The Zaks Parokhet from Prague (1602): Sacred Object, Local Liturgy, and Familial Memory

Rachel L Greenblatt, Harvard University, USA

ABSTRACT: The Zaks parokhet, donated to Prague’s Altnenschul by Nathan, known as Karpel Zaks and his wife Hadasi in 1602, provides a framework through which to view the intersection of liturgy, memory and material culture in one early modern Jewish community. The parokhet’s role as a memorial to its donor is not apparent, however, by examining the object in isolation. In seeking to understand this Torah curtain’s meaning for its donor and the worshippers who used it, I consider its graphic and material design, contemporaneous texts and additional ceremonial objects from Prague and its environs, with particular concern to the memorial functions of each. While little evidence exists to inform of us of how the Zaks parokhet may have differed in these regards from its medieval predecessors, inscriptions from objects dating from later periods attest to changes that occurred as early as the latter part of the seventeenth century and continued into later modern times.

This presentation is for the following text(s):
- Compendium of Memorial Prayers
- Memorial Prayers from the Pinkas Synagogue, Prague

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Volume 4: Jewish Consumption and Material Culture in the Early Modern Period, 2007, University of Maryland

Compendium of Memorial Prayers
Pinkas hazkarat neshamot
approx. 15th to 18th c.

Translated by Rachel L Greenblatt, Harvard University, USA

Notes: Also known as “The Altneschul Memorbuch”

May God remember the soul of the leader, ‘ruler of the people’[1] of our holy community here in Prague, who spent most of his days on earth attending to the needs of the public in [good] faith, and [thanks to] his lobbying [they] found shelter in dangerous times. It is he who with honor and glory brought to the house of our Lord a Torah scroll with rods of silver, a Torah curtain and the rest of the holy accoutrements, costing several hundred, and sanctified them. His foot stood on level ground[2] and [went on] a straight path. The honorable Rabbi Nathan son of Issachar z”l called Karpel Zak z”l. And because his son-in-law the Rabbi Avinadav (sic) David gave charity for the eternal memory of his soul, by this merit may his soul be bound in the bond of life of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah and with the rest of the pure, righteous [men and women] who are in the Garden of Eden. And let us say ‘Amen.’

Endnotes

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Publisher: Never published, to the best of my knowledge, even excerpts are quite rare.
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Compendium of Memorial Prayers
An Introduction

Rachel L. Greenblatt

Zaks parokhet - Torah curtain donated by Natan Zaks, 1602
Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague

Torah curtain donated by Yokev ben Anshel and his wife Slava bat Ozer Devidels - 1658
Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague

Torah mantle donated by Simon [Spira] and his wife Haya, 1662
Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague

Torah mantel donated by the midwife Beila, 1696
Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague

Parokhet - Torah curtain donated by Deila wife of Moses Abeles, 1690
Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague

Parokhet
parokhet - Torah curtain donated by Leib son of Gershon Karpels and his wife Esther daughter of Barukh Tilles, 1696
Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague

Pinkas hazkarat neshamot - Compendium of memorial prayers
Kovets beit knesset Altniushol, The Altneuschul Memorbuch
Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague

Copyright © 2012 Early Modern Workshop
Torah curtain donated by Natan Zaks, 1602
Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague

Jewish Museum of Prague,
Inventory number 27.391
Torah curtain, 1658
Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague

Jewish Museum Prague, Inventory no. 2.237
Torah mantle donated by Simon [Spira] and his wife Haya, 1662
Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague

Jewish Museum Prague,
Inventory no.
40.621
Torah mantel donated by the midwife Beila, 1696
Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague
JMP Inv. no. 40.096
Torah curtain donated by Deila wife ŠÝof Moses Abeles, 1690
Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Prague

JMP Inv no. 27.386
Torah curtain donated by Leib son of Gershon Karpels and his wife Esther daughter of Barukh Tilles, 1696

Courtesy of the [Jewish Museum of Prague](http://www.jewishmuseum.cz/)

JMP Inv no. 27.397
To inform and to notify:

And [because] of what they had seen: they decided to institute a new pinkas hazkarat neshamot hakedoshim (notebook of commemorations for the holy souls) who are in the earth, may their memory be for a blessing Who gave of their hearts and brought sacred vessels and sacred vestments as a memory in the sanctuary of the Lord And they made an explicit condition that their souls (i.e., their names) be remembered on Sabbath and festivals. And indeed, in the pinkas hazkarot that was previously in the Pinkas Synagogue from the year 5461 (1701), a book in the form of a scroll, was written about them everything that they vowed and that they donated And until now the cantor would recite from that pinkas However, they wrote there at great length what they vowed (i.e., donated), and it is not necessary to recite [all] this, for it is clear to heaven And it was a great inconvenience to the congregation, and it was also impossible to recite more than two or three hazkarot on a single Sabbath Because of this, it was impossible – God forbid – to complete the entire pinkas in a single year. And it was also impossible to make any sign [indicating] where the cantor concluded on a particular Sabbath, and where another cantor should begin the following week. Because of this, individuals of unique qualities donated to this synagogue to make this pinkas with signs and narrow slots. At the outset, the hazkarot were divided into [paragraphs], marked “a,” “b,” [and so on], a defined portion for each Sabbath with a line of separations between them. And a needle will be as a sign to close and to open So that the cantor the following Sabbath will begin in the place where the silver needle is fixed And when he has finished the special portion for that Sabbath, then he will put [the needle] in the slot following it, and in this manner, all the mistakes have been corrected And in order to beautify it, we wrote inside [the pinkas] everything that belongs and is needed by the cantor at that hour (i.e., at that point in the service) May God be as our helper, and send his messiah quickly in our days, Amen Renewed by officers, functionaries and assessors, and donated
by individuals of unique qualities of the Pinkas Synagogue on the New Moon of Elul in the year 5561 (1801) So states Judah Leib Graf, scribe in Prague.

Endnotes


[2] Slots were formed by attaching a narrow piece of paper on top of the manuscript, fixed at the top and the bottom and open in the middle, so that a needle could be inserted horizontally.

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Pinkas Hahazkarot, Beit Hakenesset Pinhas
1801

Prepared by Rachel L Greenblatt, Harvard University, USA

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