In the academic circles of seventeenth-century Europe, it was fashionable to own an album amicorum (German: Stammbuch), a pocket book in which one’s friends would enter proverbs, short poems, dedications and the like. Not only personal friends, but specifically professors and public personalities as well were often invited to ‘write a few words’ in honour of the album’s owner—whose purpose it was to collect and boast as many of these contacts as possible, in order to build his personal network in the Republic of Letters.

It is therefore only logical that also some so-called album inscriptions by Menasseh ben Israel (1604–1657), rabbi, printer, diplomat,1 and one of the leading Jewish intellectuals in his day, should have survived. In fact, at this point we have collected seven such inscriptions, spanning a period of ten years (1645–1655) and all written in Amsterdam, which we present below.2

1 C. Roth, A Life of Menasseh ben Israel. Rabbi, Printer, and Diplomat (Philadelphia 1934).
2 For this article we contacted the University Libraries of Amsterdam and Leyden; the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam; the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague; the British Library, London; the Universitätsbibliothek, Bochum; the Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek, Hamburg; the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel; the Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart; the Öffentliche Bibliothek der Universität Basel; the Vadianische Sammlung, St. Gallen; the Konelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen; the Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm; the Széchényi National Library, Budapest; the Library of the Academia România, filiala Cluj, Cluj-Napoca; the Library of the Protestáns Teológiai Intézet, Cluj-Napoca. We also consulted the following two databases: IAA ‘Inscriptiones Alborum Amicorum, Database of 16–18th century album amicorum entries of Hungarian relevance’ by M. Latzkovits, University of Szeged (http://susu.cs.jgytf.u-szeged.hu/~latzkovits); RAA ‘Repertorium Alborum Amicorum, Internationales Verzeichnis von Stammbüchern und Stammbuchfragmenten in öffentlichen und privaten Sammlungen’ by WW. Schnabel, University of Erlangen (http://www.raa.phil.uni-erlangen.de). Cf. K. Thomassen, ed., Alba Amicorum—Vijf eeuwen vriendschap op papier gezet: Het Album Amicorum en het Poëziealbum in de Nederlanden (Maarssen/ ’s-Gravenhage 1990) 173–175, for an extensive bibliography on alba amicorum. Two inscriptions by Menasse were published earlier (Meisner, cf. n. 6, Arnold, cf. n. 17), one is mentioned in a catalogue (Gerhard, cf. n. 12), the other four are now published in English for the first time (cf. in Dutch, F. Postma and A.J.C. Verheij, ‘Vijf
The albums in which Menasseh is now known to have written a ‘few words’ belonged to Christian scholars of philosophy and theology from Germany, Hungary, Switzerland and the Low Countries, most of whom came to Amsterdam as part of their *peregrinatio academica*—an academic journey during which they would visit several European universities.

A detailed analysis of Menasseh’s *Umfeld* as an inscriber (who were the others to contribute to these specific albums, and what does that tell us about how the albums’ owners saw Menasseh?) is beyond the scope of this article. Also, the results could never be conclusive, given the small number of inscriptions that we have.3 It is our impression, however, that as far as Amsterdam is concerned, our seven album owners were particularly interested in meeting the spiritual and intellectual leaders of that city. One name that recurs in several albums is that of Stephanus Curcellaeus (Etienne de Courcelles, 1586–1659), the well-known professor at the Remonstrant Seminary of Amsterdam.

The seven inscriptions conform to the two-part structure that is often found in *alba*. The first part contains proverbs and maxims taken mostly from Jewish traditional literature, starting out with a Hebrew quotation from *Pirqe Avot*, in square script. In the inscription dedicated to Christoph Arnold (see p. 41) this is the only element of this part. Then follows a more general and succinct saying or proverb. In four cases we have an Aramaic saying, written in rabbinic script. One is again a quotation from *Pirqe Avot* (Johan Albert Zaunschliffer, p. 44), the other three comprise Hillel’s Golden Rule from *Shabbath* 31a (Johann Meisner, István Pauli, Benedek Árkosi, pp. 37, 42 and 45 resp.). Two albums (Johann Ernst Gerhard, Johann Zollikofer, pp. 39 and 47 resp.) have Latin maxims. Meisner, the earliest of these inscriptions, has an additional proverb in Arabic.

The second part of each inscription is a Latin dedication testifying to Menasseh’s esteem for the album’s owner, with reference to the quotations (‘few words’) of the first part. It closes with Menasseh’s signature, which in most cases (not in the inscriptions dedicated to Gerhard and Arnold, both from June 1650) is syntactically part of the dedication, and the place and date of the inscription. The year of the date is

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36 ferenc postma and arian verheij
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*album-inscripties van Menasseh ben Israel—Een eerste kennismaking*, in *Alef Beet* 11/2 (2001) 23–32. After the completion of this article, we discovered one further inscription by Menasseh which we hope to publish in due course.

Jewish, except in Meisner, whereas day and month are expressed in the Christian calendar. Curiously, the earliest and latest of our Latin dedications (Meisner, Zollikofer) are almost identical in wording. The inscriptions are presented here in chronological order.

**Inscription Dedicated to Johann Meisner, Amsterdam, April 15, 1645**

Johann Meisner was born in Torgau on April 4, 1615, into a Lutheran family. A Wittenberg Magister, he travelled to France, passing through the Low Countries (i.a. Leyden). In Amsterdam he paid a visit to Menasseh, bringing a message from Abraham von Franckenberg (1593–1652), a ‘disciple’ of Jacob Böhme. He became a professor of Theology at Wittenberg University, where he died in 1681. The few remains of his album amicorum are kept in the State and University Library, Hamburg [Sup. ep. 28]. Menasseh’s inscription is on fol. 159r. It differs from the other ones presented here in that it has three proverbs, and a completely Christian dating.6

ןויס קער ותמלוכתה וברוחה והועלמה עצלאב וביגל ליבית דודק
מא עעלז סימ ל_ANDROID לא עבד
عالم بلا عمل כسحب בלא מטר

Virtute doctrinaque ornatissimo
D. JOANNI MEISNERO
in signum benevoli affectus
Amstelod. M D CXLV
15. Aprilis

Pauca haec lubens scribebat
Menasseh ben Israel

[Hebr.] ‘The day is short and the task is great and the labourers are idle [and the wage is abundant]7 and the master of the house is urgent.’ (Pirqe Avot 2.15).8

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4 Roth, A Life, 158f.
6 The inscription was published (with תעשה instead of תעבד, and dated April 25) by M. Grunwald in Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums 41 [N.F. 5] (1897) 573. Basing himself on this publication, Roth, A Life, 159, reads the inscription as evidence of unwillingness, ‘grim humor’ and ‘sarcasm’ on Menasseh’s part.
7 The words, ‘and the wage is abundant’ (ומأخذ רבדה), are lacking in Menasseh’s text.
[Aram.] ‘What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbour’ (Shabbath 31a).9

[Arab.] ‘A scholar without doings is like a cloud without rain.’10

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[Dedication] For mister Johann Meisner, so well endowed with virtue and learning, Menasseh ben Israel with pleasure wrote these few words, as a token of his well-wishing affection.

_Inscription Dedicated to Johann Ernst Gerhard, Amsterdam, June 11, 1650_

Johann Ernst Gerhard the elder was born in Jena on December 15, 1621, into a Lutheran family. He read Oriental languages, Philosophy and Theology at several universities. As a _Magister_ he made his academic tour, and in the Netherlands he visited the universities of Groningen, Franeker, Utrecht and Leyden. In 1652 he became a professor of History and later of Theology at the University of Jena, where he died on February 24, 1668.\(^{11}\) Gerhard’s album amicorum is kept in the private collection of the late M. Hertzberger.\(^{12}\) Among the other inscribers is Stephanus Curcellaeus. Menasseh’s inscription is on fol. 89r:

> ובל תופי התרשח ותנוה בט fgets
> העול נזガイド וחל ל הפועל המושם

_Spe et patientia_

_Clarissimo et eruditissimo_

_D. M. Johanni Ernesto Gerardo in signum amicitiae scripsi_

_Amstelodami XI. Jun. An. 5410_

_Menasseh ben Israel_

[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’ (_Pirqe Avot_ 3.16).\(^{13}\)

[Lat.] With hope and patience.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{11}\) Jöcher, _Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon_, II, 951f.


\(^{13}\) Transl. Danby, _The Mishnah_, 452.

\(^{14}\) We have not been able to determine whether this really is a proverb. Separately, the words may have been taken to refer to virtues. A completely unrelated German album from 1680 contains an inscription saying: ‘Durch Hoffnung und Geduld, erlangt man Gottes Huld’ (A. Buck and M. Bircher, eds., _Respublica Guelpherbytana, Wolfenbütteler Beiträge_)
Inscription Dedicated to Christoph Arnold, Amsterdam, June 14, 1650

Christoph Arnold was born in Hersbrück near Nuremberg on April 12, 1627, into a Lutheran family. He read Theology and Philosophy at the University of Altdorf, where he obtained the degree of Magister in 1649. His academic tour through the Netherlands (Groningen, Utrecht, Leyden) and Great Britain lasted from 1649 till 1652. Arnold became a professor of Greek, Rhetoric, Poetry and History at the Aegidien-Gymnasium of Nuremberg, where he died in 1685. His album amicorum is kept in the British Library, London (MS Egerton 1.324). Among the other inscribers is the English poet John Milton (1608–1674). Menasseh’s inscription is on fol. 26r.


15 Arnold is mentioned among ‘Menasseh’s friends’ by Roth, A Life, 168.
17 The inscription is mentioned (and dated 1651) in Blom, Christoph & Andreas Arnold,
Menasseh ben Israel

\[\text{Hebr.}] \text{‘All is foreseen, but freedom of choice is given; and the world is judged by grace, yet all is according to the excess of works’ (Pirqe Avot 3.16).}^{18}\]

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[Dedication] For the outstanding and most learned Magister Christoph Arnold, I wrote (the above words) with pleasure for the sake of remembrance and friendship.

Inscription Dedicated to István Pauli, Amsterdam, October 1, 1653

István Pauli (or Paulini, and also known as István Pauli Stennarius) was probably born in 1631 in the town of Kolozsvár (now Cluj-Napoca, Romania) into a Unitarian family. Together with Benedek Árkosi (see below), he read Philosophy and Theology in Frankfurt/Oder (1651), Leyden (1653), and elsewhere. He was appointed professor of Theology at the Unitarian College of Kolozsvár in 1661, where he died November 5, 1672. Pauli’s album amicorum is kept in the Library of the Romanian Academy of Sciences, Cluj-Napoca [Ms. U. 1]. Among the other inscribers are Stephanus Curcellaeus, and Arnoldus Poelenburg (one of Curcellaeus’ students at the Remonstrant Seminary of Amsterdam). The inscription by Menasseh is on fol. 55r.

מא אני אני יל ולכשאתי לא עכשו
ואני אני לא עכשו אמת
אני עליך מי לא חביר
Praestantissimo ac eruditissimo viro, D. Stephano
Paulini philosophiae ac
Theologiae studioso, in
signum benevolentiae gratia paucia haec lubens scribavit
Amstelodami
mi 1. Octob.
An. 5414
Menasseh ben Israel

[Hebr.] ‘If I am not for myself who is for me? and being for mine own self what am I? and if not now, when?’ (Pirqes Avot 1.14).21

19 Unitarianism, denying the Trinity, was mostly regarded as a heresy by mainstream Christendom.
20 G. Kathona, ‘Erdélyi unitárius tanulók külföldön 1711-ig’ (Unitarian Students from Transylvania Abroad Until the Year 1711), in Keresztény Magvető 85 (1979) 30–39, esp. 34, M. Szabó and S. Tonk, Erdélyiek egyetemjárása a korai újkorbán, 1521–1700 (Students from Transylvania at Western European Universities during the Early Modern Period, 1521–1700), Fontes Rerum Scholasticae, IV (Szegez 1992) 264 (nr. 2649).
[Aram.] ‘What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbour’ (Shabbath 31a).22

[Dedication] For the outstanding and most learned mister István Paulini, a student of Philosophy and Theology, Menasseh ben Israel with pleasure wrote these few serious words, as a token of his well-wishing.

Inscription Dedicated to Johan Albert Zaunschliffer, Amsterdam, April 27, 1654

Johan Albert Zaunschliffer23 was born in Amersfoort in 1634. From 1651 to 1655, he read Theology and Oriental Languages in Groningen, where his father was then a minister. He himself became a Reformed minister as well in 1657, eventually in Oostzaan, where he died 1678.24 Zaunschliffer’s album amicorum is kept in the University Library of Amsterdam [Ms. XXV C 27]. Menasseh’s inscription is on fol. 74r.

22 Transl. Freedman, Babylonian Talmud.
23 Roth, A Life, 168: ‘Albrecht Zaunschleifer’.
Inscription for Johan Albert Zaunschliffer (courtesy: University Library, Amsterdam)

[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’ (Pirqe Avot 3.16).\textsuperscript{25}

[Aram.] ‘According to the suffering so is the reward’ (Pirqe Avot 5.23).\textsuperscript{26}

[Dedication] For the outstanding, most learned mister Johan Albert Zaunschliffer, Menasseh ben Israel with pleasure wrote these few words as a testimony of his affection.

\textsuperscript{25} Transl. Danby, \textit{The Mishnah}, 452.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 458.
Inscription Dedicated to Benedek Árkosi, Amsterdam, May 15, 1654

Benedek Árkosi, like his younger friend István Pauli, descended from a Unitarian family in Transylvania. Together they read Philosophy and Theology in Frankfurt/Oder, Leyden, and elsewhere. On his return in 1654, he was appointed professor of Theology at the Unitarian College of Kolozsvár. He died in 1661.²⁷

Árkosi’s album amicorum is kept in the Library of the Protestant Theological Institute, Cluj-Napoca (Romania) [Ms. 106]. Among the other inscribers are the Remonstrant Stephanus Curcellaeus (inscription dated May 13, 1654) and the Amsterdam Mennonite minister Galenus Abrahamsz (1622–1706, inscription dated May 14, 1654). Menasseh’s inscription is on fol. 145r.

Ornatissimo generoso atque litteratissimo viro D. Benedicto Arcossi affectus testandi ergo Amstelodami 15 Maij. A'v 5414 Menasseh ben Israel

[Hebr.] ‘Jealousy, lust, and ambition put a man out of the world’ (Pirqe Avot 4.21).²⁸

[Aram.] ‘What is hateful to you, do not to your ‘neighbour’ (Shabbath 31a).²⁹

[Dedication] For the most talented, generous and lettered mister Benedek Árkosi, Menasseh ben Israel with pleasure wrote these few words as a testimony of his affection.

²⁸ Transl. Danby, The Mishnah, 455.
²⁹ Transl. Freedman, Babylonian Talmud.
Johann Zollikofer was born on December 29, 1633. He read Philosophy and Theology first in Zurich and later on in Basle, where he obtained the degree of *Magister* on November 29, 1651. He became a Reformed minister, in St. Gallen (Switzerland) and eventually in Herisau where he died on April 24, 1692. In 1655 Zollikofer, a friend of Johann Buxtorf the younger (1599–1664), travelled through France to Amsterdam where he stayed for a while. His album amicorum is kept in the Vadianische Sammlung der Ortsbürgergemeinde St. Gallen [VadSlg Ms. 92a]. Among the other inscribers is John Milton, whom Zollikofer, like Menasseh, met in 1656. Menasseh’s inscription is on fol. 172r.

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31 Roth, *A Life*, 165.
32 Cf. above, Arnold.
Inscription for Johann Zollikofer (courtesy: Vadianische Sammlung, St. Gallen)

[Hebr.] ‘If I am not for myself who is for me? and being for mine own self what am I? and if not now, when?’ (Pirke Avot 1.14).33

[Lat.] Hope and patience.34

[Dedication] For mister Johann Zollikofer, most noble through virtue and learning, Menasseh ben Israel with pleasure wrote these few words as a token of his well-wishing affection.

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34 Cf. above, Gerhard.