

*IN SIGNUM BENEVOLI AFFECTUS III*  
MENASSEH BEN ISRAEL'S ALBUM INSCRIPTION FOR  
NATHANAEL VECHNER

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Abstract

In April 1653, Menasseh ben Israel entered an inscription in the album amicorum owned by the Silesian student Nathanael Vechner. This article, the third in a series on Menasseh's album inscriptions, comprises a biographical sketch of Vechner; followed by a photograph, a transcription, a translation and an analysis of the inscription itself.

Keywords

Menasseh ben Israel; *album amicorum*; Nathanael Vechner; Silesia; Danzig

Nathanael Vechner<sup>1</sup> (also Wechner, or Wegner) was probably born in 1626, in the town of Beuthen, Silesia (now Bytom Odrzński, Poland). His father, the learned theologian Georg Vechner (1590–1647),<sup>2</sup> was a professor at the local gymnasium at that time. In 1648 Nathanael attended the Gymnasium of Danzig,<sup>3</sup> where he was a pupil of the well-known professor of eloquence, Johann Mochinger (1603–1652),<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Menasseh ben Israel's album inscriptions discovered so far, see F. Postma and A. Verheij, 'In Signum Benevoli Affectus I. Seven Album Inscriptions by Menasseh ben Israel,' *Zutot* 6.1 (2009) 35–47 and idem, 'In Signum Benevoli Affectus II. Menasseh ben Israel's Album Inscription for Johann Heinrich Hottinger,' *Zutot* 7.1 (2010) 75–79 (to be referred to as ISBA I and ISBA II, respectively). We would like to thank Dr. Diana Łancucka (Wrocław), Mr. Tonnis Musschenga (Groningen), Dr. Karen Robson (Southampton), Dr. Stefania Sychta (Gdańsk), and Prof. Waclaw Walecki (Kraków).

<sup>2</sup> D. Nauta, *Samuel Maresius* (Amsterdam 1935) 313.

<sup>3</sup> Z. Nowak and P. Szafran, *Catalogus discipulorum Gymnasii Gedanensis, 1580–1814* (Warszawa/Poznań 1974) 161, Nr. 92: 'Sept. 1648: Nathanael Vechnerus, Beithaniensis Sil.'

<sup>4</sup> D. van Stekelenburg, *Michael Albinus 'Dantiscanus' (1610–1653). Eine Fallstudie zum Danziger Literaturbarock* (Amsterdam 1987), s.v. Unfortunately, Mochinger's album amicorum,

who had made Menasseh's acquaintance in Amsterdam during his own *peregrinatio academica*. In August 1649, Vechner enrolled as a student of theology at the University of Groningen,<sup>5</sup> where he also met the famous orientalist Jacobus Alting (1618–1679).<sup>6</sup> He continued his studies in Franeker<sup>7</sup> and Leyden.<sup>8</sup> His visit to Menasseh took place in April 1653. In September of that year we find him in Basle, where he met the Hebrew scholar Johann Buxtorf the younger (1599–1664).<sup>9</sup> In May 1654, he visited Cambridge. After the completion of his studies, Vechner returned to Danzig, where he served as a pastor at the reformed Church of Peter and Paul from 1655 until 1675.<sup>10</sup> He died on October 11, 1680, at the age of 54.<sup>11</sup> Vechner's *album amicorum*, catalogued as *Eulogies in Praise of Nathaniel Vechner*, is kept in the Hartley Library, University of Southampton, as MS 17 [A 20]. The single folios have no numbering.

הכל צפוי והרשות נתונה ובטוב  
העולם נדון והכל לפי רוב המעשה

לפי צערא אגרא

*Praestantissimo viro*  
*D. Nathanaeli Vechnero*  
*in signum benevoli*  
*affectus, pauca haec*  
*lubens scribebat*  
*Menasseh ben Israel*

*Amstelodami*  
*Aprilis 5413*

which had been kept in the university library of Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland), appeared missing after World War II.

<sup>5</sup> *Album studiosorum Academiae Groninganae* (Groningen 1915) 60. Here in 1651, Vechner held two *disputationes theologicae* under the supervision of Samuel Maresius and Abdias Widmaris, respectively.

<sup>6</sup> Vechner's *album amicorum* contains an inscription by Alting, dated 1652.

<sup>7</sup> S.J. Fockema Andreae and Th.J. Meijer, *Album studiosorum Academiae Franekerensis, 1585–1811, 1816–1844* (Franeker 1968) 156, Nr. 5215: 'Nathanael Wechnerus, Polonus.'

<sup>8</sup> *Album studiosorum Academiae Lugduno Batavae* (Hagae Comitum 1875) 420 (April 27, 1652), resp. 440 (October 26, 1654, 'T[h]eologiae] Cand[idatus]').

<sup>9</sup> The *album* contains an inscription by Buxtorf.

<sup>10</sup> In 1657, Vechner held a public sermon for the deceased Sybilla Margaretha, Princess of Brieg and Liegnitz.

<sup>11</sup> E. Praetorius, *Danziger Lehrer Gedächtniß* (Danzig/Leipzig 1760) 26. Cf. E.D. Schnaase, 'Die böhmischen Brüder in Polen und die Reformirten in Danzig,' *Zeitschrift für die historische Theologie* (Gotha), XXXVII (1867) 152 n. 49, with additional information provided by Dr. Stefania Sychta, PAN Biblioteka Gdańska, Gdańsk.

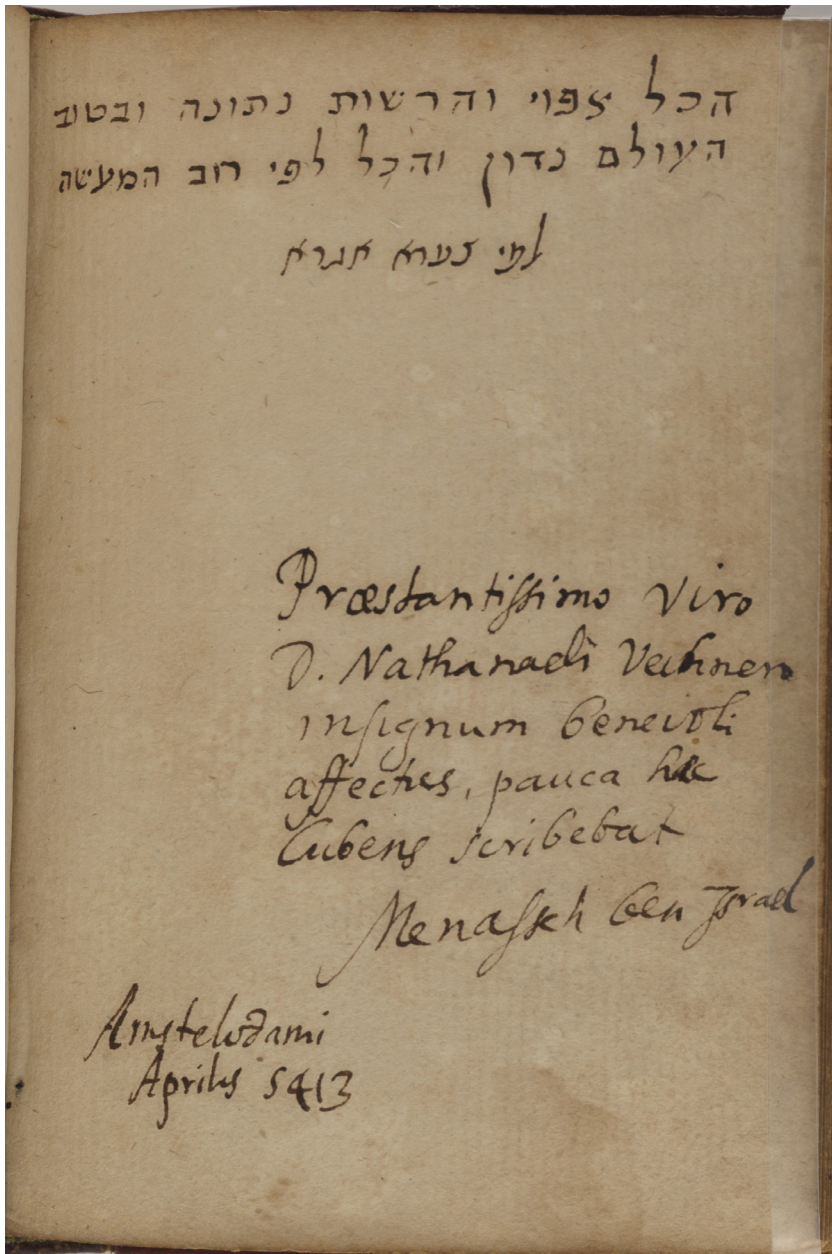


Fig. 1. Inscription for Nathanael Vechner (courtesy: Hartley Library, University of Southampton).

[Hebr.] 'All is foreseen, but freedom of choice is given; and the world is judged by grace, yet all is according to the excess of works' (*Pirque Avot* 3.16).<sup>12</sup>

[Aram.] 'According to the suffering so is the reward' (*Pirque Avot* 5.23).<sup>13</sup>

[Dedication] For the outstanding gentleman, Mister Nathanael Vechner, Menasseh ben Israel with pleasure wrote these few words, as a token of his well-wishing affection. Amsterdam, April 5413 (1653).

As far as the Hebrew and Aramaic epigrams are concerned, the inscription is identical to the one that Menasseh wrote for Zauschliffer in 1654 (ISBA I, 43), including the use of square and rabbinic script for the Hebrew and Aramaic words, respectively (ISBA I, 36). The Hebrew line is also used in the inscriptions for Gerhard and Arnold (ISBA I, 39, 41). Menasseh appears to have been particularly fond of this passage. The reading לְפִי instead of לְפִיּוֹם in the present Aramaic quotation may be an error induced by the preceding Hebrew line.

Menasseh's single-term qualification of Vechner, *praestantissimo viro*, is quite plain in comparison with the other dedications.

The dating of the inscription, *Aprilis 5413*, is a combination of Gregorian month and Jewish year, in line with the other inscriptions except the two earliest ones—Hottinger (dated 1640, ISBA II) and Meisner (dated 1645, ISBA I, 37)—that have full Gregorian datings. Unlike all other inscriptions, the present one lacks a specification of the day.

The inscription in this particular *album amicorum* is a piece of evidence adding to what has been noted by Cecil Roth about Menasseh's relations with Christian scholars from Silesia. As mentioned earlier,<sup>14</sup> Menasseh received a message from Abraham von Franckenberg in 1645. According to Roth, Von Franckenberg was 'one of the leading figures in intellectual life in Silesia,' who 'commended the rabbi enthusiastically to his friends, giving letters of introduction to any who visited Holland.'<sup>15</sup> His 'acquaintance with Menasseh was perhaps due in the

<sup>12</sup> The translation is from H. Danby, *The Mishnah. Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford 1933) 452.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 458.

<sup>14</sup> ISBA I, 37.

<sup>15</sup> C. Roth, *A Life of Menasseh ben Israel. Rabbi, Printer, and Diplomat* (Philadelphia 1934) 158.

first instance to his friend and colleague, Johann Mochinger [*sic*] [...], from 1630 Professor of Eloquence at the Gymnasium of Danzig.<sup>16</sup> On Mochinger, Roth adds that he ‘was in Amsterdam, where he made Menasseh’s acquaintance,’ and that he ‘indeed, never seems to have tired of singing Menasseh’s praises.’<sup>17</sup> It is very likely, then, that Mochinger should have encouraged his pupil Nathanael Vechner to pay a visit to the great rabbi.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 159f.

