates into our community. "Dear God, do not desert us," was our constant prayer. [...]

18

Soon we sent the children and women away, scattering them all over the countryside to protect them from harm, violence and degradation. They (the rioters) watched us at every gate, telling us that we could not

take any money out. Our hearts were broken when we went through this. [...]

20

By Sunday, the 26th of Elul in the year 374 [September 1, 1614], we did nothing else but scream and cry because our enemies had said that they should pound us good. Therefore, with our spirits low, a fast was ordained for Monday morning. We were faint and sad all day. At night we stayed awake, overwhelmed by sorrow. [...]

22

We expected the worst when it was time to pray *minhah*. The mob gathered in front of the gates. We were increasingly worried. They were getting ready to enter the Jewish quarter. Nevertheless, we locked the gates and went to the synagogue to say our prayers.

23

After the *haftorah* was chanted, we heard terrible screaming: "The enemy is breaking through the gates everywhere." The enemy was on us. We ran from the synagogue. Pity upon the person whose eyes beheld the situation!

24

Some of the pious women—precious women—took their children to lie down in the cemetery (saying), "We want to die here together." Some ran home to get their pikes and swords, hoping we would be able to run them (the rioters) off before the fighting got out of hand. [...]

29

A lot (of us) put up a fight until one of us was shot. Many of us were severely wounded as well. At that point we all became disheartened and ran. None of us remained. Then the (mob) filled their bags and sacks. There was no one to stop them. [...]

32

How great must have been our sins, even if we did not want to admit it. The thugs built a big fire and burned all the sacred books. On it they cooked the smoked meat they stole from us. It was the rebel leaders who did this and eventually they got what they deserved.

They also took the sacred books made from parchment. They divided them among themselves. The books were worth several thousand (guilders). Wounds like this never heal. They sold the (parchment scraps) to a bookbinder who would bind other books with them. They had no fear in their hearts when they committed these sins.

Translated by Rivka Ulmer.

Ibn Danan Family

The Ibn Danan family was a Moroccan family of scholars and rabbis dating back to the fourteenth century. Members of the family were leading rabbinic judges in Fez for generations and were highly respected throughout the country. Maymun was apparently one of the first members of the family to arrive in Fez, settling there in 1391. His son, Moses, was known as the Rambam of Fez and wrote many talmudic commentaries. Moses was later accused of attacking Islam and sentenced to death, leading him to flee the city. However, his son and descendants remained in Fez. A later descendant, another Maymun, died a martyr's death before 1502. Samuel Ibn Danan (d. after 1566) became rabbi of Constantine, in Algeria, and played an important role in passing significant communal regulations (*takkanot*) there. Samuel ben Saul (1666–1730) was the first editor of the family chronicles, and he also wrote a history of the Jews of Fez as well as (apparently) a prayer book according to the local custom.

Chronicle of Fez

1616

I have found written in the handwriting of the sage, our master, the crown and glory that rests upon our heads, the perfect sage and excellent judge, who is modest and happy in all his affairs. His name is renowned, our master his honor R. Samuel Ibn Danan of eternal blessed memory, the father of the sage, my grandfather, his honor R. Sa'adia of blessed memory:

In the year, *may God save Your nation, the remnant of Israel* [i.e., 5376], to creation. During most of Adar no rain fell, and also in the month of Nisan: from the day the month began the rains grew less until the eve of Passover. We declared a public fast on Thursday, 13th of Adar, even though it is not customary to declare a fast on Thursday, so as not to raise prices [see m. Ta'anit

2:9]. This was done because the situation was very urgent, and some of them had proposed to do it [declare the fast] from the previous Monday. Therefore, we went beyond the letter of the law. [. . .]

We decreed three fasts upon the public, on Monday, Thursday, and Monday, including the recitation of the seven [special] benedictions [for fasts]. All the holy congregations, may the Rock preserve them, prayed only in two synagogues, may God expand their borders: ours, which is the one of the *toshavim* ["residents"; Moroccan Jews], may the Rock preserve it, and that of the Talmud Torah, may God expand its borders. They prayed *Shaharit*, *Minhah*, *Ne'ilah*, and *Arvit*, and they also sounded the shofar. After leaving the house of prayer, we went up to the cemetery of the residents and those who were expelled, and recited the penitential prayers and the entreaties between the synagogues, may the Lord expand their boundaries, of the First Midrash and the New Midrash, may the Lord expand their boundaries.

After all of that, on Monday, Rosh Hodesh Iyar, there was a great outcry and the sounding of a ram's horn in the markets and the streets between the aforementioned synagogues, may the Lord expand their boundaries, and in the streets of the city and at the gateway of the mellah [Jewish quarter] may the Exalted one establish it, amen, among the graves of the martyrs during the persecution of the year 5425 [1465], may sorrow not arise twice. They are buried in the place where the tax collector sits—and that doorway is closed for the entrance and exit of priests [*kohanim*—and also in the cemetery close to the entrance to the mellah and the gate of the Muslim quarter. There we raised a great outcry, and we wept mightily, and after the penitential prayers we read *Remember, Lord, what was with us, Look and behold our reproach* (Lamentations 5:1) until the end of the scroll of mourning: *Return us, O Lord, to You* (Lamentations 5:21) and so on. In order to increase the weeping we recited the special Kaddish for the Ninth of Av and a house of mourning, and all the people burst out in great weeping.

At that very hour, the heavens darkened with clouds, and when we reached our houses, in the great mercy of the blessed Creator, when the Holy One removed the sun from its case [i.e., in the morning; see b. Gittin 77a], the redemption of the Lord arrived in the wink of an eye. Behold at noon: blessed and desired rains. The Name of Heaven was sanctified through us, and at *Minhah*, all the holy congregations, may the Rock preserve them, came together in the two aforementioned