# חמשה

## חומשי תורה

עם

## תרגום אונקלוס והמש מגילות ופירוש רש"י ז"ל והפטרות

כמצר נדפסו מחז ומקדש לתועלת התלמידים בבית רבן לעמוד מתוכם קריאת התורה בבית הכנסת
בשבתות ובמועדים כי מוגהים הם ומדויקים ולא יכשל בם כל קורא וכל
שומע מתוכם.

ווין

Ist Buch Mosis, Genesis, Anbmüpch Breschis genannt.

*David Trobisch*

# Rabbi Eleazar Fleckeles: A Humash, a Friendship, and an Anecdote

< Fig. 1
*Hamishah humshei Torah*, Vienna: Anton Schmid, 1808,
23.5 × 20.2 × 4.3 cm.
GFCTrust B.990

Carefully. As I pulled the book out of the turquoise paper bag with the name of a coffeehouse in Tel Aviv printed on it, the brown tome greeted me with a distinctive odor. A librarian had once warned me of the smell of old books. People have died, she said, from being exposed to books. They can spread diseases, mental and physical.

But they are also milestones.

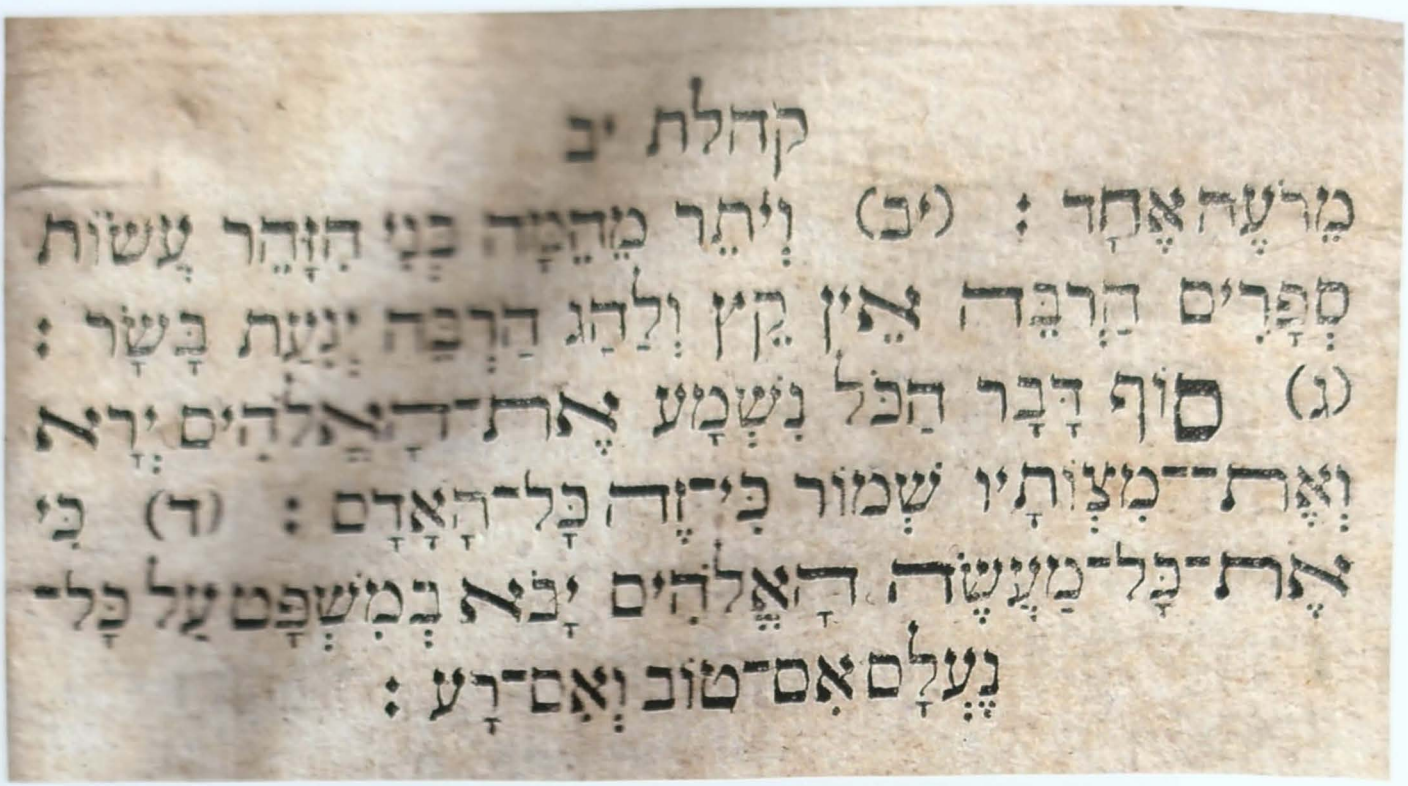
Only shortly before, I had borrowed this book from the library of William Gross who had purchased it years ago in a book shop in Prague. The book felt heavy as I lifted and opened it. It was in Hebrew and greeted me not with the title page but with the final sentence of Kohelet. I immediately felt embarrassed, as if I entered a home through the back door.

> For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Obviously, the printer had made a mistake. The Hebrew contained the verse numbers, introduced during the middle of the sixteenth century by publishers of Christian Bibles. The printer of this copy, however, had missed the *yod* before the *gimel* and the *dalet*, turning the numbers 13 and 14 into verses 3 and 4.

Many Christians are introduced to Jewish traditions only through the teachings attributed to Jesus of Nazareth. In their English Bibles, Jesus is reported saying, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law" (Matthew 5:18). The term "jot" in the King James Version represents ἰῶτα ἓν in the oldest Greek copies, which in turn identifies the letter *yod* of the Hebrew alphabet. Well, in this Hebrew Bible at least, two *yod*s were missing.

A note on a loose piece of paper stuck between the pages called the book a *Chomash*, literally "fifth." Being unfamiliar with the term, I turned to a Yiddish friend who explained that the expression was still in use and indicated an edition of the *Five Books of Moses*. A slip of paper in German, pasted


קהלת יב

מרעה אחד : (יב) ויתר מהמה בני הזהר עשות
ספרים הרבה אין קץ ולהג הרבה יגעת בשר :
(ג) סוף דבר הכל נשמע את־האלהים ירא
ואת־מצותיו שמור כי־זה כל־האדם : (ד) כי
את־כל־מעשה האלהים יבא במשפט על כל־
נעלם אם־טוב ואם־רע :

Fig. 2
From the Bible (fig. 1), final page with Kohelet

on the title sheet, however, called the book *First Book of Moses*.[1]

Obviously, Genesis is only the first of the five books of the Torah, and Kohelet is not part of the Torah.

Bound into the book even before the title sheet, is a document, signed by Karl Fischer and Eleazar Fleckeles in Prague, dated 1808.[2]

> *Prag am 9ten Sept. 1808. // Karl Fischer // der hebräischen Schriften und Bücher // K.K. Zensor und Revisor, zugleich // bey den K.K. Landesbehörden be- // stellter Translator. // Eleasar Flekeles // Rabbiner und Erster Oberjurist // der Prager Judenschaftt*

Rabbi Eleazar Fleckeles (1754–1826), is well known.[3] He was born in Prague to a wealthy family, and after going bankrupt, he entered the rabbinate and became the rabbi of the Moravian congregation of Goltein (Kojetin) from 1779 to 1783. He then offered professional guidance to a privately funded study hall in Prague, where he also served as a judge in the community's court system. In 1801 he was promoted to Oberjurist (presiding Judge or *rosh bet din*), the title he carries in the note.

Karl Fischer, the co-signer of the document, describes himself as censor and redactor of Hebrew writings and books, who was also appointed by the state authorities as a translator for Hebrew. Fleckeles published excerpts from his correspondence with Fischer. Among other topics, the two men discussed legal reservations when Jews were asked to speak the truth under oath in a Christian court. At the time, Christian citizens were asked to swear by placing a hand on a Christian Bible, but was this gesture relevant for Jewish citizens as well? Fleckeles argued, "that the force of an oath is great, and no distinction can be made between making an oath to an Israelite and to a non-Jew."[4]

It seems that the Hebrew book lying before me on my desk was used instead of a Christian Bible when Jewish witnesses took the stand.

Another document, also carrying the name of Karl Fischer, signed on 9 September, 1808, and written in Latin in Latin script was bound into the copy. It repeats the designation "Chummesch" as if it were synonymous to the expressions Torah, Law of Moses, and Pentateuch.

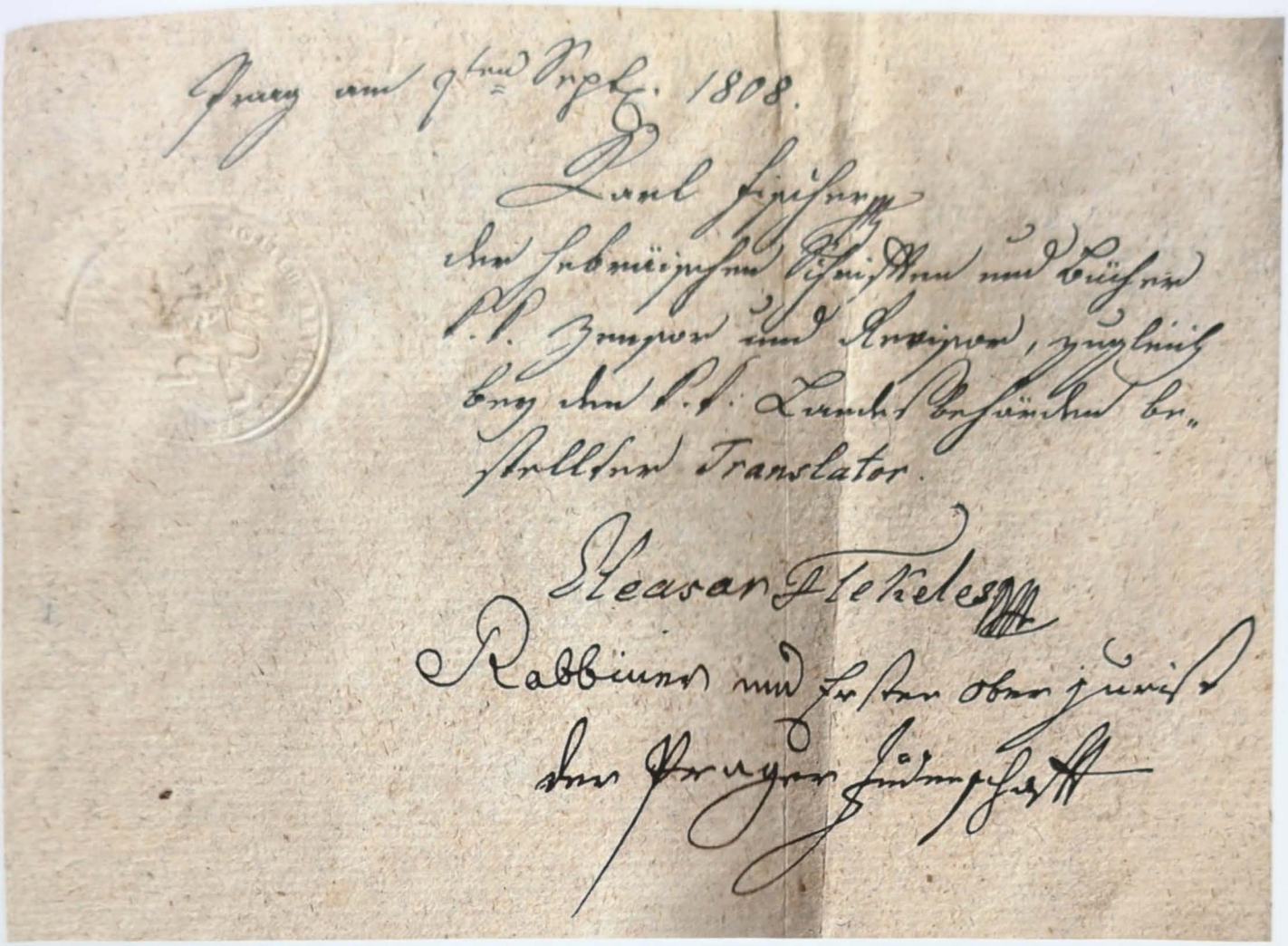


Fig. 3
From the Bible (fig. 1), handwritten document, bound into the book, signed by Eleazar Fleckeles, Prague, 9 September 1808, 15 × 13 cm

*Praesens opus, Thora sive Lex Mosaica, Iudais // etiam Chummesch seu Pentateuchus dictum, conformi- // ter Celsissimi Caesareo-Regii Bohemiae Gubernii De- // creto d.dto 23tia Februarii 1798. a me infra scripto // a capite ad calcem usque revisum, ac comitibus // sub Numero 441. confirmationis litteris munitam // esse, hisce fidem facio et testor. // Pragae 9na Septembris 1808 // C. Fischer // Caesareo-Regius Censor, // Revisor, et Translator // in hebraicis.*

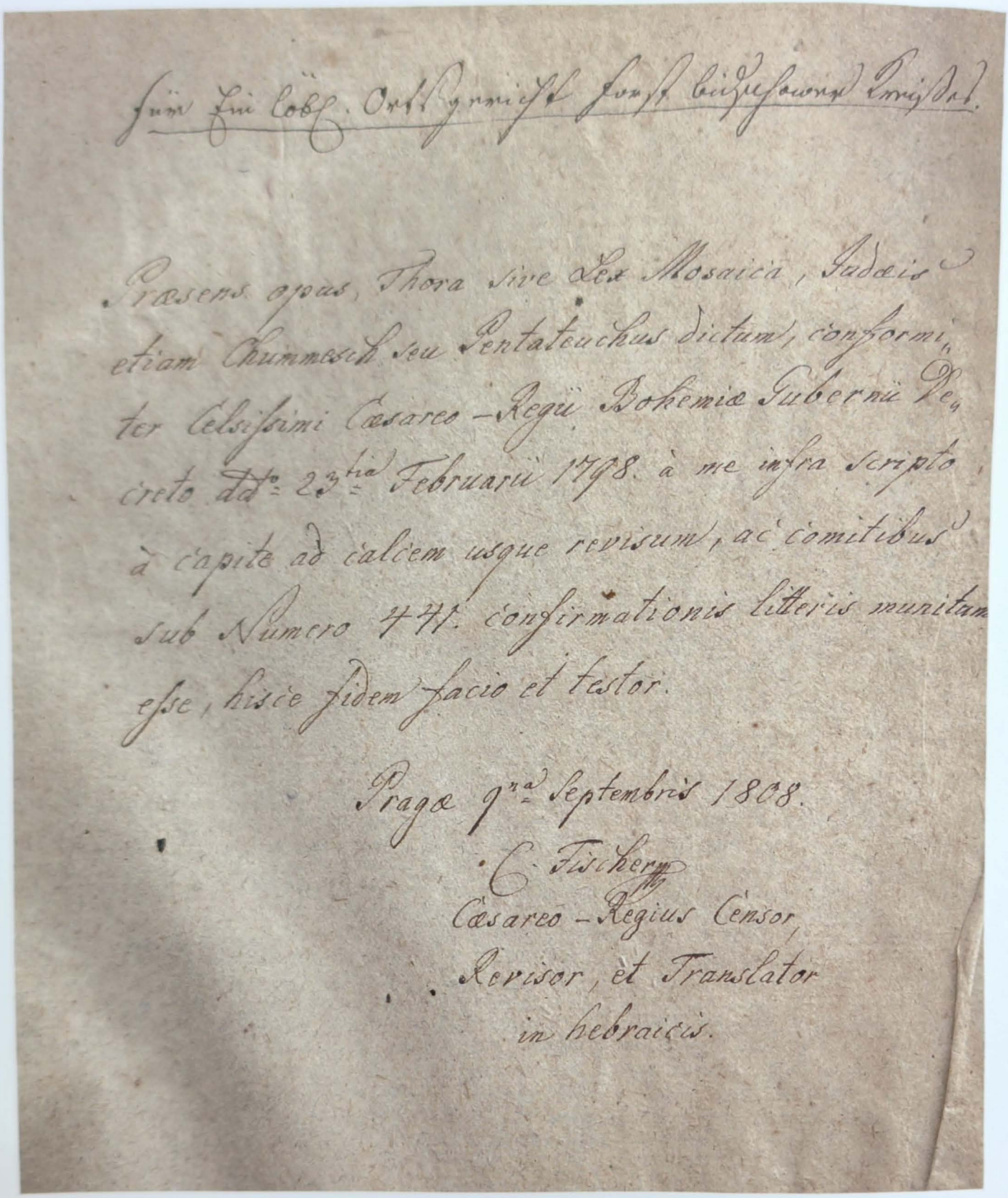
The title page, however, clearly states that the book included not only a Humash but also the Targum Onkelos, some Megillot (Lamentations and Ecclesiastes), interpretations of Rashi, and other printed material. It was printed in Vienna, no date is given.

Despite its use in the court room, the authorizing documents do not characterize this Hebrew book correctly. Not the content was on the mind of those who authorized the copy, but its use to compel the faithful to tell the truth in court.

The nephew of Rabbi Moses Moos recorded the following anecdote about Eleazar Fleckeles.[5]

One day, Eleazar Fleckeles traveled from Prague to visit his parents' grave. He stayed with his close friend and schoolmate, Rabbi Moses Moos.

Rabbi Moos showed Rabbi Fleckeles the epitaph he had designed for his own grave. The literal translation was: "And the Lord called Moses to himself; in order that he might behold the glory of the Most High, find shelter under the wings of His divine Majesty, and enjoy the fruits of his deeds of piety. For Moses is a servant of the Lord, in all his



Præsens opus, Thora sive Lex Mosaica, Judæis etiam Chummesch seu Pentateuchus dictum, conformi, ter Celsissimi Cæsareo-Regii Bohemiæ Gubernii Decreto dd.ᵃ 23.ᵗⁱᵃ Februarii 1798. à me infra scripto, à capite ad calcem usque revisum, ac comitibus sub Numero 741. confirmationis litteris munitum esse, hisce fidem facio et testor.

Pragæ 9.ⁿᵃ Septembris 1808.

C. Fischer m.p.
Cæsareo-Regius Censor,
Revisor, et Translator
in hebraicis.

< Fig. 4
From the Bible (fig. 1), handwritten document, bound into the book, signed by Karl Fischer, Prague, 9 September 1808, 17.5 × 14.5 cm

house is he faithful. He is the head of his congregation and an ornament in Israel. Behold, such is the honest, pious, and learned Rabbi Moses Moos. May his soul be bound in the bond of eternal life."

"Well, how do you like it?" Rabbi Moos asked.

Eleazar Fleckeles replied by telling a story.

Once upon a time, two traveling tailors arrived in Prague. They were natives of Moravia and wished to settle permanently in Prague.

A policeman stopped them at the city gate and asked to see their passports. He read the description of the first, 'Nose, pointed; eyes, brown; forehead, high.' The nose of the man, however, was flat, his eyes gray, and his forehead low.

"How did you come in possession of this faulty passport?" the policeman shouted angrily.

"I got my passport through an agent," the tailor replied. "He alone is responsible for the description. He must have drawn it from memory, as I was not present when it was made out."

The policeman was satisfied and issued him a permit of residence.

When the second tailor showed his passport, the policeman found under the heading of distinguishing marks the entry "none." The tailor, however, had on the tip of his nose a wart of the size of a hazel-nut with a tuft of hair growing on top of it. "How could the magistrate who made out your passport miss your wart?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon," the tailor replied. "I was present when the passport was issued. When I realized that the magistrate took no notice of my defect, which I tried to hide the best I could, I kept silent. Isn't it bad enough to have a wart in the middle of your face? Is it really necessary that a description is placed in the passport?"

"Your passport is fraudulent, and you are a fraud," the policeman shouted. "It was your duty to call the magistrate's attention to your wart! You neglected to do so and will have to be fined."

Fleckeles pointed to the tombstone of Rabbi Moos and said, "With this passport, you will never get a permit of residence in the world to come. Dare the stoneworkers engrave the lie in the milestone, which stands on the dividing line between this world and the next?"

The nephew of Rabbi Moos, added a note at the end, stating that after his uncle's death, the following epitaph was found among his papers, "Here lies Moses Moos. Peace be to his ashes."

Collectors respond to the attraction of an object and often find it difficult to resist its call. Being aware that the famous Rabbi Eleazar Fleckeles touched and signed the book lying in front of me, prompts an emotional response. The book preserves printing errors, so shunned by faith communities, and it documents negligence of the Christian authorities to provide even the most basic information of the content of the book. But it also documents a friendship between two men who tried to overcome a social conflict and find a practical solution, despite the hostile environment they lived in.

Voices from the past only capture one moment in history, but they make our existence appear as a short episode in a long story. We briefly touch an artifact, created before we were born that will continue to tell its story long after we die. It is not the charge of a collector to describe the past or to figure out the significance of a specific object for today. Collections serve as mirrors of society, and collectors are well advised to use scholars to create the narrative of an exhibition. But, as Eleazar Fleckeles reminded his friend, a historical artifact in the hands of a thoughtful collector is like a milestone that stands on the dividing line between this world and the next.

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[1] "1stes Buch Moses, Genesis, Hebräisch Breschit genannt."

[2] The professional and personnel relationship between Fleckeles and Fischer is the subject of a study by Iveta Cermanová, "Karl Fischer (1757–1844). I. The life and intellectual world of a Hebrew Censor," *Judaica Bohemiae* XLII (2007): 125–77, and "Karl Fischer (1757–1844). II. The work of a Hebrew Censor," *Judaica Bohemiae* XLII (2007): 5–63. In the second part she goes into details of the function of the Pentateuch (Humash) during taking the oath as well as of Anton Schmid's involvement by printing and providing such Bibles.

[3] Michael K. Silber, "Fleckeles, El'azar ben David," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* 27 October 2010, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Fleckeles_Elazar_ben_David (accessed 29 June 2019).

[4] The correspondence is included in Fleckeles' *Teshuvah me-ahavah* (Response from Love), 3 vols. (Prague, 1809, 1815, 1821), pt. 1, sec. 26.

[5] Louis Schnabel, *Voegele's Marriage and Other Tales* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1892), 61–65.