King Christian IV of Denmark's "General Privilege" (1641)

Abstract

This general privilege, issued in 1641 by the Protestant King of Denmark, Christian IV, granted Jews living in Altona near Hamburg since 1611 a number of rights relating to their religious rites and status as a whole. However, these rights were tied to a special status, which obliged Jews to pay a protection fee, for example, but from which religious functionaries such as rabbis were excluded. Children, too, did not have to pay protection money as long as they remained "in sacris paternis" (i.e., under paternal authority). Even after marriage, protection money on the part of the children was only due if the family of the married couple founded their own household.

Source

August 1, 1641

(August 11 n. St.)

General Privilege

Christian IV. for the High German Jews in Altona.

We, Christian the Fourth 1 [...]

hereby declare for everyone: Because the protected Jews in Altenahe 6

most humbly7 requested the confirmation of those privileges and securities

which they enjoyed under the former ruler of this town,

we [...]

[...] mercifully grant their request under these conditions, namely: that they pay protection

money of five reichstal [l] er per year per family, and that

the same shall apply to those who live in Hamburg. In exchange

they should be permitted to settle wherever they9 [...]

choose.

We afford12 them our royal protection and

patronage, in addition to safe conduct for them and their women and children, servants 13, and all

others belonging to their party. And we14 confirm15

preexisting privileges which are approximately described

in the following16:[...]

1.20 They are allowed to maintain a synagogue and to hold worship services there

in accordance with Jewish ritual21. Also, they may maintain a cemetery where they bury

their dead according to Jewish tradition.

2. Their synagogue, including22 the23 rabbi , cantor 24, and

beadle should be freed from all duties and tithes.

3. Their children, as long as they remain in sacris pater-

nis 26 should enjoy this protection and liberty. When, however,

they leave the families27 of their parents,

they are required

to pay their own protection money.

4. They are permitted to exercise all manner of honest buying and selling,

and are allowed to butcher according to their tradition.

5. For28 the sake of Jewish usury they are permitted one pfenning

per mark 29, whereby they30 are required to note the year and

day of the deposit for the depositor [?] 31; after

the lapse32 of one year, however, if the interest has not been paid off[...],

[...]they are to report to the Vogt zu Ottensen the date

when the deposit was made and to inform the

depositors34, if they are nearby, of their chance to redeem the loan. If

this does not occur within six weeks, they are permitted to sell

the pawned object and they no longer are responsible to the depositor for the

object.

6. If they should buy or lend money against property that has been lent to the depositor and this is contested

within six weeks[...] 36, they should return the property to

the original owner as long as the pretii, or money,

is returned, without interest.

7. The same should hold if they should unknowingly purchase or lend

against stolen property, the pretium or money paid should be returned.

However, if they did so in full knowledge [...] 37 or with malice38,

then they should return the purchased or deposited property without recompense

(and furthermore be subject to a punishment imposed39 by us as the

high authority).

8. They should be allowed to mediate and resolve minor disagreements and infractions among themselves in their synagogue40

without the intervention of the Vogt .

And41 if 9. one of them42, does something punishable, this individual alone should be disciplined,

but the others who have paid for protection, if they were not involved43,

should not be punished.

Whereas, 10., they should for their own sake be law-abiding, amicable, and peaceable44, both in their dealings with each other as well

as with others and, most especially towards us, [be] most subservient,

acting[...] 45 to our advantage and promoting our gains, while avoiding[...] 46

all possible47 damages and harm. And then to pay and surrender their annual protection money,

each for himself at the appointed time,

at Easter.

And finally,11., they are to allow no foreign Jew who is not one of those who pay for protection to live among them

for more than fourteen days without the knowledge of our officials, or

face the preordained punishment, and even less is it48 allowed

that such foreigners be permitted to reside here or to conduct trade or other dealings.[...]

Confirmed under Your Royal Majesty's hand sign[...] 56 and seal. Con-

ferred57 at our residence at Glücksburg on August 1, 1641.

Source of English translation: King Christian IV of Denmark, etc., in his capacity as Duke of Schleswig, Holstein, Stormarn, and Dithmarschen, grants the Ashkenazi Jews in Altona a Letter of Protection and

confirms the privileges individually listed [“General Privilege”], *Key Documents of German-Jewish History*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.23691/jgo:source-2.en.v1> [October 22, 2018].

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