



## From Thieves to Martyrs: The Story of Two Jews from Early Modern Moravia

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**Abstract** This paper focuses on the story of two Jewish men who were convicted of theft and executed in Prostějov, Moravia, in the spring of 1684. Although the two were offered a pardon in exchange for converting to Christianity, they resolutely refused. Their story was recorded in a contemporaneous Yiddish song that serves as the basis for the current case-study. The informative layer of the text portrays an event that can be contextualized within the campaign to proselytize Jews in the Bohemian lands at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Likewise, it indicates the great significance that Jews and Christians alike attributed to public conversions—or the lack thereof. From the formative perspective, the text crowns the two Jews as martyrs who died sanctifying God’s Name, disregarding their undenied legal culpability. Accordingly, this paper traces developments in the Ashkenazic ethos of martyrdom from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century. It also highlights the shared cultural legacy that bound the larger early modern Ashkenazic communities, such as those in Amsterdam, Hamburg, Frankfurt, or Prague, to smaller Jewish settlements, like those of Moravia. Besides its hagiographical function, this historic song also imparts didactic and moralizing messages. It censures those who are too lenient vis-à-vis their children’s education as well as criticizing the habit of gambling, practices that may lead to criminal activities and push those involved to the margins of Jewish society.

**Keywords** Criminally · Proselytization · Conversion · Martyrdom · Binding of Isaac · Bohemian lands · Early modern era · Yiddish literature

In the spring of 1684, two Jewish men were convicted of theft and executed in Prostějov,<sup>1</sup> which at the time was one of the most important towns in the

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<sup>1</sup>This town’s name in Yiddish is *Prostits* (פרוסטיץ, standard spelling: פראָסטִיץ), and in German it is known as *Proßnitz*. Moravia today forms part of the Czech Republic and, therefore, current Czech toponyms will be used throughout this article, unless the place has a common name in English, e.g., Prague.

Moravian Margraviate and home to a large Jewish community.<sup>2</sup> This seemingly ordinary criminal case probably would have been forgotten, had it not been recorded in a Yiddish song that framed it as an exemplary tale replete with an awe-inspiring title: “A Beautiful Song about Two *Kedoshim* Who Were Recently Executed over *Kiddush Hashem* in the Holy Community of Prostis.” A single copy of this printed booklet, numbering eight pages (seventy-eight stanzas of four lines and an introduction of twenty-five rhyming couplets), survived in David Oppenheim’s collection and today is found in the Bodleian Libraries in Oxford.<sup>3</sup> (For our English translation of this song, see [appendix](#).)

This Yiddish song (hereafter *Eyn sheyn lid*) narrates this tragic, somewhat balladic<sup>4</sup> story from a distinctly Jewish perspective. As such, *Eyn sheyn lid* necessarily confronts a significant conflict: on the one hand, it acknowledges the protagonists’ act of theft (criticizing them for it in the introduction)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup>A rough calculation suggests that about 1,200–1,500 Jews lived in Prostějov at the time of the events described, accounting for a fourth of the town’s population. See Jacob Freimann, “Geschichte der Juden in Prossnitz,” *Jahrbuch der Jüdisch-Literarischen Gesellschaft* 15 (1923): 26–58; Leopold Goldschmied, “Geschichte der Juden in Prossnitz,” in *Die Juden und Judengemeinden Mährens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, ed. Hugo Gold (Brünn, 1929), 491–504; Dagmar Roháčková, “Neklidné 17. století, 1599–1697” (The Restless Seventeenth Century, 1599–1697), in *Prostějov: Dějiny města*, pt. 1 (Prostějov, 2000), 129–50; Pavel Kocman, “Die jüdische Besiedlung Mährens im Jahre 1667: Die Steuererklärungsbriefe zur Haussteuer,” *Judaica Bohemiae* 40 (2004): 149–224, at 180–83; Pavel Kocman, “Die Juden im ersten erhaltenen mährischen Kataster – Lahnregister,” *Judaica Bohemiae* 39 (2003): 104–92, at 140–42; Marie Dokoupilová, “Židovské osídlování Prostějova v 16. a 17. století” (Development of Jewish Settlement in Prostějov in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries), in *Židé a Morava: Sborník z konference konané v Muzeu Kroměřížska 13. listopadu 2002*, ed. Petr Pálka (Kroměříž, 2003), 35–59; Marie Dokoupilová, “Soupisy židovských obyvatel Prostějova v 18. století” (Censuses of Jewish Inhabitants of Prostějov in the Eighteenth Century), in *Židé a Morava: Sborník z konference konané v Muzeu Kroměřížska 7. listopadu 2001*, ed. Petr Pálka (Kroměříž, 2002), 29–46; Helena Klímová and Lenka Matušíková, “The Demographic Development of Jewish Settlement in Selected Communities in the Bohemian Lands,” in *Prague and Beyond: Jews in the Bohemian Land*, ed. Kateřina Čapková and Hillel J. Kieval (Philadelphia, 2021), 306–7.

<sup>3</sup>Its signature is Opp. 885 (36), and the original title reads: איין שייך ליד אויף שני קדושים דו גיילך בק”ק פרוסטין זיין ניין גווארין על קידש השם. See Moritz Steinschneider, *Catalogus librorum hebraeorum in bibliotheca Bodleiana* (Berlin, 1852–1860), 572, no. 3692. Jacob Freimann made a brief reference to this song and presented a somewhat erroneous transcription of it in his “Geschichte der Juden in Prossnitz,” 3 and 46–53.

<sup>4</sup>Chone Shmeruk, *Yiddish Literature: Aspects of Its History* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 1978), 70. On the broad phenomenon of folk ballads in Yiddish, see Michael Lukin, “At the Crossroad: The Early Modern Yiddish Folk Ballad,” in *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 40 (2022): 105–42.

<sup>5</sup>Theft is strongly prohibited by Jewish law. See Shalom Albeck et al., “Theft and Robbery,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., 22 vols. (De-

while, on the other hand, the song lauds the pair for their consistent refusal to be baptized, despite knowing that it would have earned them a pardon. This conflict distinguishes the current song from other texts mourning or lauding Jews who were falsely accused of theft, sentenced to death despite their innocence, and rejected offers to convert and thus gain a pardon.<sup>6</sup>

This article offers a historical and cultural contextualization of the events described in *Eyn sheyn lid*, highlighting the beliefs and views at its foundation. As such, it improves our understanding of the dialectical move by which the execution of two men who had transgressed both common and Jewish law came to be perceived as an act of venerated martyrdom. Moreover, the recorded events serve as a case study that extends beyond the borders of Moravia, echoing the religious and ethical values and conflicts of early modern Ashkenazic society at large. Although both geographically and historically Moravia constituted a somewhat peripheral part of early modern Ashkenaz, it nevertheless was bound to greater traditional Ashkenazic centers, such as those in Amsterdam, Hamburg, Frankfurt, or Prague, affirming their shared cultural legacy.

## Historical Context and Chronotope of the Song

The town of Prostějov lies in a strategic position in central Moravia, the eastern part of the Bohemian lands. At the time the events described in the song took place, Prostějov was part of the Plumlov Estate (*Herrschaft Plumenuau*), which since the beginning of the seventeenth century had belonged to the noble family of the princes of Liechtenstein. Thus, local Jewish residents were also subjects of this family.<sup>7</sup>

Moravian Jews represented an autonomous grouping of roughly fifty communities that abided by shared statutes and customs, and they were regulated

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troit, 2007), 19:686–91. Likewise, the legal corpus *Shai Takanot* (“The 311 Statutes” of the Moravian Jewish communities, formulated by lay leaders and rabbis in 1650), strictly forbade theft and theft-related criminal activities, as well as gambling (in which one of the song’s protagonists was allegedly involved; see below). See Israel Halperin, ed., *Takanot Medinat Mehrin (Constitutiones congressus generalis Judaeorum Moraviensium, 1650–1748)* (Jerusalem, 1951), 86 (no. 260), 88 (no. 265), 92 (no. 280), etc. German translation in Gerson Wolf, *Die alten Statuten der jüdischen Gemeinden in Mähren* (Vienna, 1880).

<sup>6</sup>For instance, see the story of Avrom of Mościsk in Chava Turniansky, “Yiddish ‘Historical’ Songs as Sources for the History of the Jews in Pre-partition Poland,” *Polin* 4 (1989): 47.

<sup>7</sup>Generally, on the relationship between the nobility and the Jews in Moravia, see Pavel Kocman and Helmut Teufel, “Vztah šlechty a židů na Moravě v raném novověku” (The Relations of the Nobility and Jews in Moravia in the Early Modern Period), in *Šlechticův žid, žid šlechticem: Židovské elity a židovská šlechta v novověku a moderní době*, ed. Jan Županič, Janusz Spyra, and Aleš Zářický (Ostrava, CZ, 2015), 11–36.

by a supracommunal council (*Va'ad Medinat Mehrin*).<sup>8</sup> These communities, which since the late fifteenth century were concentrated in small and mid-sized noble towns, were self-sufficient entities with an urban character that maintained their own communal infrastructure, for example, a cemetery, ritual bath, rabbi, etc.<sup>9</sup> This distinguished them from the predominantly rural Jewish settlements in Bohemia and the German lands, which either lacked or shared such facilities. The Prostějov Jewish community, which boasted its own Hebrew printing press for a short period at the beginning of the seventeenth century,<sup>10</sup> as well as a yeshiva and a rabbinic establishment, was therefore commonly known as the “Jerusalem of the Haná region.”<sup>11</sup> It was the second largest Jewish community in Moravia, following Mikulov (Nikolsburg), where the Moravian chief rabbi (*Landesrabbiner*) resided. This prestigious rabbinic position was taken up in around 1690 by the above-mentioned David Oppenheim, in whose collection *Eyn shen lid* has survived.<sup>12</sup>

The events of the tumultuous seventeenth century, especially the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) and the Khmel'nitsky Uprising (1648–1657), significantly affected the Prostějov Jewish community and its population.<sup>13</sup> During the Swedish invasion under the leadership of General Lennart Torstenson in the years 1642–1643 and 1645–1646, a number of Moravian towns

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<sup>8</sup>Halperin, *Takanot Medinat Mehrin*; Wolf, *Die alten Statuten der jüdischen Gemeinden in Mähren*.

<sup>9</sup>Verena Kasper-Marienberg and Joshua Teplitsky, “The Jews of the Bohemian Lands in Early Modern Times,” in *Prague and Beyond: Jews in the Bohemian Land*, ed. Kateřina Čapková and Hillel J. Kieval (Philadelphia, 2021), 22–60; Michael K. Silber, “The Making of Habsburg Jewry in the Long Eighteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 7, *The Early Modern World, 1500–1815*, ed. Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe (Cambridge, UK, 2018), 763–97, esp. 763–75; Michael Laurence Miller, *Rabbis and Revolution: The Jews of Moravia in the Age of Emancipation* (Stanford, 2011), 16–35; Alfred Engel, “Die Ausweisung der Juden aus der Königlichen Städten Mährens und ihre Folgen,” *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Geschichte der Juden in der Čechoslovakischen Republik* 2 (1930): 50–96.

<sup>10</sup>Marvin J. Heller, “Often Overlooked: Hebrew Printing in Prostejov (Prossnitz),” in idem, *Further Studies in the Making of the Early Hebrew Book* (Leiden, 2013), 117–27; Andrea Jelínková, “Hebrew Printing in Moravia at the Beginning of the 17th Century,” in *Hebrew Printing in Bohemia and Moravia*, ed. Olga Sixtová (Prague, 2012), 153–63.

<sup>11</sup>See above n. 2.

<sup>12</sup>Joshua Teplitsky, *Prince of the Press: How One Collector Built History's Most Enduring and Remarkable Jewish Library* (New Haven, 2019), 60–67.

<sup>13</sup>Moravia as a whole represented an important migration crossroads; in more detail, see Adam Teller, *Rescue the Surviving Souls: The Great Jewish Refugee Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 2020). See also Shaul Stampfer, “What Actually Happened to the Jews of Ukraine in 1648?,” *Jewish History* 17 (2003): 207–27; idem, “Violence and the Migration of Ashkenazi Jews to Eastern Europe,” in *Jews in the East European Borderlands: Essays in Honor of John D. Klier*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin and Harriet Murav (Boston, 2012) 127–46; for the context of Prostějov see Roháčková, *Neklidné 17. století*, 129–50.

were pillaged and members of both their Christian and Jewish populations were murdered. The massacres of Jews in many Moravian towns, including Prostějov, were depicted in three Hebrew elegies (*seliḥot*) by Rabbi Moshe ben Yishai Birgel.<sup>14</sup> These bloody events, along with the flow of refugees from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Khmelnytsky massacres, and general messianic expectations, seem to account for the particular susceptibility of Prostějov's Jews to Sabbatianism.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, during the early modern period Prostějov was a crossroads for military troops, emigrants, refugees, merchants, peddlers, scholars, and yeshiva students who either passed through the town or settled there for some time. These trans-migrations also probably explain why the author of this song, Hayyim ben Shalom, about whom we know nothing but his name and the fact that he hailed from Poland (see below), visited Prostějov.

Although the song's plot largely concerns criminal law, the generally widespread anti-Jewish prejudice also plays a role here. Throughout the period of the Thirty Years' War, Jews were criticized for purchasing stolen goods from looting soldiers, even though they were not the only ones to profit from the military situation. This accusation was also levelled in 1628 by the owner of the town of Prostějov, Prince Maximilian of Liechtenstein, demonstrating that the Jews had enough money to pay part of the contribution (tax) for his regiment. Jews also were accused of accompanying Imperial soldiers during their looting and of purchasing their booty in Prostějov. Likewise, in 1638, Prince Gundakar of Liechtenstein, guardian of the ruling Prince Karl Eusebius, specifically forbade the Jewish subjects in his dominions in Austria and Moravia (including Prostějov) from possessing stolen items or trading in them.<sup>16</sup> A significant development occurred in 1637, when the owner of

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<sup>14</sup>Jiřina Šedinová, "Hebrew Literature as a Source of Information on the Czech History of the First Half of the 17th Century: The Reflection of the Events in Contemporary Hebrew Poetry," *Judaica Bohemiae* 20 (1984): 3–30; David Kaufmann, "Plundering of Jewish Communities in Moravia by the Swedes in 5403 [1643]" [in Hebrew], *Mi-Mizraḥ u-mi-Maarav* 3 (1895): 77–82.

<sup>15</sup>Oskar K. Rabinowicz, "Schabbatianer in Mähren im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert," unpublished manuscript, Gershom Scholem Archives, no. 1599/143, The National Library of Israel. This is supported by the ardent preaching of the Sabbatian Judah Leib Prostitz, as well as the residence of Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschutz in the local yeshiva. See Gershom Scholem, "Prossnitz, Judah Leib Ben Jacob Hollerschau," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 16:623–24; Yehuda Liebes, "The Author of the Book Tsaddik Yesod Olam – The Sabbataian Prophet, Rabbi Leib Prossnitz" [in Hebrew], *Daat: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy & Kabbalah* 1 (1978): 73–120; Paweł Maciejko, ed., *Sabbatian Heresy: Writings on Mysticism, Messianism, and the Origins of Jewish Modernity* (Waltham, MA, 2017), 123–28; Moshe Arie Perlmutter, *Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz and His Attitude towards Sabbatianism: New Researches Based on the Manuscript of the Book "And I Came this Day unto the Fountain"* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 1947).

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Winkelbauer, *Gundaker von Liechtenstein als Grundherr in Niederösterreich und Mähren* (Vienna, 2008), 418–19, no. 64.

the estate, Prince Karl Eusebius, decided to place the Jewish community in Prostějov under the jurisdiction of the town and the municipality, including cases of criminal law. (Previously they were legally dependent on the owner of the estate.) The only exception was in religious matters: in this regard, the Jewish community was granted autonomy.<sup>17</sup> This order accounts for the fact that the song's protagonists were handed over directly to the town of Prostějov, and during the criminal proceedings there were no consultations with the estate's owner.

In the Bohemian lands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where the events described in *Eyn sheyn lid* took place, robbery, theft, and the trafficking of stolen goods were capital crimes.<sup>18</sup> A range of cases in which Jews were charged with these offences (particularly trafficking) are documented in Czech and in German in chronicles and town archives, as well as folksongs and broadside prints. These cases include, for instance, the execution of two Moravian Jews, Judah and Jonas, who in 1701 broke into a merchant shop in Velké Meziříčí.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, during the French army's occupation of Prague in 1742, a Jewish woman named Saka was convicted of stealing from a French woman who was accompanying the military regiments (*Marktfrau*); she was subsequently hanged.<sup>20</sup> Such records at times also entail anti-Jewish sentiment, particularly when the crime involved Church property and was defined as sacrilege. This kind of illegal activity was often associated with crimes that fell into the category of *ex odio fidei* (the hatred

<sup>17</sup>Leopold Goldschmied, "Geschichte der Juden in Prossnitz," in *Die Juden und Judengemeinden Mährens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, ed. Hugo Gold (Brünn, 1929), 493; Roháčková, *Neklidné 17. století*, 144.

<sup>18</sup>See the Codex of Pavel Kristián of Koldín: Josef Jireček, *Práva městská království Českého a markrabství Moravského: Spolu s krátkou jich summou od M. Pavla Krystyana z Koldína* (Municipal Laws of the Kingdom of Bohemia and the Margraviate of Moravia), 5th ed. (Prague, 1876), 345–51. It should be noted, however, that not all theft-related crimes were punished to the maximum extent of the law. For instance, in the middle of the eighteenth century in southern Bohemia, members of a gang of five Jewish criminals were convicted of pickpocketing and were incarcerated but not executed. See Jaroslav Čechura, *Kriminalita a každodennost v raném novověku: Jižní Čechy 1650–1770* (Criminality and Everyday Life in the Early Modern Period: South Bohemia 1650–1770) (Prague, 2008), 228–40, esp. 238–39.

<sup>19</sup>Martin Štindl, "Velkomeziříčská exekuce z roku 1701: Židé a barokní společnost in zrcadle hrdelního procesu" (Execution in Velké Meziříčí in 1701: Jews and Baroque Society in the Mirror of the Capital Trial Process), in *Židé a Morava: Sborník příspěvků přednesených na konferenci konané 12. listopadu 1997 v Kroměříži*, ed. Petr Pálka (Kroměříž, 1998), 12–21.

<sup>20</sup>Jiří Fiala, ed., *České písně ze slezských válek* (Czech Songs from the Silesian Wars) (Olomouc, 2001). In one of the folk songs, the hanged woman was mockingly referred to as "a worm" (*ibid.*, 33, verse 13) and is reported to have called out beseechingly "Adonai!" before her execution (*ibid.*, 232 n. 8). Similar vulgar elements and distorted records of Jewish prayers can also be found in a Christian report of a case from the year 1519 (about this case see n. 21 below).

of Christianity), including accusations such as blasphemy, desecration of the host, ritual murder, or the murder of converts.<sup>21</sup>

However, unlike the above-mentioned cases, we have been unable to find any further documentation of the main events described in *Eyn sheyn lid*.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the text itself does not even indicate when and where it was printed, and although the author signed his name at the end of his composition—Hayyim son of Shalom from Poland—we have not found any further record of him. Despite this, external sources support certain peripheral historical details mentioned in the song. Likewise, it includes accurate descriptions of Prostějov's urban space,<sup>23</sup> as well as the interrogation and

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<sup>21</sup>For instance, in 1502 a reliquary was stolen from the Monastery Sancta Corona (Bohemia) and sold to Jewish traffickers in České Budějovice. In response, the town's municipality repeatedly called for the expulsion of the local Jewish community, and in the following years the Jewish residents were falsely accused of ritual murder. In 1505, at least twenty Jews were executed (burnt at the stake or drowned) and the rest were expelled indefinitely. See August Stein, *Die Geschichte der Juden in Böhmen* (Brünn, 1904), 34–37; Karel Pletzer, "Epizoda z historie Židů v Českých Budějovicích (Krádež relikviáře ve zlatokorunském klášteře)" (An Episode from the History of Jews in České Budějovice), *Výběr: Časopis pro historii a vlastivědu jižních Čech* 35, no. 3 (1998): 189–92; idem, "Z temných dob" (From the Dark Ages), *Židovská ročenka* (5743/1982–83): 35–43. In the early modern Bohemian lands, we find several similar examples of crimes acknowledged as sacrilege, e.g., the *Staré letopisy české* (Old Czech Chronicles) mention two Jews who in 1519 planned to rob the church of St. Stephen in the New Town of Prague but were caught and subsequently executed (Manuscript Library of the National Museum in Prague, *Staré letopisy české*, Rkp. III B 12, fol. 276r). Likewise, in 1642 in Prague, a Jewish woman named Regina was convicted of purchasing stolen church items. She was beheaded and her body was subsequently burnt at the stake; see Jan František Beckovský, *Poselkyně starých příběhů českých* (Messenger of Old Czech Stories), ed. Antonín Rezek (Prague, 1880), 303 (edition of a manuscript from 1700); Antonín Novotný, *U staropražských cyriáků čili Kronika zaniklého kláštera 1265–1925* (At the Old Prague Cyriacs or Chronicle of a Defunct Monastery 1265–1925) (Prague, 2002), 89–90. For a review of parallel cases in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, see Magda Teter, *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland: A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era* (Cambridge, UK, 2006), 37–39, 113–14.

<sup>22</sup>The fire of 1690 destroyed most acts of the Prostějov Jewish community; see Freimann, "Geschichte der Juden in Prossnitz," 29. Our research in the Jewish Museum of Prague, State District Archive in Prostějov, National Archives in Prague, Liechtenstein–The Princely Collections (Vienna), as well as The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem unfortunately yielded no results so far.

<sup>23</sup>The song mentions locations that played a significant role in the legal process, e.g., the town hall (stanza 19), the market square (56), and the local Olomouc gate (59). It also names the protagonists' burial place close to the nearby village of Držovice (75). Cf. Filip Paulus, Šárka Steinová et al., *Landscape and Urbanism in Manuscript Plans from the 18th Century: Translocation Plans of Jewish Settlements in the Lands of the Bohemian Crown from the Period of 1727–1728* (Prague, 2020), 388–91.

judicial processes.<sup>24</sup> These factors, together with the author's mention that he visited Prostějov (epilogue) and his implication that he witnessed the reported events (stanza 73), endow the text with a significant degree of credibility. As we will explain, they also allow us to date the occurrences to the year 1684.

We can glean the following outline of events from the text of *Eyn sheyn lid*: On the night between Tuesday and Wednesday, March 13–14, 1684, two Jewish men broke into a house in Prostějov and stole unspecified goods. The first felon, Leib Wessel, apparently a middle-aged man, had an infamous reputation “in most Jewish communities of Moravia” (2). We may infer that he belonged to a class of poor vagabond Jews who moved through the Moravian countryside, sustaining themselves however they could, by both lawful and unlawful means. (Such Jews were often referred to as *Betteljuden* in German texts and *arhe parhe* in Hebrew and Yiddish texts.<sup>25</sup>) Leib had a son named Zanwel who lived in the nearby town of Uherský Brod, but the two apparently had no contact.<sup>26</sup> There is no clear reference to Leib's wife (the mother of his son) and, curiously, nor is there a reference to the husband of the married Jewish woman interrogated on suspicion of assisting the crime—who claimed in her defense: “What do women know about what their husbands

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<sup>24</sup>The song depicts in detail the gradual stages of investigation, interrogation, and punishment. The cycle of interrogations and torture is historically accurate and reflects the methods of the *Constitutio criminalis Josephina* (1707) that applied in the Bohemian lands and preserved previous legal codes (like Koldín's Code of Law). Regarding the torture mentioned in the song, see Richard van Dülmen, *Theatre of Horror: Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Germany*, trans. Elisabeth Neu (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 19. By contrast, the song relates very little information about the trial, mainly focusing on its outcome. Regarding criminality and punishment in the Bohemian lands, see Václav Bůžek, ed., *Společnost českých zemí v raném novověku: Struktury, identity, konflikty* (Society of the Bohemian Lands in the Early Modern Period: Structures, Identities, Conflicts) (Prague, 2010), 570–81.

<sup>25</sup>See Debra Kaplan, *The Patrons and Their Poor: Jewish Community and Public Charity in Early Modern Germany* (Philadelphia, 2020), chap. 5, “The Transient Poor,” 96–122 (esp. 120–22: “The Transient Poor and Crime”); Shmuel Feiner, *New Age: Eighteen-Century European Jewry 1700–1750* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 2017), 165–68; Christoph Kühn, *Jüdische Delinquenten in der Frühen Neuzeit: Lebensumstände delinquenten Juden in Aschkenas und die Reaktionen in der jüdischen Gemeinden sowie der christlichen Obrigkeit* (Potsdam, 2008); Rudolf Glanz, *Geschichte des niederen jüdischen Volkes in Deutschland: Eine Studie über historisches Gaunertum, Bettelwesen und Vagantentum* (New York, 1968).

<sup>26</sup>A list recording the Jews living in Uherský Brod was created by the local landowner in 1682. It lists 997 people, including women and children. Most of those on the list are mentioned by first name, and only a few last names are recorded. The name Wessel does not appear on the list at all, and individuals with the given name Samuel or Löbl (Leib) cannot be linked with certainty to the characters mentioned in *Eyn sheyn lid*. The list is kept at the Moravský zemský archiv Brno (Moravian Provincial Archive Brno) (Inv.-Nr. 474), *Verzeichnis der jüdischen Häusern in Austerlitz, Neuraufnitz und Ungarisch Brod*, fols. 10r–19v.

do?” (16, 18). No other married Jewish man is mentioned in the text, possibly suggesting that she was Leib’s wife and, for some unknown reason, the relevant information was omitted.

The second felon, Peretz son of Abraham, was a twenty-two-year-old man (i.e., born 1662). Unmarried, he lived with his impoverished parents in Prostějov and supported them through gambling, a dubious practice suggesting that he belonged to the margins of society. (The introduction criticizes gambling, lines 20–26.)<sup>27</sup> Peretz’s poverty is also reflected in his (later broken) engagement to an orphaned girl, who very likely had a small dowry or none at all. The two Jews were assisted by a glazier who made them an iron instrument to use in carrying out the larceny. The song does not identify this man as a Jew, presumably implying that he was Christian.<sup>28</sup>

All three men were caught within two days of committing the crime and were interrogated using torture. Their trial was held very quickly, although no clear details of it are given. Within less than a week of the arrests,<sup>29</sup> verdicts were reached: the glazier was sentenced to thirty-one lashes,<sup>30</sup> and the unnamed woman was acquitted. The two Jewish protagonists, by contrast, were sentenced to death. Their execution by hanging was set for Holy Thursday,<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Likewise, the Moravian ordinances condemned gambling (cards and dice), both publicly and privately, and threatened violators with penalties. See Halperin, *Takanot Medinat Mehrin*, 92, no. 280.

<sup>28</sup>If our identification of the accomplice glazier as a Christian is correct, this illustrates that Jewish criminals commonly cooperated with Christian criminals. This particular Christian collaborator may have had better knowledge of the non-Jewish environment and perhaps knew the daily habits of the owner of the goods. Similar patterns of such cooperation were analyzed by Ephraim Shoham-Steiner in his *Jews and Crime in Medieval Europe* (Detroit, 2021), revealing that organized crime in the premodern era provided a liminal space, enabling close relations between members of majority and minority groups, and that such contacts could be free of mutual prejudices. See also, idem, “Criminal Cooperation between Jews and Christians in Medieval Europe: A View from Some Inner Jewish Sources,” in *Medieval Ashkenaz: Papers Held at the 17th World Congress of Jewish Studies in Honor of Alfred Haverkamp*, ed. Christoph Cluse and Jörg R. Müller (Wiesbaden, 2021), 263–75.

<sup>29</sup>Death sentences were usually sent to the Appeals Court in Prague, but the short timeframe here implies that no appeal was submitted. Such an exception was possible due to the fact that the Jewish community of Prostějov was under full jurisdiction of the town council, including criminal matters.

<sup>30</sup>According to Koldín’s Codex, which was valid at the time of this execution, theft crimes of a lesser severity were punished by flogging. See Jireček, *Práva městská království Českého a markrabství Moravského*, 346, article P. iv; van Dülmen, *Theatre of Horror*, 51.

<sup>31</sup>The poem calls this holiday “Hannukah Thursday” [חַנוּכָּה דְאַנְרֶשְׁטִיק] a term we have not encountered elsewhere. In Yiddish calendars from the eighteenth century, Holy Thursday is called “White Thursday” or “Green Thursday.” (We thank Dr. Bart Wallet for his assistance on this matter.) The German and Czech terms for this holiday, *Zelený čtvrtek* or *Gründonnerstag*, also mention “green.”

March 30, when a fair was to be held in the town, thus ensuring the presence of many people from the town and surrounding area. This same day was also the first day of Passover (15th Nissan),<sup>32</sup> but strikingly the song makes no mention of this meaningful information. The author apparently withheld this fact deliberately,<sup>33</sup> perhaps in order not to associate this day, which according to rabbinic tradition should be the day of the redemption,<sup>34</sup> with the death of fellow Jews. The author's reason for omitting this date may very well be the exact reason that the Christian authorities rushed the trial and set the execution date, seeking to further humiliate the convicted felons, their community, and the Jewish faith at large.

Following the sentencing, Catholic priests repeatedly suggested that the two protagonists convert, offering them a pardon in return. However, the two felons consistently rejected these offers. To exert further pressure on the two prisoners to convert, they were held separately and had little contact with other Jews. Nevertheless, Leib and Peretz were still allowed Jewish religious items such as tefillin and a prayer book. Close to their execution, delegates from the Jewish community were permitted to visit them, providing them with religious rites and spiritual support.

On Holy Thursday, March 30, the execution was carried out in public. A large audience, which included Christian and Jewish residents of Prostějov, as well as visitors attending the fair, gathered to witness it. First, the crimes were announced in the market square. The glazier was forced to hold in his hands the rods with which he would subsequently be struck, apparently to humiliate him,<sup>35</sup> and he then received his punishment of lashes. Peretz and Leib Wessel were given another chance to convert and, after refusing, they were taken to the gallows outside town, near the Olomouc Gate. Broken by his arrest and torture, Leib Wessel was barely able to stand, and he was executed first. Immediately thereafter, Peretz was hanged. Both protagonists refused baptism until their last breath. Their bodies were then left hanging for more than two months, until they were taken down and buried in an open field—not a Jewish cemetery—on June 14.<sup>36</sup> In addition to the main narrative, the song

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<sup>32</sup>See 8a and 20b, implying that the protagonists' interrogation, trial, and sentencing were concluded within a day or two.

<sup>33</sup>It should be noted that the author withholds information elsewhere in the song (albeit not as meaningful as in this case), e.g., the identity of the interrogated woman (16), or the details of the trial (18).

<sup>34</sup>BT Rosh Hashanah 11b.

<sup>35</sup>See van Dülmen, *Theatre of Horror*, 44–47, 49. The custom of publicly humiliating the criminals is perhaps also insinuated from Peretz's request that he not be given Wallachian trousers (40), although we have not been able to determine the exact meaning of this term.

<sup>36</sup>The song describes this place as "Far away from the gallows, near the small village of Drshovits [Držovice]" (75b), i.e., outside the village. Držovice lied within the Plumlov Estate

relates (17, 51–52) that the assigned executioner was an avid Jew-hater who was eager to hang the two. However, apparently through divine intervention, he lost his mind the day before the execution and fled town. He was replaced, however, by other executioners.

The main detail that helps determine the date of the events described is the reference to a recent massacre in nearby Uherský Brod. On July 14, 1683, this south Moravian town was attacked by Kuruc soldiers. They massacred its residents, both Christians and Jews, among them the renowned kabbalist Nathan Neta Hannover.<sup>37</sup> The fresh imprint of the event is reflected in *Eyn sheyn lid*. Indeed, when Peretz tries to comfort his parents, he asks them to think of him as a victim of that massacre (36). Likewise, we read that Leib Wessel was unaware whether his son, Zanwel, had survived the calamity (24).<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, a reasonable chronological setting for our song seems to be the following year, 1684. This assumption, reached also by Steinschneider,<sup>39</sup> is further supported by miscellaneous calendrical information scattered throughout the song. Indeed, in 1684 (5444) the new moon of Nissan fell on a Thursday (6, 8), and the 3rd of Tammuz also fell on a Thursday (74).

Another piece of historical evidence embedded in *Eyn sheyn lid* is the rabbinic figure of Elchanan son of Issachar Katz of Prostits, who witnessed the execution and supervised the burial of the two protagonists.<sup>40</sup> While we do not know the exact dates of his birth and death, some of his printed works have survived, and they indicate a late seventeenth-century setting.<sup>41</sup> Given the author's statement that he published the song soon after the burial of Leib

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but but did not belong to the estate's owners. (It was purchased in 1637 by the noble family Salm-Neuburk.)

<sup>37</sup>See David Kaufmann, "Die Verheerung von Ungarisch Brod durch den Kuruzzenüberfall vom 14. Juli 1683," *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 37 (1893): 320–23; Magdalena Soukupová, "Masakr v Uherském Brodě, 1683" (Massacre in Uherský Brod, 1683), in *Vybrané hebrejské a jidiš prameny k dějinám Židů na Moravě: Středověk a raný novověk*, ed. Tamás Visi, Marie Krappmann, and Alžběta Drexlerová (Olomouc, 2013), 107–27. The horrors of this massacre were described in detail by an anonymous writer in a Yiddish elegy entitled *Hurban gadol* (Great Destruction), traditionally recited on the twentieth of Tammuz, the anniversary of the massacre (see Soukupová, *ibid.*, 110–14).

<sup>38</sup>We were unable to find mention of Leib Wessel's son in the above-mentioned elegy.

<sup>39</sup>Steinschneider, *Catalogus*, 572, no. 3692.

<sup>40</sup>The officiating rabbi at the time in Prostějov was She'altiel (Yizhak?) son of the renowned kabbalist Naftali Cohen; see Goldschmied, "Geschichte der Juden in Prossnitz," 501. However, he is not mentioned by his name, only by his title, *Av beit din* (69).

<sup>41</sup>Elchanan son of Issachar Katz, *Sha'ar ha-Hazlaḥa* (The Gate of Prosperity) (Prague, 1684); idem, *Mar'eh le-Hittkashet Bo* (A Beautifying Sight) (Dyhernfurth, 1693); idem, *Seliḥot le-Shovavim* (Penitential Prayers for the Shovavim Period) (Frankfurt an der Oder, 1703). Cf. Elazar Shulman, *Sefat Yehudit-Ashkenazit ve-Sifruta mi-Kez ha-Meah ha-15 ad Kez Shenot ha-Meah ha-18* (The Yiddish Language and its Literature, from the Late Fifteenth Century until the Late Eighteenth Century) (Riga, 1913), ch. 2 (no pagination).

and Peretz (73), we assess that the text was likewise composed and printed in 1684.

From a book-history perspective, the song's typography and décor indicate that it was printed in Wilhermsdorf by Isaac Jüdels Katz of the Gershuni printing family of Prague. This printing house was active in 1684.<sup>42</sup> It therefore appears plausible that the Polish author of *Eyn sheyn lid*, Hayyim ben Shalom, journeyed in the Bohemian realm for an extended period, during which he visited Prague and may have established contacts with the Katz-Gershuni printing family. Indeed, Isaac Katz, who founded a printing house in Wilhermsdorf in 1669, employed and collaborated with Jews from Moravia and Poland in his workshop.<sup>43</sup> The geographical setting of Wilhermsdorf in Bavaria and outside Moravia, under the rule of Lutheran Count Wolfgang Julius of Hohenlohe-Neuenstein, was therefore an ideal place for the printing of *Eyn sheyn lid*, where censorship vis-à-vis the song's delicate content would be more lenient.

From a linguistic point of view, the song's language contains almost no Slavic words despite its Polish author and Bohemian setting. This is apparently due to the premodern literary Yiddish standard, which also addressed readers in western Europe.<sup>44</sup> The only Slavic lexeme that *Eyn sheyn lid* contains, נעבך (the poor thing!, alas!; 37b, 37c, 38d, 41b), is a common exception to that rule.<sup>45</sup> By contrast, the use of the second person plural pronoun עטץ and its conjugations<sup>46</sup> is typical of the Polish and Bohemian dialects of Yiddish,<sup>47</sup> as is the single occurrence of the plural imperative ending

<sup>42</sup>We are grateful to Olga Sixtová (Prague) who was able to glean this detail for us. On this printing house, see Hayyim Dov Friedberg, *Toledot ha-Defus ha-'Ivri* (History of Hebrew Typography) (Antwerp, 1935), 78–81; Josef Benzing, *Die Buchdrucker des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts im deutschen Sprachgebiet* (Wiesbaden, 1963), 463; Christoph Reske, *Die Buchdrucker des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts im deutschen Sprachgebiet: Auf der Grundlage des gleichnamigen Werkes von Josef Benzing* (Wiesbaden, 2007), 987.

<sup>43</sup>Aron Freimann, "Annalen der hebräischen Druckerei in Willhermsdorf," in *Festschrift zum siebenzigsten Geburtstage A. Berliner's: Gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern*, ed. A. Berliner and A. Freimann (Frankfurt am Main, 1903), 100–115, esp. 101–2.

<sup>44</sup>See Shmeruk, *Yiddish Literature*, 80–82.

<sup>45</sup>Erika Timm, "Gliks Sprache vor ihrem sozialhistorischen und geographischen Hintergrund," in *Die Hamburger Kauffrau Glikl: Jüdische Existenz in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Monika Richarz (Hamburg, 2001), 61–62; Abraham M. Tendlau, *Sprichwörter und Redensarten deutsch-jüdischer Vorzeit* (Frankfurt, 1860), 197 no. 633; Paul Wexler, *Explorations in Judeo-Slavic Linguistics* (Leiden, 1987), 159–60.

<sup>46</sup>For example, עטץ (58b, 63c), ענק (28a, 41c), and ענקר (63d).

<sup>47</sup>Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, ed. Paul Glaser, trans. Shlomo Noble, 2 vols. (New Haven, 2008), 2:446, 452; Alfred Landau and Bernhard Wachstein, *Jüdische Privatbriefe aus dem Jahre 1619* (Vienna, 1911), xliii–xliv; Alexander Beider, *Origins of Yiddish Dialects* (Oxford, 2016), 164–65. The word ריגד (11c) may also be a Slavic borrowing; see

with טָן (טָן; 26d).<sup>48</sup> The possessive pronoun זיָהר (their) is characteristic of eastern Yiddish but appears also in seventeenth-century letters from the Bohemian lands.<sup>49</sup> All these traits signal a local substrate of Yiddish, apparently the author's Polish dialect, or possibly the Bohemian dialect of the printer or one of his workers.

A broader historical context that improves our understanding of *Eyn sheyn lid* and further affirms its credibility is the song's documentation of missionary activity among Bohemian and Moravian Jews in the early modern period.<sup>50</sup> Following the Thirty Years' War, the Jewish population in these lands grew and the Habsburg authorities consequently sought to reduce it. This "reduction policy" converged with Catholic proselytizing efforts, notably carried out by the Jesuit order.<sup>51</sup> This missionary campaign involved, to mention a few examples, forcing Jews to listen to proselytizing sermons<sup>52</sup>

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Chone Shmeruk, "Ha-Kadosh Reb Shachna," in idem, *Ha-Kriyah le-Navi: Meḥkerei Historiya ve-Sifrut*, ed. Israel Bartal (Jerusalem 1999), 124 n. 11.

<sup>48</sup>As all other plural imperatives end with only a ט (e.g., 28b, 30c, 36a), it seems that an effort was made to purge this particular dialectical trait from the text, perhaps by the publisher who sought to address a large readership. On the טט- imperative ending, see Landau and Wachstein, *Jüdische Privatbriefe*, xlv; Noyekh Prylucki, *Mame-loshn: Yidische shprakhvisnshaftleke forsharbeyn* (Warsaw, 1924), 27–29, 145; idem, *Yidische Folkslider*, 2 vols. (Warsaw, 1911), 1:70 n. 2, 132 n. 1; 2:20 n. 3.

<sup>49</sup>Beider, *Origins of Yiddish Dialects*, 168. This word is considered more eastern European.

<sup>50</sup>This phenomenon occurred also outside the Bohemian lands, as evidenced by numerous examples from the German lands (where Protestants also performed such acts) and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries. See Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500–1750* (New Haven, 2001), 37–42; Adam Kaźmierczyk, "Converted Jews in Kraków, 1650–1763," *Gal-Ed* 21 (2007): 17–52; Adam Kaźmierczyk, *Rodzilem się Żydem ... : Konwersja Żydów w Rzeczypospolitej XVII–XVIII wieku* (I was born a Jew ... : Conversion of Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Seventeenth–Eighteenth Centuries) (Kraków, 2015); Alexandr Putík, "The Prague Jewish Community in the Late 17th and Early 18th Centuries," *Judaica Bohemiae* 35 (2000): 4–140, esp. 42–63.

<sup>51</sup>Daniel Soukup, "Péče katolické církve o židovské konvertity a její reflexe v agendě jezuitů Francisca Haselbauera (1677–1756)" (The Care of the Catholic Church for Jewish Converts and its Reflection in the Agenda of the Jesuit Franciscus Haselbauer, 1677–1756), in *Vytváření konvertity: Jazyková a vizuální reprezentace konverze v raném novověku*, ed. Prchal Radmila Pavlíčková et al. (Prague, 2021), 247–79.

<sup>52</sup>Since Jews were prohibited to attend mass—unless they wished to convert—such sermons were held outside the church, in other spaces (e.g., a school or outdoors). See Soukup, "Péče katolické církve," 253–54; Jaroslav Prokeš, "Úřední antisemitismus a pražské ghetto v době pobělohorské" (Official Antisemitism and the Prague Ghetto in the Period after the Battle of White Mountain), in *Ročenka Společnosti pro dějiny Židů v Československé republice* 1 (1929): 41–224, esp. 54–57, and 79 n. 24; Gernot Heiss, "Mezi ochranou a ohrožením: italská a židovská obec v Praze a ve Vídni v 16. a 17. století ve zprávách jezuitů" (Between Protection and Threat: The Italian and Jewish Communities in Prague and Vienna in the Sixteenth and

and the distribution of Christian books written in German in Hebrew letters (targeting Yiddish speakers).<sup>53</sup> Particular pressure was exerted on Jews who could be relatively easily manipulated, such as minors or convicts awaiting execution.<sup>54</sup> As illustrated in *Eyn sheyn lid*, Catholic clergymen endeavored to persuade the latter to convert in return for reduced punishment.

An example of a successful attempt to convert a convict waiting execution involved Manasse of Osoblaha, who was convicted of forging money in 1624 in Nysa (Silesia).<sup>55</sup> During his execution—he was sentenced to hang by his feet between two live dogs—he agreed to be baptized and, despite his serious wounds, survived.<sup>56</sup> By contrast, another Moravian Jew, Herschl Lebl, who was convicted of stealing money in 1733 in Boskovice, refused the offer of baptism on the scaffold, even daring to insult the local priest, and was executed.<sup>57</sup>

In the time frame of our song, punitive measures against Jewish criminals condemned to death were far more painful and humiliating than the standard punishment given to Christian criminals.<sup>58</sup> Punishments and executions were usually conducted in public, but when Jews were involved in such events an anti-Jewish sermon was often given, and the audience remained in suspense as to whether the Jew would convert at the last minute. Although baptism could mitigate the physical pain of the execution, it nevertheless constituted part of the Jewish convict's public punishment, causing him, as well as his relatives and community, spiritual pain. While the conversion of Jews at the gallows constituted a relatively minor phenomenon, each instance of it nev-

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Seventeenth Centuries in Jesuit Reports), in *Barokní Praha – barokní Čechie 1620–1740*, ed. Olga Fejtová et al. (Prague, 2004), 177–89, esp. 184–85.

<sup>53</sup>See Soukup, “Pěče katolické církve,” 270–78; Aya Elyada, *A Goy Who Speaks Yiddish: Christians and the Jewish Language in Early Modern Germany* (Stanford, 2012), 207 n. 4.

<sup>54</sup>Religious pressure on Jewish minors, adolescents, and accused persons in Prague is described in detail by Putík, “Prague Jewish Community,” 42–61.

<sup>55</sup>Today in Poland, Opole Voivodeship.

<sup>56</sup>Manasse later reverted to Judaism. See Bernhard Brilling, “Manasse von Hotzenplotz: Der erste jüdische Münzlieferant in Schlesien (1622–1624),” *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Geschichte der Juden in der Čechoslovakischen Republik* 7 (1935): 387–98.

<sup>57</sup>Pavel Kocman, “Požáry, pogromy, ceremonie a popravy – Židé z pohledu dvou boskovic-kých kronik” (Fires, Pogroms, Ceremonies and Executions – Jews from the Perspective of Two Chronicles from Boskovice), *Židé a Morava* 22 (2016): 7–23.

<sup>58</sup>Concerning degrading executions of Jewish convicts in the German lands, see Guido Kisch, “The ‘Jewish Execution’ in Mediaeval Germany and the Reception of Roman Law,” in *L’Europa e il diritto romano: Studi in memoria di Paolo Koschaker*, 2 vols. (Milan, 1954), 2:63–93; Rudolf Glanz, “The ‘Jewish Execution’ in Medieval Germany,” *Jewish Social Studies* 5 (1943): 3–26; Jörg R. Müller, “Eine jüdische Diebesbande im Südwesten des Reiches in der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts,” in *Beziehungsnetze aschkenasischer Juden während des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Jörg R. Müller (Hanover, 2008), 71–116.

ertheless aroused excitement and interest in Christian culture. Indeed, a public baptism reflected—from a Christian perspective—the pastoral role of the Church and its superior social position.<sup>59</sup> In this respect, *Eyn sheyn lid* confirms that Jewish executions were orchestrated as a spectacular dark drama that should have ideally ended with conversion at the gallows.

*Eyn sheyn lid* also seems to record the custom that Jews went to their executions adorned with conspicuously Jewish artefacts, such as a religious head covering or tefillin.<sup>60</sup> This was intended to humiliate or punish not only the condemned but their entire religion. In this case, the song informs us that both Wessel and Peretz wore “wedding garments” (49), perhaps referring to the long white coat, known as *kitl*, traditionally worn by the bridegroom under the *chuppah* (wedding canopy).<sup>61</sup> This garment was also worn for other religious occasions and ultimately used as a burial shroud, which seems fitting in the given context.<sup>62</sup> By contrast, the two protagonists were not given *tzitzit*, sparking a rumor that they had converted to Christianity (49–50). However, the steady renunciation of this scenario in *Eyn sheyn lid* seems credible, reflecting the importance that Jews also attributed to these public conversions.

## Literary Context

*Eyn sheyn lid* is an example of an Older Yiddish *historical song*, a literary genre that served the functional purpose of imparting news. Some fifty such songs from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have reached us, and scholars believe that many more have been lost. Printed as pamphlets close in time to the occurrence of events they report, and targeting Ashkenazic readers throughout Europe, these songs paved the way for modern newspapers.<sup>63</sup> The *avant la lettre* “journalistic” tendencies of the entire genre highlight that

<sup>59</sup>Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 39–46.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>61</sup>We have found similar contemporaneous reports about executed Jews wearing white clothing. In 1519, in Prague, two Jewish thieves were brought to the gallows “wearing white robes and canvas hoods, legs sewn in canvas according to Jewish custom” (in the original Czech: “zobláčení do bílých košílí a karkule plátěnné na hlavě, nohy také plátnem obšité podlé svého obyčeje židovského,” *Staré letopisy české*, Rkp. III B 12, fol. 276r). Likewise, in the song about Shalom-Shachna, who was executed in 1682 in Kraków, we read that his father brought him white trousers and shirt, which Chone Shmeruk understood as shrouds, “Ha-Kadosh Reb Shachna,” 125 and 131, line 80).

<sup>62</sup>On the *kitl*, see Esther Juhasz, ed., *The Jewish Wardrobe: From the Collection of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, 2012), 317, 333; Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York, 1979), 120–21, 209.

<sup>63</sup>Max Weinreich, *Shturemvint: Bilder fun der yidisher geshikhte in 17tn yorhundert* (Vilna, 1927); Turniansky, “Yiddish ‘Historical’ Songs,” 42–52.

*Eyn sheyn lid* offers a realistic report of historical events, thus adding to its credibility.

We find parallel genres to Yiddish historical songs in other European literatures, for example, the German *Flugschriften* and *Neue Zeitungen*<sup>64</sup> or the Czech *kramářské písně*.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, the Yiddish genre exhibits distinctively Jewish characteristics. These are not limited to the choice of themes and the narrative perspective, but include also references to Jewish liturgy in Hebrew, in particular the genre of *kinot* (elegies) and *seliḥot* (penitential prayers).<sup>66</sup> For instance, quotes and intertextual references are common, alongside formalistic borrowings, such as the use of an acrostic based on the Hebrew alphabet.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, *Eyn sheyn lid* begins with the words *El male raḥamim* (“Merciful God,” the opening of the Hebrew prayer recited at funerals), and its stanzaic structure of quatrains is borrowed from a particular category of liturgy known as ‘*akedah piyyutim* (see below).

An additional literary context that affected the composition of *Eyn sheyn lid* is contemporaneous Christian reports regarding convicted Jews who accepted baptism at the gallows. Texts containing detailed descriptions of such cases, at times attributing to them miraculous aspects, were transmitted through popular songs, printed booklets, and engravings. In addition, converts often wrote and published their biographies.<sup>68</sup> By the seventeenth century, the German genre of the *Todesurteil* (death sentence) had developed and achieved popularity. Works of this genre describe the life story of criminals (regardless of religion), enumerating the crimes they had committed and the various methods of torture used in their interrogation and trial. In cases involving Jews, such works also focused on their conversion.<sup>69</sup>

In this regard, *Eyn sheyn lid* can be read as a Jewish reaction to Christian reports of conversion, establishing a narrative that strengthens Jewish

<sup>64</sup>Rudolf Stöber, *Deutsche Pressegeschichte: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, 3rd rev. ed. (Konstanz, 2014), 32–51.

<sup>65</sup>Patricia Fumerton, Pavel Kosek, and Marie Hanzelková, eds., *Czech Broadside Ballads as Multimedia Text, Art, Song in Popular Culture, c. 1600–1900* (Amsterdam, 2022).

<sup>66</sup>On *seliḥot* recording historical events, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, 1982), 45 and 118 n. 30.

<sup>67</sup>Shmeruk, *Yiddish Literature*, 69.

<sup>68</sup>Elisheva Carlebach, “Converts and their Narratives in Early Modern Germany: The Case of Friedrich Albrecht Christiani,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 40 (1995): 65–83.

<sup>69</sup>See Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 42. Instances of such works focusing on Jews converting (or refusing to do so) at the gallows include Löbl Kurtzhandel, the alleged murderer of the young Simon Abeles who wanted to be baptized. See eadem, “The Death of Simon Abeles: Jewish Christian Tension in Seventeenth Century Prague,” in Third Annual Herbert Berman Memorial Lecture, Queens College, CUNY (New York, 2003), 1–44; Rachel L. Greenblatt, “Saint and Countersaint: Catholic Triumphalism and Jewish Resistance in Baroque Prague’s Abeles Affair,” *Jewish History* 30 (2016): 61–80.

religious identity. The song's narrative, and the very fact that it was written in Yiddish—the vernacular language used by all Ashkenazic Jews in the seventeenth century<sup>70</sup>—clearly indicate this. Also, while Christian reports of similar events often conceal the presence of a Jewish audience, *Eyn sheyn lid* emphasizes that local Jews attended the execution (54, 68–69).

Additional contemporaneous works of Yiddish literature adopted a similar ideological stance, depicting cases in which Jews who committed a crime and were sentenced to death refused a conversion that may have saved them or mitigated their sentence. For instance, a historical song from 1682 relates the story of Shalom-Shachna of Kraków, who was sentenced to death for trafficking artifacts stolen from a church.<sup>71</sup> According to the song's author, one Mordecai son of Abraham Melamed Zisels, the authorities demanded that Shalom-Shachna convert (which apparently would only lessen the cruelty of his execution),<sup>72</sup> but he refused and was executed in a very cruel manner. Consequently, the song calls him a *kadosh* and praises his behavior. Interestingly, while the Yiddish song acknowledges his criminal actions, a parallel source in Hebrew claims, perhaps out of respect for the deceased, that he was falsely accused.<sup>73</sup> It should be noted that early modern Jewish texts apply the term *kadosh* also to Jews who were killed by Christians in a wide array of circumstances that do not involve direct religious persecution, including lawful execution.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, here we understand this term to mean a conscious choice of martyrdom.

<sup>70</sup>Dovid Katz, "Language: Yiddish," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, ed. Gershon D. Hundert, 2 vols. (New Haven, 2008), 1:979–87.

<sup>71</sup>See Shmeruk, "Ha-Kadosh Reb Shachna." Similar cases were probably not rare in Poland, and we have records of cases of trafficking and robberies involving Jews in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Poland, often resulting in execution. See Magda Teter, *Sinners on Trial: Jews and Sacrilege after the Reformation* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 40–62; eadem, *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland: A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era* (New York, 2006), 37–39, 113–14.

<sup>72</sup>Shmeruk believes this would have earned him a pardon ("Ha-Kadosh Reb Shachna," 127), but the only relevant position in the song [גימאך] גימאכט לאזין גימאכט מיך דורך ווערן מיר דורך כופר ווערן מיר דורך זיין דורך ("convert and we will leave you"; line 55) can be understood as a promise only to stop torturing him.

<sup>73</sup>The Yiddish song from 1682 begins with a vague statement, neither acknowledging nor denouncing the theft, about a Jew who bought some goods, apparently church items (דרום זאל איטלכער גווארינט זיין) ... ער העט טאן טומא זכין גקויפן (1, 9). However, in the end the song warns its readers not to buy stolen goods: (זאל חלילה קין גנבה קויפן ...; 130–32). By contrast, the Pinkas (records) of the Chevra Kadisha of Kraków, which also records the death of Shalom Shachna, clearly writes that he did not hold any stolen goods and was falsely accused (נתפש ... בלא חמס בכפו והתעוללו עליו עלילות ברשע) (198b). See both texts and their analysis in Shmeruk, "Ha-Kadosh Reb Shachna."

<sup>74</sup>Edward Fram and Verena Kasper-Marienberg, "Jewish Martyrdom without Persecution: The Murder of Gumpert May, Frankfurt am Main, 1781," *AJS Review* 39 (2015): 267–301, esp. 293.

The song about Shalom Shachna significantly resembles *Eyn sheyn lid* in terms of the overall plot, and in particular the dramatic execution scene that describes the protagonists dressed in white clothes, reciting *Shema Yisrael* in their last moments, an announcement to their parents following their deaths, and reporting their burial as a source of consolation. In addition, both songs warn their readers to learn a lesson and not break the law. Given the Polish origins of *Eyn sheyn lid*'s author, he may have been acquainted with this song, composed only two years before the Prostějov incident, and based his work upon it. Yet the only known copy of the Kraków song is a manuscript, and we do not know whether it was ever printed, thus mitigating the likelihood that it was read by an itinerant man such as Hayyim ben Shalom. Moreover, considering that both texts report similar cases of criminality and subsequent executions, their great resemblance could hardly be avoided. Likewise, a comparison of the two works did not reveal any direct reciprocal influence: stylistically, the Kraków song uses mostly colloquial language and repeats entire lines,<sup>75</sup> and it was written in some 150 rhyming couplets. By contrast, *Eyn sheyn lid* was written in stanzas and is twice as long, and its poetic style is more elevated. Notably, it makes ample use of the Hebrew component of Yiddish, suggesting that its author received a rabbinic education. Furthermore, the Kraków song includes much more violence than the Prostějov song—apparently drawn from reality; indeed, torture was used not only to coerce Shalom-Shachna to confess his crime but also in the efforts to persuade him to convert and as revenge at his refusal to do so. Thus, his execution was not a mere hanging but a horrific combination of shooting, stoning, additional torture, and hanging. From an ideological perspective, we find no use of the *'akedah* motif in the song about Shalom Shachna (see below), and it entails anti-Christian terminology and sentiment,<sup>76</sup> whereas *Eyn sheyn lid* lacks such terms and is much more respectful and/or fearful vis-à-vis Christianity.<sup>77</sup>

A further example of a similar case is found in the memoirs of Glikl Hamel: she relates the story of two Jews who stole diamonds from a Christian in Glückstadt. The two were sentenced to death but were offered a pardon in exchange for converting. In this case, one of the men agreed to convert and was subsequently released, whereas the other refused and was executed. Glikl harshly criticizes the convert and praises the executed man.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup>See, for instance, lines 14, 33, 47, 131, 143 (ביטרה פיין); 61, 123 (בית המקדש איז חרב); 11, 48, 140 (גאטש פארנט).

<sup>76</sup>For example, it calls the stolen church items טומא זכין (“impure objects,” line 9); refers to the thieves who sold him the stolen goods as שקצים (a pejorative term for non-Jewish boys, lines 3, 25); and the act of conversion is termed זיך כופר זיין (“to become heretic,” line 55).

<sup>77</sup>See, for example, 42c, 54. The act of conversion is termed פֿר קערין (“to turn, change,” cf. German *verkehren*, 45a), a more neutral term.

<sup>78</sup>Chava Turmiansky, ed. *Glikl: Memoirs: 1691–1719*, trans. Sara Friedman (Waltham, MA, 2019), 147–49.

In this regard, it is possible to discern two different perspectives within *Eyn sheyn lid*. While the body of song (stanzas 1–78) concentrates on the religious aspect of withstanding the temptation to convert, voicing nothing but praise for the protagonists,<sup>79</sup> the introduction (lines 4–28) is critical of the theft and the protagonists, also censuring Peretz’s upbringing and his gambling. It is possible that the introduction was a later addition to the original song, a claim that cannot be proved but is supported by the reference to the song’s author in the third person (line 13). However, this duality could also be attributed to a literary norm that distinguishes between the historical report itself and its analysis in the introduction.

### The Ashkenazic Ethos of Martyrdom and the Binding of Isaac

Known in Hebrew as ‘*akedah* (“binding”)), the narrative of the Binding of Isaac (Genesis 19) has played a central role in Jewish culture since ancient times. Jewish thought derived various religious values from this narrative, among them Kiddush Hashem (the sanctification of God’s Name), i.e., Jewish martyrdom, the willingness to give up one’s life for the sake of God.<sup>80</sup> During the High Middle Ages, and particularly following the First Crusade, Ashkenazic Jews perceived the Binding of Isaac as the model for contemporaneous cases of Jewish martyrdom.<sup>81</sup> Thus, Jews who chose death over

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<sup>79</sup>Rachel Greenblatt noticed a similar phenomenon, albeit in a different context, in another Yiddish historical song. *Eyn nay kloglid*, a song recounting the story of the death of Simon Abeles, concentrates mainly on the suffering and the steady faith of Löbl Kurtzhandl, who was accused of being an accomplice to the murder; see Greenblatt, “Saint and Countersaint,” 70–72.

<sup>80</sup>Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem, 1975), 501–5; Albert van der Heide, “Now I Know”: *Five Centuries of Aqedah Exegesis* (Cham, 2017).

<sup>81</sup>Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial: On the Legends and Lore of the Command to Abraham to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice: The Akedah*, trans. Judah Goldin (New York, 1967); Ezra Fleischer, *Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in the Middle Ages* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 2007), 468–71; Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 37–39; Lena Roos, “God Wants It!”: *The Ideology and Martyrdom in the Hebrew Crusade Chronicles and Its Jewish and Christian Background* (Turnhout, 2006), 87–105. The Chronicles of the Crusades have been the focus of extensive modern scholarship, much of it published in the current publication and touching upon issues such as Jewish martyrology, Jewish-Christian relations, and the image of Jews and Judaism in the eyes of Christians, and vice versa. A nonexhaustive selection of studies written by some of the main researchers involved in this large and continuous discourse includes Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, 1999); Robert Chazan, *God, Humanity, and History: The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives* (Berkeley, 2000); Gerson D. Cohen, “The Hebrew Crusade Chronicles and the Ashkenazic Tradition,” in *Min-hah le-Nahum: Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nahum M. Sarna*, ed. Marc Brettler

forced conversion to Christianity were compared to Isaac who, according to tradition, also agreed to sacrifice his life for God. Similarly, the biblical figure of Abraham was compared to the venerated medieval Jewish parents who killed their own children in an effort to save them from forced conversion. We find abundant examples of this association in the chronicles of the Rhineland massacres, for instance, in Solomon bar Simson's Chronicle (ca. 1140):

The people of Mainz faced ten trials similar to Abraham our father . . . and even bound their sons as Abraham bound Isaac his son and accepted upon themselves the yoke of heaven . . . willingly.<sup>82</sup>

A further significant source recording such views are *'akedah piyyutim*—a category of liturgical poems unique to the Ashkenazic synagogue rite,<sup>83</sup> composed mainly during the eleventh–thirteenth centuries. *'Akedah piyyutim* retell the Binding of Isaac, often drawing a connection to other acts of Kiddush Hashem, and typically conclude with a request that God remember His promise to protect the future generations of Abraham's descendants in recognition of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son (Gen 22:17–19). The highly embellished *piyyut* entitled *Elohim 'al domi le-dami* (“God! Be not silent on my blood”), part of the general Ashkenazic rite in the *selihot* portion of the Yom Kippur morning service, and in the Bohemian rite (מנהג פיהם) also in the Musaf service,<sup>84</sup> provides an apt example of this concept:<sup>85</sup>

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and Michael Fishbane (Sheffield, 1993), 36–53; Jeremy Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade* (Philadelphia, 2006); Susan L. Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France* (Princeton, NJ, 2002); Alfred Haverkamp, ed., *Juden und Christen zur Zeit der Kreuzzüge* (Sigmaringen, DE, 1999); David Malkiel, *Reconstructing Ashkenaz: The Human Face of Franco-German Jewry, 1000–1250* (Stanford, 2008); Shmuel Shepkaru, *Jewish Martyrs in the Pagan and Christian Worlds* (Cambridge, UK, 2006). See also the special issue of *Zion* 59, no. 2–3 (1994), as well as *Facing the Cross: The Persecutions of 1096 in History and Historiography*, ed. Yom Tov Assis et al. (Jerusalem, 2000).

<sup>82</sup>Abraham Meir Haberman, ed., *Sefer Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Zarfat: Divrei Zikhronot mi-Benei ha-Dorot she-bi-Tkufat Mas'ei ha-Zlav u-Mivhar Piyyuteihem* (Jerusalem, 1971), 31.

<sup>83</sup>Leon J. Weinberger, *Jewish Hymnography: A Literary History* (London, 1998), 223–24; Oren Roman, “Early Ashkenazic Poems about the Binding of Isaac,” *Naharaim: Journal of German-Jewish Literature and Cultural History* 10, no. 2 (2016): 175–94. Most known *'akedah piyyutim* can be found in Daniel Goldschmidt's editions of liturgical texts: idem, ed., *Seder ha-Selihot: Keminhag Polin ve-Rov ha-Kehilot be-Eretz Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 1965); idem, *Maḥzor la-Yamim ha-Noraim: Lefi Minhag Benei Ashkenaz le-Khol 'Anfeihem Kolel Minhag Ashkenaz (ha-Ma'aravi) Minhag Polin u-Minhag Zarfat le-she'Avar*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1970); idem, ed., *Leket Piyyutei Selihot: Me'et Paytanei 'Ashkenaz ve-Zarfat*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1993).

<sup>84</sup>Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-Yamim ha-Noraim*, גג, 530.

<sup>85</sup>Composed by twelfth-century poet David bar Meshulam, who personally endured the calamities he describes, this is perhaps the earliest liturgical poem to portray the persecution

Infants and women vowed themselves to be bound together,  
 choice lambs in the Chamber, of the House of Fire.  
 Only One and Exalted, better slain and bowed for Your sake,  
 than to bow the head before the “spawn of fornication” . . .  
 Once we relied on the Binding on the Mountain of Myrrh, and this  
 would stand up for us  
 as a hidden [treasure] for the salvation for every generation, to  
 beware  
 These and like these were added [now] until it is impossible to  
 tell.  
 Living One, the acquittal of their hopes keep for us and end our  
 destitution.<sup>86</sup>

The stanzaic structure of these poems, comprised of four lines and a monorhyme, alongside a unique melody, influenced various texts in Hebrew and in Yiddish that touch upon the theme of the *‘akedah*, including *Eyn sheyn lid*. Indeed, the Binding of Isaac continued to constitute a central religious ethos in Ashkenazic thought also in the early modern period. We see this first and foremost in the High Holiday liturgy, in which the Binding of Isaac constitutes a recurring motif and *‘akedah piyyutim* were recited.<sup>87</sup>

Likewise, seventeenth-century Yiddish literature is replete with such motifs. Two additional historical songs written to the tune of the *‘akedah* melody (see below) connect the calamities they report with the biblical narrative. Also, *Yudisher shtam*, a popular Yiddish poem retelling the story of the Binding of Isaac and written in the same stanzaic formula as *‘akedah piyyutim*, was reprinted repeatedly.<sup>88</sup> Near the end of the edition of *Yudisher shtam* published in mid-seventeenth-century Prague, we find the following statement: “Dear people, remember the Binding of Isaac! For the sake of God, you should agree to be burnt and hanged!”<sup>89</sup> By connecting contemporary persecutions with the biblical narrative, this interpretation of the Ashkenazic

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of the Jewish communities in the Rhineland in 1096. See Haberman, *Sefer Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Zarfat*, 69–71; Avraham Fraenkel, Abraham Gross, and Peter Sh. Lehnardt, eds., *Hebräisch-liturgische Poesien zu den Judenverfolgungen während des Ersten Kreuzzugs* (Wiesbaden, 2016), 72–89.

<sup>86</sup>Translation by kind permission of Peter Sh. Lehnardt, who first presented it at the conference “Visual and Material in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish Culture,” University of Münster, July 17–20, 2017.

<sup>87</sup>Oren Roman and Eliyahu Schleifer, “*Niggun ‘Akedah: A Traditional Melody Concerning the Binding of Isaac*,” *Yuval Online Journal for Jewish Music Studies* 11 (2020): 2.

<sup>88</sup>Wulf-Otto Dreeßen, *Akêdass Jizhak: Ein altjiddisches Gedicht über die Opferung Isaaks* (Hamburg, 1971); Jerold C. Frakes, ed. and trans., *Early Yiddish Epic* (Syracuse, 2014), 149–55; Roman, “Early Ashkenazic Poems.”

<sup>89</sup>Dreeßen, *Akêdass Jizhak*, 144.

ethos clearly instructed persecuted Jews as to how they should behave when confronting harsh choices.<sup>90</sup> Interestingly, reports of the persecution of Jews in the Khmel'nitsky Uprising, which is much closer chronologically and geographically to the setting of *Eyn sheyn lid*, make relatively few references to the 'akedah motif.<sup>91</sup> This may be attributed to the fact that, unlike during the Crusades, religion was not the main factor motivating these persecutions. (The term Kiddush Hashem could also be used to describe cases in which Jews were murdered because of their religious identity but did not actively choose this death.)<sup>92</sup>

In view of this, various ostensibly trivial details in *Eyn sheyn lid* could in fact be intertextual references to the Binding of Isaac, associating the Prostějov protagonists with this biblical narrative. For instance, the concern of young Peretz for his parents (37–38): “All my life I fought for their sake . . . / How lonely I leave them in their old age, / Who will provide or care for them?” These words can, of course, be taken at face value. However, they may also reference Isaac’s moving concern for his parents prior to his near death. This element does not appear in the biblical text but is depicted in various retellings of the story, such as the above-mentioned Yiddish poem *Yudisher shtam*,<sup>93</sup> or the Hebrew exegetic work *Midrash Vayosha*:

Isaac went on, “Further, once you have slaughtered me and are separated from me, what will you say when you go to Sarah, my mother, and she asks, ‘How is Isaac, my son?’ And what will the two of you do in your old age?”

<sup>90</sup>Yaakov Elbaum, “‘Od ‘al Agadot ha-‘Akedah” (Further on the Akedah Legends), *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 9 (1986): 344.

<sup>91</sup>See, for instance, in Meir of Shebreshin, *Tzok ha-‘Itim* (In Times of Trouble): הרציא זרע / קרא הרב אחי גושו / פשטו צואריכם מהרו וחשו / יצחק הנעקד [...] ומסר היהודים ביד העוקד, in A. I. Itzkovitch, ed., *Sefer Gezerot Tach ve-Tat* (Book of the Decrees of 1648–1649) (Jerusalem, 2019), 81; Shabbatai ha-Kohen, *Megillat Eifa*: שחטו בחלפות / קדש הקדשים / שם העלו בני ישראל עולות וקרבנות ואישים / עקדו עצמם כאילים וכבשים המשוררים והחזונים והשמשים / שם העלו בני ישראל עולות וקרבנות ואישים / עקדו עצמם כאילים וכבשים תרשישים (in Itzkovitch, *ibid.*, 105). See also, Adam Teller, “Jewish Literary Responses to the Events of 1648–1649 and the Creation of a Polish-Jewish Consciousness,” in *Culture Front: Representing Jews in Eastern Europe*, ed. Benjamin Nathans and Gabriella Safran (Philadelphia, 2008), 24.

<sup>92</sup>Jacob Katz, “Between 1096 and 1648–1649” [in Hebrew], in *Yitzhak F. Baer Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Salo W. Baron et al. (Jerusalem, 1961), 318–37, esp. 332–33; Edward Fram, “Between 1096 and 1648–1649: A Reappraisal” [in Hebrew], *Zion* 61 (1996): 159–82; idem, “Creating a Tale of Martyrdom from Tulczyn, 1648,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and N. Myers (Hanover, NH, 1998), 89–112.

<sup>93</sup>Dreeßen, *Akêdass Jizhak*, 128–29.

He said to him, “We know that after you, our days will be few. He who comforted us before you were born will comfort us again after today.”<sup>94</sup>

Similarly, we discussed above the song’s portrayal of the two executed men as dressed in “wedding clothes” (49). While there is historical evidence that executed Jews were typically given religious garments and objects, the choice of wedding clothes (understood in this case to be a white *kitl*) is puzzling. First, it is debatable whether Christian spectators would have perceived this as a typically Jewish garment. Second, if the executed men were dressed “as Jews,” why were they not given *tzitzit*? Moreover, we must ask why the author identified the traditional white garment as wedding clothes and not shrouds? The answer to this puzzle may lie in a literary trope. Indeed, this element may be understood as presenting the soon to be executed Peretz as an Isaac figure, who in some Ashkenazic retellings is portrayed as facing his near death as happy as a bridegroom. For instance, *Midrash Vayosha* relates how Isaac prepared the altar for his own sacrifice: “Isaac was like a man getting ready for the *huppah* [wedding canopy], which one does joyfully.”<sup>95</sup> This perspective appears also in the Yiddish poem *Yudisher shtam*: “Both father and son comforted each other in their mutual distress and great sorrow. Isaac himself stacked the wood on the altar, like a bridegroom who rejoices at his wedding canopy.”<sup>96</sup> This reading is further reinforced by the description of Peretz going happily to the gallows in *Eyn sheyn lid* (59, 67).

Further similarities between *Eyn sheyn lid* and the classic ‘*akedah*’ narrative include emphasizing Peretz’s young age, insinuating that he is a child, as well as depicting the two protagonists as pious Jews (despite their criminal background and transgression of the strong prohibition against theft): beyond their choice to die and not convert, the two pray, don tefillin, perform ritual hand washing, request a ritual burial, etc. Finally, *Eyn sheyn lid* ends in the same manner as ‘*akedah piyyutim*, invoking God’s ancient promise to Abraham (76).

In addition to connecting our text with this Ashkenazic ethos of martyrdom, these similarities also slightly undermine its credibility. Such literary tropes cast doubt on the reliability of the details they provide. Indeed, the author may have added them to the narrative to create a more complete story.

<sup>94</sup>Rachel S. Mikva, *Midrash vaYosha: A Medieval Midrash on the Song at the Sea* (Tübingen, 2012), 47.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Frakes, *Early Yiddish Epic*, 152. Cf. Dreeßen, *Akêdass Jizhak*, 127.

## Musical Framing

Although they were printed as relatively cheap reading materials, Yiddish historical songs, as their name suggests, were meant for acoustic performance, and they usually mention the melody to which they should be sung.<sup>97</sup> At times the accompanying melody merely embellished the text—an important factor for a product sold in the free market—but in other cases it infused it with meaning. Certain melodies bore a strong character of their own, affecting the reception of the text and framing the song as sad, happy, parodic, etc. Ashkenazic Jews did not use musical notation until the modern era, and thus instructions regarding which melody should be used for a particular song were imparted using a *contrafactum* reference to a more well-known song. Usually, the words *niggun* or *ton* were used for “melody.” *Eyn sheyn lid* mentions two possible melodies, *niggun ‘akedah* or *niggun Braunes lid*, both of which can be characterized as tragic.

The first melody, *niggun ‘akedah*, refers to the Binding of Isaac, connecting the text with the religious theme discussed above. It is assumed that *niggun ‘akedah* stems from the Middle Ages and was first used to accompany texts retelling the biblical narrative, such as the Hebrew *‘akedah piyyutim* or the Yiddish *Yudisher shtam*.<sup>98</sup> Over time, this melody became so strongly associated with the biblical narrative that it ipso facto invoked it, including the associated notion of Jewish martyrdom, even in other texts. This applies to *Eyn sheyn lid*, for instance.

The second melody, *Braunes lid*, is not connected with the color brown but rather with the city of Braunschweig, and the medieval Netherlandish/Low German ballad *Der Herr von Braunschweig*.<sup>99</sup> This identification is affirmed by the similar metrical structure of the two texts (stanzas of four lines), and especially by the content of *Braunes lid*—relating the tragic story of a cruel landowner who prosecuted a (non-Jewish) child for shooting a rabbit on his

<sup>97</sup>Shmeruk, *Yiddish Literature*, 70.

<sup>98</sup>Roman and Schleifer, “*Niggun ‘Akedah*,” 1–41.

<sup>99</sup>We thank Ms. Barbara Boock, formerly head of the *Deutsches Volkslied Archiv* in Freiburg, for this identification. Regarding the song’s circulation in German and Netherlandish culture see Rolf Wilhelm Brendich, “*Der Herr von Braunschweig*,” in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Wolfgang Stämmler, Christine Stöllinger-Löser et al., 2nd rev. ed., 14 vols. (Berlin, 2010), 3:1135–136; Ludwig Erk and Franz M. Böhme, *Deutscher Liederhort*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1893–1894), 1:224–27; Lutz Röhrlich and Rolf Wilhelm Brendich, *Deutsche Volkslieder: Texte und Melodien*, 2 vols. (Düsseldorf, 1965), 1:212–17. To the best of our knowledge, this is the only mention of this song in Yiddish literature. However, in some German variants of the song a “contamination” with another folk ballad, *Schloß in Österreich*, has been observed; see Brendich, *Deutsche Volkslieder*, 1136. On the circulation of the latter in Yiddish culture, see Diana Matut, *Dichtung und Musik im frühneuzeitlichen Aschkenas*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 2010), 1:78–81 and 170–73, 2:137–42.

property, insisting that the child be executed by decapitation, despite the parents' efforts to save him. Thus, the melodies designated for *Eyn sheyn lid* not only served decorative purposes but were also a tool of interpretation. Both signalled to the audience the song's tragic content, while the 'akedah melody also drew a parallel between the two men from Prostějov and Jewish martyrdom. This melody echoes the political-religious context of the Bohemian lands in the late seventeenth century mentioned above, when forced conversion to Christianity posed a real threat to Jews.

In connection to musical framing, we discovered a highly significant piece of external evidence regarding the cultural reception of *Eyn sheyn lid*. In a historical song about the plague epidemic that spread through Prague in 1713, the title page states that the song should be sung *be-niggun prostitser kedoshim*, i.e., to the melody of the martyrs from Prostějov!<sup>100</sup> Since we do not know of any other case of martyrs from Prostějov, this appears to refer to *Eyn sheyn lid*.<sup>101</sup> As was noted above, musical singing instructions made reference to a popular song with which most people were familiar; likewise, they were constantly changing.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, it seems that *Eyn sheyn lid* was still popular nearly thirty years after it was published. Moreover, it was so popular that its name replaced the classical 'akedah or *Braunes lid* melodies.

## Conclusion

The seventeenth-century text *Eyn sheyn lid* clearly bears the mark of Baroque culture, which dominated central Europe at the time, and was characterized by dramatic gestures, antithetical contrasts, tensions, and conflicts. Accordingly, the Yiddish song displays the intricacy of Jewish-Christian coexistence, shaping the social order, family relations, and community values in the shadow of the noble religious principle of Kiddush Hashem, Jewish martyrdom. Likewise, both the song's content and the circumstances of its production reflect the imprint of migration in the early modern era, caused by political, social, and cultural factors.

<sup>100</sup>Steinschneider, *Catalogus*, 1800, no. 6458, 3.

<sup>101</sup>Other scholars share this opinion: Steinschneider, *Catalogus*; Chava Turniansky, "Yiddish Song as Historical Source Material: Plague in the Judenstadt of Prague in 1713," in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein (London, 1988), 191.

<sup>102</sup>See, for instance, the constantly changing singing instructions for a Yiddish song about the Ten Commandments—from *Yudisher shtam*, to *Hadesh sasoni*, to *Kol mekadesh shevi'i*, to *Shmuel-bukh!* See Avraham Ya'ari, "The Metamorphosis of a Yiddish Song on the Ten Commandments" [in Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 41 (1966): 397–98.

This paper sought to demonstrate that the song is historically credible and mirrors real events, despite the lack of further evidence regarding this case. Nevertheless, the *informative* aspect of the text stands in the shadow of its *formative* function: shaping piety and ethics among early modern Ashkenazic Jews. The body of the song provides an example of model behavior in the face of the harsh dilemma between conversion or death.

The song's introduction, which seems to be a somewhat later addition to the original historical report, is written in an even stronger didactic and moralizing tone, thus serving as an interpretative key to the main text. In addition to praising the decision to die sanctifying God's Name, the introduction addresses, critically, topics that are absent from the main narrative. Perhaps seeking to balance the failure of the main text to censure the predicate act, the introduction calls upon readers to note the disadvantages of theft. Further, it claims that criminal behavior is the result of a bad rearing, urging readers to educate their children strictly. It also condemns gambling, Peretz's ostensible source of income. A close reading of the discrepancy between the historical report and the introduction likewise highlights aspects of the cultural history and social order of early modern Ashkenazic Jews. In particular, we emphasized the critical attitude of the introduction in contrast to the subtle sympathy expressed by the main text for those on the margins of the Jewish community.

Indeed, the core of *Eyn sheyn lid* represents both a continuation and a transformation of the medieval Ashkenazic ethos of Kiddush Hashem (which is in turn based on ancient Jewish traditions). Echoing the collective memory created in the wake of the First Crusade, and referencing the biblical narrative of the Binding of Isaac, it lauds the individual choice not to abjure the Jewish religion even at the cost of one's life. At the same time, this early modern song transforms this ethos, offering a new type of a hero—shifting from innocent victims of anti-Jewish persecution to undeniably criminal characters. Still, the fact that these criminals resisted the temptation to convert and thus save themselves made them an example worthy to be followed.

As we have demonstrated, *Eyn sheyn lid* should also be read in the context of contemporaneous public executions of Jewish criminals, which at times ended in public conversion. As such, it can be seen as a Jewish literary response to enthusiastic Christian reports of Jews who actually converted. Furthermore, we noted that not only verbal content was instrumental in the transmission of the song's main religious-ethical message. Indeed, the musical framing was also of great importance. As the later reception of *Eyn sheyn lid* suggests, all the components discussed here made this song popular and attractive for decades following its publication. Thus, we see that even convicted thieves could achieve the status of venerated martyrs and be forgiven for their crimes—if they performed an act of Kiddush Hashem.

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## Appendix

*Eyn sheyn lid / A Beautiful Song*

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[א:א] איין שיין ליד

אויף שני קדושים דו ניילך בק"ק פרוסטיץ זיין נידן גווארין על קידוש השם  
בניגון עקידה אדר בניגון ברוינס ליד

הקדמה פרייא מאג זיך איטלכר שפיגלן דארין. דען גאר גרוש התעוררת ווערט  
איר דרינגן גפינגן.

דו מן דעם עולם זאל ווינג אכטן. זיך נאר עולם הבא צו ריכטן. [5]

נעמט אייך ווינג צייט. ווערט איר הערן איין קידוש השם פון צווייא לייט.  
דיא האבן אויף קידוש השם הער געבן זיהר לייב. איינר איין אלטיר מאן דר  
אנדר האט נאך קיין ווייב.

דער יונג קדוש העט אפער זיין לעבן קעגן דער פון ברענגן. אונ' זיך פון קידוש  
השם וועגן נעבן דעם אנדרן לאזן הענגן.

ניט וואלן כופר זיין באלקי ישראל. דש עז איין שם גיבט איבר אל.

אך ווערט איר חידושים הערן אונ זעהן. וואו דעם תליון איז גשעהן. [10]

דער זיך האט זער גפראייט דארף. איין טאג דער פיר איז ער גיווארן משוגע  
ומטורף.

לנג האט ער אויף זיהר טוט טאן האפין. איין טאג דער פיר איז ער אבר משוגע  
ווייז גאר אוועק גלאפן.

אך ווערט איר הערן וויא עש איז גנגן. פֿון דען מאל זיא זיינן איין קומן ביז זיא זיינן ווארין גהנגין.  
 דיא קדושים צו קיין שמאך חס ושלום האט דר שרייבר דיא גניבה אך דריין גשטעלט. דר וארטן זיא זאלן איין זכות האבן ווען זיך פֿון זיא ווערט איין בייא שפיל נעמן דיא גנצי וועלט.  
 זעלכי זכין קיינר מער נאך צו גין. נייארט לייטן זכין צו פֿרידן לאזן שטיין. [15]  
 אונ וואז איינס גאט ניט גיבט זאל מן זיך אליין ניט נעמן. אוב מען שון ניט האט זאל מען זיך דעם דלות ניט שעמן.  
 מיט זייני טעניר ליבר שווער דער נעריין. זייא וואז פֿר איין מלאכה נאר וועגן עריין.  
 דער דלות איז קיין שנד אין ווייט אונ ברייט. דיא חברותה איז גרוש דאז מיינשטי ערלכי חשובה לייט:

נאך איין מוסר ווערט דרויז יוצא זיין. דש איטלכר זיין קינד זאל שטראפֿן ווייל עש איז קליין.  
 אונ ווער קינד האט אין וויגן. זאל דער בוים אין דיא יוגנט ביגן. [20]  
 ניט לאזן נעמן איבר הנט. דש די עלטרן ניט דער לעבן שנד.  
 קיין קינד לאזין [ז]יין ווילן. ובפֿרט ניט גווינן אין שפילן.  
 דארויף זאל ניט גשפֿארט [א:ב] ווערן דיא רוט. דען שפילן טוט קיין גוט.  
 זאלטין דעם יונגן קדוש זיין עלטרן דאז שפילן ניט האבן נאך געבן. טעט ער אפֿשר נאך לעבן.  
 דעשט וועגן האבן זי עש ניט גיווערט. ווייל ער זיא דער מיט האט דר נערט. [25]  
 זונשט האט מן באמת נישט ביז אן אים טאן שפירן. נייארט דש ער זיך האט בעוונות הרבים מיט דיא גניבה לאזן פֿר פֿירן.  
 דרום ליבן לייט לאזט דאז ביכל קיינר פֿארן. טוט אייכש אן מויל אב שפארין.  
 לאשט אייך דאז ווינג געלט ניט פֿר דריסן. פֿילייכט ווערט איר זיהר זכות אך גניסן.

1. אל מלא רחמים דער ברמיגר פֿאטר.  
 דער ליז אונש בלד דש מיר ווערין דאז גלות פטור.  
 פֿון דיין פֿאלק ישראל טוא אב דיין צארן.  
 נעם צו שטייאר זכות שני קדושים דיא דא זיינן בק"ק פרוסטניץ גיווארן.
2. איין אלטיר מאן ליב וועסל האט מען אים טאן נענין.  
 [ברוב] קהלות מעררין האט מען אים וואול שאן קענן.  
 פֿיל זכין האט מען אים טאן זאגן נאך.  
 זייני פֿרומה זיל ניט גרעט צו קיינר שמאך.
3. דער אנדר האט גהיישן פרץ בן אברם איין וועלט קינד.  
 איין פאר שון דז זיין גלייכן מען ווינג גפינט.  
 צו פֿאטר אונ מוטר איין איינציגר קדיש.  
 צו צווייא אונ צוונציג יארן איז ער גווארן איין קד[ו]ש:

4. אי ער איז תפוס גיווארן דער פֿיר עטליכי וואכין.  
איז ער מיט איין יתומה איין בתולה גוועזן פֿר שפראכין.  
דר נאך איז דער חיתן גנגן צו רוק.  
דיא יתומה איז אים ניט נגזר גוועזן פֿר זיין בת זוג.
5. נוא זאל איטלכר צו גאט טאג אונ נכט ביטין.  
דש ער אים זאל פֿר מחשבות רעות בהיטין.  
פֿון יצר הרע אונ' ביזי גזעלין  
דיא דעם בן אדם פֿר פֿירין וועלין:
6. אז וויא זיך דיא קדושים האבן בעו"ה לאזן פֿר פֿירין.  
בייא איין בורגר איין גניבה טאן אויז שפירין.  
אן איין מיטוואך אום מיטר נכט.  
האבין זיא אים בדלות גימכט:
7. אין דיא מויאר האט מען איין לאך אויז גיבראכן.  
דא אריין איז מען ליידר גקראכן.  
קיין שעה מאג עש האבן גיווערט  
זיינן דיא קסטין שון גיוועזן אויז גלערט:
8. בע"רח ניסן פֿריא איז גווארין איין גשרייא אויז דער מאסין.  
דער בורגר האט אויז גשיקט אויף אלי שטראסין.  
אך האט ער לאזן תפסין דיא וועכטר דיא דא האבן בייא נכט גיווכט  
אויף קיין בר ישראלים האט קיינר גיטרכט:  
אין זעלביגן חדר האבן זיא לאזן ליגן איין שפיציג אייזן.  
דר בורגר האט עש ארום גטראגן איטלכן טאן ווייזן.  
קארץ דעז אייזן [ב:א] האט דער קענט איין שמיד.  
דאז הא[ט] — מכן איין גלאזר א[—]:<sup>103</sup>
10. אין דיון קומין פויארין אונ טואן זאגן.  
[—] גזעהין איין יהודי איין גרושין פינקיל טר[אנגן].  
[—] גבוגין ביז צו דער ערד.  
אום דרייא גולדין וואלט [—] פֿערד:  
וויא בלד וואר מען נאך יאגין:  
אזו לנג ביז מ[—] דר פֿראגין.  
אויף צווייא מייל צו איין רנדר א[—].
11. דארט האט מן ליב וועסל בקומן אונ דיא גניבה גפ[ונן]:  
נון קאן מן זיך מציר זיין.
12. וויא מן ליב וועסיל האט [—] וויד[ר] אויף פרוסטיץ אריין.  
אן פֿערט גיבונדין אונ מוזין [נאך] לאפֿין.  
דעז מיינסטי טייל האט מן אים טאן שלאפֿין:

<sup>103</sup>The extant copy of the song is missing the top external corner of the second leaf. Based on context and the rhyming scheme we have prudently completed some missing words, clearly marked in square brackets.

13. קיין הוט אויף דעם קאפף קיין שוך אן פֿיסן.  
אן [–] פֿער[ט שטריק גבונדין אונ איינר האט נאך גשמיסין.  
וויא גש[ריאן] איבר דיא חרפה אונ גשריאיא אז עש האט געבן.  
קיין יידש קינד זאל זעלכש מער דער לעבן:  
14. סמוך לשבת וויא מען מיט אים איז גקומן.  
וויא בלד דער נאך האט מן פרץ אך איין גנומין.  
העט ער זיך אויף זייטן גמכט העט ער קענן זיין גנעזן.  
דיא גזירה אבר שון פֿון גאט גיוועזן:  
15. וויא דיא זכין רויו קומן ווער צו לנג צו זאגין.  
וויא מן דיא גניבה איינציג ווייש האט גבראכט ווידר צו טראגן.  
דער שמיד מיט דעם אייון האט עש דעם גלאזר אין פנים גזאגט.  
זא האט מן דעם גלאזר אך תפֿוס גינומן דעם זעלבגן טאג:  
16. נאך איין אשה האט מן אין דיא תפֿיסה גטאן.  
מן האט חושד גוועזן עז האט איין חלק דראן איר מאן.  
זיא שפראך וואז ווישן דיא ווייבר וואז טואן דיא מנין.  
מן האט זיא גדימילט זיא איז אבר וואול בשטנין:  
17. צו שלעם מזל האט מן איין נאיין תליון אויף גינומן.  
צווייא טאג נאך זיהר איין קומן.  
ליב אונ פרץ האבן תיכף בקענט.  
דר גלאזר האט נישט מודה גוועזן ביז מן אים האט גברענט:  
18. נוא איז דאז משפט אויז גינגן.  
ליב און פרץ זאלין ווערן גהנגין.  
דיא יידנה צו לאזין פטור אונ ניט לענגר זיצין.  
דעם גלאזר זאל מן אויז שמיצין:  
19. אויף דעם ראט הויז האט מן זיא דיא בשורה טאן זאגן.  
ליבל וועסיל מושט מן אויף דעם ראט הויז טראגן.  
צו גין הא[ט ער] קיין כח גיהט.  
אין דר תפֿיסה וואר ער שטעץ קרנק אונ מט:  
20. [ווען] מן זיא האט דאז פֿיר גלעזין.  
איז נאך פֿירצעהן טאג צו זיהר מיתה גוועזין.  
תיכף האבין זיא גאט אין הערצין [ב:ג] גנומן  
[–] אויף קידוש השם אום צו קומן:  
21. [–] שבת[ת] צו נכט פֿר זיהר טוט.  
אויף ליבל וועסיל [–] נוט.  
ער וואר איין זא שוואך קום די נשמה [–].  
דער שופט טאט ראשים צו ווישן אז:  
22. [–] שמשים צו אין קומן.  
דא טאט ער גלייך אז [–] שלומין.  
וויא ער נון יהודים דר זוך.  
דא קריגט ער ווידר איין נחת רוח:

23. [—] ליס ער וושין זיין הענט.  
ווידיוי לאשט ער זיך פֿיר [—] זאגין בהענד.  
נאך דעם ער ראשים פֿלייסג באט.  
אוב זיא אים ניט נאך קענטין אכטין גנאד:  
24. [—] ש אבר ניט אנדרשט גזיין.  
זיכט צו קבר ישראל צו ברענגן מייני גיבין.  
מייין זון זנוויל טוט עז צו וויסן קען אונגריש [ברוד]  
אוב ער אנדרשט אין דער גזירה ניט איז ווארין גשלאגין טוט:  
25. [ווי]א וואר ער שרייאן איבר דיא ביטרן גזירות.  
ער שפראך איך האב קיין דיא שולד צו געבין זונדרין מייני גרושי עבירות  
איך זינדגר אונ שולדיגר מאן.  
וויא חרטה האב איך אויף דיא עבירות דיא איך האב מייין טאג גטאן:  
26. ליבן הערציגן ראשים אום גאטש ווילן.  
לאשט מיר דער סופר בויכטגן מייני תפילין.  
לאז ער זעהין אוב זיא זיין רכט.  
דער מיט זייטץ מוחל אונ גוט נכט:  
27. פון דארטין זיין ראשים מיט דעם שופט צו פרץ גנגין.  
וויא גאר פֿריינטליך וואר ער זיא אנטפֿנגן.  
מחילה וואר ער זיא בעטין גען.  
גלובט זייא גאט דש איך יהודים ווידר זעך:  
28. ליבין לייט איך טוא ענק זער בעטין.  
זאגט מייין פֿאטר איך ווער פֿון יודן גלויבן ניט אב טרעטין.  
לאזין זיא דארויף גאר ניט זארגין.  
צו דעם טוט גיא איך ליבר היינט אז מארגין:  
29. לאזין זיא אויז מיר מכין קיין גרושי הכנה.  
עש איז מיר אזו נגור גווארין יום כפור אונ ראש השנה.  
הערצלך גערין גיא איך צו דער מיתה.  
ליברשט אז איך מייני יונגי יאר זאל אזו פֿר ברענגין אין דער תפֿיסה:  
30. מייני האר אונ נעגיל וועלט איך מיר גערין לאזן אב שניידן.  
אי איך פֿון דער זינדג וועלט וואר אב שניידן.  
אך וואלט א[י]ך גערין דש איינר איין גוטר פֿריינד זאלט נעבן מיר גין.  
דש ער ווישט צו זאגין וויא איך בייא דעם יודן גלויבן וור בשטין.  
31. אוב מן אנדרשט יהודים דער בייא ניט מכט וועלין ליידין.  
זוא ביט איך זער לאזין זיך עטליכי פֿר קליידן.  
דש [—] אן זיא ניט וורט שטוסין.  
אונ קענטן בייא מייין יציאת נשמה [—]:  
32. דער שופט שפראך עז ווערט שווערלך צו גלאזין ווערין  
[—] [a:3] אים זייני היפשי האר ווערט לאזן אב שערין.  
פֿילייכט ווערט ער זיך נאך פֿר קערין.  
ער שפראך אזו אלט ווער איך גוויש ניט ווערן:

33. ניין דארויף טוא איך גאר ניט גדענקן.  
ענטליך אוב מען מיר שון מיין לעבין וואלט שענקן.  
דען צו שטרבין איז מיר ניט לייד.  
איך העט לושט מיך צו לאזן פֿירן צום טוט מיט שפיל לייט:  
דער שופֿט שפראך מיר וואלין עש לאזן דער ווייל מיט רוא.
34. עש איז יוא נאך פֿיר אדר פֿינף טאג דער צו.  
דוא ווערשט שון אנדרשט רידן אונטר דעשין.  
נוא פרץ פֿר שאף וואו דוא ווילשט עשין:  
פרץ וואר אויז דעם עשין לאכין.
35. ער שפראך פֿר וויא וויל איך דיא פֿיגל אונ ראבין איין מאל צייט מכין.  
עשין אונ טרינקן זעץ איך שון אויף זייט.  
עש איז נימר אום דער פֿאריג צייט:
36. נון ליבן הערציגן ראשים טוט עטץ מיין פֿאטר אונ מוטר זאגן.  
זיא זאלין אום מיר ניט זער וויינן אונ קלאגין.  
לאזין זיא זיך טרישטן מיט דעם וואז איך מיר האב פֿיר גנומין.  
אונ לאזין דונקן א[ן]ך ווער אין ברידר[!] גזירה אום גקומן:  
נאך מער וויל איך ענק ביטין.
37. ווייל איך האב גלעבט האב איך פֿר זיא נעביך גשטריטין.  
וויא איך האב גקענט האב איך זיא נעבך דער נערט.  
גטיילט מיט זיא וואז מיר האט גאט בשערט:  
וויא עלינט לאז איך זיא אויף איר אלטי טאגין.  
ווער ווערט אינן וואז געבין אדר נאך זיא פֿראגין.  
דרום איז א[ן]ך ענק מיין ערינשטי ביט.  
בדענקט זיא נעבך אונ פֿר לאזט זיא ניט:
38. אויף חיילה מיין שוועסטר יתום לאזין זיא אכטונג געבין.  
אונ זיך מיט אים טריסטן א[ז] איך זאל לעבן.  
קיין ביזן ווילן נאך געבן פֿיל.  
אונ זיך פֿון מיר נעמין איין ביא שפיל:  
נון בגער איך נישט מער פֿון דיזר וועלט.
39. נאר רופֿפֿין הוזין אונ העמיד דש מן מיר מכין זעלט.  
קיין וואלחשי הוזין טוט מיר דארך אויז ניט מכין.  
דו מן מיך אן גלגין ניט זאל אויז לאכין:  
אך ביט איך להשתדל דו איך ניט לנג זאל הענגין.  
דש מן מיך נעבך צו קבר ישראל קענט ברענגין.  
ווייטר וויל איך ענק ניט פֿיל מטריח זיין.  
די עטליכי טאג זייט ניט זעלצום אונ קומט איין ריין.
40. ראשים הבין גיהט פֿון זייני ריד איין גרושי נחמה.  
זיא שפראכן וואול צו דיר אונ דייני נשמה.  
מיר ביטן למען השם ריד קיין ביז אויף זיהרי אמנה.  
דש דוא דעם כלל ניט שטעלשט חס ושלום אין קיין סכנה.

43. און דא עש קאם דרייא טאג דער פֿיר.  
וויא פֿעסט הלטיט מן צו דיא תפֿיסה טיר.  
קיין יהודי לים מען דארך אויז צו זיא שמעקין.  
טאג און נכט ווארן כומרים בייא זיא שטעקין.
44. אירי סידרלך און תפֿילין אוועק גנומין אלי בידין.  
פֿר מיינט זיא [ג:ב] צו איבר רידן.  
זיא שפֿראכֿן טוט אירי מייילר ניט פֿר דרבין.  
יהודים זייגן מיר גבארין יהודים ווערין מיר שטרבין:  
פֿרץ טוא דוא דיך פֿר קערין.
45. עש קאן נאך איין הער אויז דיר ווערין.  
דיזי וועלט און דאז הימל רייך קאנשטו האבין.  
שאד פֿר איין זא איין קעריל זיין לייב צו עשין דיא ראבין:  
פֿרץ שפֿראך מייין לייב האב איך שון דריין גיגעבן.
46. קיין קומר האב איך פֿר דעם הימל רייך און איבגן לעבן.  
און אוב איך מיך שון וואלט פֿר קערין.  
פֿר וואר נישט אנדרשט ענטליך אז איין יוד מכט ווידר אויז מיר ווערין:  
און ווען איך מיך שאן זולט לאזין טויפֿן.
47. ענטליך מכט איך דאך אנטלויפֿן.  
דרום ביט איך גיבט מיר פֿריד.  
און לאשט מיך הלט שטרבין אז וויא איין יוד:  
צו זיא צו לאזין יהודים העט מן גערין בייא דעם שופֿט אויז גריכט.
48. ער שפֿראך איך האב זיא נימר אין מיינר מכט.  
אי דאך וואלין דיא כומרים צו זיא לאזין יודן.  
זא בין איך עז אך גאר וואול צו פֿרידן:  
דאנרשטיק פֿר טאג וויא מן זיא האט זאלין הענגין.
49. זיהר חופה קליידר טאט מן צו דעם שופֿט ברענגין.  
ער שפֿראך דיא קליידר ווערט מן זיא וואול אן טאן.  
קיין ארבע כנפֿות וורט אבר גנומין אן:  
דארוף האט מן אין דר קהלה נישט אנדרשט טאן גענקין.
50. און גטרכט זיא העטין זיך לאזין פֿון דער אמנה לענקין.  
מן האט אבר חושד בכשרים גוועזין.  
אז וויא איר וורט ווייטר לעזן:  
דיא מסקנה פֿון דעם במעלטיין נייאן תליון און זייני גרושי פֿרייד.
51. איז בוודאי גוועזן הש"י לייד.  
משוגע איז ער גווארין איין טאג דר פֿיר.  
ברפֿיסג לויפֿט ער אין וועלדרין אז איין ווילד טיר:  
דא האט מן גזעהין דיא גרושי חדושים.
52. דז איין גרושר זכות איז פֿר הנדין בייא דיא קדושים.  
דורך אנדרי תליינים האט דיא זכין מוזין פֿר ריכט ווערין.  
דעם זעלביגין תליון האט מן דר בייא ניט טון זעהין נאך הערין:

53. בחנוכה דאנרשטיק פֿרוא צווישן זיבן אונג אכט אור.  
וואלט מן פֿר חידוש זעהין דעז גרוש רמור.  
פון צעהין מייל זמילט זיך דעז פֿאלק גנץ שטרק.  
עז וואר גלייך פֿר זיהר האגין ד[נ] גרושי וואכן מרק;  
דיא קהלה וואשט ניט וויא זיא זאלין טאן.
54. אין הייזרין צו בלייבן אדר אויף דעם מרק פֿל צו [!]האן.  
דיא מסקנה איז גבליבן ניט צו פֿר[ץ] שטעקין.  
דו מן ניט ערשט מער רשעות זאל דער וועקין:  
ליב וועסיל האבין דיא תליינים גבונדנר הייט אויז דער תפֿיסה גטראגין.  
זיא ווארפֿין אין אויף איין מישט וואגין.  
[פרץ] [א:ד] טאט מן אויז פֿירין צו פֿוס דער נעבֿין.  
דעם גלאזר טוט מן בעזין אין הענטין געבן:  
אויף דעם מרק האט מן איין גרושן כֿרוז פֿר זיא גיטאן.
56. דעם גלאזר בינדעט מן נקיט אן פרנגיר אן.  
וויא שייצליך מכֿט מן אים דיא זך.  
מן גאב אים איין אונג דרייסיג שטראך:  
איטליכן שמיץ דש מן האט גשמיצט.<sup>104</sup>  
אילן ווייט וואר דאז בלוט גשפריצט.  
פֿעשט וואר ער גבונדין אן די זייל.  
איטלכן שרייא זאלט מן הערין אויף פֿרטיל מייל:  
דיא כומרים שפראכן האט איר ג[י]ש[ו]יאט וואז דעם גלאזר איז גשעהן.  
נון בלד ווערט דער גלאזר ענק אך צו זעהן.  
דרום טוט עטץ ענק נאך פֿר קערין.  
פֿר וואר בגנאד קאנט עטץ ווערן:  
ניין שפראכן זיא לאשט אב פֿון דיא זאכין.  
פרץ גינג גנץ ברירג אין טנצין אונג לאכין.  
זיא שפראכן אלש גיבט אונג פֿריד אונג רוא.  
דיא פֿירט מן צו דעם (אולמיצר) טאר צו:  
ליב וועסיל שריא אלס פֿון וואגין מיט העליר שטים.  
שמע ישראל אונג ה' הוא האלהים.  
פרץ וואר אלז פֿון ווייטן דעם עולם מחילה בעטין.  
קיין יהודי ליסן דיא כומרים צו זיא טרעטין:  
אונג דא זיא ווארין שון פֿר דעם טאר.
61. דיא הלבי קהילה יהודים ווארין שון נאך אונג פֿאר.  
אויף איין זייט טאט מן יהודים פֿארט שפֿין.  
אויף דיא אנדר זייט ווארין זיא דענג דר צו לויפֿן:  
פֿון דעם עם רב דש דא וואר איז ניט צו דער שרייבן.  
אויף צעהן מייל וואר נימנט דער היים בלייבן.  
פֿון בהגניני וועגן אויך צו פֿוס אונג צו פֿערד.  
קיין אפיל קאנט מן וורפֿין צו דר ערד:

<sup>104</sup>original: גשמיטץ

63. דא מן קאם פֿון גלגין ניט ווייט.  
דיא כומרים שפראכֿן נוא היץ האבט איר צייט.  
וואלט איר זעליג ווערין זאג עטץ היצונד.  
דען עש ווערט בלד זיין ענקר לעצטי שטונד:  
ניין שפראכֿן זיא אן יודין גאט וואלין מיר ניט בראכֿין.  
מכֿט נאר גשווינד וואו איר וואלט מכֿין.  
וויא גשווינד טראגן דיא תליינים ליב וועסיל אויף דיא לייטר אנויף.  
מיט הוכֿר שטים שריא ער יי' הוא האלהים אונ שמע ישראל דרויף:  
אי מן זיך האט אום גועהן.  
איז עש מיט א[י]ם שון גוועזן גשעהן.  
מיט פרץ וואר מן נאך פֿר ציהן.  
דיא כומרים ווארין זיך מיט אים נאך שטרק במיהן:  
אונ דא זיא זאכֿן דש ער זיך פֿון ייחוד ניט וויל רירין.  
וויא (באף ובחימה) ליסן זיא אים פֿארט פֿירין.  
ווען דוא אונז גאר ניט ווילשט פֿאלגין.  
זא פֿאר נאר הין א[י]ן הוכֿין גלגין:  
וויא פֿרוא וואר פרץ דש ער וואר פֿטור.  
מיט פֿריידין רופֿט ער אן דען הימלשין פֿאטר.  
יי' הוא האלהים אונ שמע ישראל [ד:ב] וואר ער מיט העליר שטים זינגן.  
דש דאו גנצי פֿעלד וואו קלינגן:  
ר' אלחנן שמש מיט עטליכי לייט.  
שטונדין דער פֿון עכ"פֿ איין ביקסן ש[ו]ס ווייט.  
וויא בשיידלך הערטין זיא וויא ער שמע ישראל גיזונגן האט.  
דש זיא האבין נאך גיזאגט ברוך שם כבוד:  
וויא נון רבי אלחנן שמש זאך דז זי שון הענגין.  
וויא בלד לויפֿט ער אריין צו דעם רב אב"ד די בשורה ברענגין.  
רבי לעבין זיא זיין שון גנעזין.  
זיא האבן שטרק מקדש השם ברבים גוועזין:  
וויא בלד וואר דער רב ברכֿה מכֿין.  
(זכאה חולקיהו) וואר ער שפרכֿין.  
גוויינט האט ער אז איין קליין קינד.  
זיכֿט רבותינו לעבין וויא מן קאן עולם הבא פֿר דינן אזו גשווינד:  
צו פרץ פֿאטר אונ מוטר ווארן מנין אונ ווייבר גין.  
ניט וויינט אונ טוט פֿון דער ערדין אויף שטין.  
זיין טוט לאזט אייך ניט זיין לייד.  
אויף עולם הבא וורט ער ענק מכֿין איין גרושי פֿרייד:  
וויא זיין סוף ווער גוועזין האט עטץ דאך ניט קענין ווישן.  
היינט האט איר דאך עכ"פֿ זיין זכֿות צו גניסין.  
איבג העט ער ניט גלעבט אונ ווער גשטארבן.  
וואו העט איר גנומן אזו איין חשובֿ קרבן:

73. דאז ליד האט מן ביז אלהער לאזין בלייבן.  
אלש גהאפט אוב פֿון אירה קבורה אך קעניט שרייבן.  
נוא האט מן דר רט בעזרתֿ השם מבורך.  
אונ זי קובר גוועזן בליל ד' פרשת קרח:  
צו מארגניש וואר יום ה' ג' תמוז.
74. אונטר די מתעסקים במצוה וואר אך דר במעלטי רבי אלחנן שמש.  
אויף אירה קבורה וואר זיך איטלכֿר פֿרייאן.  
קיין מענש טאט זיך אירר גאר נישט ש[ר]ייאן:  
אויף איין שינה וויזן ליגן זיא אין אירן רוא.  
ווייט פֿון גלגין איין וועק צו דעם דערפֿיל דרשאוויץ צו.  
אוב רייזגי לייט נאך אירה קברים מכטן פֿראגן  
זא קענטין זיא דארטין אתה גבור זאגן:
76. אלמכטיגר גאט ווען דוא גדענקשט דעם זכותֿ פֿון דער עקידה.  
טוא גדענקן אך דיא קדושים אלי בידי.  
אונ זייא דיין פֿאלק ישראל מציל פֿר אלין ביזין.  
אונ' שיק אונז משיח צו דער ליזן:  
נון ליבן לייט יונג אז אלט גרוש אז קליין.
77. לאשט אייך דאז או[ם] איין עקסעמפיל אונ בייא שפיל זיין.  
לאזט אייך ווייטר קיינר צו ביזין פֿר העציין.  
ווערן מיר זוכה זיין ובא לציון גואל וכן יהי רצון:

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78. דאש ליד ווערט קיינם ניט גיבאטן וויא טיאר.  
דען עש איז גידרוקט גיווארן איין געטליכֿן ספֿר צו שטיאר.  
דרום אי מער איינר וויל דר פֿיר געבן.  
וויא לענגר ער זאל לעבן:

דאז ליד האט גימכט חיים בן הר"ר שלום ממדינות פולין דער וואר גלייך בק"ק פרוסטיץ

English Translation by Oren Cohen Roman and Rebecca Wolpe

**A Beautiful Song About Two *Kedoshim*  
Who Were Recently Executed over *Kiddush ha-Shem*  
in the Holy Community of Prostits.<sup>105</sup>  
To be Sung to the ‘*Akedah* Tune or the *Braunes Lid* Tune**

**Introduction** Everyone should surely reflect upon this, for you will discover within it much to rouse your spirit.

- [5] That one should care little for this world and only prepare for the world to come.

Take some time, and you will hear about the act of *Kiddush Hashem* that two people performed.

They gave their life for the sake of *Kiddush Hashem*, one of them an old man, the other did not yet have a wife.

The young *kadosh* may have been able to save his life, but for the sake of *Kiddush Hashem* let himself be hanged near the other.

He did not want to deny the God of Israel, that God is everywhere.

- [10] You will also hear and see remarkable things that happened to the executioner.

He rejoiced greatly in this, but one day before it he lost his mind and went insane.

He hoped for their death for a long time, but one day beforehand he ran away, a crazy man.

You will also hear how it all happened; from the time they were arrested until they were hanged.

The writer also included [a description of] the theft, not meaning to shame the *kedoshim*, God forbid, but rather expecting that they might merit from it in heaven, when the whole world learns a lesson from them.

- [15] That no one should do such things anymore, but rather leave people's possessions be.

And whatever God did not give a man, he should not take himself, and if one is indeed poor, he should not be ashamed of his poverty.

It is better that he [work] hard with his own hands to feed himself, at any type of work, the main thing is to retain his dignity.

Poverty is no shame at all, many people are members of this company, most of them honest and honorable.

**One more moral** will come from this [song], that everyone should punish his child when he is still little.

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<sup>105</sup>Today in the Czech Republic. Czech name: Prostějov, German name: Proßnitz.

[20] And whoever has children in the cradle should bend the tree when it is still young.

Not let them get the upper hand, so that the parents will not endure shame.

Not let any child have his own way, especially not let him win a game.

Therefore, the rod should not be spared, for playing brings no good.

Had the parents of the young *kadosh* not owned nor given him games, he may perhaps still be alive.

[25] They did not forbid it because that is how he sustained them.

Apart from that, one could not detect any evil in him, really. Only that he, unfortunately, let himself be lured into stealing.

Therefore, dear people, no one should let this booklet escape him, [even] spare [food] from your mouth.

Do not care about the little money [it costs], perhaps you may also enjoy their merit.

1. *El male raḥamim*, merciful Father,  
Redeem us quickly, that we should be rid of our exile,  
Withdraw your anger from your people Israel,  
Look favorably upon the merit of the two *kedoshim* who were [executed]  
in the holy community of Prostits.
2. An old man, Leib Wessel was his name,  
He was well known in most Jewish communities of Moravia,  
They said many things about him,  
May his pious soul not be ashamed.
3. The other one was called Perez ben Avram, a mere mortal child,  
A person the like of whom you rarely find,  
He was the only son to his father and mother,  
At the age of twenty-two he became a *kadosh*.
4. A few weeks before he was arrested,  
He became engaged to an orphaned maid.  
Later the engagement was canceled,  
The orphan was not destined to be his wife.
5. Now every person should pray to God, day and night,  
That He should save him from evil thoughts,  
From the Evil Inclination and bad company,  
That seek to tempt human beings.
6. As the *kedoshim* let themselves unfortunately be tempted,  
They discerned an opportunity to steal from a townsman.  
One Wednesday, at midnight,  
They impoverished him.

7. They made a hole in the wall,  
There, unfortunately, they crawled inside.  
It did not take more than an hour,  
For the boxes to be emptied.
8. In the morning of the day before the New Moon of Nissan, a great cry  
broke forth,  
That townsman sent [his people] to all the streets.  
He also had the guards who were on duty at night arrested,  
No one suspected any Jews.
9. In that same room they left behind a pointed piece of iron,  
The townsman carried it around and showed it to everyone.  
In short, a blacksmith recognized the iron:  
“A glazier made this [—]
10. At the same time peasants came and said,  
[—] saw a Jew carrying a big bundle,  
[—] bent to the ground,  
Wanted [—] a horse for three Guldens.”
11. Very quickly the chase began,  
Long enough until [—] asked,  
[—] two miles away to an arendator,  
There Leib Wessel was caught and the stolen goods found.
12. You can well imagine  
How Leib Wessel was brought back to Prostits,  
Tied to a horse and forced to run [behind it],  
For the most part he was dragged.
13. No hat on his head, no shoes on his feet,  
To the [horse] bound with a rope while another man whipped.  
How there was [crying] and lamenting over the disgrace,  
No Jew should experience such a thing again.
14. Close to the Sabbath, when they arrived with him,  
Very quickly afterwards Perez was also caught.  
Had he hidden himself, he could have been saved,  
But the decree had already been made by God.
15. How things developed would take too long to tell,  
How the stolen goods were carried back, piece by piece.  
The blacksmith with the iron, he accused the glazier to his face,  
Accordingly, the glazier was also arrested on that same day.
16. A further woman was put in jail,  
They suspected that her husband took part in it.  
She said: “What do women know about what their husbands do?”  
She was tortured with a thumbscrew, but she withstood it well.

17. Most unfortunately a new executioner was appointed  
Two days after their arrival.  
Leib and Perez confessed right away,  
The glazier did not admit until he was burnt.
18. Now the trial concluded:  
Leib and Perez were to be hanged,  
The Jewess was to be acquitted and released from jail,  
The glazier was to be whipped.
19. The news was announced to them in the town hall,  
Leibl Wessel had to be carried to the town hall.  
He was not strong enough to walk,  
In jail he was always sick and feeble.
20. [When] it was read to them,  
There were still fourteen days until they would meet their deaths.  
They immediately took God into their hearts,  
[—] to die over *Kiddush Hashem*.
21. On the Saturday evening before their death,  
Leibl Wessel [—] great despair.  
He was so weak that his soul barely [—],  
The judge informed the Jewish community leaders.
22. [—] the *shamashim* came to him,  
He pretended [—] to sleep.  
As soon as he noticed [that they were] Jews,  
He was delighted once again.
23. [—] he let his hands be washed,  
He let them recite for him the *vidduy* [confession] prayer immediately.  
He then asked the community leaders diligently,  
Whether they could grant him some grace.
24. “[—] that it cannot be otherwise,  
See that my bones are brought to Jewish burial,  
Inform my son, Zanwel, in Ungarish Brod,<sup>106</sup>  
If he was not killed in that calamity.”
25. How he cried over the bitter decrees.  
He said: “I cannot blame anyone but my great transgressions,  
I, a sinful and guilty man,  
How I regret the transgressions that I committed in my life.
26. “Dear esteemed community leaders, for God’s sake,  
Let the scribe inspect my tefillin,  
Let him see if they are proper,  
With that said, forgive me and good night.”

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<sup>106</sup>Today in the Czech Republic. Czech name: Uherský Brod; German name: Ungarisch Brod.

27. From there the community leaders went with the judge to Perez,  
He received them in such a friendly manner,  
He quickly asked them for forgiveness,  
“Praised be God that I see Jews once again.
28. “Dear people, I entreat you,  
Tell my father that I did not abandon the Jewish faith,  
They should not worry about this at all,  
I would rather go to my death today than tomorrow.
29. “They should not go to great trouble for my sake,  
It was so decreed for me on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah,  
I go to my death with great delight,  
It is better than spending my youth in prison.
30. “I would like to have my hair and nails cut,  
Before I leave this sinful world,  
I would also like a close friend to walk near me,  
That he may be able to relate that I remained loyal to the Jewish faith.
31. “If Jews may otherwise not be tolerated there,  
I ask very much that some will dress up [as non-Jews],  
That they [—] not be hit,  
And be able to [—] my death.”
32. The judge said that it is hard to allow this,  
[—] will permit the shaving of his beautiful hair,  
Perhaps he will still convert.  
He said: “I will surely not live to an old age.
33. “No, I do not think about that at all,  
Even if my life would be spared at the last moment,  
Because for me dying is not a source of sorrow,  
I would even like musicians to accompany me to my death.”
34. The judge said: “We will leave it for now,  
As four or five days still remain,  
You will speak differently in those circumstances.  
Now, Perez, ask for what you would like to eat.”
35. Perez laughed at the [mention of] food.  
He said: “For what purpose? Should I prepare a meal for the birds and  
ravens?!
- I have already put aside eating and drinking  
The past is now gone forever.
36. “Now, dear esteemed community leaders, please tell my father and  
mother  
That they should not cry and lament much over me,  
They should find comfort for what I have done,  
And imagine that I died in the Brod calamity.

37. "I wish to ask you something more.  
All my life I fought for their sake, poor things,  
I helped sustain them, miserable things, in any way I could,  
I shared with them whatever God gave me.
38. "How lonely I leave them in their old age,  
Who will provide or care for them?  
Therefore, my solemn request to you is this,  
Remember those poor people, and do not forsake them.
39. "They should look after my sister H̄ayele's orphaned boy,  
And find comfort in him, I swear,  
Never yield to evil thoughts,  
And learn from my lesson.
40. "Now I want nothing more from this world,  
Only that you should make me trousers and a shirt of coarse linen,  
Definitely do not make me Wallachian trousers,  
That I should not be mocked at the gallows.
41. "I also ask you to make efforts that I will not hang long,  
That my poor body be given a Jewish burial,  
I do not wish to trouble you anymore than this,  
In these few [remaining] days, do come and visit me."
42. The community leaders were very much comforted by his words.  
They said: "Blessed be you and your soul,  
We ask you, for God's sake, say nothing bad about their faith,  
So that you will not put the Jewish public, God forbid, in any danger."
43. And when it was three days before [the execution],  
How firmly the prison doors were held closed,  
No Jew was allowed in to determine their wellbeing,  
Day and night the priests pestered them.
44. Both their prayer books and tefillin were confiscated,  
They thought they could persuade them.  
They said: "Do not waste [the words of] your mouths,  
Jews we were born, Jews we shall die."
45. "Perez, convert!  
You can still become an honorable man,  
You may have both this world and the kingdom of heaven,  
Such a fine lad, how sad that the ravens should eat your body."
46. Perez said: "I have already given up my life,  
I have no concerns about the kingdom of heaven nor eternal life,  
And if I were to convert,  
Then truly, in the end, I would become nothing other than a proper Jew  
again.

47. "And if I were to agree to be baptized,  
I would run away at the last moment.  
Therefore, I ask you, give me peace of mind,  
And just let me die a Jew."
48. The judge was asked to allow Jews to visit them.  
He said: "They are no longer in my power,  
However, should the priests wish to allow Jews to visit them,  
Then I would also be very pleased."
49. On Thursday, early in the morning, when they were to be hanged,  
Their wedding clothes were brought before the judge.  
He said: "They should be dressed in these clothes."  
But they were given no *arba' kanfot*.
50. Therefore, people in the Jewish community could not help but think,  
And assume that they had been swayed away from the Jewish faith.  
But they suspected innocent people,  
As you will read below.
51. The outcome of the aforementioned new executioner, [his behavior] and  
his great joy,  
Surely displeased God, blessed be He,  
That man lost his mind one day before [the execution],  
He now runs barefoot in the forests like a wild animal.
52. These remarkable things were noticed,  
That the *kedoshim* possessed great merits.  
The executions had to be carried out by other hangmen,  
That same hangman was neither seen nor heard of again.
53. On Holy Thursday morning, between seven and eight o'clock,  
People were eager to see the great event,  
People from a radius of ten miles gathered en masse,  
It was just before the day of the big weekly market prior to their holidays.
54. The Jewish community did not know what to do,  
Whether to stay in their houses or [go] to the market square.  
The conclusion was reached, not to hide,  
That they should not arouse any more hatred of the Jews.
55. The hangmen dragged Leib Wessel, bound up, out of prison,  
They threw him on a garbage cart.  
Perez was led on foot close by,  
The glazier was given brooms [to hold] in his hands.
56. In the market square a big announcement was made before them,  
The glazier was bound naked to the pillory.  
How horribly they treated him,  
They gave him thirty-one lashes.

57. Every lash that was given,  
 Blood splattered cubits away,  
 He was bound tightly to the column,  
 Each scream could be heard from a quarter of a mile away.
58. The priests said: “Did you see what happened to the glazier?  
 Well, soon the glazier will watch you too.  
 Therefore, you should still convert,  
 Truly you may find grace.”
59. “No,” they said, “leave the matter be.”  
 Perez walked quite energetically, dancing and laughing.  
 They kept on saying: “Leave us alone.”  
 They were taken to the Olomouc Gate.<sup>107</sup>
60. Leib Wessel cried out from the wagon with a clear voice, *Shema Yisrael*  
 and *Adonai hu ha-Elohim*.  
 Perez asked the public for forgiveness from afar,  
 The priests did not allow any Jew to come near them.
61. And as they were already standing in front of the gate,  
 Half of the Jewish community was behind and in front of them,  
 On one side Jews were chased away,  
 On the other side they nevertheless ran there.
62. It is impossible to describe the massive crowd that gathered there,  
 No one within a radius of ten miles stayed at home,  
 They came on foot and on horse [to see] the hanged men,  
 You could not drop an apple to the ground.
63. When they were not far from the gallows,  
 The priests said: “Now you have time,  
 Do you wish to become blessed? Tell us now,  
 Because soon it will be your last hour.”
64. “No,” they told them. “We will not sin against the God of the Jews,  
 Just do quickly what you want to do.”  
 How quickly the executioners carried Leib Wessel up the ladder,  
 With a loud voice he cried *Adonai hu ha-Elohim* and *Shema Yisrael*.
65. Before you could take a look,  
 It was already all over for him.  
 With Perez they lingered more,  
 The priests still persisted greatly with him.
66. And when they saw that he will not be moved from faith in the One,  
 Very angrily they let him go on,  
 “If you do not wish to follow us,  
 Then go up there, to the high gallows.”

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<sup>107</sup>Olomouc (German Olmütz) is some 20 km northeast of Prostějov.

67. How happy Perez was that he was done with that,  
With joy he called on his Heavenly Father,  
He sang with a clear voice *Adonai hu ha-Elohim* and *Shema Yisrael*,  
So that the whole square resonated.
68. Rabbi Elchanan the Shamash with a few people,  
Stood nevertheless a gunshot away.  
They heard so clearly how he sang *Shema Yisrael*,  
That they answered *baruch shem kevod*.
69. As soon as Rabbi Elchanan the Shamash saw that they had been hanged,  
Very quickly he ran to the rabbi, the *av beit din*, to bring him the news,  
“Dear Rabbi, they have been saved already,  
They performed a firm act of *Kiddush Hashem* in public.”
70. Very quickly the rabbi recited a blessing,  
“Blessed is his fate,”<sup>108</sup> he said.  
He cried like a little child,  
See, dear people, how quickly one can win the world to come.
71. Men and women went to Perez’s father and mother,  
“Do not cry, get up from the ground,  
Do not let his death cause you sorrow,  
He will bring you great happiness in the world to come.
72. “You could not have known how he would meet his end,  
Nevertheless, today you can enjoy his merit,  
He would not have lived forever and would die,  
Where could you have found such a meaningful sacrifice?”
73. We left this song waiting until now,  
In the hope that we could also write about their burial.  
Well, they were saved, thank God,  
And they were buried on Wednesday night, *parashat Korah*.
74. The following day was Thursday, third of Tammuz,  
Among those who took care of the mitzvah [of their burial] was also the  
aforementioned Rabbi Elchanan Shamash.  
At their burial everyone was happy,  
No one wailed over them.
75. In a fine meadow they lie at peace,  
Far away from the gallows, near the small village of Drshovits.<sup>109</sup>  
If travelers wish to ask the whereabouts of their graves,  
They may say *atah gibor* there.

<sup>108</sup>The Aramaic phrase *זכאה חולקיהו* translates into Hebrew as *אשרי חלקו*.

<sup>109</sup>The village of Držovice, some 3 km northeast of Prostějov.

76. Almighty God, when You remember the merit of the *'akedah*,  
Please remember these two *kedoshim* as well,  
And save your people Israel from all evil,  
And send the Messiah to redeem us.
77. Well, dear people, young and old, big and small,  
Let this serve you as an example and a lesson.  
From now on, do not let anyone mislead you to do evil,  
Thus, we will be so lucky that *u-vah le-z'iyon go'el ve-khen yehi rāzon*.<sup>110</sup>

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78. This song is not offered at any set price,  
For it was printed as a godly book.  
Therefore, the more one pays for it,  
The longer may he live.

This song was composed by Ḥayyim son of R. Shalom from the States of Poland who just recently visited the holy community of Prostitis.

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<sup>110</sup>Heb. "The redeemer may come to Zion and may it be His will."