Der Hildesheimer Rabbiner Samuel Hamlen

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Rabbi Samuel Hameln of Hildesheim

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In the year 1609, when the plague raged, the Jews of Hildesheim had to leave because they were accused of introducing the devastating epidemic and settled in the adjoining episcopal areas Steuerwald and Marienburg. Soon afterwards, the Jews were accepted back to the city and received the permission from prince-bishop Ernst II (1573-1612) to appoint their own rabbi of the city and Hochstift of Hildesheim. After his death, the Jews of Hildesheim approached his successor Ferdinand (1612-1650) with the request to appoint a rabbi. The answer received was that the Jewish community should suggest two or three qualified people who could fit the position and the prince-bishop would then choose the rabbi. In 1618 the Jews of Hildesheim were allowed to appoint any one as they wish. In addition, they received the permission to impose fines, make decisions when disputes occur and settle compromises. Among the appointed, honourable rabbis of the 17th century was rabbi Samuel Hameln, who lived and worked in Hildesheim.

His parents were Josef and Freudche Hameln and their marriage resulted in three daughters and six sons. His father, a pious Jewish scholar, sent him, as was usual in these times, to Poland to study Torah. In Poland, Hameln also met his wife Lena, who was the daughter of rabbi Meshullam from Lvov. There, Hameln listened to lectures of Talmud and religious studies with such dedication and became a rabbi himself. With his wife Samuel Hamel returned to his hometown, where at first, his father supported the young family. Hamel was firstly mentioned in the "Jewish letter of consignment of the city Hildesheim" from the year 1660, where his was named as one of the Jewish residents of Hildesheim. In addition, he is mentioned in bishop Maximilian Heinrich's letter of safe conduct of 1662 under the name "Rabbi Shmuel". It is unclear how long he acted as the rabbi of Hildesheim. Records exist of him – already in 1668 – being out of office and an active member of the Chevra Kadisha. Presumably, for unknown reasons to us, he stepped down from his position as a rabbi which was filled in 1671 by Rabbi Mordechai Cohen. For almost two decades (from 1669-1687) Rabbi Shmuel worked with dedication as a community leader until his death in 1687. His community felt deep sorrow for the loss of their former spiritual leader, who worked most of his life for the benefit of the community of Hildesheim.

Addendum

Annexed to the dissertation are several letters from the 17th century which served as resource material.