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“Like Iron to a Magnet”:
Moses Hayim Luzzatto’s Quest for Providence

By

David Sclar

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Abstract

“Like Iron to a Magnet”: Moses Hayim Luzzatto’s Quest for Providence

by

David Sclar

Advisor: Prof. Jane S. Gerber

This dissertation is a biographical study of Moses Hayim Luzzatto (1707–1746 or 1747). It presents the social and religious context in which Luzzatto was variously celebrated as the leader of a kabbalistic-messianic confraternity in Padua, condemned as a deviant threat by rabbis in Venice and central and eastern Europe, and accepted by the Portuguese Jewish community after relocating to Amsterdam. Using unpublished archival documents and manuscripts, as well as rare printed books, I seek to reconcile the seemingly incompatible aspects of Luzzatto as ‘heretic’ and ‘hero.’

Chapter one sets the tone for the dissertation by analyzing the original version of Mesilat Yesharim, which differs drastically from the well-known printed edition. Consisting of a dialogue between a hasid and a hakham, the treatise was a pietistic, semi-autobiographical manifesto rooted in Kabbalah that polemicized against the rabbinic establishment.

Using material culled from communal and state archives in Padua and Venice, chapter two provides a foundation for Luzzatto’s identity and critique of the rabbinate. Chapter three discusses Luzzatto’s kabbalistic activities with an emphasis on his relationships and religious development. I argue that Luzzatto and his inner circle grew out of a loose confederation of Italian pietists in northern Italy, beginning with Moses Zacut three generations earlier, who were unhappy with the values and goals of the Talmud-centered rabbinic establishment.

In chapter four, I consider the nature of anti-Luzzatto sentiment that spread among rabbis in Italy and Ashkenazic lands. Rabbinic responses ranged widely and vacillated, reflecting the complexity and disharmony of Jewish religious leadership in the eighteenth century. The fifth and final chapter explores Luzzatto’s eight years in Amsterdam. I show that Luzzatto was intimately connected to Portuguese rabbinic and lay leadership, who supported him financially and morally as he studied in the Ets Haim Yeshiva following years of intense controversy in Italy. The editing of his original version of Mesilat Yesharim indicates, however, that refraining from rabbinic critique and overt kabbalistic activities were mitigating factors in his acceptance in Amsterdam. Luzzatto, in turn, emphasized his own personal quietism as a means to redemption.
Acknowledgments

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Additionally, many people aided and facilitated my research in libraries and archives. In Amsterdam, Odette Vlessing and the staff of the City Archives. In Italy, Emanuele Colorni and the Jewish Community of Mantua; Rafi D'Angeli and the Jewish Community of Padua; the staff of the State Archives of Padua and the staff of the State Archives of Venice. In Jerusalem, Yisrael Dubitsky and the staff of the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts. In New York, Yoram Bitton and Michelle Chesner at Columbia University; Sarah Diamant, Warren Klein,
Sharon Liberman Mintz, Jerry Schwarzbard, and David Wachtel at the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary; Shuli Berger at Yeshiva University. My gratefulness for the friendship and mentorship of Jerry Schwarzbard and David Wachtel in particular cannot be overstated.

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taught me to respect the past and present alike, while my father is my strongest link to the past; his veneration of his father and respect for our ancestors’ experiences exemplify the living history I seek to impart professionally. Meanwhile, my older brother, Ari Sclar, has unsparingly offered advice and shared his own experiences in earning a doctorate in history.

This dissertation could not have come to fruition – existentially or practically – if not for my wife, Yafit. Her faith in my goals and motivation has been surpassed only by her dedication to our children.

To Noa and Avraham Hayim, I dedicate this dissertation, written during your first years of life.
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Introduction

Moses Hayim Luzzatto (1707–1746 or 1747) produced celebrated literary works of mysticism, ethics, Talmud, rhetoric, grammar, poetry, and drama. His writings have been printed more often and disseminated more widely than almost any other early modern Jewish figure. He, or rather his books, influenced the development of the Haskalah, Hasidism, and the Musar movement. Yet, during Luzzatto’s life, rabbis throughout Europe feared that his novel and overt kabbalistic teachings reflected Sabbatianism. Bans were promulgated against him and his mystical writings were confiscated and destroyed.

Dozens if not hundreds of scholars have studied his life and writings from many angles through two centuries of Wissenschaft des Judenthums. However, no work has offered a uniform portrait of the man or sought to explain how this formerly marginalized and condemned rabbi became the subject of adoration and reverence. Luzzatto’s extraordinary intellectual ability and breadth traverse several (academically defined) distinct fields, and expertise and interest in a given field can preclude scholars from dealing with complex but related issues existing in other academic areas. Thus, scholars of Hebrew literature have delved deeply into Luzzatto’s Migdal ‘Oz and La-Yesharim Tehilah, but not into his extensive mystical writings. Researchers of Kabbalah have elucidated some of Luzzatto’s esoteric works, but have largely ignored his non-kabbalistic material.

In contrast to early historiography that focused on Luzzatto as a solo poet and dramatist, and a later generation that accepted him as a mystic but without much regard, scholars in the last several decades have emphasized the context in which Luzzatto functioned.
Isaiah Tishby successfully demonstrated that Luzzatto’s writings were complemented by others who had their own transcendent experiences. Elisheva Carlebach situated Luzzatto’s activities within the context of early modern rabbinic culture and Sabbatian polemics. More recently, Jonathan Garb, a scholar of Jewish thought and Kabbalah at The Hebrew University, has argued that Luzzatto can only be understood adequately if studied in his eighteenth-century intellectual context. As he has eloquently stated: “While in the past such innovative thinkers as R. Luzzatto were surrounded by the isolating halo of the solitary, misunderstood genius, contemporary studies of intellectual creativity emphasize the role played by networks and support groups in the making of these figures.”

Still, Jewish scholarship as a whole has fallen short of grasping the nuances of Luzzatto’s worldview and intentions. Each of these scholars, and many others, has expertly presented Luzzatto in a particular framework, whether mystical, rabbinic, intellectual, or literary, but a larger social and cultural context is necessary to explain the diversity of his literary oeuvre and biographical experience. We lack an understanding of Luzzatto’s religious and social identity, without which we cannot explain the development of Luzzatto’s glorified legacy despite the controversy that surrounded him.

In this dissertation, I present the social and religious context in which Luzzatto was variously celebrated as the leader of a kabbalistic-messianic confraternity in Padua, condemned as a deviant threat by rabbis in Venice and central and eastern Europe, and accepted by the insular Portuguese Jewish community after relocating to Amsterdam. This is the first study in

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decades to publish new archival research about Luzzatto, and the first academic work to analyze Luzzatto’s famous ethical tract *Mesilat Yesharim*, one of the most oft-printed and influential Hebrew books in the modern period. Traversing geographic, temporal, and cultural boundaries, my research contributes to historiography of Jewish ethical literature and pietistic practices, the Jewish book and Hebrew printing, rabbinic culture and its controversies, Italian and Dutch Jewry, and the relatively neglected first half of the eighteenth century.

Chapter one sets the tone for the dissertation by analyzing the autograph manuscript of *Mesilat Yesharim* (Moscow MS Guenzburg 1206), which differs drastically from the well-known printed edition. Consisting of a dialogue between a *hasid* and a *hakham* – the former akin to Luzzatto and the latter to the rabbis with whom he quarreled – the treatise was a pietistic, semi-autobiographical manifesto rooted in Kabbalah that polemicized against rabbinic arrogance and preoccupation with Talmud and *halakhah*. Luzzatto’s vision emphasized the individual’s relationship with God and respect for all facets of society, and he argued that members of the rabbinic elite were required to serve God by uplifting their surroundings and community with palpable spirituality. The book’s most biting and overt critiques of the rabbinate were excised from the printed edition for reasons discussed in a later chapter.

Using previously unpublished material culled from communal and state archives in Padua and Venice, chapter two provides a foundation for Luzzatto’s identity and critique of the rabbinate. It explores life in Padua’s ghetto, and presents three primary social and cultural influences on Luzzatto: Luzzatto’s mercantilist (and non-rabbinic) family; the city’s small and unified Jewish community; and positive relations between Jews and Christians in Padua. In short, Luzzatto’s family encouraged diverse interests and funded his incessant study; the
community was small enough to instill in Luzzatto profound self-confidence and an all-encompassing love of the Jewish public; and Jewish social stability in the Veneto produced conflicting rabbinic positions with respect to acculturation and worldviews.

Accordingly, chapter three discusses Luzzatto’s kabbalistic activities with an emphasis on his friendships and religious development. With other members of Padua’s intellectual elite, including medical students of the University of Padua, Luzzatto sought to redeem the world through mystical means. They believed the era to be ripe for redemption, and themselves to be cosmically appointed harbingers. As leader, Luzzatto taught an intellectual pietism (which he later expressed in *Mesilat Yesharim*) that stressed humility, study of the Zohar, and tangible spirituality. Luzzatto had a strong base of support in Padua, and he gathered around him both scholars and likeminded laymen. I argue that Luzzatto and his inner circle grew out of a loose confederation of Italian pietists in northern Italy, beginning with Moses Zacut three generations earlier, who were unhappy with the values and goals of the Talmud-centered rabbinic establishment.

In chapter four, I consider the nature of anti-Luzzatto sentiment that spread among rabbis in Italy and primarily Ashkenazic lands. I show that, rather than dividing between proponent and opposition camps, rabbinic responses ranged widely and vacillated, reflecting the complexity and disharmony of Jewish religious leadership in the eighteenth century. Although opposition to Luzzatto stemmed ostensibly out of fear of heresy, as Elisheva Carlebach aptly showed, correspondence and the later editing of *Mesilat Yesharim* indicate that Luzzatto’s rabbinic antagonists were as much concerned with his cultural worldview (described in chapter one) as with his complicated theological ideas. Ultimately, the success of Luzzatto’s
opponents, consisting almost entirely of rabbis who did not know Luzzatto personally, depended on a wide network of men generally dependent upon each other to maintain their authority.

The fifth and final chapter explores Luzzatto’s eight years in Amsterdam (1735–1743), a period that scholars have almost completely overlooked. Using printed books, manuscripts, and previously unpublished archival material, I show that Luzzatto was intimately connected to the Portuguese rabbinic and lay leadership, who supported him financially and morally as he studied in the Ets Haim Yeshiva following years of intense controversy in Italy. The editing of his original version of *Mesilat Yesharim* indicates, however, that refraining from rabbinic critique and overt kabbalistic activities were mitigating factors in his acceptance in Amsterdam. Luzzatto, in turn, emphasized his own personal quietism as a means to redemption, and, consequently composed non-mystical works to benefit his adopted community. I argue that it was the combination of Portuguese measured acceptance and Luzzatto’s cosmic reorientation that enabled his glorifying posthumous reception, for he managed to publish two works (*Mesilat Yesharim* and *La-Yesharim Tehilah*) that proved immensely influential to major nineteenth-century movements (Musar and Haskalah, respectively).

This is not a biography intent on addressing ‘all’ that was Luzzatto. The chapters do not systematically tackle themes in his expansive thought, nor do they analyze every composition of his vast literary catalog. Some ‘concepts’ and ‘subjects’ weave in and out because of their presence in the narrative, but are not treated as supremely relevant topics with which to engage. For example, economics and politics, each of which played a role in Luzzatto’s identity,
upbringing, and interaction with others, could well constitute whole chapters. However, as I am interested in continuity between Luzzatto’s controversial life and his influential legacy, I have opted to present a unified understanding of Luzzatto’s background, religious and social identity, and ‘legitimacy’ in the eyes of those he interacted with.

In short, this dissertation is intent on presenting Luzzatto’s essential human quality. Rather than attempt to present a ‘definitive’ study of a rabbinic giant or his cultural context, likely an impossibility in a single monograph, I focus on the quietude of the man. What was his nature and what did he regard as implicitly valuable in life? With whom did he identify and how did he relate to others? Was he a definably contented individual, or was he unhappy with his lot? What did humility mean to him and how did he understand the ideals of Jewish learning, piety, and redemption?

As such, this dissertation largely revolves around the writing, thought, and publication of a single treatise: *Mesilat Yesharim*. It is a work of piety that provides profound insight into Luzzatto’s thought and experience, and the book by which his reception history may be most quantitatively measured. Several historiographical themes, which often function separately, but are all integral to the premise of my dissertation, come together when studying Luzzatto through the guise of *Mesilat Yesharim*: biography and autobiography, book and printing history, Amsterdam and Italian Jewry, Jewish ethics and Kabbalah, rabbinic controversy, and the relationship between pietism and the rabbinate in eighteenth century.

In turn, the abundance of correspondence to, from, and about Luzzatto provides an opportunity to comprehend the man, the diversity of his intellectual output, and his larger historical context. His personal, though often restrained, voice in private communications
reveals experiences, emotional concerns, and moral ideals. What’s more, as with *Mesilat Yesharim*, the primary source material, from letters to communal records, helps contextualize and enliven Luzzatto’s compositions, and vice versa. While this may be a truism with respect to all intellectual biography, the study of Luzzatto is unique because he was received with massive rabbinic protestation during his life only to earn a posthumous place in the rabbinic pantheon. Thus, *Mesilat Yesharim* – composed after the height of the controversy, edited to make it more palatable to contemporary rabbinic society, as I will show, and more popularly received than any other early modern Hebrew text – is an exciting and useful tool to understanding Luzzatto, his extensive social and communal network, and the era in which he lived.

Ultimately, the complexity of Luzzatto’s cultural environment, which has thus far resulted in dissected and appropriated images of the man and his work, does not necessarily preclude perceiving a unified whole devoid of arbitrary distinctions. Luzzatto’s literary oeuvre, talents, and experiences were diverse, but his internal spirituality was essentially ‘simple’: he was motivated by a desire to cling to and reflect the divine. Though Luzzatto’s legacy may be defined by various terms and genres, his life and personality are better understood when viewed less categorically. He may have been a mystic, poet, dramatist, Talmudist, linguist, and Paduan, but he was also a young man, a talented thinker, a rising rabbinic star, a student, colleague, and teacher, a scion of an established family that made him financially and

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² For reasons that will become clear, Luzzatto’s reception history is unlike two other famous Jews condemned during their lives and posthumously celebrated: Moses Maimonides and Barukh Spinoza. Maimonides was a towering figure by the time he was chastised. His rabbinical position was not qualitatively challenged, nor was he effectively damaged by accusations of heresy. Spinoza, meanwhile, was banned by rabbinic Jewry, but accepted generations later by Jews no longer adhering to the thought of their forbearers. In addition, Spinoza happily left the Jewish community, and did not force himself to adapt psychologically and emotionally in order to stave off rabbinic retribution.
educationally privileged, and a friend, son, brother, and husband. He was also deemed a heretic, a “suckling babe,” and a sexual deviant, as well as unimportant and unoriginal. And he had allergies.

Most importantly, in understanding Luzzatto’s life and the making of his legacy, he was one of many. Born and raised in a place with a long and celebrated history, he travelled to the world’s most cosmopolitan city and settled among Jewry’s most insular community. His upbringing was unusual but not unheard of. His abilities were exceptional, but not the dominant factors in the development of the controversy or his ultimate acceptance. The story of Luzzatto’s life and the making of his legacy is as much about those around him as it is about him.
Chapter One

Goal and Journey: *Devekut* and Perfected Community in *Mesilat Yesharim*

On Wednesday, September 10, 1738, less than a week before Rosh Hashanah, Moses Hayim Luzzatto rested his pen next to a pile of tightly written pages that began “*Ish hakham hayah*” (There was once a wise man). The day by rabbinic reckoning was the 25th of Elul, according to one opinion the anniversary of the creation of the world, some 5498 years prior.3 That did not necessarily make the day auspicious, for no man discerned God’s unfathomable plan; nonetheless, it was meaningful to a man whose intellect fixated on notions of divine providence.

Luzzatto was in Amsterdam, in the fourth year of a self-imposed exile from his native Italy. He lived among Portuguese Jews in relative calm, after having experienced several years of derision for pursuing an intellectual and social vision that ran counter to the predominant ideas of the rabbinic establishment. Writing this book, untitled at the time of its completion in 1738, was a cathartic process that he had begun the previous year, and finishing it just prior to the Day of Judgment was a spiritual release as he entered a new year. The impetus for the work had originated during his adolescence in conversation with his teachers, flourished throughout his young adulthood as he self-directed his intellectual and spiritual development, and solidified in his mind as a communal need the more he was condemned and harassed by fellow members of the rabbinate who rejected his vision of Judaism.

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3 There is a dispute in the Talmud between Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Eliezer as to whether the world was created in the spring or autumn (Babylonian Talmud, *Rosh Hashanah* 12a). The Talmud endorses the view of the former. Following Rabbi Eliezer’s opinion, however, some argued that Rosh Hashanah was the first day of Creation (*Rosh Hashanah* 11a), while others argued it was the sixth (Leviticus Rabbah 29a) or the seventh (*Pesikta Rabati* 46).
Luzzatto had produced much written material by then, in numerous genres and to varying lengths and intellectual depth. His poems, particularly those that celebrated the life and achievement of those dear to him, had reflected his sensitivity and nuance. His adolescent publications, including a treatise on the Holy Tongue and a Psalter, revealed his exceptional abilities and soaring aspirations. Moreover, his literary efforts in mysticism, which included explanations of the divine and prosaic elucidations of kabbalistic concepts, reflected his individual creativity and spiritual intentions. He believed some of his writings had been divine gifts, his soul and intellect bound with his creator, his physical being serving as a vessel of revelation. Other compositions he readily admitted were not only this-worldly, but had been copiously edited and consciously reflected the cultures in which he lived.

Now, at the age of 31, Luzzatto had written a book like no other. Based on the “ladder of saintliness” attributed to the talmudic sage Pinhas ben Yair, the book instructs readers in moral behavior by systematically detailing steps from forsaking sin to maintaining contact with the divine spirit. It was a semi-autobiographical kabbalistic polemic, without overtly reflecting any of those elements. The book took the form of a dialogue between an enigmatic hasid, or pietist, and a hakham, or sage, whose confidence masked superficial notions of God and Torah compared to his partner in conversation. Luzzatto had used dialogue before to stir the reader’s sensibilities, but his goal this time was to revolutionize the rabbinic mind by directly confronting its defining characteristics. He sought to lead the amenable student on a journey through

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intention, rigor, thought, and spirit, spanning the diversity and intensity of previous writings and laying the foundation for what he termed the “Perfected Community.”

**Manuscript and Printed Book**

The book Luzzatto completed that September day was printed within two years under the title *Mesilat Yesharim*. The published product differed significantly from the manuscript, both in form and in essence. The dialogue was reshaped as a monologue, and a small but significant amount of text was excised. In spite or because of that fact, the book has been widely considered modern Judaism’s quintessential religious ethical text from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Adopted by Israel Salanter as a foundation text for his ethical Musar movement, it became ubiquitous in Lithuanian Jewish communities. Among the most oft-printed Hebrew books of the modern era, *Mesilat Yesharim* was disseminated in more than two dozen editions in Warsaw between 1841 and 1895 and seven editions in Vilna between 1844 and 1875. At least five editions of the book appeared in Königsberg in 1858 and 1859 alone. The rapid pace at which it was reissued rivaled the printing of Hebrew Bibles, prayer books, and standard rabbinic texts. It remains Luzzatto’s most well-known and widely studied work.

Remarkably, there has been virtually no academic study of *Mesilat Yesharim*. In 1931, Mordecai Kaplan produced the first English translation of the text, supplemented with an introduction that left much to be desired. Kaplan chose to write about the sweeping moralistic

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concepts of the millennia-old Jewish Civilization he envisioned, and offered no insight into Luzzatto’s psyche or his historical context. When considering the book, scholars have largely referred to it in passing or in relation to the Lithuanian Musar movement. Mesilat Yesharim may have been avoided until now because it does not fit neatly into any particular category. Scholars of Kabbalah and Modern Hebrew Literature have seen little to no reason to study the book that is neither poetic nor overtly kabbalistic. Historians interested in reconstructing all or some of Luzzatto’s life, such as Giuseppe Almanzi, Simon Ginzburg, Isaiah Tishby, Elisheva Carlebach, Joelle Hansel, and Natascia Danieli, have either found the book irrelevant or insignificant to their subject matter. Moreover, Luzzatto’s eight-year stay in Amsterdam has been almost completely neglected, leaving the composition of Mesilat Yesharim in a vacuum.


Finally, more broadly, few studies have sought to contextualize Jewish ethical texts or religious identity in the early modern era.\(^{10}\)

The book is significant for the study of both rabbinic thought and Jewish ethical tracts that proliferated between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. During the early modern period, a myriad of moralizing works intent on disseminating meaning in Jewish tradition and culture rolled off the presses. Many books, especially those originally composed as kabbalistic tracts, were reissued in abridged and simplified formats for the uninitiated or impatient reader. Thinkers also produced works that circulated only in manuscript, while others composed short moralistic expositions of ideas or religious texts for themselves or a select few. Additionally, some educated men acting as professional scribes assembled miscellanies dedicated to the task, copying treatises and expositions from far and wide for laymen who desired and could afford written texts. Hence, Luzzatto’s decision to write *Mesilat Yesharim* was in line with societal demands for ethical guides of the Jewish religion.

Equally important to the larger context and consequences of the treatise’s publication, is its indication of Luzzatto’s worldview and self-conception. As an ethical text, related to acting and thinking in an imperfect world, the book provides an understanding of Luzzatto’s thoughts of self, society, purpose, and godliness. Moreover, it offers a perspective on the life of a kabbalist far too often obscured by a dearth of biographical information and autobiographical

\(^{10}\) A notable exception is Roni Weinstein, *Juvenile Sexuality, Kabbalah, and Catholic Reformation in Italy:* Tiferet Bahurim by Pinhas Barukh ben Pelatiyah Monselice, trans. Batya Stein (Leiden, 2009). At the conclusion of the transcription, Weinstein offers a several-page outline of early modern Jewish pietism.

testimony. During his life, contemporaries formed numerous conceptions of Luzzatto, including bombastic youth, deviant threat, gifted but disoriented student, and messianic redeemer. Likewise, two centuries of academic study has yet to produce a unifying view of the man. *Mesilat Yesharim*, his most well-known and widely published work, dedicated to perfecting character traits, can provide a perspective enabling disparate elements of his personality and legacy to unify.

To a certain extent, *Mesilat Yesharim* is Luzzatto’s most enigmatic work. Even for an oeuvre as diverse as that of Luzzatto’s, which spanned the gambit of early modern Jewish literary genres, the book stands apart. As mentioned, it is devoid of the kabbalistic overtones and lyrical language that to varying degrees and combinations permeated the rest of his writing. The prose is dry and caustic, made even more abrasive because the author’s voice betrays no doubt and is unabashedly superior. The concepts are abstract, sometimes appearing contradictory and rarely accompanied by concrete examples. Citations are confined to biblical, talmudic, and midrashic sources, evidence that Luzzatto refrained from engaging in open ‘conversation’ with later works. That is, he chose not to refer to, agree with, or contradict

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11 My desire to reconcile other-worldly mysticism with the mystics’ practical lives was sparked after reading Lawrence Fine’s excellent study of Isaac Luria, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford, 2003). Fine mentions in passing a Genizah fragment housed in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary recording Luria’s business transaction in cucumbers (JTS Genizah, no. 47 [fragment is currently missing]; a facsimile was published by Meir Benayahu in “Documents from the Geniza Concerning the Business Activities of the Ari” [Hebrew], in *Sefer Zikaron le-ha-Rav Yitshak Nissim*, ed. M. Benayahu, vol. 4 (Jerusalem, 1985), 230. Did Luria separate his mystical life from his economic activities, and, if so, why? If not, what did he think of business in a cosmic sense, or, for that matter, what did he think of cucumbers, vegetables, acquisition, and selling?

To be sure, supreme confidence, abstract discussion without elaboration, and ideas conveyed in an apparent intellectual vacuum characterized other Luzzatto books. Luzzatto composed two relatively rudimentary explications of kabbalistic thought – Da’at Tevunot, written while he was still in Italy, and Derekh Hashem, written in Amsterdam shortly after Mesilat Yesharim – with the same characteristics. (Both books will be used throughout this chapter to complement the ideas extrapolated from Mesilat Yesharim.) Luzzatto’s absolute ideas about divine providence, the nature of evil, and the purpose of the world appear both in the former, an unfettered meandering dialogue, and the latter, a well-ordered textbook. Each conveys Luzzatto’s near prophetic moral standpoint, relating the author’s cosmological scheme as absolute, eternal, and sacrosanct. He not only saw himself as a link in the Jewish chain of tradition (and ultimate redemption), but also as a throwback to what he regarded as the unbridled purity of the biblical and talmudic eras, when in his imagination God reigned supreme and Jewry was not mired in confusion or egotism.

Still, Mesilat Yesharim differs, both in style and in complexity, from Luzzatto’s other texts. Luzzatto’s usual demand of the reader to submit totally to his text is complicated by the
content’s proximity to everyday life. Prophecy and the soul are more easily absorbed, or in the least kept at an emotional distance, than challenges to utilize every moment for a higher purpose, fear sin as a constant in one’s life, or sense holiness. Luzzatto’s voice emulates the integrity of the biblical prophets, challenging scholars, lay leaders, societal norms, and cultural truisms. The book is laborious, setting as an example for the reader to strive for perfection in minute, unpretentious, unglamorous ways.

Consequently, the content of Mesilat Yesharim and the difficulties it presents demonstrate that Luzzatto directed the book to a very few men who, from the start, could and would accept the teachings he wished to impart in the treatise. The reader is tasked with pursuing truth, justice, and living with God, the latter being a tangible (albeit spiritual) presence and not merely an intellectual concept. The text hovers above the reader as an otherworldly guide to living, tantalizingly close to the reader’s psyche because it speaks about life’s most banal elements, yet intellectually confusing and emotionally troubling because it progresses towards undefined, and as I will discuss undefinable, statuses of piety and holiness. In short, comprehension would come to the man who absorbed the text as a whole, embarking on the author’s spiritual journey step-by-step.

My analysis of Luzzatto’s worldview, his goals for himself and Jewish society as a whole, and the difficulties he faced in response to his ideas, is immeasurably aided by the existence of Luzzatto’s autograph manuscript of Mesilat Yesharim. Even with the vast amount of written material composed, printed, and disseminated during the early modern period, it is rare to be

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13 Moscow MS Guenzburg 1206, Russian State Library.
able to compare an author’s original manuscript treatise with a distinct printed edition released by the author soon after the manuscript’s completion. After all, printed texts usually reflected the author’s original composition. Additionally, autograph manuscripts are not regularly extant, perhaps because the manuscript was submitted to the printing shop and later discarded or simply due to the vicissitudes of time.

In this chapter I will analyze the autograph of Mesilat Yesharim with reference both to Luzzatto’s life, experience, and activities, and what is different from the printed edition. I will show how it elucidates Luzzatto’s personality, motivations, and approach to the rabbinate, and, in turn, how Luzzatto’s biography and cultural context illuminates the intention and (edited) publication of Mesilat Yesharim. The autograph manuscript of Mesilat Yesharim, only recently published for the first time, in contrast to the printed version, is far richer than the printed edition, providing opportunity to breathe new life into conceptions of Luzzatto and his cultural milieu.14 The manuscript contains within it the story of Luzzatto’s goals, struggles, perseverance, intended legacy, and corrupted influence as an appropriated image.

The chapter format and much of the text of the two versions is the same, but the manuscript reveals a spirit lacking in the published product. In contrast to the latter, which reads like a stern rebuke from author to reader, the autograph consists of a dialogue that enables the reader to observe a discussion of the challenging material at a distance. The reader

14 The manuscript was discovered two decades ago and published by Avraham Shoshanah with an introduction by Yosef Avivi: Mesilat Yesharim (Cleveland: Ofeq Institute, 1995). Both Simon Ginzburg and Isaiah Tishby mentioned the manuscript – and the codex was sold at auction in the nineteenth century – but until Shoshana’s and Avivi’s work, scholars did not apparently know what it was exactly. A nineteenth-century owner of the manuscript did recognize its relation to the printed book, as evident in a note. In the two decades since it was published, it has been welcomed by some in orthodox Jewish communities as an opportunity to complement regular study of the famous ethical treatise, but the text’s historical value has been overlooked or dismissed.
is initiated by a narrative that introduces him to the two characters whose conversation he would be absorbing for twenty-eight chapters. While the printed book was sufficient to elicit extraordinary popularity, the manuscript’s format and later excised passages serve as superior guides to understanding some of the most perplexing questions about Luzzatto’s spiritual intentions and the controversy that stirred around him. Broadly speaking, comparison of the manuscript with the printed edition raises questions about authorship intentions, relations between authors and printers or editors, rabbinic supervision of Hebrew presses, and Amsterdam Jewry’s interrelated rabbinic, print, and financial sectors — themes that will be addressed in a later chapter. Suffice it to say at present, and as I will show forthwith, that the book’s innumerable reprinting and Luzzatto’s posthumous popularity would not have been possible had the composition remained in its original state.

The present chapter is designed to set the tone for later biographical chapters that explore Luzzatto’s life and cultural context. Luzzatto’s complexity, and the sheer magnitude of his oeuvre and that of his associates, warrant a series of studies on his life and thought that take into account current historiographical trends and advances in theoretical and empirical research on the early modern period. This biographical study is one intended to set a foundation for understanding Luzzatto’s reception history. I have investigated Luzzatto’s worldview and self-conception in order to understand him according to his own terms, so that we can truly comprehend how the images of ‘Ramhal’ diverged from Luzzatto, the man.  

result is to learn about his historical and cultural contexts, an era of which we know comparatively little,\textsuperscript{16} and about the developing Jewish psyches in the rapidly changing nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

To a certain extent, my dissertation is a revision — not of previous research, but of assumptions about unexplored topics directly or tangentially connected to Luzzatto. In later chapters, I will investigate the Jewish communities of Padua and Amsterdam in the early eighteenth century, each of which provides much needed background for understanding Luzzatto and the controversy that stirred around him. In addition, I will discuss how rabbinic relationships influenced intra-communal associations in Italy and affected the Luzzatto controversy, as well as how a Sephardic-Ashkenazic ethnic divide was prevalent in the Luzzatto controversy but was just permeable enough in Amsterdam to enable his posthumous acceptance as a mainstream and celebrated figure. Ultimately, Luzzatto’s composition of \textit{Mesilat Yesharim} figures prominently in my re-visioning of Luzzatto’s experience, intention, and contemporary reception. Beginning my dissertation with an analysis of the original manuscript will help to demonstrate the macro-issue of how he, as an early modern figure, could be dissected and remembered selectively by adherents in the modern period after being subject to a massive heresy campaign.

In general, I have not written an intellectual biography of Luzzatto, one that sets out to analyze Luzzatto’s grand thought within Enlightenment, Sabbatian, or kabbalistic contexts, for

\textsuperscript{16} Two sessions of the 45\textsuperscript{th} Annual Conference of the Association for Jewish Studies in Boston, MA were devoted to the need to address the historiographical gaps spanning the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries. Organized by Shmuel Feiner and Matt Goldish, the panels were entitled “Between Spinoza and Mendelssohn; or, Was there a Jewish ‘Hazard Generation’?”
instance, or one that seeks to definitively establish his influences or influence on others.

Nonetheless, as Luzzatto was quintessentially a thinking person – he stated explicitly several times in *Mesilat Yesharim*, no less, that consciousness in deed, intention, and thought itself was imperative – I have chosen to begin with the book that best represents his worldview to help drive the narrative I wish to present. In addition to the implicit value to scholarship of early modern Jewish thought, Italian Kabbalah, eighteenth-century pietism, and the nineteenth-century Musar movement, *Mesilat Yesharim* is necessary to understanding Luzzatto’s self-conception, intention and activities in Italy, and his response to rabbinic opposition in both fighting rabbis while in Italy and living quietly in Amsterdam.

Thus, what follows is an analysis of Luzzatto’s original version of what became his most famous and widely read work. I am deliberately presenting a linear analysis of the work, as opposed to a conceptual one, in order to demonstrate the progression the author sought to convey to the reader and the sometimes seemingly contradictory circular nature of his thought. Although Luzzatto identified ascent to the divine as the book’s primary mission, his recognition of and concern for complex society, with distinct and varied individuals, demanded ability to submit to lesser ideals for the sake of divine harmony. The ideal of spiritual ascent, therefore, stood as an ideal of an individual’s vacuum-like relationship with God, but it was tempered and purposefully challenged by a horizontal ideal of sensitivity to one’s place in the world. While conflict could result, Luzzatto presented in *Mesilat Yesharim* an overarching purpose, each element feeding the other when engaged in properly — in fact, each integral to the other, essentially serving as opposite sides of the same proverbial coin.
Dialogues

Prior to completing his ethical treatise in September of 1738, Luzzatto had utilized the dialogue format in at least three works composed in Padua. The origins of dialogue as a narrative and philosophical device in western culture are found in classical Greek literature. Plato developed the art of an argumentative conversation in which truth appears through a give and take between two or more characters. Such resolution of truth influenced ancient western philosophers and became a common literary device adopted by European authors in the medieval and early modern periods. Baldassare Castiglione published The Courtier in 1528, describing perfect Renaissance character in a fictional conversation between a duke and his guests. Other Italian writers, including Torquato Tasso and Galileo Galilei, also followed Plato’s model. At the end of the seventeenth century, the French theologian François Fénelon composed Dialogues des morts, and at the beginning of the next century the French philosopher Nicolas Malenbranche published Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion. The most notable eighteenth-century example of this literary style may be David Hume’s Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (London, 1779).

Jewish authors living in Europe similarly adopted the dialogue genre. Most famously, the medieval Sephardic philosopher and poet Judah Halevi used the art of conversation in his apologetic masterpiece, the Kuzari. In a markedly different genre, Samuel Usque set his Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel in what Yosef Yerushalmi described as a “pastoral dialogue between three allegorical characters.” In Yesod ‘Olam, the Italian kabbalist Moses Zacut, a direct influence on Luzzatto’s kabbalistic thought and self-conception, utilized

17 Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory (reprint; University of Washington Press, 1996), 57.
characters in poetic discourse to celebrate the divine and the uniqueness of the Jewish people. Though distinct in subject and style, Jewish-authored dialogues faithfully emulated the Platonic dialogue of conversation in search of truth.

Luzzatto’s dialogues, meanwhile, stand apart. Luzzatto’s personality and pedagogy was direct and hierarchically minded, and his dialogues invariably include a character who submits entirely to the will and intellect of the teacher. That is, rather than presenting fellows in conversation working towards a common and joint enlightenment, Luzzatto’s dialogues clearly demarcate the character roles between teacher and student. This presentation not only reflected Luzzatto’s position as imparting wisdom to the reader, it mirrored his conception of the relationship between divine soul and crude body inherent in all Jews. The soul, about which Luzzatto wrote extensively in *Derekh Hashem*, was the source of inspiration to the body; the banality of the body was required to yield to the purity of the soul in order to raise the individual, and the world, spiritually. Consequently, when dealing with matters of the soul, including the purpose and intention of daily living found in *Mesilat Yesharim*, Luzzatto wrote his dialogues as reflections of the ultimate master-disciple relationship of soul-body — a model idealized in close-knit kabbalistic groups and epitomized by Luzzatto and his circle of associates. Luzzatto was unapologetic about his direct pedagogical style, stating explicitly in both *Da’at*

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19 Almanzi described two of Luzzatto’s dialogues as an arrangement of conversations between Luzzatto and his fellow-Paduan kabbalist, Moses David Valle (“Toledot R’ Mosheh Hayim Lutsato me-Padovah,” 131).

Tevunot and Mesilat Yesharim that acquisition of any skill – spiritually centered or not – necessitated adhering to the teachings of a master.21 Interestingly, it is precisely because of Luzzatto’s directness that the dialogue that was originally Mesilat Yesharim could be quickly and easily edited into monologue format, for most of the dialogue, with some crucial exceptions, consisted of teacher monologues.

Still, Luzzatto’s choice of dialogue reveals his layered approach to hierarchy. For Luzzatto and other kabbalists, the passive recipient was integral to God’s design of the cosmic universe: a teacher required students in order to transmit knowledge; a man, including one seeking to unite with the divine, was expected to marry; and the soul could not fulfill the divine will without a body.22 Despite the demand for complete submission to the lead character’s wisdom, certain interactions in the dialogue indicate Luzzatto’s awareness and acceptance that spiritual and intellectual development was difficult and not often achieved. The book’s supreme goal of uniting with the divine was rarely if ever attained, Luzzatto admitted, which subsequently made the task of striving for such unity the practical goal of the reader.

Attainment of any quality, ascending any rung of the ladder, was to be regarded as an ideal in and of itself.

21 Luzzatto, The Complete Mesillat Yesharim in Two Versions: Dialogue and Thematic (Ofeq Institute, 2007), 191–192 [cited from now on as Mesilat Yesharim]. He conveys the same idea in Da’at Tevunot: “There is no question in my mind that it is impossible to attain even that modicum of knowledge attainable by man of the wisdom of the Blessed One’s deeds except through the paths of learning and wisdom, and that one who wishes to enter into these inquiries without the necessary preparation and learning is entirely irresponsible and cannot succeed” (Luzzatto, The Knowing Heart — Da’at Tevunot, trans. by Shraga Silverstein [Feldheim, 2003], p. 225) [cited from now on as Da’at Tevunot].

22 In discussing the link between the Godhead and creatures of the lower worlds, Luzzatto identified the Jewish people with Keneset Israel, which was the Shekhinah, “creatures carried within the divine female to receive the flow from the Godhead in intercourse,” making Jews ideally passive in the world (Tishby, “A Collection of Kabbalistic Works from the Unpublished Manuscripts of Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto: MS Oxford 2593,” in Messianic Mystics, 101–102) [originally published as “Kovets shel kitve kabalah me-ginze Ramhal be-ketav yad Oksford 2593,” Kiryat Sefer 53 (1978): 167–198].
Luzzatto had practiced this nuanced hierarchical theory for years in Padua before moving to Amsterdam. He headed a yeshiva in his father’s home in which men of varying abilities and goals studied kabbalistic and other religious texts in a manner designed to promote their respective spiritual growth. The goal was the same, while the emphasis, depending on the man, varied. Similarly, in conjunction with the generalized perfection that Luzzatto detailed, the reader of Mesilat Yesharim would strive for his own personalized perfection in relation to his capabilities, circumstances, and acceptance of a divine plan. Ultimately, Luzzatto’s pedagogical scheme reflected a multi-layered perspective: first, his worldview sought to encompass the complexity of society and empower individuals with their own spiritual destiny; second, this perspective and subsequent intention reflected his self-conception and cultural diversity; and third, having judged himself successful despite the opposition he faced, he wished to convey the palpability and truthfulness of his spiritual journey.

**Narrative, Textual Foundation, Rabbinic Corrective**

The manuscript opens with a narrative worth quoting at length:

“There was once a certain wise man to whom God had given a wise and understanding heart. He set his mind to search and investigate by means of wisdom everything that happens under the heavens. His thoughts never ceased, day or night, hunting for things to investigate and examine in every domain, so as to

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23 The yeshiva’s regulations, to be discussed in depth in chapter three, are found in manuscript in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary (MS 8520a). They were first published along with dozens of letters to, from, and about Luzzatto by Simon Ginzburg in Ramhal u-vene doro: osef igerot u-te’udot, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv, 1937). Alexander Marx, librarian of JTS for half a century, informed Ginzburg of the collection of Luzzatto documents, and Ginzburg ably used them to produce his biography of Luzzatto as his doctoral thesis at Dropsie College.

The letters, along with a handful of other documents, were reprinted in Mordecai Chriqui, Igerot Ramhal u-bene doro (Jerusalem: Mekhon Ramhal, 2001). Chriqui’s work on Luzzatto at the Ramhal Institute in Jerusalem has advanced the availability and readability of many difficult texts associated with Luzzatto. For this reason, I use Chriqui’s edition when citing the “Ramhal letters.”
expand his knowledge and augment his wisdom, both in the meaning of the Torah and its commandments and in the realm of nature and creation in all its facets, sciences and arts. He would challenge his mind with every difficulty, saying: “Muster your forces and go forth.” For it was his sole desire and aspiration to multiply knowledge and original insight, wherever the mind could demonstrate the glory and brilliance of its majesty and power, great as it is.

Now among the various classes of people who, each in their own way, constitute society, the wise man would take daily notice of a circle of pietists who would follow their calling in simplicity, separateness, and piety. They would recite many psalms and draw out their prayers, and other similar practices. Whenever he would see them, the spirit within him would become agitated and he would ask himself: What are these people doing? What do they ponder? What insights do they have? How is it that their souls are satisfied and their intellect tranquil within them? How is it that they are not impelled by disquiet or moved by discontent to seek to know, to search for understanding? The twenty psalms they recite each day seem more than enough to set their thoughts calmly at rest. I, however, am always troubled concerning wisdom and knowledge, and my passion for new knowledge allows me no sleep. I find no satisfaction whatsoever in anything but intellectual investigation and comprehension of premises that are substantiated and verified. O that I could sit down with one of them, just once, for two or three hours, to hear what he has to say, to find out what knowledge he has acquired from all his seclusion and from all the books of the pietists that he is always reading. For I cannot imagine what knowledge he discovers in them. In all my days I never wasted a single hour over those books, nor did I ever desire in the least to see them. For I knew that I would gain no wisdom from them. Yet these people have these books in their hands from morning to night, as if they had never before heard that a person should be righteous, upright, and faithful, that he should not be evil or commit transgressions. By my life I have a great desire to listen to one of them, so that I may know what satisfies his soul and quenches his thirst. It happened one day that the wise man saw one of them approaching him. As youths they had been close friends, but later
Luzzatto presents the story of a wise, knowledgeable, and intellectually talented man. His curiosity is constantly piqued, his intellect always firing. The wise man pursues and masters both sacred and secular literature, and in so doing epitomizes the diversity and greatness of rabbinic figures influenced by and active in Renaissance Europe.

However, Luzzatto’s presentation is not actually honorific. His hakham is perpetually searching, with an implication that he is incomplete. From the start, Luzzatto makes clear that “God had given him a wise and understanding heart,” but God, as creator and immanent being, is absent from the wise man’s mind. The hakham’s study of Torah and commandments are intellectual, mentioned in the same sentence as his study of the sciences. The apparent praise of pursuing knowledge for its own sake becomes subsumed under the man’s unsettled spirituality. He is, after all, troubled by a circle of pietists who keep to themselves and are preoccupied with prayer to their creator. The distinction between the hakham and the pietists is presented as the fault of the former. The hakham is interested in the pietists as an intellectual problem, but he approaches them with negativity. His assumption that he can comprehend their perplexing way of life in mere two or three hours indicates his dismissal of their point of view. He condescendingly proclaims that he never “wasted” time with “those” books, because he assumed they were worthless, yet he is nevertheless bothered by their activities if not their actual existence.

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24 Mesilat Yesharim, 1–3.
Immediately following the hakham’s soliloquy about the pietists, he happens upon a hasid with whom he had been close as a youth. They proceed to discuss their differing perspectives. The hakham asks the hasid to tell him about his learning and outlook, to which the hasid replies humbly that there is little to tell. When the hasid asks the hakham in turn to teach him what he has learned in all his years of talmudic study, the latter proudly responds that it is useless for him to even begin because the hasid, in his ignorance, could not possibly comprehend: “My brother, you cannot taste the fruit of wisdom, for you have accustomed yourself only to the practice of separateness and seclusion, reciting psalms or offering supplications. But you have not trained yourself in conceptual analysis and dialectical thrust and parry with students. Words of wisdom are now for you like the words of a sealed book, one that is written yet no one can read.” The hakham elaborates on the many and difficult subjects of his study, and exclaims that the ideal of Judaism is the pursuit of talmudic dialectic (pilpul) and legal ruling (piske halakhah).

The hasid, supportive but unimpressed, rejects this notion as being too superficial. He replies: “My brother, you have learned a great deal, but do you know what is necessary for your own perfection and what pertains to the relationship between you and your Maker?” In a rapid but elaborate exchange concerning the nature of the divine commandments, their study, and their appropriate fulfillment, the hasid presses the hakham to explain the essence of love and fear of God, both of which are counted among the 613 mitzvot. As a proof text, the hasid quotes Deuteronomy 10:12–13: “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord

25 Ibid., 8.
your God with all your heart and with all your soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes, which I command you this day for your good.”

To the hakham, concepts such as fear and love of God are “clear and simple.”26 The biblical text is fit to be taught to children, a far cry from the intellectual challenges presented in the Talmud and other rabbinic literature. Luzzatto’s hasid, initially presented as the lesser of the two characters, thereupon demonstrates his own creative intellect by challenging the hakham to explain and present particulars of the “clear and simple” mitzvoth. He asserts that the Deuteronomy statement, among Moses’ final words to the children of Israel, sums up ideal Jewish living. It refers, he explains, to a series of five interrelated commandments: to fear God, to walk in His ways, to love God, to serve God, and to keep the commandments. The first four stand as distinct, complex commandments and require constant explication like any other mitzvah. Moreover, they are required to appropriately observe all other commandments; to ignore them is to denigrate all actions supposedly performed in the service of God.

The challenge to explain the meaning of abstract concepts of the relationship between God and man stumps the hakham, while the hasid’s own commentary converts him to a willing and faithful student. The remainder of the manuscript includes only a handful of useful comments from the hakham, who otherwise attentively listens to and affirms the words of the pietist.

Throughout the manuscript, as in all of Luzzatto’s master-disciple dialogues, the mood is free of contention and flows optimistically, sometimes absurdly so. The originally brilliant and

26 Ibid., 13.
proud *hakham* quickly becomes acquiescent and almost thoughtless, for his purpose is to serve as a vessel for the wisdom of the *hasid*. Even the initial exchange between the characters exhibits a joint tendency for friendship, as both the *hasid* and the *hakham* call each other “brother” (אחי). Though a challenging, even revolutionary, book, Luzzatto wished to cajole the reader rather than upset or anger him.

Nonetheless, the moral distinction between the two men is made clear from the start in two ways: first, as mentioned, in their attitudes towards relating their respective endeavors, with the pietist downplaying his own abilities and exhibiting an interest in the *hakham*; and second, in the *hasid*'s related eagerness and willingness to converse with the *hakham* in twice replying, “Here I am” (*hineni*). The *hasid*, sensitive to the *hakham*’s curiosity and more importantly to his own role as a spiritual aid, evokes the sincerity and readiness of Moses and the patriarchs, who similarly responded to the divine call with “*hineni*.” Obviously, the *hakham*-*hasid* roles do not parallel those of God and the Bible’s greatest figures, for the *hasid*’s reply of *hineni* is not given in a conciliatory manner. Rather, Luzzatto was intent on showing the complexity of the true, idealized pietist. He, as Luzzatto in fact saw himself, would respond to God and man with *hineni*, because the latter acted, wittingly or not, at the behest of the former.

The distinction and roles of the characters was, for Luzzatto, inherent in the words he used to describe them. The *hasid*, humble, unassuming, and ultimately triumphant, represented a simplified version of Luzzatto.27 More accurately, the *hasid* represented a multi-

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27 In fact, he used the term *hasidim* (pl. for *hasid*) to refer to himself and his inner circle. See Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle (Ramdav) and his Position in Luzzatto’s Group,” in *Messianic Mysticism*, p. 328, n. 99 [originally
generational circle of Italian pietists to which Luzzatto belonged and of which he believed himself to be the culmination. The title, study habits, and attitude of the hakham, meanwhile, evoked either Luzzatto’s belligerent contemporaries or friendly rabbis whom Luzzatto hoped to inspire and convert to his way of thinking. Though Luzzatto could have used another term for the latter character, including ‘maskil,’ Luzzatto chose ‘hakham,’ an official rabbinic title in Italian and Sephardic Jewish communities, as a means of calling for intellectual and spiritual development among his rabbinic colleagues.

The hakham acts as a foil for the hasid, enabling Luzzatto to manifest a social commentary about the rabbinate. Only once, after the opening chapters, does the hakham state anything intelligent. In the midst of the hasid’s description of perishut, or spiritual separateness, the hakham contradicts his new teacher and insists that the dicta of the sages and the letter of the law are sufficient for living appropriately. The hasid’s ideal, however, consisted of refraining from, or at least regulating, even that which is permitted. Luzzatto’s inclusion of this exchange, along with explicit comments from the hasid, served to acknowledge surreptitiously the challenge his vision posed to the reader. The book was intended for the high-minded scholars, but Luzzatto believed that they needed encouragement in order to revolutionize the rabbinate.

Viewing the characters’ relationship in the context of Luzzatto’s life experience, the dialogue is a clear manifestation of the author’s frustration with the rabbinic establishment,

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28 The word ‘hasid’ is biblical in origin and was used during the Hellenistic period. During the medieval and early modern periods, it was used among both Ashkenazim and Sephardim in various capacities. It has always denoted pietism beyond normative social mores.
Ashkenazic rabbis in particular. In a letter written in 1735, shortly after his arrival in Amsterdam, Luzzatto complained of three hundred yeshiva students in Frankfurt hopelessly seeking understanding and wisdom through the “emptiness of talmudic casuistry.”

Every Ashkenazic community he passed through and those he came in contact with in Holland, he continued, contained religiously committed men incorrectly pursuing or ignoring the supremely important mitzvoth of love and fear of God. He evoked the chaos of the first day of creation by describing Ashkenazic scholarship as void, formless, and dark, and stressed that Ashkenazic Jewry was ignorant of “what the Lord, your God, requires of you”—that is, Deuteronomy 10:12–13. As a result of their emphasis on pilpul and piske halakhah, they were completely devoid of the “scent of piety” (re’ah hasidut).

At one point in their initial exchange, the hasid warns against compulsive reading of “thousands of responsa.” While he admits to the hakham that halakhic inquiry is endless, extending as it did to innumerable volumes of printed books, the hasid laments that none concern the crucial matters of love and fear of God. Luzzatto’s reference to thousands denotes the vast proliferation of texts through print in the early modern period. Sitting in Amsterdam’s Ets Haim Yeshiva, with a library established in the 1640s to serve the Portuguese community as a depository of innumerable books printed in many languages, Luzzatto was privy to the profound impact of the printing press on Jewish scholarship and religious life. In a

29 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 33.1. This excerpt of the letter was published in Simchah Assaf, Mekorot le-toldhot ha-Hinukh be-Yisrael: A Source-Book for the History of Jewish Education from the Beginning of the Middle Ages to the Period of the Haskalah, ed. Shmuel Glick, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 2001), 460 (first ed. in vol. 4, no. 98). See also Hansel, Moïse Hayyim Luzzatto, 148.
30 Mesilat Yesharim, 12.
later chapter on Luzzatto’s eight years in Amsterdam, with an analysis of previously unpublished archival records detailing his stay there, I will argue that Luzzatto composed *Mesilat Yesharim* and other textbook-like treatises as guidebooks for students undergoing rabbinical training in the Ets Haim Yeshiva. The book was published at a point of rabbinic-oriented transition in the Portuguese community, Luzzatto was provided with a stipend to study in the yeshiva, and he was close to both Portuguese students and lay leaders. Therefore, his reference to excessive study of responsa takes on added meaning, as a warning to the intellectual elite of his adopted community that increased access to knowledge, valuable as it may be, did not in itself promote spirituality or fulfill God’s will.

The issues presented in the manuscript’s narrative had been at the forefront of Luzzatto’s mind for several years. Playing them out through dialogue was an attempt to enliven a debate or at least publicly state a problem. These issues had been part of a discourse in northern Italy in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries among pietistic and kabbalistic adepts. Benjamin Vitale, father-in-law of Luzzatto’s teacher Isaiah Bassan and a significant figure among a loose confederation of Italian pietists, had cited the same Deuteronomy verse in the introduction to his massive tome *Gevul Binyamin* (Amsterdam, 1727).\(^{32}\) An in-depth investigation of early modern Italian Hasidism — including the individuals and groups who studied Kabbalah, their religious and communal activities, their expressions of messianism, and their relationships with Sabbatianism — is a desideratum. Suffice it to say that in the second half of the seventeenth century, pro-pietistic, pro-kabbalistic rhetoric in opposition to legalistic

\(^{32}\) Benjamin Vitale, *Gevul Binyamin* (Amsterdam, 1727), author’s introduction (unnumbered folio after title page and before fol. 1r).
rabbinic thought was neither vehement nor widespread. Vitriolic polemic may have been relegated to private discourse, if it was expressed at all, for fear of anti-pietistic backlash stemming from rabbinic attacks on Sabbatianists. However, the basic idea found in the narrative of Luzzatto’s original version of *Mesilat Yesharim* was one that he inherited from his kabbalistic masters, though its presentation in his work is sharper and more polemical than in *Gevul Binyamin*. He judged the rabbinic establishment in general as failing to embody the depth of Judaism, inadequately serving both God and the public.

Through greater study of the multi-generational development of Italian kabbalistic thought between the late sixteenth century and the early eighteenth century, including cultural and biographical study, we could have a clearer idea of the significance of Luzzatto’s critique. Luzzatto matched his criticism of the rabbinate with concern for society as a whole. *Mesilat Yesharim* is a spiritual guidebook for the elite, and the manuscript makes clear that Luzzatto directed his teachings to rabbinic leaders who, he argued, owed their exceptional social and intellectual positions to God. They were responsible for the spiritual well-being of their community, and consequently were expected and in fact required to love and fear their Creator wholeheartedly, serve God, walk in God’s ways, and observe the mitzvoth with these intentions.34

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33 See Yaacob Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah: Leon Modena, Jewish Mysticism, Early Modern Venice* (Princeton, 2011), 275–276, who observes that at least three kabbalistic apologies were written in Italy in the 1730s. I will address this in chapter three.

34 For Luzzatto’s definitions of righteous leaders, see *Derekh Hashem*, II:3.8.
The Journey: Intention, Community, and Divine Proximity

Most of the first three chapters of the manuscript did not make it into the printed edition. The basic structure of the latter, however, was integral to Luzzatto’s original plan.

With Moses’ seemingly simple and rhetorical question to Israel as the basis for the book, Luzzatto used a statement from the Talmud as the medium through which to present his own answer:

“Torah leads to vigilance; vigilance leads to alacrity; alacrity leads to blamelessness; blamelessness leads to separateness; separateness leads to purity; purity leads to piety; piety leads to humility; humility leads to fear of sin; fear of sin leads to sanctity; sanctity leads to the holy spirit; the holy spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead.”

The moral and pedagogical declaration was attributed to Pinhas ben Yair, a second-century tanna celebrated for his piety. The baraita of Pinhas ben Yair may have reflected “mishnat hasidim,” representing an alternative pietistic curriculum to the legal emphasis prevalent during the talmudic period.

While Luzzatto may have been unaware of the historical ramifications of the baraita, he undoubtedly recognized the relevancy of the ancient authoritative text to his own contemporary polemic. Wishing to present a way for the hasid to instruct the hakham, Luzzatto assured his validity by relying upon the well-known and unquestionable talmudic text.

To be sure, Luzzatto was not merely justifying his perspective by finding an early rabbinic statement to support his argument, nor did he arbitrarily adopt this baraita as a companion to

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35 The baraita – a teaching external to that found in the six orders of the Mishnah – appears twice in the Babylonian Talmud and once in the Jerusalem Talmud, with slight variations: Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 20; Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 9:15; Jerusalem Talmud, Shekalim 3:3.

36 I am grateful to Haim Shapira, senior lecturer in the Faculty of Law at Bar-Ilan University, for relating this possibility to me. The baraita has not been extensively dealt with in scholarly literature.
Deuteronomy 10. The *baraita* had appeared with truncated analysis in at least two books printed in Amsterdam in the 1730s, and Luzzatto’s lengthy elucidation was certainly a contribution to scholarship at the time. Moreover, aware that Pinhas had been the father-in-law of Simeon bar Yohai, the pseudonymic author of the Zohar and the paragon of Jewish mystical figures in the early modern period, Luzzatto read the *baraita* as the prototypical mystical text. Whether directly connected or not, the *baraita* evokes mystical Merkavah (“chariot”) literature of the same period, which described ascents to the heavenly palaces and the Throne of God. The prophetic visions of Ezekiel and Isaiah served as quintessential examples of spiritual ascent and encounter with the divine, and Merkavah mysticism developed in the early rabbinic period with exegetical expositions of the biblical prophecy. In addition, *Merkavah* literature described supplementary vision and experience:

“When I ascended to the first palace, I was righteous; in the second palace I was pure; in the third palace, I was truthful; in the fourth palace, I was perfect; in the fifth palace, I brought holiness before the King of Kings, blessed be His name. In the sixth palace, I said the sanctification before Him who spoke and fashioned and commanded all living beings so that the angel would not destroy me. In the seventh palace, I stood in all my power. I trembled in all my limbs.”

Luzzatto sought to bolster his critique of the rabbinic establishment and further his goal of influencing men typified by the *hakham*.

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37 See chapter five for the context of the printing of *Mesilat Yesharim*, and the other books that dealt with the *baraita* of Pinhas ben Yair.
As stated, the initial encounter between the *hasid* and the *hakham* results in the latter submitting to the pedagogical approach of the former. More than adopting the role of student in order to obtain additional information, as he presumably had done throughout his fictitious life, the *hakham* suspended his worldview in order to become adept in the way of living like his new master. The *hasid*, for his part, explains to the *hakham* that the best way to understand Moses’ instruction to fear and love God (and to serve God and walk in God’s ways), was to adopt the difficult but simplistic approach found in the Mishnah of Phineas ben Yair. The *baraita*, understood and followed properly, would result in spiritual ascent that, to Luzzatto, would simultaneously affect moral character, spiritual sensitivity, and cosmic and societal perfection. That is, thoroughly elucidating each rung of the ladder and assimilating their ideas would palpably change one’s being; ascent to the Heavenly Throne was not merely an intellectual exercise, nor even an ethereal mystical experience; rather, it was an all-encompassing and constant state of being.

*Mesilat Yesharim* warrants analysis from several vantage points, not in the least the author’s proximity to and evocation of medicine, science, language, art, mercantilism, politics, and war. Yet, as my dissertation is focused on Luzzatto’s spiritual motivation and his challenge to the rabbinate, these important issues are addressed largely in passing — much in the way, I believe, Luzzatto himself valued them. While individuals are not always conscious of changes they experience, particularly broad cultural characteristics that drive modern historiography, Luzzatto was aware of the advancing era in which he lived. He reflected his cultural milieu, but he was not devoted to it per se: he appropriated contemporary intellectual theories to conform to his primarily mystical conception of the world.
The vast majority of Luzzatto’s original ideas and text elucidating Pinhas ben Yair’s ladder of saintliness was retained in the printed edition. The manuscript consists of twenty-eight chapters; twenty-six of them relate directly to the steps delineated in the baraita, with the first two entailing the initial interaction of the characters followed by the hasid’s introductory remarks about Man’s duty to his Creator. The twenty-six chapters show that Luzzatto treated each ascending step as expansive platforms rather than narrow rungs. For instance, he devoted four chapters to Vigilance (zerizut): an explanation of the concept; elements of the trait; how to acquire vigilance; and factors detrimental to vigilance and ways to avoid them. A similar format is followed for each of the other traits, though most consist of three chapters rather than four. Luzzatto devoted the most ink to the trait of Piety (hasidut), probably because his goal was to convert the reader from ‘hakham’ to ‘hasid.’ In contrast, the final three traits of Humility (anavah), Fear of Sin (yirat het), and Sanctity (kedushah), appear immediately after the chapters on Piety in fewer combined pages. As will be discussed, the higher elements of the ascent are more spiritually comprehensive and intellectually abstract, and, for Luzzatto, warranted, required, or allowed for less explanation.

Purpose, Duty, and Torah Study

With the hakham metaphorically sitting at his feet, the hasid begins the lesson:

“The study one must undertake to achieve piety and separateness seeks to know, first of all, what man’s duty to his Creator truly is, what the Lord our God requires of us, and how we may gain His favor, blessed be He. Once we know this, we can look for the ways that will enable us to fulfill these duties of ours, and to fix in our souls those qualities that it ought to have so as to achieve this aim. So too we can strive to recognize the factors that may
prevent us from accomplishing this, or that remove the good traits from our souls and establish their opposites in them.”

The goal for the reader is to live a life of piety. The separateness to which he refers is dealt with extensively in later chapters and entails a combination of public and private abstentions. Recognition that God is a perceptible being with anthropopathic desire is the first step towards fulfilling God’s will, followed by proper study and pursuit of said will and awareness and avoidance of anything that detracts from piety. The hakham dutifully replies: “I already see that this study will not be as short as I had previously imagined, and as imagined by everyone in the world except those who practice piety and separateness. It is impossible for it not to be as broad and profound as any of the most profound investigations in the sciences.”

Luzzatto sought to present a perspective unknown, disregarded, or misunderstood by vast swaths of society. Choosing to move quickly into his exegeses of the baraita, however, he devoted only a few pages to the validity of his pietistic viewpoint. First, the hasid explained that some people argue that the divine plan has no relevance to the human psyche — God created “so many kinds of goodly creatures and fine pleasures, everything ordered with marvelous wisdom” for unknown reasons. Humanity, in turn, was created in order to witness the beauty, “eat of its fruit, be sated with its goodness, and contemplate its great and goodly creations.” Under such circumstances, the Torah’s statutes and ordinances serve only to aid mankind in recognizing the existence of the Creator and managing society without corruption. As the hasid explains, from this point of view, “Just as clothing [is necessary] due to cold, and

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40 Mesilat Yesharim, 23.
41 Ibid., 23.
houses due to rain, so [are] the mitzvot [necessary] to order man’s social arrangements and deeds.”

Luzzatto did not specify the origin of this idea, and it does not correlate exactly with either rabbinic or Enlightenment thought. Social explanations for commandments are found in the writings of Maimonides and other philosophers, but even the most philosophically minded rabbinic thinker adhered to talmudic conceptions of ritualistic precepts as distinct from socio-political precepts. The idea that man was created only to enjoy the fruits of the physical creation is similarly inconsistent with Maimonides’ view of this world or the next.

At the beginning of Da’at Tevunot, in a preamble to complicated remarks about God’s Oneness, Luzzatto provided five contrary views that he argued necessitated refutation. Luzzatto classified the first two under ‘idolatry’: one acknowledged the existence of the Supreme Being, but considered the world as governed by lesser and innumerable gods; the other, perhaps evocative of Zoroastrianism, contended that the world consisted of opposites, including a deity of evil to counter a deity of good. The third concept belonged to the “general population,” and regarded natural law as God’s universal and sole interactive mechanism, and human exertion within the natural system as the only factor in success. This viewpoint denied a personal God and the existence of providence, and celebrated the power

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42 Ibid., 24–25.
45 Luzzatto’s terminology: הקדוש ברוך הוא.
46 Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 39a.
and ability of the individual. Luzzatto was addressing contemporary notions of Deism, which rejected the concept of revelation and identified reason and observation as the faculties through which man could know the divine. In contrast, the fourth idea Luzzatto wished to overturn was a blatant reference to Christianity, which argued that Jewry’s cosmic status had been superseded. “The length of the exile ostensibly seems to bear this out,” Luzzatto wrote, “and casts fear into the hearts of those who are not strong in the true faith.” Unlike the preceding popular belief that was secular in nature and feasibly belonged to society at large, the latter reflected Jewish religious doubts stemming from minority status in Christendom. One of Luzzatto’s own supporters in the midst of the controversy, a rabbi who had granted Luzzatto the second tier of rabbinic ordination, converted to Christianity around the time that Luzzatto composed Da’at Tevunot. The fifth and final standard that Luzzatto sought to combat consisted of Jews who intentionally sinned despite recognizing their Creator. This could refer to individual Jews who were not drawn to Christianity, either for religious, social, or financial reasons, but who chose to live without observing the commandments. A document that I will discuss in the following chapter detailing the construction of an ‘eruv hatserot, an imaginary boundary devised for the sake of easing Sabbath observance, indicates that some of Luzzatto’s fellow Paduan Jews freely desecrated the Sabbath without compunction. However, Luzzatto’s emphasis that these “corrupt sinners” thought “to strengthen themselves through magic and charms... [or] through a knowledge of the ministering angels and their functions” seems to

48 Da’at Tevunot, 32–33.
49 See chapter four for Nehemiah Kohen and his relationship with Luzzatto.
50 See chapter 2.
designate individuals or groups who willfully, rather than casually, rejected commandments. It is possible that Luzzatto referred surreptitiously to Sabbatianists or other quasi-mystics whom he denied were true pietists, but with whom he was associated by opponents.

Luzzatto composed *Da’at Tevunot* in 1734, combatting Christianity, Enlightenment thought and culture, and more, but just a few years later in Amsterdam, writing this handbook of Jewish moral and spiritual ideals for an elite few, Luzzatto explicitly countered only the single unidentifiable viewpoint mentioned above. On the surface, it appears to be an amalgamation of ideas, combining a philosophical justification for certain commandments found in the writings of some rabbis with a philosophical notion of humanism. However, considering the author’s overall critique of both rabbinic and lay leadership – as I will show, the manuscript includes biting evaluations of affluent members of society content to live well without concern for a larger purpose – the idea presented here is in fact a commentary on the state of *halakhah* in contemporaneous Jewish society. Viewing mitzvoth as mere buttresses of communal living humanized and intellectualized them, opening the psychological possibility that individuals would conclude that certain provisions did not apply to them personally. Luzzatto did not overtly address this issue, for he maintained an ambiguity throughout *Mesilat Yesharim* as a means to extend the book’s reach, but there is widespread evidence that Italian and Dutch Jews with whom he lived were lax in aspects of religious observance. Concurrently, Luzzatto’s criticism of the existence of and preoccupation with myriads of printed responsa reflected his concern with contemporary rabbinic discourse, not only in terms of the *hakham* who sought to master the vast field of *halakhah* but also with rabbis who contributed to extending the parameters and influence of the field. Not that Luzzatto disregarded responsa literature or new
halakhic questions arising from novel circumstances. Luzzatto’s goal in *Mesilat Yesharim* was to challenge the intellectual elite to move itself and the community as a whole closer to God spiritually. Endless discussion in the same intellectual realm precluded spiritual growth. He challenged his rabbinic readers to elevate their minds to proper intention, which he believed would subsequently fulfill God’s will for them personally and for the community as a whole, and disparaged the view that rabbis could solve communal (and cosmic) difficulties piecemeal and through legal proclamation.

In addition to commenting about the social state of halakhic practice, Luzzatto used the idea as a foil for his own platform, paralleling his presentation of the confident but ultimately mistaken *hakham*. Citing various midrashic sources and displaying a keen rational assessment, the *hasid* contradicts the idea that everything was created for the sake of mankind’s pleasure. With respect to Genesis 6:7 and the near total destruction of the world by flood, for instance, the pietist quotes a midrashic analogy concerning a king who prepared an elaborate bridal chamber for his son: after the young man angered his father, the monarch destroyed the chamber, proclaiming “Have I made these for anyone but my son? Now that my son is gone, should these remain?” Luzzatto identified this Midrash and the lesson learned from the biblical deluge as indicative of God’s purposeful creation of and interaction with every aspect of the world. Creation itself retains a deeper objective for mankind than enjoyment, and

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51 Throughout *Mesilat Yesharim*, Luzzatto used *midrashim* freely and without a methodology. His use of and reliance on Midrash deserves to be studied in its own right, particularly as it relates pedagogically to the midrashic emphasis of his kabbalistic master, Benjamin Vitale. For examples of Midrash and Kabbalah, see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 81.

destruction results from rebelling against God, not as a consequence of social and political corruption.

Challenging the presumptive rationale, the hasid argues that the sheer number of the commandments and their minutiae, which the hakham holds dear as an intellectual enterprise, are unnecessary if their function is merely to enable man to keep order and harbor appreciation. Likewise, the spiritual loftiness of the soul, associated with the divine in rabbinic literature, conflicts with an ideal that man seek out and enjoy materialism. Moreover, “if man was created in order to enjoy the good things of the world, and the mitzvoth serve merely as limits to prevent his corruption...then in light of what has occurred in this world and continues to occur, the divine intention has been, God forbid, frustrated and completely unrealized.”

Reason shows that man’s life is full of “toil and sorrow, with all sorts of distress and sickness, pain and troubles, and after all of that, death.” Mankind does not in fact enjoy the fruits of creation, and it is preposterous in the hasid’s conception of the perfect, singular deity that God could have intended something that did not occur.

With the setup complete – and the hakham conceding to the hasid’s critique – Luzatto proceeded to succinctly declare the purpose of creation as he saw it. Combining biblical, talmudic, and kabbalistic sources, the hasid counters that “man was created solely to delight in God and take pleasure in the splendor of the shekhinah.... The place for this delectation is the

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53 See Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 152b; see also Moses de Leon, Ha-Nefesh ha-Hokhmah, no.1.
54 Mesilat Yesharim, 29.
55 See Psalms 90:10; Avot 5:21.
world-to-come, but the path that leads to that haven of ours runs through this world.”

Pleasure was still the goal, but it was a spiritual pleasure reflective of God’s glory that man should pursue. While nineteenth-century Lithuanian Jewry managed to divorce kabbalistic inclination from *Mesilat Yesharim*, the manuscript leaves no doubt of Luzzatto’s mystical intention. “True perfection,” Luzzatto wrote, “lies only in cleaving (*devekut*) to Him.... That alone is good, while everything else that people deem to be good is but vanity and a deceptive lie.”

The concept of *devekut* is mentioned but not actually discussed in the manuscript. After this statement, it does not appear again until the end of the book in the lone chapter on *kedushah* (holiness), as the result of the long and difficult process of ascending the *baraita*’s spiritual ladder. The verb appears several times in Deuteronomy, and the Talmud includes discussions concerning the way one may achieve it. Talmudic definitions of cleaving to God range from marrying the daughter of a scholar and supporting scholars monetarily to emulating God’s attributes. In the medieval and early modern periods, kabbalists used the term to describe communion with God, achieved after mastering the fear of God and love of God. Moshe Idel has shown that medieval masters of ecstatic Kabbalah, such as Abraham Abulafia, identified *devekut* as a union between the human intellect and the neo-Aristotelian theory of

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56 *Mesilat Yesharim*, 33. Psalms are replete with expressions of delight in Heavens, the Zohar includes reference to enjoyment of the Divine Presence, and *Avot* compares this world to an antechamber before entrance into the Celestial Throne room (see Psalms 37:4; Zohar, Genesis, I:47a; *Avot* 4:16).
57 *Mesilat Yesharim*, 33–34.
59 See Babylonian Talmud, *Ketubot* 111b (marrying daughter of a scholar or assisting scholars materially); *Sotah* 14a (emulating his attributes).
Early modern kabbalists, meanwhile, emphasized the cleaving of the soul with the divine in a mix of intellect, imagination, and emotional exaltation, usually during times of prayer. In general, kabbalists identified devekut with a degree of prophecy, and estimated that a permanent state of devekut was attainable only after death or the cosmic redemption.

Luzzatto’s use of the term was deliberate. He sought to convince highly educated rabbis, presumably aware of the Talmud’s definition of devekut, to adopt kabbalistic ideals. Therefore, he argued that all societal values, including, based on the manuscript’s narrative, Torah study and mitzvah observance, are good only if they achieve the redemptive value of approaching the divine. Scholars expert in the particulars of Jewish law or talmudic dialectic are not necessarily accomplishing good. If the purpose is communion with God, then the scholar wishing to fulfill God’s will must engage in study and activities that will bring this goal to fruition. A kabbalistic way of life, as Luzzatto envisioned it, was a far cry from the standards of the Jewish intellectual elite to whom he directed his moralism.

Few men could reach the supreme level of kedushah, but Luzzatto nonetheless believed that all men could and should better themselves morally regardless of their spiritual, or social, status. Hence, the constant and attainable purpose for all of mankind, as Luzzatto saw it, was to serve God by gradually but relentlessly striving to attain devekut. God created the world to enable this striving, the hasid argues: this world – the antechamber in the rabbinic analogy – is a place to toil rather than enjoy, because the individual must overcome divinely-sanctioned

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trials in order to reach perfection. “The fundamental purpose of man’s existence in this world,” he declares, “is solely to keep the mitzvoth, serve [God], and withstand trial. The pleasures of this world serve only to aid and assist him in being tranquil and composed, so that he may turn his heart to that service for which he is responsible.”

In order to grasp Luzzatto’s goal for his ideal rabbinic reader, it is important to comprehend at least rudimentarily Luzzatto’s theory of evil and its relationship to divine providence. Much of Luzzatto’s books of kabbalistic prose, Da’at Tevunot and Derekh Hashem, discuss the concepts of evil and providence in relation to God’s Oneness, the (morally challenging) bond of soul and body, and the existence of trials and tribulations. Although the ideas are abstract, they help illuminate Luzzatto’s critique of the rabbinate, his motives in authoring Mesilat Yesharim, and his self-conception and activities in both Italy and Amsterdam.

In short, God’s Oneness – defined as perfect, simple, and all-encompassing – is the only divine aspect revealed in this world. Revelation is nothing less than knowing God’s Oneness through spiritual attachment of soul to Creator. This is the ultimate good and purpose of man’s existence. Evil may be identified with anything that runs contrary to this goal, and it exists as a result of God ‘withdrawing’ from the ‘world.’ Luzzatto conceived of ‘withdrawing’ and ‘world’ as providential spectrums, such that the withdrawal could vary in degree and the world could include humanity, a nation, or a single person. Withdrawal occurred, generally, as a result of

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61 Luzzatto’s theory of evil, subsumed under God’s sovereignty and providential interaction with creation, is another desideratum and deserving of a study in its own right. For a study of Luzzatto’s theory of Theodicy (freeing God’s Providential Rule from the existence of evil) relative to trends in contemporary European thought, see Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, “Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto’s Thought against the Background of Theodicy Literature,” in Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence (=Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Series 137), eds. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (Sheffield, 1992), 173–199.

62 Da’at Tevunot, 44–45.
sin. So, while the possibility to affect God’s relationship with the world empowered the individual, it also demanded grave responsibility. Without appropriate intention, thought, and action, man countered the purpose of creation and prevented the revelation of God’s Oneness in its entire splendor.

Although mankind has the power to affect the cosmos, Luzzatto stressed in both treatise and correspondence that God was forever in complete control as the world’s sovereign. Fulfilling God’s will and uniting with God’s Oneness is possible only if the individual willfully acknowledges God as sovereign and master. That acknowledgement entails accepting evil as an element of providence, the interaction between the creator and mankind for a purpose. Evil that befalls man serves as an opportunity for the individual to proclaim God’s sovereignty, uplift himself morally and spiritually, and be drawn closer to the divine. As justice will ultimately reign supreme, in combination with the world-to-come, individuals devoted to observing mitzvoth should value tribulations as divine trials and spiritual opportunities. If viewed appropriately – incorporating an elaborate explanation for why the righteous suffer while the wicked prosper – evil itself could then be regarded as good.⁶³ As Luzzatto stated in Da’at Tevunot, “in the time to come the Holy One, Blessed by He, will make known...how even the chastisements and tribulations were precursors of good and actual preparation for blessing.”⁶⁴ Hence, God meted out good and evil, reward and punishment, pleasure and suffering according

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⁶³ Derekh Hashem, II:3.9 (“Suffering is the thing that God created to cleanse this pollution... [T]hrough the suffering of these select individuals, creation in general is cleansed, and step by step the world is brought closer to perfection”).
⁶⁴ Da’at Tevunot, 80–81.
to a vast plan, and the infinite complexity of individual experience and talent reflected that plan.

An intellectually supple mind prevented spiritual stagnation and enabled the adept to fulfill God’s will. In the dialogue of *Mesilat Yesharim*, the *hasid* presents the *hakham* with a three-fold, multi-layered challenge: one, to unite with God through appropriate thought, intention, and action; two, to recognize that toiling in this world as a result of evil is integral to *devekut*; and three, to acknowledge the vast spectrum of circumstance, experience, and spiritual status in the Jewish community. The latter element, which permeates the manuscript in the background, concerns the individual’s critical awareness of self in relation to others.

As I will elaborate in a chapter on Luzzatto’s kabbalistic activities in Padua, he accorded cosmic value to birth and ability. In his own case, Luzzatto believed himself to be akin to the biblical Moses, and associated other members of his mystical fellowship with specific reincarnated souls or messianic figures integral to the ultimate redemption.65 Luzzatto identified these connotations as divine gifts to be cultivated and appreciated. His status as Moses, for instance, was at the behest of the divine, and consequently warranted seriousness and humility. All members of society, of all intellectual or socio-economic strata, were similarly

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involved in lives intended to contribute to the divine plan. Luzzatto’s submission to God’s sovereignty was his social leveler, demanding and enabling respect for all levels of individuality as it permeated the community. Just as trials were elemental to his understanding of providence, so too was acceptance that one’s circumstance, among the elite or otherwise, was granted by God. In addition to enabling the reader to contemplate his own existence, Luzzatto’s conception of divinely-ordained circumstance promoted a basic level of personal toleration. His pedagogical activities in Padua had been open to the entire community, though still within a hierarchical framework, and Luzzatto conveyed in Mesilat Yesharim that one’s personal stringency was not the appropriate barometer to judge and interact with others.

As explicitly stated in Derekh Hashem, Luzzatto valued soul and body as equal partners in the quest to fulfill the purpose for which man was created. Thus, Luzzatto followed the hasid’s statement about enduring trials with an affirmation that pleasure, the sensations of which stem from God’s creation, should be consciously utilized for the sake of serving God. The challenges of the body were to be acknowledged and even appreciated. One may and in fact must engage with physicality and pleasure to a degree that is spiritually beneficial. Thus, for his elite reader, not only is one’s own judgment imperative, but so too is recognition of the individual contemplation and decisiveness of others, all cogs in the great wheel of the divine plan.

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66 Tishby points out that Luzzatto’s “central idea in his commentary on the periscope Mishpatim is that the transmigration of souls is not intended as a punishment: its chief purpose is rather to give man a chance to rectify the faults and shortcomings of which he was guilty in his previous existence in this world; less, however, with the aim of self-perfection than in order to help complete the tikun of the whole world and of the Shekhinah” (Tishby, “A Collection of Kabbalistic Works…MS Oxford 2593,” in Messianic Mysticism, p. 100).
67 Derekh Hashem, II:3.11.
68 Ibid., I:3.2.
69 Mesilat Yesharim, 164–170.
Mastering the relationship between soul and body was to be followed by finessing one’s external circumstances. This included relating positively to other individuals involved in their own providential experience and engaged with particular challenges. Devekut was not achieved solely in relation to God as if in a spiritual vacuum; it was also in regards to the functioning of the entire world according to the divine plan. In turn, devotion to God was accompanied by submission to one’s limitations, and recognition that masses of people could not measure up to an elite ideal. The ideal is complex, amorphous, and difficult to attain, and Luzzatto’s enigmatic text reflects that. However, Mesilat Yesharim is offered as a comprehensive guide, and the ideas are comprehensible if absorbed within the context of Luzzatto’s stated purpose of creation. The mission, whether or not devekut was attainable, travels along the path of spirituality, with the Oneness of God in mind.

In his exposition of the theory of halakhah and spiritual existence, Luzzatto contended that each commandment had implicit value, the appropriate performance of which literally brought man closer to God. In turn, his emphasis on fear and love of God as constant mitzvoth in their own right demanded that the individual recognize the inherent importance of each moment. Using figures of speech to demonstrate the author’s and readers’ cultural contexts, the hasid implores man to weigh his deeds “according to the standard used for gold,” reasoning that he would consequently be drawn after God “like iron to a magnet” (כברזל אחר אבן השואבת). The former expression, attesting to financial sensibilities prevalent in both the Dutch and Venetian mercantilist societies, means that the performance of each commandment

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70 Derekh Hashem, 1:2.3.  
71 Mesilat Yesharim, 37–38.
is valuable and will be judged on high to the minutest degree. This contrasted with the antagonistic theory, discussed above, that man will be judged favorably as long as he is generally good. That theory, he argued, presented mitzvoth as mere guidelines to prevent mankind from going astray and corrupting the world. Under such a system, man could knowingly and contentedly sin consistently if he knew that he accomplished more good than evil according to the heavenly scale of judgment. However, Luzzatto’s conception of truth, justice, and providence necessitated God’s evaluation of every deed, thought, and intention. God’s mastery over the world, including man, consisted of knowledge of all; knowledge of the intricacies of a person’s life was integral to the divine plan in which providence played an essential part. Therefore, in Luzzatto’s conception, man’s assiduous attention to moral detail was imperative to living according to God’s direction and, moreover, to understanding his purpose in the divine plan. This made living in this world as important as the presumed reward of the next world, an idea that carried more meaning as the adept ascended the ladder of spirituality. In the analogy, just as society valued gold, Luzzatto called for the equivalent emphasis on moral living.72

Meanwhile, the expression that the righteous man would be drawn to God “like iron to a magnet” is important for two reasons. First, Luzzatto viewed the world as fluid and not stagnant, in which God responds to the man who seeks Him. To Luzzatto, at any given moment, depending on actions, intentions, or thoughts, a person was either drawn closer to or

72 Similarly, Luzzatto demanded that man scrutinize his actions, “much as great merchants constantly assess all their affairs so they suffer no damage” (Mesilat Yesharim, 58).
pushed further away from God.\textsuperscript{73} Secondly, Luzzatto was well aware of advances in scientific and medical knowledge and used science to further his argument.\textsuperscript{74} The iron-magnet analogy displayed Luzzatto’s (and his reader’s) familiarity with a discovery in the early seventeenth century by the English scientist William Gilbert that magnets may be made by beating wrought iron.\textsuperscript{75} Gilbert’s work was published in 1600 and again in Amsterdam in 1651, the latter publication of which Luzzatto may have read while living in the Dutch Republic.\textsuperscript{76}

The hasid’s introductory remarks indicate that Luzzatto perceived his own perspective to be in conflict with established rabbinic sentiment. Citing the baraita that “Torah leads to vigilance,” the pietist states, seemingly superfluously, that Torah study is the first stage of the spiritual path and that without it evil will engulf the person. “If a person fails to study Torah,” the hasid explains, “the darkness of materiality will prevail over him by degrees until he is at great remove from the truth and does not realize it.”\textsuperscript{77} Using a medical analogy, an indication of Luzzatto’s association with the study of medicine,\textsuperscript{78} the hasid explains that just as God gave man the evil inclination to test him, so too did God provide an antidote to its potency. If a sick

\textsuperscript{73} Luzzatto used a light-darkness analogy to convey this idea in Derekh Hashem, I:4.3–4. In his discussion of Alacrity, Luzzatto stated that the ‘lazy’ man “is drawn from evil to evil until he finds himself immersed in the ultimate evil” (Mesilat Yesharim, 90).
\textsuperscript{74} In Da’at Tevunot, he refers to a horologe (169), medicinal plants (191), “osseous vapor” (209), and curing illness (305).
\textsuperscript{75} Gilbert first published his findings in 1600 in a work entitled De Magnete, Magneticisque Corporibus, et de Magno Magnete Tellure (On the Magnet and Magnetic Bodies, and on the Great Magnet the Earth). Luzzatto may have come across De Mundo Nostro Sublunari Philosophia Nova (New Philosophy about our Sublunary World), published in Amsterdam in 1651.
\textsuperscript{76} In the midst of his observations, Gilbert rejected Aristotelian philosophy. Perhaps Luzzatto, in his belief that the physical world reflected God’s cosmic universe (see Derekh Hashem, II:7 [chapter on astronomy and astrology]) identified Gilbert’s discovery as representative of kabbalistic sublimation of philosophy and other theoretical systems. If so, the intended reader, an expert in halakhah with an interest in science, would have valued the analogy and the lesson.
\textsuperscript{77} Mesilat Yesharim, 49.
\textsuperscript{78} See chapter two.
“patient wants to take a different drug [than that proscribed by his physician], following his own fancy without the prerequisite medical knowledge, it is clear that it will do him no good at all. Indeed, he will forfeit the cure he would have had, if he had followed the physician’s prescription. As a result, his illness will grow worse and he will die from it.”

Through the Torah, the individual could combat materialism and the evil inclination, and acquire the means of ascending the ladder and cleaving to God.

The hakham concurs, but follows with an acerbic denigration of non-scholars as forever ignorant and lost:

“[T]hey are devoid of all spiritual good, full of vice and delusion. They are incurable, since they despise the proper cure. Now transgressions are like a chain, each one linked to the next. So anyone who thinks about setting the perversities of the generation straight is unable to find an opening since the defects are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. But the truth of the matter is that all of the defects stem from the first evil root, namely abandonment of the Torah.”

This passage – harsh and conclusive, ending the chapter and temporarily the conversation – shows that while the hakham is at this point amenable to the hasid’s teachings, he has yet to develop spiritually. It is so aggressive and opposite in tone of the venerable hasid that Luzzatto seems to want it to hang unanswered, ringing abrasively in the reader’s ear. The hakham’s derogatory statement serves as a stark contrast to the unity and spiritual sensitivity espoused by the pietist, and a blatant example of the difficulty and complexity of living with pietist intent among a population with conflicting values.

79 Mesilat Yesharim, 46.
80 Ibid., 50.
At the very end of the volume, at the conclusion of his discussion of *kedushah* and *devekut*, the *hasid* earnestly reminds the *hakham* to value individuality, each person comprised of a unique nature and requiring specific direction and guidance:

“For the way of piety, appropriate for one whose occupation is the study of Torah, is not the same as that which is suitable for one who has to hire himself out to work for others. And neither of the two is appropriate for one who engages in business. The same applies to all other details regarding man’s worldly affairs. For each and every one, according to his nature, there are appropriate ways of piety. This is not because piety varies [in essence], for it is certainly the same for all people, which is simply to do that which is pleasing to the Creator. But inasmuch as the bearers [piety] vary, the means that get them to that goal cannot but vary with the individual.”

Thus, Luzzatto’s polemic against the rabbinate was multi-layered. Not only did he decry the importance of talmudic casuistry and legalism, amid his call for greater spirituality among the intellectual elite, Luzzatto promoted increased consciousness towards the community at large.

The *hakham*’s rant was Luzzatto’s acknowledgement that his contemporaries were distressed by widespread vice and transgression. However, the decision to leave the man’s venom unanswered until after he’d ascended each rung of the ladder indicated two things: one, that Luzzatto viewed the gap between religious leader and communal members as the responsibility of the former; and two, that communal unity would follow naturally from the individual’s complete commitment to the divine plan and spiritual ascension.

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81 Ibid., 287.
Vigilance, Alacrity, and Cleanliness

The intricacies of Luzzatto’s elucidation of the baraita attributed to Pinhas ben Yair are innumerable. While Mesilat Yesharim has not previously undergone academic analysis, it has been extensively studied and commented upon in religious circles. Having established what I regard as Luzzatto’s understanding of purpose in life and in writing Mesilat Yesharim, and because my main concern is to understand Luzzatto’s general social and cultural context relative to his posthumous acceptance following the controversy, I will deal only briefly with the steps of ascension that comprise the bulk of the treatise.

The first three rungs on the ladder, following the crucial element of Torah study, are treated as a unit. Vigilance and Alacrity are presented as two sides of the same coin, with Cleanliness as an overarching characteristic attainable after achieving the first two traits. Luzzatto presented the fourth, fifth, and sixth traits – Separateness, Purity, and Piety – in a similar incorporated fashion, though with different emphases and configuration. The final levels of Humility, Fear of Sin, and Sanctity are successively in different spiritual realms, attained through increasing awareness of God’s presence and, ultimately, the providential hand of heaven.

The amorphous groupings are complex and difficult to navigate, readily admitted and in fact continuously stressed by the hasid as he encourages the hakham to rise to his divinely ordained challenge. At the beginning of the trait of Vigilance, the hasid presents a scenario: the world is like “a labyrinth, a garden planted for amusement as is commonly known among the
nobility.” People wander aimlessly, sometimes searching for a way out, but invariably find themselves adrift in the misleading paths. It is possible to escape the maze through a combination of overcoming the evil inclination and following the direction of those who had already reached the ‘colonnade,’ an elevated position from which true and false pathways are discernible. “It is in [the righteous] that we must put our trust,” the hasid explains to the hakham, “for they have already tried, they have already seen, and they have come to realize that this alone is the right path by which man may reach the good that he seeks; there is none other.” The implications of the analogy and this statement are plentiful, and will be addressed in-depth below and in later chapters. One, Luzzatto saw and presented himself as such a man. Two, he identified his own influences as having attained this position ahead of him, and believed himself to be part of a chain of tradition. Three, he desired his readers, as rabbinic members of the elite, to reach the proverbial colonnade and in turn guide others. Four, Luzzatto believed his path was unique, not as a way to God but as the way. Five, as with the scientific and medical analogies cited above, Luzzatto utilized contemporary cultural innovations to convey his spiritual vision.

Vigilance entails scrutinizing one’s actions and ceasing to perform evil. In addition to divine judgment, Luzzatto stressed, even the smallest deeds have tangible and sometimes

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82 Hayim Yosef David Azulai mentioned the reference to gardens in Mesilat Yesharim: Ma’agol Tov, ed. Aaron Freimann (Jerusalem, 1934), 8–10; see also, The Diaries of Rabbi Ha’im Yosef David Azulai, trans. Benjamin Cymerman (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1996), 86–87.

83 Mesilat Yesharim, 60–63.

84 Luzzatto’s use of the phrase “there is none other” to describe this path may allude to his further conception of his path as either a manifestation of God or, more likely, a way in which man emulated God.
horrifying effects in this world.\textsuperscript{85} However, God’s love and benevolence is so great that man may atone for sin through deep pain and regret. Atonement uproots the sin so that “the iniquity \textit{literally} goes out of existence.”\textsuperscript{86} Arguing for tangibility of spirituality akin to physicality, Luzzatto described a life in which man sensed the gravity of sinning to such an extent that the individual’s mentality and the scenario that enabled the sin would be transformed for the better. The literal disappearance of iniquity was a result of learning from the experience and increasing awareness of the divine. He warned readers that factors deterring from Vigilance included worldly preoccupation, jesting and mockery, and keeping evil company. Likewise, concerning oneself with finances deadened the divine spirit within, levity and foolishness shrouded God’s presence and prevented growth, and social contacts influenced one’s thoughts and trajectory.

Yet, in contrast to the hakham’s wholesale criticism of non-scholars, the hasid exhibits understanding. He readily admits that financial stability and worldly matters are vital to life. Therefore, the hasid attempts to coax merchant lay leaders, who presumably defined self-worth in socio-economic terms, into imagining their spiritual station as beneath the poor yet humble individuals they otherwise disregarded or even disrespected.\textsuperscript{87} Luzzatto gently urged non-scholars to distinguish between materialistic necessity and desire, and, seeking to manipulate their psychology for the better, he implored the wealthy to concern themselves with their spiritual status as they did with their social and economic status. He was neither

\textsuperscript{85} Using midrashic sources, Luzzatto cited specific sins and the subsequent punishments of biblical personalities, including Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and David (\textit{Mesilat Yesharim}, 70–73).

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Ibid.}, 77.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Ibid.}, 67–68.
compassionate nor sympathetic to lay leadership, but he was inclusive and empathetic of their ensconced perspectives in the Italian and Amsterdam Jewish communities.\textsuperscript{88}

As I will show in the following chapter, Luzzatto’s broad consciousness concerning the full spectrum of Jewish society partly stemmed from his merchant, rather than rabbinic, background. In general, the Luzzatto family in the early eighteenth century pursued commerce rather than scholarship; Luzzatto’s immediate relatives, including his father and uncles were successful merchants in Padua and elsewhere in the Veneto. His father’s success, combined with Luzzatto’s exceptional abilities, enabled the young man to completely devote himself to spiritual matters when most young men trained vocationally. Scholars have long emphasized that Jewish intellectual elite in early modern Italy attended medical schools, especially in Luzzatto’s native Padua, and often practiced medicine while holding rabbinical positions.\textsuperscript{89} Supported financially by his family, Luzzatto did not pursue medical studies, or the rabbinate for that matter, making his perspective, polemical tone in this dialogue, and experiences during the controversy all the more unique. What is important here is that the early chapters of \textit{Mesilat Yesharim} are replete with references to the wealthy in the context of juxtaposing the \textit{hakham}’s judgmental nature with the \textit{hasid}’s compassion.

Whereas Vigilance pertains to negative commandments, such as avoiding evil deeds and speech, Alacrity concerns the prompt and complete performance of positive commandments. Adopting Vigilance, a person lives “in the manner of laborers who work for their

\textsuperscript{88} For Luzzatto and patronage, see chapter five.
\textsuperscript{89} Luzzatto’s connection with medicine will be discussed in chapter two and three in relation to friends, colleagues, and relatives who may or may not have followed what has been perceived as a typical Italian path.
employers…and in the manner of soldiers…always ready for the moment of battle.”

Perfection is incremental, but constant betterment is possible and imperative. As such, the hasid warns against laziness as the gradual enabler of evil, and decries laborers and scholars alike who do not accomplish their tasks fully or expeditiously.

The trait of Vigilance is awakened through valuing each mitzvah, for performance by rote reflects tempered spirituality. Likewise, appreciation for one’s status, possessions, health, and life itself inspires divine service. God is benevolent master over all, Luzzatto argued, and a servant responds in kind:

“The rich and the healthy are indebted to Him Blessed be He for their wealth and their health. The poor are indebted to Him, for even in their poverty He wondrously and miraculously provides for them, and does not allow them to die of hunger. The sick are indebted to Him for sustaining them while under the weight of their sickness and afflictions, not allowing them to descend to the pit.”

Every person had reason to praise and attempt to please God, an attitude necessary to attain perfection. By including a range of members of society, Luzzatto set out a platform for a perfect society under the abstract and individualized rule of ‘serving God.’ Scholars would be roused by a sense of obligation in conjunction with recognition of the value and good of each deed. Educated non-scholars, likely merchant lay leaders, would be motivated by the promise of reward in the world-to-come, and desire to avoid the shame of judgment day. The population at large, meanwhile, would be driven by their needs in this world.

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90 Mesilat Yesharim, 105; based on Babylonian Talmud, ‘Eruvin 65a.
91 Ibid., 90–92, 108.
92 Ibid., 101.
93 Ibid., 102.
94 Ibid., 102–103.
Further challenging readers to expand their capacity for understanding, and seeking to inspire people to eschew laziness and wholly pursue good, Luzzatto cited biblical women as the ideal. Lot’s eldest daughter epitomized promptness, the first element of Vigilance, having taken the initiative to copulate with her father for the sake of perpetuating the human race. Rebecca exemplified the trait’s second element, that of completion, in the manner in which she aided Abraham’s servant Eliezer. Gender and sexuality in Luzzatto’s thought has been touched upon by several scholars, most notably by Elliot Wolfson in his 1997 article on Luzzatto’s theory of redemption and ‘overcoming sexual dimorphism.’ Wolfson showed that Luzzatto identified androcentric gender as epitomizing redemption, as opposed to the idea that unification entailed one gender subsuming another. This point of view, theoretically, demanded equal respect for the existence and necessity of both genders, and reflected the same psychology that Luzzatto displayed in utilizing the dialogue format, which itself stemmed from Luzzatto’s notion of dependent relationships — soul/body, master/pupil, hasid/hakham.

In using women from the Bible to convey his message that Vigilance – doing good always and completely – is an attainable trait, Luzzatto spurred the male reader to reflect on his identity and self-conception. Luzzatto did the same, but to a greater extent, in Da’at Tevunot, 

95 Ibid., 97.
96 Genesis 19:30–38.
97 Genesis 24.
probably written expressly for interested students on the fringe of his study circle in Padua.\footnote{See chapter 3.}

In that work, Luzzatto bred a conversation between the Intellect (\textit{sekhel}) and an inquisitive Soul (\textit{neshamah}), the latter being, by virtue of its grammatical construct, feminine in nature. Repeatedly and throughout the discourse, the Intellect addresses the Soul directly. Thus, the reader is thrust into the role of the submissive Soul, akin to the position of the \textit{hakham}, and forced to absorb the text itself, along with the larger ideas, passively.\footnote{Similarly, Catholics and Protestants identified the soul as the bride of Christ. They frequently based themselves on Bernard of Clairvaux’s commentary on the Song of Songs. For a discussion of the femininity of the soul in seventeenth-century England, and for an extensive literature on the broad subject, see Tom Schwanda, \textit{Soul Recreation: The Contemplative Mystical Piety of Puritanism} (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub., 2012). For a discussion of eighteenth-century Englishmen adopting feminine rolls in deathbed repentance, see Richard J. Bell, “Our People Die Well: Death Bed Scenes in John Wesley’s Arminian Magazine,” \textit{Mortality} 10 (2005): 210–223; and for a discussion of sexuality and mysticism in the mid-eighteenth century, see Paul Peucher, “Inspired by Flames of Love: Homosexuality, Mysticism, and Moravian Brothers Around 1750,” \textit{Journal of the History of Sexuality} 15 (2006): 30–64.} The intention is clear in both treatises, for Luzzatto could have used a different component of the soul to converse with the Intellect in \textit{Da’at Tevunot}, or cited other biblical sources to demonstrate Vigilance in \textit{Mesilat Yesharim}. To be sure, it is unlikely that Luzzatto utilized the feminine in order to goad male readers into adopting his spiritual perspective. After all, responsive emotion was not conducive to the all-encompassing spirituality he proposed. Rather, Luzzatto sought to remind the reader, even subconsciously, of feminine components as representative of comprehensiveness. In keeping with his broad social context, and his criticism of the rabbinate, Luzzatto argued for a spiritual makeover, where identity and self-perception expanded and unified disparate elements in the quest to honor and cling to the divine.
Consequently, Blamelessness serves as a capstone of the first two traits. It entails an unsullied clarity of mind in order to “weigh matters truthfully,” demanding increased consciousness of self, thought, and activity, combined with awareness of one’s social surroundings and circumstances. After extensive analysis of the ills of society, the hasid assures the hakham that overcoming transgressions of minutia “is more difficult in thought than in the actual deed.” In each case, Luzzatto stressed the gravity of the deed, despite its relative benign appearance. For instance, while most people are not thieves, he wrote, they “experience a taste of theft in their business dealings by allowing themselves to profit through their neighbor’s loss, claiming ‘profiting is different.’” That is, ostensibly permissible activities can contain evil elements if societal mores are not analyzed and challenged. In addition to theft, the hasid describes two additional issues that were largely acceptable in society at large. Refraining from lewdness is not “merely a threat to keep one far from sin,” but is rather innately degrading to spirituality. Non-kosher food, meanwhile, brings “real defilement into a person’s heart and soul,” solidifying the body’s coarseness over the spirit’s sanctity. He further condemns the prevalence of pride, anger, envy, and mendacity, and provides detailed, if slightly bizarre, descriptions of characters embodying a given characteristic.

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101 *Mesilat Yesharim*, 111.
102 Ibid., 157.
103 Ibid., 115.
104 Ibid., 120.
105 Ibid., 129–130.
106 One wonders if Luzzatto sometimes described someone specific. With respect to a type of pride, Luzzatto portrayed a man who believes he must conduct himself in a specific fashion: “walking at a gentle gait, heel touching toe, sitting with his back to the chair, rising slowly like a snake” (ibid., 145–146).
After lengthy chapters on Blamelessness, including rational analyses of aspects of Jewish law, Luzzatto concludes: “It is impossible for [man] to be a faithful servant to his Maker as long as he cares for his own honor, for he will have to [therefore] detract from Heaven’s honor in some way.” All personal concerns were ideally dissolved in favor of serving God, even in seemingly unjust relationships with other people. The hasid reminds the hakham that the Torah commands him to “love your neighbor as yourself,” indicating that anger and envy are especially egregious offenses against God. Both, even in fleeting moments, reflect an individual’s displeasure with the providential system.

The text in these chapters is personal and triumphant, revealing Luzzatto’s psychological struggle during and after the controversy, and his ultimate success in upholding the divine mission. With respect to the intertwining of injustice, hatred, and revenge, the hasid remarks:

“It is also very difficult for the mocked heart of man to escape hating and taking revenge.... [However] if he will not hate the person who aroused his hatred, or take revenge upon him when the opportunity arises, or bear a grudge against him; if he can forget the entire matter, removing it from his heart as if it had never happened, then he is strong and courageous.”

Luzzatto experienced the ire of rabbis throughout Europe, most of whom did not know him, for presumed ritualistic and theosophical crimes. While Luzzatto did not have opportunity to wreak vengeance against rabbis geographically distant or socio-politically more powerful than

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109 Unlike the manuscript, the printed Mesilat Yesharim included an example of Hillel the Sage, known for his exceptionally mild demeanor (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a).
110 Mesilat Yesharim, 133.
he (unless he believed himself capable of exacting it on a mystical level),\(^\text{111}\) bearing a grudge against said rabbis would certainly have been understandable. Apart from several visceral attacks in private correspondence, Luzzatto did not react to the condemnation overtly. There are no reports of Luzzatto denouncing his accusers publicly, in Padua or elsewhere, and while Luzzatto did choose to leave Italy he did not opt to abandon Jewish communal living or nominal Jewish practice, as had other controversial figures during the early modern period. Instead, Luzzatto sought to remove vengeance (and any portending emotions, such as anger, pride, spite, and jealousy) “from his heart” – akin to the dissolving of sin in repentant growth discussed in the context of Vigilance – in order to enable total service of the divine. Thus, strength and heroism was measured as a reflection of honoring God, rather than in social status or bravado.

*Separateness, Purity, Piety*

The next three rungs on Pinhas ben Yair’s ‘ladder of saintliness’ – Separateness, Purity, and Piety – function as a unit in similar but distinct ways, as did the initial three. Resembling Vigilance and Alacrity, Separateness and Piety are counterparts, with the former pertaining to refraining from evil and the latter relating to doing good. Meanwhile, Purity parallels Blamelessness by completing the triad, though it serves as a bridge (rather than a capstone) between the lower level of Separateness and the higher level of Piety. Whereas Vigilance, Alacrity, and even Blamelessness, were theoretically attainable traits for all members of society, Separateness-Purity-Piety in their essence required remarkable ability. These higher levels

\(^\text{111}\) Cf. the Talmudic story of R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, who had the power to destroy the world (Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Metzia* 59b; Jerusalem Talmud, *Mo’ed Katan* 3:81).
concern the individual’s relationship with the world at large and involve greater introspection and civil consciousness. As a spiritual unit, they function thus: one disassociates from worldly matters to an extent deemed appropriate through Separateness; contemplates one’s place and abilities in the realm of Purity; and acts in the world with Godly intent upon reaching the trait of Piety.

Luzzatto begins his chapters on Separateness by citing the Talmud: “Sanctify yourself [by abstaining] from what is permitted to you.”\(^{112}\) The statement originates amid discussions concerning permitted and prohibited marital unions, and the difficulties surrounding Levirate marriage. Luzzatto broadened the idea to imply that the individual aspiring to fulfill the path set out in *Mesilat Yesharim* should refrain from anything that could potentially give rise to evil. Superficially, this could be taken to the extreme, but Luzzatto did not advocate asceticism. “One ought to abstain from all worldly things that are not essential for him,” Luzzatto wrote, “but should he abstain from anything that, for any reason, is essential for him, he is a sinner.”\(^{113}\) The goal is to leave worldly pleasures behind, though without denunciation, in order to live a more spiritual life. The qualifier “for any reason” tempers the ominous instruction, respectful of a variety of circumstances and leaving spiritual advancement up to the individual.

Luzzatto cites several examples to convey his point, including eating, sexual relations, wearing clothes, walking, and talking. None are evil in and of themselves. To the contrary, they are beneficial and in appropriate circumstances serve as (or help to serve) religious obligations. For instance, eating is a necessary act and contributes to joy expressed on holidays, clothes are

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\(^{112}\) Babylonian Talmud, *Yevamot* 20a.

\(^{113}\) *Mesilat Yesharim*, 170.
similarly necessary and pertain to modesty, and sexual relations within marriage may fulfill the commandment of begetting children. Permissible acts performed to an extreme extent or pursued as an ideal, however, dull the spiritual life for which humanity was created and subsequently breed evil. Gluttony, immorality, vanity, laziness, and frivolousness all stem from indulgence in the above activities, easily attainable behaviors in the cosmopolitan cities of Amsterdam and the Veneto.¹¹⁴ As such, the hasid warns the socially connected hakham that “permanent association with aristocrats and men of great wealth who pursue honor multiplies vanity.”¹¹⁵

The details of the chapters on Separateness are extensive, particularly as it relates to pleasure, ritual law, and social conduct. The primary and generalized lesson, however, is that the individual should associate with (good in) society for a (preferably short) duration of time necessary to study or earn a livelihood; the remainder of time should consist of seclusion in order to incline his heart to divine service.¹¹⁶ Luzzatto’s theory of Separateness was epitomized by a talmudic comparison of Judah Ha-Nasi and Antoninus, “whose tables were never missing radishes, lettuce or cucumbers, neither in the summer nor in the winter.”¹¹⁷ The Roman emperor spared no expense to satisfy his own desires and needs, whereas the latter did so only for the sake of his ‘princedom.’ The implied distinction was that of transcendence: a lack of

¹¹⁴ A more extreme passage is that concerning R. Eliezer, who acted “as though possessed by a demon,” so as not to derive pleasure from the conjugal act. This is the ultimate form of Separateness, to deny oneself pleasure even at the moment of pleasure” (Mesilat Yesharim, 166). To Luzzatto, physical pleasure paled in comparison to spiritual delight.
¹¹⁵ Ibid., 176. Luzzatto undoubtedly penned this line from experience. However, he did retain connections to wealthy individuals who supported him contrary to patronage norms, as I discuss in chapter five.
¹¹⁶ Ibid., 172.
¹¹⁷ Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 57b. Antoninus may refer to the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (161–180 CE).
cucumbers in the winter would not disturb Judah Ha-Nasi, because he sought to serve God and materialism (or the lack thereof) presumably did not affect his psychological and emotional well-being. Luzzatto’s idealized hasid, therefore, partook of the world while retaining spiritual aspirations. He tempered his ideals with reality, recognizing that measured aspirations were integral to mastering the step of Separateness on the way to Piety. “While in the process of acquiring Separateness,” the hasid explains, “a person must be heedful not to leap and jump to the far extreme all at once, for he will certainly not succeed. Rather, he should gradually proceed in Separateness, acquiring a small amount today and a bit more tomorrow, until he is so completely accustomed to it that it becomes natural.” True intention to serve God, devoid of self- and materialistic interest, could become his ‘natural’ state of existence, in which, as the hasid remarked at the beginning of the dialogue, the soul would be drawn to God like “iron to a magnet.”

Psychological introspection lay at the core of Luzzatto’s pietistic system. He conveyed this in his relatively short discussion of the ladder’s next rung: Purity. As mentioned above, it serves as an intermediary step between Separateness and Piety. In contrast to widespread rabbinic opinion, including Maimonides and Luzzatto’s contemporary and visceral opponent Jacob Emden, Luzzatto conceived of the trait of Purity in spiritual terms. Uncharacteristically, the hakham prods the hasid: “Is it really your opinion that this Purity taught to us by Rabbi

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118 Mesilat Yesharim, 177. Maimonides has a similar understanding of repentance; see Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot de’ot 1:7, where he uses the term “Derekh Hashem.”
119 See Maimonides, Commentary on Mishneh, Tohorot, ed. Yosef Kafih (Kiryat Ono, 1984), 23 (end of introduction); Jacob Emden on Avodah Zarah considered Purity as referring to cleanliness of body and clothing.
Pinhas refers not to bodily purity, but to purity from evil motivations and improper thoughts?"® To which the hasid replies: “One who is truly a servant of God will not content himself with little. He will not agree to accept silver mixed with dross and lead.”¹¹ That is not to say that Luzzatto denied the importance of bodily purity and cleanliness. Luzzatto’s theory of abstinence did not deny the body or worldly pleasures. In fact, evidence strongly suggests that Luzzatto took his outward appearance seriously, in keeping with his socio-economic station and possibly as an expression of his spirituality.¹² However, as Separateness itself was as spiritual as it was physical – in that it entailed self-discipline as much as solitude – it followed that successive and ascending traits involved increasing spirituality. Thus, to Luzzatto, Purity necessitated self-awareness, ensuring that all thought, intent, and activity are devoid of ill intent.

In the chapters on Piety, the longest section of the treatise, Luzzatto implied that leaders are divinely chosen and are responsible for the wellbeing of the Nation of Israel. Ability is more a gift and prospect from heaven than a testament to an individual’s greatness; it is not an indication of the individual’s hard-earned prowess, but is rather representative of God’s beneficence and ensuing expectation. In so avowing, Luzzatto disparaged early modern conceptions of individuality, which celebrated and praised artistic and intellectual talent. To be sure, Luzzatto brilliantly reflected his cultural context, including in his adoption of literary

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¹⁰ Mesilat Yesharim, 178.
¹¹ Ibid., 183.
¹² See chapter two for a discussion of Luzzatto’s upbringing; chapter three for Luzzatto’s fashion sense in not growing a beard, in opposition to kabbalistic custom; and chapter five, Luzzatto’s mingling with the Portuguese elite in Amsterdam.
norms and the prominent position he gave the individual in his cosmological scheme, but he used the larger milieu to his own religious ends. He manipulated the dialogue format, composed drama and poetry idealizing love of God rather than man’s love of woman, and, in the case of *Mesilat Yesharim*, preached a spiritualized individuality focused on fulfilling God’s will rather than pursuing one’s own desires or exhibiting one’s skills. He believed in an elite, but its members were essentially ordained by God. Instead of breeding elitism for its own sake, Luzzatto sought to inspire rabbinic readers to deepen their elite self-conceptions to such an extent – whereby, they were in exclusive *cosmic* positions – that it necessarily dissolved their perceived self-importance and glorified the divine.

In a short passage of *Derekh Hashem*, Luzzatto described the role of the righteous in this world. There are three types of righteous individuals, he wrote, defined in relation to their contribution towards the development of what he termed the ‘Perfected Community.’ The most prominent, but least powerful, are those who lead a group or community. It is unlikely that Luzzatto associated all communal rabbis as such, not in the least because of his relentless critique of what he regarded as rabbinic superficiality. Instead, Luzzatto probably identified leaders of small kabbalistic confraternities as representative of this level. He himself led such a group, as had Benjamin Vitale, Moses Zacut, and Isaac Luria, for example. The second type of righteous leader was one who served as the head of a generation. Due to Luzzatto’s kabbalistic emphasis and his conflict with major rabbinic figures of his own era, ‘leader of the generation’

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123 *Derekh Hashem*, II:3.7–8. Luzzatto referred to these individuals as *tsadikim*. At the beginning of his discussion of Separateness in *Mesilat Yesharim*, Luzzatto wrote: “Thus far I have explained what is required of a person to be a *tsadik*. From this point on [I shall discuss] what is required of him to be *hasid*” (*Mesilat Yesharim*, 160). A careful investigation of Luzzatto’s terminology would be fruitful, particularly if we are to understand the relationship between his self-help moralism of *Mesilat Yesharim* and his larger cosmological theories of the universe.
(gadol ha-dor) must be defined amorphously. The spiritual power and effect of a man’s righteousness was judged according to the heavens, and expressly not based on the masses of an imperfect society. Thereby, Luzzatto regarded his Italian predecessors Vitale and Zacut as generational leaders despite the limitations of their temporal influence. Finally, the third and most significant level of righteousness belonged to those whose spiritual importance spanned multiple generations. This included the biblical figures Adam, Abraham, and Moses, Shimon bar Yohai of Zoharic fame, to a lesser extent Isaac Luria, and Luzzatto himself.124

Likewise, the dialogue of Mesilat Yesharim displays Luzzatto’s multi-layered, hierarchical social viewpoint. He sought to elevate the reader to devekut, convey the need for the rabbinate as a whole to transform itself, and promote both personal rigor and greater sensitivity towards others. As such, it is clear that Luzzatto did not expect every reader to comprehend his moralistic teachings, and fewer still to attain any great level. His base goal, as discussed earlier, was to convince the contemporary rabbinic leaders to adopt and absorb heightened spirituality. His viewpoint, he argued, was the true vantage point: the hakham’s initial assumptions about pietism were off base; the quiet and secluded individual could be closer to God than the authoritative legal scholar; and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake did not necessarily bring one closer to God.

At the start of Luzzatto’s exposition of Piety, the hakham states:

“My perception of the pietists was incorrect. I had imagined their piety as superficial and almost vain, based entirely on an abundance of supplications, reciting confessionals and Psalms, and mortifying themselves with afflictions and ablutions in ice and snow; practices that are not agreeable to the wise of heart and

124 See chapter three.
those possessing correct sense.... [Instead] I have found you to possess a profound conception of what constitutes right conduct and the perfection of character, that which is deserving of every rational person’s assent and no wise person can, in any way, controvert.”

In placing these words in the mouth of the hakham, Luzzatto addressed the existence of a less intellectual piety “based on external practices rather than inward self-study,” as Jonathan Garb has aptly described it. The hasid similarly condemns such people that have “pretensions of piety [resulting] from a lack of reflection and true rational thought.” To Luzzatto, true piety was deeply spiritual, intellectually and emotionally challenging, and intensely reflective and personal. Generalized and physical mortification, including frequent fasting and self-flagellation, would not accomplish the divine task and was potentially sinful behavior. In conjunction, the mistaken type of Separateness, Luzzatto wrote, is the way of those “who abstain not only from the unessential, but also from that which is essential to them. They punish themselves with afflictions and strange practices that God does not desire at all.”

Garb has argued that this false pietism probably described the nascent eastern European movement of Hasidism. This is a tempting theory, but in fact there is no indication in the plethora of correspondence to, from, and about Luzzatto that he knew of the contemporaneous Israel Ba’al Shem, whose movement in the 1730s was still small (or

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125 Mesilat Yesharim, 190. The printed edition is tempered with respect to this statement and what follows from the hasid.
126 Garb, “Mussar, Curriculum and Exegesis in the Circle of Ramhal,” 16.
127 Mesilat Yesharim, 170.
128 Garb, “Mussar, Curriculum and Exegesis in the Circle of Ramhal,” 16. Nonetheless, in a future study of Luzzatto’s reception history, I intend to argue that hasidic scholars of the generation following Israel Baal Shem were among the extreme few who grasped Luzzatto’s intentions in Mesilat Yesharim. This becomes particularly important in the study of Hasidism’s development from nascent movement of revolutionary thinkers to mass mobilization and dynastic leadership. Luzzatto is not recognized in the Hasidic canon despite his possible influence, because the image and word of the living godly rebbe predominated over the non-hasidic text.
nonexistent). It is more probable in my opinion, that Luzzatto referred to both scattered, individual Jews and a conglomeration of contemporary gentile practices. Of the former, perhaps Luzzatto’s ire was simply for Sefer Hasidim itself, which promoted such activity; after all, a latent ethnic-cultural component permeated the controversy and Luzzatto’s relationships. Of the latter, he was well-aware of the sexual abstinence of Catholic priests,¹²⁹ and may have been exposed to the pietisms of Quakers, Shakers, and others while living in the Dutch Republic.

Regardless, the hakham’s realization of true piety deepened both his character and that of the hasid. The former had been brought full circle to his initial judgment of the pietist, which enabled the latter (and Luzzatto) to surprise the reader yet again:

“If you wish to complain about [pseudo-pietists engaged in unnecessary and irrational practices], you are right (ha-din imekha). But my complaint against you is that when you saw two or three fools portraying themselves as pietists – when in reality they are nothing but deficient both in heart and correct knowledge – you therefore decided that they represented the entire class of true pietists and that piety is nothing but the folly you witnessed. Is there a science or craft in the world that has no small foxes spoiling the vineyard? The fools who leap to the fore as if they were among the leaders of those skilled in that science or craft, when in fact they have not even served half of their apprenticeship?”¹³⁰

¹²⁹ The foolish gentiles “abstain not only from the unessential, but also from that which is essential to them. They punish themselves with afflictions and strange practices that God does not desire at all” (Mesilat Yesharim, 168).
¹³⁰ Mesilat Yesharim, 191–192. Luzzatto stressed appropriate training in Da’at Tevunot as well: “The Soul said: There is no question in my mind that it is impossible to attain even that modicum of knowledge attainable by man of the wisdom of the Blessed One’s deeds except through the paths of learning and wisdom, and that one who wishes to enter into these inquiries without the necessary preparation and learning is entirely irresponsible and cannot succeed” (224–225). For medieval expressions of Piety, see Haside Ashkenaz (Berlin, 1891–1893, sec. 1006); Nahmanides, Commentary on Leviticus 19:2; Magid Mishneh on Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Shekhenim 14:5.
In addition to reminding the reader that mastering piety required sustained learning and effort under guidance, akin to the dialogue itself, the last statement seems to imply that Luzzatto had specific contemporary rabbis in mind, presumably in Italy and perhaps among his opponents.\textsuperscript{131} One often gets the impression that Luzzatto had specific people in mind when describing inappropriate behavior.

More importantly, the \textit{hasid}'s reply displays love as an essential component of the book’s pietism. Ever particular about language, Luzzatto could have used a turn of phrase other than ‘\textit{ha-din imekha}’ to indicate the \textit{hasid}'s tacit agreement with the \textit{hakham}'s principle observation. However, kabbalist that he was, Luzzatto indicated that unadulterated and wholesale condemnation manifested \textit{din}, or judgment, the harsh sphere of the cosmically constructed universe.\textsuperscript{132} Reflecting the ideal of loving God, the pietist relates to people, society, and creation as a whole with love. Thus, the \textit{hasid} states unequivocally, “mercy and benevolence must be fixed forever in the heart of the pious. He must constantly aim to bring contentment to all creatures and avoid causing them any pain.”\textsuperscript{133} Moreover, Luzzatto cited the Zohar (and a post-talmudic book) for the first time: “Who is pious? He who practices benevolence towards his Maker.”\textsuperscript{134} Love was both active – rather than passive in the modern sense of admiring or desiring – and an expression of one’s relationship with the divine. Thus, the \textit{hasid}'s censure of the \textit{hakham}'s own condemnation of pseudo-pietists – even though they

\textsuperscript{131} As stated at the beginning of this chapter, detailed study of Italian Jewish societies at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries should reveal the scope, membership, and activities of pietistic circles.
\textsuperscript{132} For an introduction to the \textit{sefirot}, see Moshe Hallamish, \textit{An Introduction to the Kabbalah}, trans. Ruth Bar-Ilan and Ora Wiskind-Elper (SUNY, 1999), ch. 9.
\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Mesilat Yesharim}, 205.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 227; Zohar III, 281a.
did not conform to the author’s conception of serving God and misrepresented the lifestyle for which he advocated – indicated that Luzzatto idealized love of God and creation as a selfless act.

Within the extensive discussion of Piety’s three principal divisions – action, performance, and motive – Luzzatto articulated the extent to which the pietist should express his love. For instance, one should help his neighbor with “whatever his means allow and save him from damages however he can.”

Likewise, one must do all that is in his power to uplift another person, whether emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually. He cited several examples of talmudic rabbis whose piety merited long lives. Common to all of them was refraining from using nicknames to address other people, deeming it principally demeaning and thereby detract from God’s honor. In essence, Luzzatto argued for a literal fulfillment of “Love thy neighbor as thyself”: as all comes from God and as all people are integral to the divine plan of redemption, it is the individual’s responsibility to respect and assist others in need using his own God-given physical possessions and spiritual abilities.

Contentment in serving and loving God, however, is not without its tribulations. Hearkening back to the hasid’s and hakham’s initial discussion about the purpose of creation – that man must aspire for more than enjoyment and that evil enables man to ascend greater heights – Luzzatto bursts the reader’s bubble by asserting that love of God and others is not in fact wholly rewarded with love. Instead, the pietist’s love is forever tested, for which the hasid offers two appropriate responses:

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135 Mesilat Yesharim, 199.
136 The stories cited, and their pietistic reception history, deserve their own study.
“The first is that whatever Heaven does is for good. This means that even the pain and distress that appear to him as evil are in fact true good. As in the case of a doctor who cuts away flesh or an infected limb so that the rest of the body may regain healthy and [the patient] may live. Though the action seems cruel, it is in fact an act of mercy intended for eventual benefit. The patient will not stop loving the doctor because of what was done; on the contrary he will love the doctor even more.”

Again demonstrating his proximity to medical knowledge and approach, Luzzatto provided the reader with a basic and universal response to evil. Though an individual may continuously demonstrate his love of God and his creation, the divine plan is beyond human comprehension, no person is without fault, and any pain or distress that befalls him is for the good and should be celebrated as such. In his analogy, the positive effect of surgery far outweighs its painful side effects. With this attitude intended for the average person, the hasid proceeds with a deeper response for those who aim to increase God’s honor and desire the “well-being of the generation” as a whole:

“The more formidable the obstacles they face, and the more strength they thus need to overcome them, the more they take courage and rejoice in demonstrating the power of their faith. Like an army commander, distinguished for his bravery, who always chooses the hardest battle in order to demonstrate his strength by prevailing. This is in fact typical of any human lover — he rejoices in the opportunity to demonstrate how powerful his love is for his beloved.”

Here, the hasid challenges the hakham to manifest the love of God he so cavalierly had considered elementary. Together, the responses represented Luzzatto’s idealized ‘Perfected Community,’ consisting of a populace that adhered to the general view that all is for the good,

137 Mesilat Yesharim, 219.
138 Ibid., 220.
and led by a hasid (or communal hakham-turned-hasid) who lived for the well-being of the generation and relished trials as an opportunity to approach God.

While appropriating contemporary romantic mores to reflect his religious ideals, as he did more fully in at least two dramatic works, Luzzatto projected onto the page his ultimate response to the controversy that had engulfed him in Italy. He was destined, he had believed, to lead his people into a temporal realm of redemption, but was challenged, rebuffed, and obstructed. He concluded, therefore, that the controversy had been divinely ordained for reasons external to his own personal relationship with God and necessitated a response that demonstrated his steadfast faith. That response was acceptance and joy, Luzzatto revealed in Mesilat Yesharim, because “it is the will of the Omnipresent that the pious of Israel vindicate and atone for all the other ranks of their people.... These are the true shepherds of Israel, in whom the Holy One, blessed be He, takes great delight. For they devote themselves to His flock, demanding and interceding in every way on behalf of their welfare and good.”

Luzzatto did not opt to evoke the ‘suffering servant’ of Isaiah 53:12, or talmudic references to Moses and R. Akiva, with whom he identified as their shared soul reincarnate, but the autobiographical reference is apparent nonetheless. As will become clear in my analysis of his biography in Italy and then in Amsterdam, Luzzatto’s retreat from his home and the seat of

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139 Migdal ‘Oz and La-Yesharim Tehilah.
140 Mesilat Yesharim, 230–231. Luzzatto used the term “Makom” (lit. place) to denote God. In keeping with Luzzatto’s careful use of language, it is important that he deliberately used the terms ‘shepherd’ and ‘flock’ rather than ‘rabbi’ and ‘community’ here. The implication is that Luzzatto likened the spiritual leader’s relationship with the general population to the committed shepherd’s care for the flock; if so, it would make the public largely unconscious participants in their own activities, steered in a given direction by singular men.
141 See chapter three.
142 Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 14a associates Isaiah 53:12 with Moses; while Jerusalem Talmud, Shekalim 5:1 associates it with Rabbi Akiva.
his messianic pretensions did not necessitate a reevaluation of his cosmic destiny, for, as quoted here, suffering of the spiritually powerful pietist atoned for the sins of others. He could only delight in what God took pleasure: a hasid’s selfless beneficence as it echoed divine benevolence.

Stressing the cosmic-communal aspect of Piety, Luzzatto cautioned his readers about the unpredictability of manifesting piety in a public setting. He devoted considerable space to warning against the dangers of Piety, whereby a leader could potentially bring about evil based on a decision that appears pious. For instance, rebuking sinful behavior was not always wise; under certain circumstances it could lead unheedful sinners to intensify their evil ways, thereby simultaneously “desecrating God’s name and adding iniquity to their sin.”

Similarly, certain (unspecified) supplemental acts or characteristics of piety could inspire ridicule and mockery from the general populace; keeping with the role of shepherd caring for his flock, which would incur heavenly punishment for said mockery, “it is certainly more correct for a pious person to forsake such practices rather than perform them.” More profoundly, Luzzatto argued that one may forsake the performance of a mitzvah in exceptional cases, citing the Midrash that the Levites would pass over all other Temple implements in favor of carrying the Ark. As it led to arguments and desecration, the performance of the mitzvah was not in keeping with the spiritual state of loving, fearing, and serving God. Likewise, Luzzatto evoked the moralistic aggadita of Kamtsa and Bar Kamtsa, in which Rome launched the military campaign against

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143 *Mesilat Yesharim*, 236.
144 Ibid., 236. Luzzatto avoided providing details of such practices. It is possible, in my mind, that he opted to shave his beard, even while choosing a life of piety, for this very reason. See Elliott S. Horowitz, “The Early Eighteenth Century Confronts the Beard: Kabbalah and Jewish Self-Fashioning,” *Jewish History* 8:1–2 (1994): 95–115.
145 Midrash Rabbah, *Naso*. 
Judea and destroyed the Holy Temple and Jewish national sovereignty, because a Jewish sage insisted on adhering to halakhah even though it would overtly offend the Roman emperor.\(^{146}\)

Thus, performance that is in and of itself good can have dire consequences, just as the appearance of evil may mask ultimate good. Therefore, the truly pious, the true shepherd of Israel, said Luzzatto, “must weigh whatever deeds he contemplates doing in relation to the consequences that follow from them and the circumstances that accompany them, considering the time, social environment, occasion, and place.”\(^{147}\) In other words, decisions are made clairvoyantly according to a final outcome — not prophetically, but rather in a spiritual sense that combined intention, rationality, and social awareness.

**Humility, Fear of Sin, Sanctity**

In September 1729, almost exactly six years before completing his dialogue of a hasid and a hakham, Luzzatto wrote to his teacher Isaiah Bassan concerning the kabbalistic concepts of tshitsum and tikun. The letter was accompanied by a folio-size illustration of the sefirot, the ten cosmic spheres of creation.\(^{148}\) Whereas most sefirotic charts of Lurianic Kabbalah depict successive triads of spheres, culminating in the single and most material sphere of Malkhut, to which everything flows like rivers to the sea, Luzzatto rendered his chart unusually: the top three sefirot of Keter-Hokhmah-Binah appear as one above the other above the other in a descending line.\(^{149}\) Without attempting to analyze Luzzatto’s interpretation of the ten-step

\(^{146}\) Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 56b.

\(^{147}\) Mesilat Yesharim, 238.

\(^{148}\) JTS MS 8520a, uncatalogued letter; the chart is cataloged as B (NS) K106.

\(^{149}\) In July of 2011, at a conference hosted by the University of Haifa, Menachem Kallus gave a lecture on this sort of sefirotic depiction, entitled “The truly ‘Great’ Kabbalah-Parchment: Ilan-Scroll MS Oxford-Neubauer 1949; Vatican ebr. 598.”
baraita in a kabbalistic key, which I do believe is worthwhile and could help translate early modern Jewish mystical ideas into commonplace language, Luzzatto’s exploration of Humility, Fear of Sin, and Sanctity reflected his ascending sefirotic diagram. The final three acquired traits on Pinhas ben Yair’s ‘ladder of saintliness’ neither reflect the earlier patterns nor actually function as a unit. Instead, they each relate to the unique righteous individual’s progressively exceptional status, a result of increasing his sensitivity to personal providence and his proximity to God.

Humility is the last (and highest) trait linked to social interaction, with Fear of Sin and Sanctity referring to spiritual states focused on the Divine Presence. As such, Humility was the joint at which the individual pivoted between divine and human foci. In the relatively short section, Luzzatto argued that Humility entailed acknowledging that one’s position, abilities, and possessions entirely stemmed from God. “Wealthy man may easily turn poor, the lord a slave, and the distinguished ignoble,” the hasid warns the hakham.150 Luzzatto wrote both generally and personally, for, by the time he composed Mesilat Yesharim, his affluent father had lost some of his fortune and he himself had been forced to accept charity from the Portuguese community in Amsterdam. In the context of his polemic against the rabbinate, Luzzatto maintained that even knowledge and wisdom, so cherished in learned circles as the apex of human endeavors, were to be recognized as divine gifts. He lamented that “knowledge (ha-hokhmah) is what most often brings a person to haughtiness and pride,” and reminded the reader that the “chosen of the human species” retain their leadership positions only due to

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150 Mesilat Yesharim, 260.
In keeping with Luzzatto’s stated goals of *devekut* and Piety, the acquisition of knowledge was not the end-goal of creation, but rather was divinely intended to serve the purpose of spiritually advancing the individual and humanity as a whole. While Luzzatto wrote for the elite and conceived of society as hierarchical, he argued that ascending the ‘ladder’ was a God-given privilege and responsibility. “Can a horse boast that it pulls a wagon, or a dove brag that it flies?”, the *hasid* implores. “The same is true of a learned person. He is learned because his nature drives him to this and he is compelled to acquire wisdom. And once he is in possession of great wisdom he is duty-bound to impart it to anyone who is in need of it.”

Again adopting a contemporary concept – the notion of human and individual nature – Luzzatto expressed a nuanced archetype of rabbinic leadership. Obviously, Luzzatto did not reject the acquisition of knowledge, for his literary oeuvre displayed erudition both deep and broad, and his exposition of the *baraita* elucidated in *Mesilat Yesharim* begins and ends with an emphatic call for Torah study. Rather, he warned that acquiring knowledge could instill pride and even vanity; and he wrote the character of the *hakham*, his rabbinic prototype, accordingly. At the beginning of the manuscript, Luzzatto had degraded the unending study, composition, and publication of responsa literature, and here he explained that, worse than deadening a spiritual drive, the prevailing cultural pursuit of knowledge bred a desire to be praised and glorified over others. A few years prior to composing this dialogue, Luzzatto had condemned as vainglorious rabbis who attacked him without honest investigation or proper knowledge of his

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151 Ibid., 245.
152 Ibid., 245–246. In a discussion of human inability to comprehend God’s nature, he refers to human nature (*Da’at Tevunot*, 64–65).
motivations. True humility encompassed both thought and deed, and thereby required constant self-assessment to stave off a ‘haughty humility’ in which the supposed wise and restrained individual is impressed with his achievements and position. Therefore, Luzzatto explained in his chapters on Humility, the humble eschewed sycophants, refrained from finery, fasted occasionally (occasional the operative word), and devoted “constant reflection to recognize the weakness of the human intellect and its many errors and delusions; how it is always closer to error than to true knowledge.”

In conjunction, Luzzatto advised his rabbinic readers to temper their aspirations for leadership. Presumably envisioning a synagogue or yeshiva, the hasid tells the hakham to heed the proverb and not exalt himself by stepping to the front of a room: it is better to sit back until one is invited to ‘come forward,’ than to overreach and be told ‘move back.’ As I will show in a later chapter, I believe that Luzzatto again wrote autobiographically, for he had attempted to inspire a movement in Italy and beyond, but was rebuffed by those with greater authority. Regardless, the lesson that Luzzatto sought to impart was to acquire a ‘Godly’ perspective over a human one, in which the individual accepted the profundity of human imperfection compared to the divine. Ultimately, Luzzatto believed that egotistical conceptions, in which people judged themselves relative to others, shunted God’s honor to the side in favor of enhancing that of the individual. As such, he suggested that the individual should aspire to the goals laid out in

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153 See chapter four.
154 Mesilat Yesharim, 261.
156 At present I suspect that Luzzatto believed that God-centered reality existed when the pietist avoided levying judgment (din), thereby retaining an open channel to one’s providential relationship. Judgment precludes the sensing of providential reality, for such a moment is manifestation of man’s personality on the world with which he interacts. Sensing the divine plan and acting within it belonged to an otherworldly experience.
Mesilat Yesharim – approaching the heavens, beseeching God on behalf of his generation, and imparting wisdom – without concern for his own honor or position. The problem is that, characteristically, Luzzatto did not elaborate, so that the reader is left to question how and under what circumstance communicating one’s knowledge is in line with the divine will.

Perhaps Luzzatto’s explicit statement that “once he is in possession of great wisdom” implies that the adept should forever assume he is not yet ready to sit in the front row of the synagogue, so to speak — that whatever ‘great’ level he achieves, it is deficient and pales in comparison to God’s perfection. If so, the consequence is that God will place said individual in the appropriate place and time, and only then, when the moment of imparting the wisdom has been presented, should the pietist actively engage in teaching others. This, I hope to show in the final chapter, is how Luzzatto viewed his experience in Amsterdam, writing Mesilat Yesharim and other treatises for an expanding Portuguese rabbinical class.

Having said that, Luzzatto was not without ego, and, as discussed throughout this chapter, condemnations abound in Mesilat Yesharim. After all, he promoted communal living, which necessarily included defining oneself in relation to others and resulted in some level of judgment, and more pointedly he polemicized against a rabbinate he actively sought to enlighten. Therefore, to illustrate his vision of Humility, Luzzatto recounted a story of the talmudic sage Baba bar Buta:

“A certain Babylonian went up to Israel and took a wife [who did not speak the same language]. He said to her, ‘Cook for me two [animal] feet. Misunderstanding him, she cooked for him two beans. He fumed at her…. He said to her, ‘Bring me two pumpkins,’ and she brought him two candles. He said, ‘Go break them over the door [baba].’ Baba bar Buta was sitting in judgment. She came and broke [the candles] over his head. He
said to her, ‘Why have you done this?’ She said to him, ‘So my husband ordered me.’ He said, ‘You did the will of your husband, may God bring forth from you two sons like Baba bar Buta.’”

Luzzatto’s views on gender aside, primarily because the sage is the protagonist here, the example demonstrated the paradox of the trait in which one simultaneously stood meekly before God and interacted with the world. Baba bar Buta’s blessing appears egotistical, but, as the hasid related in the chapters on Piety, appearances can be deceptive and must be evaluated according to the circumstances. Rather than reacting negatively to public humiliation and physical pain, Baba bar Buta calmly asked the woman the reason for her action, and, knowing the exceptional spiritual level that he had attained relative to those present, prayed that through her God would provide Israel with equally righteous sons.

Talmudic literature is replete with maxims and stories of rabbinic humility, but the evermeticulous Luzzatto opted for this one intentionally. I suspect that, in keeping with the narrative of the hasid imparting wisdom to the arrogant-turning-modest hakham, the aggadita was intended to convey to the inundated reader the importance of maintaining their sense of self. After all, at least in Luzzatto’s intention, the reader had embarked on a journey that had taken him far afield. If Luzzatto was successful, if a member of the rabbinic class had indeed been converted to the author’s pietistic ways, he may have desired to abandon his communal position of leadership, deeming it incompatible with the hasid’s presentation. Yet, just as self-reflection and the pursuit of piety and humility did not value promoting oneself, neither did it necessitate abandonment of leadership positions. In using Baba bar Buta as Humility’s

157 Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 66b.
prototype, Luzzatto argued for spiritual elevation of the status quo.\textsuperscript{158} As God granted status, ability, and opportunity, one was required and privileged in their given situation.

Therefore, the end result of Luzzatto’s polemic was less austere than his initial criticism, for, believing his worldview to be the ideal commitment to Heaven but not in itself deserving of praise, he wished to convert and elevate without revelry.\textsuperscript{159} This element of the manuscript is important, because it elucidates Luzzatto’s mysterious transition from manifest messianism in his native Padua to quietism in Amsterdam and later Acre. It also distinguishes Luzzatto from the rabbinate at large, which was sometimes overtly antagonistic (and from which Luzzatto received abundant personal attacks), and thereby signifies the need for comparative studies of early modern rabbinic figures in order to discern the relationship between thought and character. As discussed earlier, Luzzatto’s stated goal was devekut, so any controversial interactions during his life, or argumentative sections in his writings, were of secondary importance. Thus, the final two rungs of the ‘ladder of saintliness’ – Fear of Sin and Sanctity – provide the greatest insight into the author’s spiritual mentality, as the hakham is initiated into the hasid’s mystical experience. Hearkening back to their initial interaction, and further still to the biblical Prophets, the hakham replies to the hasid’s transition to the penultimate trait:

“hineni le-hakshiv lekha”—“I am ready to listen to you.”\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{158} “If one might say, ‘Who am I, and what is my importance, that I should pray for [the end of] the exile and [the rebuilding of] Jerusalem? Will the dispersed be gathered and salvation sprout because of my prayer?’ His refutation is at hand, as we have learned…. [but] It is indeed pleasing to God, blessed be He, that His children should plead and pray for this” (Mesilat Yesharim, 228).

\textsuperscript{159} A study of early modern polemical treatises, both within and without the Jewish community, would be worthwhile in determining whether Luzzatto’s ‘benevolent’ polemic was unique.

\textsuperscript{160} Mesilat Yesharim, 264.
In only a handful of pages, the manuscript’s shortest section, Luzzatto discussed Fear of Sin, a trait distinct from the prevailing emotional fear of divine retribution. The latter belonged to the populace at large, which conceived only of a transcendent God that meted out reward and punishment. As the hasid explains to the hakham, however, Fear of Sin consisted of recognizing that God’s presence permeates existence and that his providence is all encompassing. At its apex, Fear of Sin was in fact awe of God’s majesty, in which the “understanding and insightful” person trembled while standing in prayer.\textsuperscript{161} Man was unable to maintain this awe, so Fear of Sin concerned time not spent in communication with the Creator. It entailed constant worry that one would sin, reflecting upon one’s past deeds and dreading that “some measure of sin passed through his hands unknowingly.”\textsuperscript{162} Conveying the extent to which the hasid acquired a Fear of Sin, Luzzatto again cited Baba bar Buta, who was said to have offered a provisional guilt-offering every day.\textsuperscript{163} More profoundly, the hasid remarks:

\begin{quote}
“Fear is not acquired naturally. On the contrary, it is foreign to a person’s nature due to the corporeality of his senses and therefore can only be acquired through training.\ldots That is, one must constantly contemplate and reflect upon this matter, when he sits and when he walks, when he lies down and when he rises, until he has establishes this truth in his mind.”\textsuperscript{164}
\end{quote}

To Luzzatto, habitual action could not assist in attaining Fear of Sin. Whereas Separateness was achieved through refraining or avoiding sinful elements, and Piety was a reflection of developed ritual and intention, Fear of Sin consisted of an all-encompassing spirit pervading one’s being. Baba bar Buta had not presented his guilt-offerings routinely, for selfishness and apathy bellied

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 266.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 271.
\textsuperscript{163} Babylonian Talmud, Keritut 6:3.
\textsuperscript{164} Mesilat Yesharim, 275–276.
\end{flushright}
heavenly acceptance of Temple sacrifices. To accentuate his point, Luzzatto paraphrased the verse from the *Shema* (italicized above), one of the most apt and, ironically, habitually stated texts in Jewish ritual.

Whereas Fear of Sin demanded spiritual training to the extreme edge of the human condition, converting the unnatural to the natural, attaining Sanctity, according to Luzzatto, was not in fact *humanly* possible. The *hakham* commences the sole chapter on Sanctity: “are you referring to sanctity that a person achieves by sanctifying himself, this being a form of service, or to sanctity that is granted to a person, this being a form of recompense?” The *hasid* rejects both possibilities and, in so doing, reveals the foundation of Luzzatto’s rationale. “Sanctity,” he responds, “begins as [human] striving and ends as a [divine] gift.” Man must seek to attain sanctification, but attaining it is providential. As God is the sole being who sanctifies, the *hasid* continues, even the most talented and committed individual is unable to ascend the level beyond Fear of Sin without God’s will. Concurrently, those who attain Sanctity may not be self-assured that they earned it as reward. It is an end point of the journey that is in no way automatic: one does not attain Sanctity after serving God in a certain way or extent, as with the other traits, nor is one sanctified as reward for mastering Fear of Sin. More to the point of enlightening the *hakham* at the early stages of his journey, those who manage

165 Ibid., 277.
166 This is a problematic concept, as the Bible itself contains commands that one should sanctify (see Leviticus 19:2 and 25:10).
167 This raises the question as to whether a person who attains Sanctity may lose it. Luzzatto did not address this directly, though he may have alluded to it in his light-darkness analogy in which man is constantly in a state of flux.
to attain Humility, Fear of Sin, and ultimately Sanctity are focused on God and his creation rather than themselves.

The exchange highlights the characters’ differing perspectives, betraying the hakham’s human-centered viewpoint, and, more than that, revealing the profound subjectivity of Luzzatto’s ‘cosmic’ perspective.\(^{168}\) How does one determine the level to which he has attained, or one’s place relative to others, or whether or not the splendid heights with which he identifies is not merely an indication of an active imagination and subconscious desire? This is an issue that should permeate historical study of Luzzatto and mystics in general, and may require developing a methodology that analyzes the correlation of the subject’s articulated thought, deed, and self-perception in relation to his intellectual, religious, and social contexts. Throughout Mesilat Yesharim, the individual is tasked with analyzing his place in relation to God, society, and his own potential, enabled primarily with the amorphous and spiritually elevating tools of selflessness and honoring God.

Therefore, while Luzzatto conceived of elite individuals at the top of a hierarchical society – albeit as divinely ordained – he arguably removed spiritual authority from a social and organizational system and gave it to the individual. In so doing, Luzzatto’s worldview, rooted in Kabbalah and promoting a God-centric perspective, actually reflected larger trends arguing for the broadening of intellectual values and moral, social, and political rights. This should not in

\(^{168}\) I am curious as to whether the heliocentric theory influenced kabbalistic thought, particularly Luzzatto as he was raised in Padua where Galileo had taught. For a recent study of Jewish thought on the Copernican model, see Jeremy Brown, New Heavens and a New Earth: The Jewish Reception of Copernican Thought (Oxford University Press, 2013). Brown notes that most early modern Jews, like Pinhas Horowitz in Sefer ha-Berit, rejected the new model; although Joseph Delmedigo, a student of Galileo in Padua, adhered to the new theory (p. 253). See also David B. Ruderman, Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe (Wayne State University Press, 2001), 263–264.
fact be surprising, because his writings were replete with references to ‘newness.’ For instance, in different contexts in *Da’at Tevunot*, Luzzatto wrote of a “new heaven and new earth,” and “new providences and new perfections,” while in *Derekh Hashem* he argued that each day is literally a “new creation.”

Similarly, in an extant letter from Luzzatto at the height of the controversy, Luzzatto wrote that “God has wrought something new in the world,” while Elisheva Carlebach has argued that the anti-Luzzatto campaign was primarily opposed to his desire to reveal a *Torat hadashah* (New Torah).

As I discussed above and intend to show throughout my dissertation, Luzzatto’s ‘newness’ was not culturally, religiously, or eschatologically radical. He reflected several mainstream tendencies, and grew naturally out of a mercantile, educated, diverse Paduan context. Rather, the political or social aspects of his mystical thought was what was innovative, particularly as it emphasized the individual’s relationship with God. It was not revolutionary, for Luzzatto did not seek merely external change, but it did empower the individual — or, more accurately, Luzzatto empowered himself. That he faced rabbinic rejection only confirmed his social thought and self-conception — that the rabbinate was stagnant and that he, as a unique figure in history, should strive to change it — and strengthened his resolve. To a certain extent, one can posit that, contrary to millennia-old rabbinic thought, Luzzatto believed that the Torah was defined in the heavens and not by rabbinic consensus, and that the genuinely spiritual

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169 Luzzatto wrote of a “new order,” “new heaven and new earth,” and “new providences and new perfections” in *Da’at Tevunot* (pp. 71, 159, 287), and that each day is literally a “new creation” (*Derekh Hashem*, IV:4.11).

170 In a letter to Immanuel Raphael Calvo in Livorno, he wrote “God has wrought something new in the world” (Chriqui, *Igerot*, nos. 32 and 81, p. 242); Carlebach, *Pursuit of Heresy*, 219.

171 The phrase *lo ba-shamayim hi* (Not in Heaven) appears in Deuteronomy 30:12. It takes on added meaning in the story of Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, in Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Metzia* 59b.
individual ascended to the heavens with God’s help to bring down to this world the Torah’s true meaning.

Nonetheless, Luzzatto’s ‘newness’ was markedly spiritual, or non-physical. A life of Sanctity, the hasid tells the hakham, “consists of completely detaching and removing oneself from what is material, and always clinging to the divine at each and every moment... Even when a person is engaged in the physical activities made necessary by his bodily existence, his soul should not depart from its supernal communion.”\(^{172}\) The great medieval commentator, kabbalist, and communal leader Moses Nahmanides (Ramban) had written similarly: “a person may be speaking to other people with his mouth and tongue, but his heart is before God and not with them.... It may be that during their lifetimes, the souls of people on this level are already bound in the bond of life.”\(^{173}\) Whether Luzzatto was influenced by Nahmanidean thought is less important than their joint dissolution of the boundary between spirituality and physicality. In *Derekh Hashem*, Luzzatto’s cosmological scheme identified spirituality and physicality as a single continuum.\(^{174}\) His iron-magnet analogy, therefore, referred to man’s intensified spirituality, a natural de-physicality as he is drawn closer to God, first through his actions and intentions and second through God’s providential will. Such was the case, Luzzatto argued in these final pages of *Mesilat Yesharim*, with the biblical Enoch, who, the Bible records, “walked with God; and he was no more for God took him.”\(^{175}\) “Because of his clinging [to

\(^{172}\) *Mesilat Yesharim*, 278–280. “It is impossible for a person to achieve this state of his own accord, the task being too difficult for him as he is, after all, composed of matter, flesh, and blood.... The best a person can do is make the initial effort, pursuing true knowledge and giving incessant thought to the sanctification of [his] deeds.”

\(^{173}\) Nahmanides, Commentary on Deuteronomy 11:22.

\(^{174}\) *Derekh Hashem*, II:7:1–2.

\(^{175}\) Genesis 5:22–29.
God],” the hasid explains, “[Enoch] departed and transcended all death.”\(^{176}\) That is, this world and the next were melded as an extension or manifestation of God’s Oneness and the unity of the creation.

Luzzatto’s interpretation of Enoch reflected his individualized reading of the biblical text and served as a point of convergence with the talmudic text he sought to elucidate. It was also in sharp contrast with the prevailing rabbinic view. Just as Luzzatto utilized but did not ascribe to some ideas in contemporary European culture, so too did he selectively read the vastness of Jewish literature. Apocalyptic texts of the late antiquity period, including at least one book of Merkavah literature, had glorified Enoch’s communion with God.\(^{177}\) Midrashic literature, however, claimed Enoch had been corrupted and had vacillated between good and evil. In turn, the most ubiquitous of all medieval commentators, Solomon ben Isaac (Rashi), reasoned that Enoch was taken by God because he would have ‘fallen’ spiritually had he continued to live. Thus, Luzzatto’s interpretation was outside the bounds of normative rabbinic intellectualism, but it was not unheard of in Jewish mystical thought. Or, more temporally, Luzzatto utilized ideas from late antiquity rather than those from the more recent medieval era.

At the beginning of my analysis of Mesilat Yesharim, I compared the analyzed baraita to contemporaneous Merkavah literature and argued that Luzzatto identified with such writings of spiritual ascent. His use of Enoch in this context, skipping over predominant rabbinic views in favor of pre-Mishnaic literature, may be demonstrative of his intertwined focus on promoting

\(^{176}\) Mesilat Yesharim, 280.

\(^{177}\) See Joseph Dan, The Ancient Jewish Mysticism (Mod Books, 1993), 110; Peter Schäfer, The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism (SUNY, 1992), 144. Apocalyptic literature viewed Enoch favorably, but with his adoption by Christian thinkers, rabbinic literature urged caution.
mystical texts while demoting contemporary rabbinic emphasis. As I will address in the final chapter, Luzzatto’s motivation was not lost on the book’s editors: in the process of eradicating all polemical elements of the manuscript in preparation for publication, they excised his reference to Enoch.  

Luzzatto’s final comments in the book concern the man who has in fact attained Sanctity:

“Such a man is regarded as if he himself were a sanctuary, a temple, an altar.... As a consequence, the food they eat is like a sacrifice placed upon the fire.... So greatly were [the Temple sacrifices] enhanced, that everything belonging to their species throughout the world was blessed.... The same applies to the food and drink that a holy man consumes. His food and drink are elevated as if they had actually been offered on the altar.”

In devekut, the individual completely overcomes the ‘gravity’ of materialism enabling his every moment and deed to benefit the world. Paralleling the soul elevating the body, and the hasid and the hakham forming a master-disciple relationship, this final trait involves the sanctification of the individual, and, again appropriating a scientific concept, ultimately the species. Through self-nullification and correct intent, the sanctified serves as a divinely ordained vessel through

178 Luzzatto’s original version included examples of Elijah and Elisha as well, which were also excised from the printed edition.


In a series of articles, Isaiah Tishby attempted to prove Luzzatto’s influence on Hasidism in Poland in the eighteenth century. He relied primarily on the dissemination of Luzzatto’s writings in manuscript by Jekutiel Gordon of Vilna, who met Luzzatto while studying medicine at the University of Padua and who subsequently became a significant member of Luzzatto’s mystical circle (see chapter three). Tishby’s meticulous work notwithstanding, the extent and nature of Luzzatto’s influence on early Hasidic thinkers is still unclear. This quote, which was retained in the printed edition, begs questions concerning his reception history in the midst of Hasidism: was *Mesilat Yesharim* appreciated and studied by hasidim, and, if so, why did it have no lasting influence? As I mentioned in a note above, I suspect the nature of Hasidism, with living and idealized grand rabbis, and after two generations a growing literature, precluded overt adoption of Luzzatto’s books.
which God’s redemptive plan is revealed. Thus, in his own mind, Luzzatto’s move from Italy to Amsterdam, from overt messianism to lone piety, did not necessarily affect his eschatology, identity, or self-perceived mystical success.

Moreover, with these concluding thoughts, Luzzatto’s critique of the rabbinate did in fact account for practical societal problems, including halakhic observance. The hasid’s call for the hakham to study works of piety rather than responsa was an attempt to form a sanctified rabbinate. In perfecting himself according to Luzzatto’s pietistic manifesto, the rabbinic reader would not only set an example to others and refrain from furthering the norm of mitzvah performance by rote, he could have a cosmic effect on his community and humanity as a whole. The journey to that point included recognizing that God alone provided one’s challenges, and that God’s plan was more complex than man foolishly assumed. Consequently, the hasid reminds the hakham – bringing the dialogue full-circle to address the latter’s initial denigration of the former – that “inasmuch as the bearers [of piety] vary, the means that get them to that goal cannot but vary with the individual. Just as it is possible for someone who never interrupts his study to be a perfectly pious man, so is it also possible for someone who, out of need, is a lowly craftsman. As it is written, ‘The Lord has made every thing for His purpose.’”

Intention, Time, and Space

In this chapter, I have presented some of the intricacies of one of the most popular Hebrew books from the early modern period. As discussed, Luzzatto appreciated societal diversity, and hoped to persuade readers (i.e. rabbinic leaders) to respect communal

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180 Mesilat Yesharim, 287; Proverbs 16:4.
complexity. This was not merely an abstract ideal, however, for chapters on Separateness, Piety, and Humility in particular establish an expectation that pietists maintain communal living.

His conception of Sanctity, meanwhile, indicated that the most exceptional spiritual state was one in which man benefited the world through his every action. As such, *Mesilat Yesharim* is psychologically challenging, reflecting Luzzatto’s intellectual approach to mysticism and encompassing the author’s social outlook, identity, and relationships. Luzzatto’s repeated cultural references, including to medicine, scientific discovery, economics, politics, and war, indicate his engagement with the world ‘horizontally’ as he elevated himself ‘vertically.’ It is Luzzatto’s most personal treatise, semi-autobiographical in fact, and deserving of a monograph in its own right. It could well be used to illuminate Luzzatto’s thoughts about innumerable issues, though I am primarily interested in understanding Luzzatto’s complex personality and motivations, and in uncovering the link between his controversial life and glorifying reception history. Through my analysis of the original version of the book, I have sought to present the author’s view of the rabbinate and the ideal righteous individual, the way in which he responded to the controversy, and how he related to non-rabbinic segments of society.

While scholars have addressed Luzzatto’s cosmic self-conception, specifically ideas that he was a reincarnation of the biblical Moses and identified his spiritual purpose as facilitating the ultimate redemption, we have lacked a clear understanding of Luzzatto’s social outlook. This invaluable autograph shows that Luzzatto’s religious and social platform was essentially an intellectual pietism. In the coming chapters, I hope to articulate that Luzzatto’s form of pietism

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181 This may partially explain Israel Salanter’s attraction and appropriation of the work for nineteenth-century Lithuanian Jewry. In the near future, I hope to address how such a spiritual, personal, and even emotional work found its widest study among Lithuanian Jews.
reflected a minor ‘movement’ that stirred in northern Italy in the late-seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries. What existed to varying degrees in small mystical confraternities throughout Italy and elsewhere, expanded through Luzzatto’s efforts and the desires of other likeminded young men native or drawn to Padua.

To a certain extent, it is clear that he sought to subvert much of the rabbinic establishment. He rejected Talmud-centric notions of Judaism, and hoped to inspire his rabbinic readers to elevate themselves and those around them according to his (Kabbalah-based) direction. What I hope to show in this dissertation, however, is that accusations of heresy do not, historically, make a heretic. Not that my intention is to declare Luzzatto ‘kosher.’ The responsibility of the historian is to present evidence about a given issue, and when dealing with Sabbatianism, for instance, the task is to show one way or another whether accusations of heresy match the accused’s deeds or motives. Luzzatto is a fascinating example of a man innocent of heresy but guilty of subversion. He based himself entirely on traditional Jewish sources, and his ideas did not fall outside of the Jewish canon. In his own mind, he believed he was restoring an ideal that had existed for millennia as a cosmic track parallel to banal historical living.182 Luzzatto’s criticism of contemporary rabbinic mentality and his observations about society as a whole were driven by a perspective rooted in kabbalistic thought and a life of diverse cultural experiences. Thus, the subversion of Luzzatto and his compatriots cannot be viewed merely within the context of rabbinic sentiment. Luzzatto had support of rabbinic and lay leadership, as well as non-subversive communal influence, in Padua

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182 Luzzatto demonstrated historical consciousness, though confined it, perhaps intentionally, to his cosmological scheme spanning biblical, talmudic, and contemporary times. I hope to publish an article on this in the near future.
and other Italian communities; while concurrently the ‘rabbinate’ opposed to Luzzatto displayed tendencies far from monolithic.

In an attempt to define Luzzatto’s originality, Jonathan Garb has recently argued that Luzzatto sought to move from “a religion of Law, of caution and asceticism, to a far more spontaneous and individualistic ‘religion of love.’”183 Undoubtedly, Garb’s identification of a transformation of the religion of Law is accurate. However, I prefer to broaden Garb’s definition to that of a religion of ‘spirit,’ a concept that encompasses the fear of God about which Luzzatto wrote in Mesilat Yesharim and other works.184 Similarly, though Garb’s assessment of Luzzatto’s individualism is apt, the word ‘spontaneous’ is unsuitable for at least two reasons. One, there is little reason to consider early modern rabbinic culture, the ‘religion of law’ in Garb’s words, as wholly rigid and unchanging. As I will discuss, the rabbinic societies in which Luzzatto lived, in the Veneto and in Amsterdam, may have been defined in fact by an incongruous nature. A combination or mix of Kabbalah, philosophy, and medicine characterized the Italian rabbinate to which Luzzatto officially belonged and with which he was socially connected to some degree. Portuguese Jewry, with whom Luzzatto found refuge, was largely outside the rabbinic mainstream. The Ashkenazic rabbinate, which produced Luzzatto’s most vehement opponents, demonstrated variations of obsessiveness, conviction, and carelessness. Meanwhile, as I will show, and as Garb himself has argued, Luzzatto was himself quite rigid in setting curriculum and expectations in his yeshiva. Spontaneity implies freedom,

183 Garb, “Mussar, Curriculum and Exegesis in the Circle of Ramhal,” 15.
184 Writing from Amsterdam to his students in Padua, Luzzatto wrote: “do not deviate from the true love that we studied in our midrash and the fear of his majesty (yirat ha-romemut) that we embarked upon” (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 164). The love to which he referred was Kabbalah, while the fear denoted the penultimate level discussed in Mesilat Yesharim, constant awareness of God’s presence.
whether of consciousness, conscience, or will. Luzzatto idealized devekut, a concept that did free man from materialism and society, but only in order to replace it with divinely driven spirituality.

Ultimately, Luzzatto had several goals in composing his moralistic spiritual dialogue. First, he wished to inspire members of the elite to fulfill what he regarded as their God-given mission in bringing Jewish communities closer to God. This consisted of challenging societal ideals of selfish intellectual edification, and by promoting sensitivity to palpable spirituality. Mankind was by definition subservient to the Creator, and rabbinic leaders had the cosmic abilities and in turn the responsibility to wholly serve their God through perpetual interaction with the divine.

Second, Luzzatto promoted individuality in the undertaking. The book was designed for the intellectual and religious elite. Luzzatto did not encourage distance from community or tradition as a whole, nor was he a social or political revolutionary. However, he showed that spiritual ascent required knowledge of self and society. The men desiring to follow Luzzatto’s path could only do so with a sense of individuality and uniqueness as they stood before their Maker.

Third, as he depicted the microcosm of the hakham, Luzzatto desired to transform rabbinic culture to one that embodied kabbalistic ideals. Talmudic casuistry (pilpul) and legalism (piske halakhah) had their respective places, but neither subject could sufficiently elevate a person, let alone a complex non-scholarly society. “What pleasure can we give our Creator with great pilpulim and many codes?,” Luzzatto stated in the midst of the controversy.
“True, laws are necessary for Israel...and we will set aside time for them because they are indispensable...but we will not, Heaven forbid, devote the lion’s share of our time to them.”^185

In contrast to the monologue of Mesilat Yesharim, which evades a firm understanding of the author in Amsterdam on the heels of the controversy, the dialogue demonstrates that Luzzatto continued to respond to his opponents. He did not accept defeat, nor did he relent in his larger quest for the cosmic redemption with himself at the helm. Although the manuscript is not overtly kabbalistic, except for the occasional linguistic reference, the characters, their titles and interaction, and much of the exchange indicates that Luzzatto sought to reposition the struggle. His blatant critique of rabbinic culture demonstrates that scholarly assumptions about Luzzatto’s quiet period in Amsterdam, stemming primarily from a dearth of archival material, are incomplete to say the least. The unpublished documents that I have found and will present in the final chapter do not necessarily contradict ‘quiet,’ but they, along with the present manuscript under discussion, demand an exploration of this ‘quiet’ relative to the presumed ‘noise’ of the controversy.

Fourth, after several years of controversy over his (presumed) thoughts and activities, Luzzatto wrote the dialogue as catharsis. He placed himself, as the hasid, in the position of authority and success, and vicariously experienced what persisted as an ultimate hope. The book’s concluding sentences follow standard scribal practices of praising God and offering a

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^185 Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 209, citing Chriqui, Igerot, no. 88. Luzzatto continued, “Most Sages of Israel have already become distant from the truth to pursue vain dialectics.... They crave only money and honor.” The connection between the two statements may be that, during the early modern period, rabbis in Venice (and probably elsewhere) were paid for each responsum they composed (Howard Adelman, Success and Failure in the Seventeenth Century Ghetto of Venice: The Life and Thought of Leon Modena, 1571–1648 [PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1985], 621). Luzzatto generally decried pilpul and piske halakhah in tandem, so he may have associated such writing of responsum with “vain dialectics” and the pursuit of money.
prayer. Yet, following the colophon, in which the author signed his name and the date of the manuscript’s completion, an additional verse appears like a post-script: “For the Lord most high is awesome; He is a great king over all the earth. He subdues peoples under us, and nations under our feet. He chooses our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom He loves, Sela.” As my analysis has shown, Luzzatto devoted his dialogue between a hasid and a hakham to ideal Jewish living, without particular concern for Jewish interaction with gentiles. The lack of discussion about non-Jewish oppression of Jews reflects, in the least, Luzzatto’s emphasis on a God-centered pietism that accounted for evil befalling man, and Luzzatto’s relatively benign (and sometimes positive) relations with Christians throughout his life in both Padua and Amsterdam. Therefore, the subdued people under his feet referred to his enemies, and the pride of Jacob to his own lasting impact. As I will show, Portuguese archival documents and the printed book’s haskamot prove that, by the time he completed his manuscript in September 1738, Luzzatto had become highly regarded among Amsterdam’s Sephardic community. Encouraged, Luzzatto chose to emphasize the ‘heritage’ (his legacy) and temper animosity towards the ‘nations’ (his opponents) by composing a treatise intent on bettering himself and the community at large, rather than merely venting frustration or voicing criticism.

The latter element demonstrated the complexity of Luzzatto’s pietism. His perspective was God-centric in absolute terms. As discussed above, he argued that submission to God as sovereign required acceptance of ‘evil’ as an element of providence. Devoted to kabbalistic

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186 Psalms 47:3–5.
187 A letter written in Luzzatto’s hand indicates his relationship with a Christian magistrate who valued the study of Kabbalah (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 99), while a notarized document in the Amsterdam city archives records a Christian man, Christoffel Sluyter, swearing a “solemn oath” on behalf of Luzzatto in pursuit of money owed to his father (SAA 5075, no. 10340).
notions of cleaving to God, Luzzatto searched and found God even in the events that countered his understanding of good and fulfilling God’s will. Though he believed that punishments imposed upon him as a result of the controversy, including the inability to teach, write, and publish what he wished, was unjust and perpetrated by ‘evil,’ it was ultimately positive in terms of God’s cosmological scheme. Thus, the manuscript of Mesilat Yesharim stands as a testament to Luzzatto’s acceptance of the widespread opposition to him as God’s will. Moreover, it explicitly shows that Luzzatto viewed the controversy, like all struggle, as an ordained trial with implicit spiritual and cosmological value. In writing it, he opted to redirect his energy: whereas he previously devoted himself to the ultimate cosmic redemption, in Amsterdam Luzzatto focused on individualistic and communal redemption. The latter, when understood as the pursuit of near prophetic connection to the divine while remaining an active member of society, was not a less important or grand mission. Rather, it was the fulfillment of the imminent expectation placed before him by his Maker to further the divine plan.
Chapter Two

An ‘Enclosed Infinite’: Padua and the Making of Luzzatto in the Early Eighteenth Century

In chapter one, I presented aspects of Luzzatto’s social and religious outlook through an analysis of the manuscript of *Mesilat Yesharim*. The autograph, displaying significantly different characteristics than the widely disseminated printed edition, demonstrates Luzzatto’s critique of the rabbinate and society at large. It highlights Luzzatto’s emphasis on the power of the individual, cultural complexity, and spirituality. The treatise was directed at the rabbinic elite, and within that a select few either amenable to change or disgruntled with contemporary mores. Luzzatto’s hope was to influence his readers to live a more spiritual lifestyle, which in turn, if followed as he delineated, would inspire others and uplift the world as a whole.

Prior to composing the book, Luzzatto had been subject to relentless accusations of heresy. After years of contention over his kabbalistic activities in Padua, Luzzatto left Italy and relocated to Amsterdam, where he was accepted by the Portuguese Jewish community and where he composed the book in question. Luzzatto positioned himself in Amsterdam to live a life of quiet piety. After nearly five years away from controversy, *Mesilat Yesharim* was Luzzatto’s renewed, less brazen attempt to subvert the rabbinic establishment. However, Luzzatto based his subversion on traditional sources and his own social and religious experience in the Veneto.

This chapter provides a foundation for Luzzatto’s identity and critique of the rabbinate. Using previously unpublished material culled from Jewish communal and state archives in Padua and Venice, I will show that Luzzatto was wholly a (kosher) product of his time and place.
In the next chapter, I will situate Luzzatto within a religious and social context, and present some of his teachers, compatriots, and students in Padua. However, in order to contextualize his and their activities and the eventual backlash from communities elsewhere in Italy and abroad, the present chapter first evaluates contemporary life in Padua’s ghetto. It delves into a host of influences on the young thinker, including the University of Padua, religious observance in the Padua ghetto, and the relationship between the community’s rabbinic and lay leadership.

The chapter consists of three primary social and cultural elements that were integral to Luzzatto’s viewpoint. First, Jews enjoyed relatively positive relations with Christians in Padua, the Veneto, and northern Italy in general. Social and political discrimination was innate, but violence against Jews in the early eighteenth century was not prevalent. Under the Venetian State, many Jews prospered and reflected larger cultural patterns. Second, Padua’s Jews existed as a cohesive community despite geographic, political, and ethnic complexity. Small in number and great in pride, Padua Jewry formed three congregations under one political banner and shared a single communal rabbi. The city was a magnet for much intellectual activity, and the community produced a variety of Jewish thinkers. Third, Luzzatto was a scion of a mercantile, non-rabbinic family. His father and uncles were among the community’s lay leadership, which provided him with social standing and self-esteem. Meanwhile, his parents’ largesse granted him intellectual freedom and enabled him to establish a yeshiva. Altogether, relatively positive political circumstances, the size and unity of the community, and familial support helped forge Luzzatto’s profound self-confidence and all-encompassing love of the Jewish public.
Padua Culture and Politics

Padua rests on the plains of the Veneto, northeast of the Euganean Hills and approximately twenty-five miles west of Venice. It lies between the Brenta and Bacchiglione rivers, both of which flow into the Gulf of Venice on the Adriatic Sea and which were integral to Padua’s growth in the late medieval and early modern period.¹ Padua’s character and power developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as residents of the town established a constitution and town councils, and fought wars with Venice and Vicenza over control of the rivers.²

In the first half of the thirteenth century, the city established two institutions that helped define its character and importance over the next several hundred years. The first was the Basilica of Saint Anthony of Padua. Exhibiting a nave like that of the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi and domes like those of San Marco in Venice, the Padua Basilica includes a mix of Romanesque, Byzantine, Gothic, and Islamic elements that reflect the complexity and cultural diversity of the city and region. It made Padua the first stop for pilgrims from northern Europe on the way to Assisi and to Rome, and thereby contributed to the political, economic, and religious vitality of the town and its environs.

¹ The oldest literary reference to Padua is Virgil’s Aeneid: the Trojan prince Antenor founded the “happy seat,” providing peace in the midst of war (Virgil, The Aeneid, trans. John Dryden, with introduction and notes [New York, 1909], 83). Ancient ruins in the city are comparatively scarce, although they include four Roman segmental arch bridges spanning the Bacchiglione River. The Ponte San Lorenzo was one of the earliest segmental arched bridges in the world, constructed in the first century BCE. See Colin O’Connor, Roman Bridges (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 92 (1161), 171. Padua’s growth and development until the High Middle Ages was typical of cities in northern Italy; it remained under the rule of the Roman Empire for several centuries and later fell under episcopal supremacy.

² The height of its political power came during the reign of the house of Carrara in the fourteenth century. See Benjamin G. Kohl, Padua under the Carrara, 1318–1405 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), and idem, Culture and Politics in Early Renaissance Padua (Burlington: Ashgate/Variorum, 2001).
The second was the university, which included studies in theology, law, and medicine. Students came to Padua from other Italian cities and abroad, and played an integral part in the establishment of the University. They elected their own officials, including the Rector (a student until the sixteenth century), influenced the hiring of professors, and organized themselves into “nations,” each with particular statutes.\(^3\) The University proved beneficial to both academicians and townsfolk: the former experienced some level of autonomy from civic authorities, while the latter profited from the boon to the economy.\(^4\) The Jews of Padua also benefited intellectually and professionally from their proximity to the University.

In 1405, Padua, along with large swaths of the mainland in northeast Italy, passed into the control of the Republic of Venice (Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia). Through the eighteenth century, Venice promoted peace and political stability in the region, with economic expansion during the Renaissance solidifying relationships between Venetians and communities of the Veneto.\(^5\) For easy governance, the Venetian State often united several towns under one banner. As the largest municipality of the ‘Padovano,’ Padua retained some of its former dominance over smaller towns in the region, including Monselice, Montagnana, and Cittadella. The town council administered the municipality, and a Paduan noble served as envoy (nuncio) in Venice to lobby the interests of the town.

Under Venetian domination, the city’s cultural institutions grew. The University of Padua was promoted as the home in northern Italy for conferring legal and theological degrees.

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\(^3\) In the early modern period, the Universitas legistarum consisted of twenty-two nations: Germanica, Bohema, Polona, Hungara, Provincialis, Burgundica, Anglica, Hispana, Ultramontana, Scotia, and twelve Italian nations.


The State taxed all citizens of the Padua district in order to contribute towards maintenance of the University. In 1545, the Venetian Senate supported the establishment of the University’s Orto Botanico, which remains the world’s oldest academic botanical garden still in its original location. The aesthetically beautiful and extremely well-ordered garden, through which several of Luzzatto’s compatriots strolled, contributed to the University’s promotion of botany, medicine, chemistry, and pharmacology. Students learned to identify beneficial plants and to experiment in the search for balms and cures. Luzzatto himself referred to medicinal plants and the curing of illness in Da’at Tevunot, reflecting the municipal-wide importance of the University and the gardens. Moreover, the garden’s geometric patterns and sculptures evoking the seasons represented humanist ideals of an ordered universe, the essence of which was adapted by Luzzatto in uniting Jewish mysticism and contemporary European thought. In the latter half of the sixteenth century, responding to students’ hands-on pedagogical demands, the University constructed an Anatomy Theater. Shaped like an amphitheater, the very steep hall consisted of six wooden tiers, each with a balustrade, in a window-less room.

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6 Allessandro Minelli, The botanical garden of Padova (1545–1995) (Venice: Marsilio, 1988); and Gabriella Buffa, Francesco Bracco, and Noemi Tornadore, Guida all’Orto Botanico di Padova. Quattro percorsi per conoscerne la storia e le piante (Padova, 1999). The year before, Cosimo I de’ Medici had established Europe’s first university botanical garden at the University of Pisa, but it was relocated twice in the ensuing decades. See F. Garbari, et al., Giardino dei Semplici. L’Orto botanico di Pisa dal XVI al XX secolo (Pisa, 1991).

7 On the structure of the Garden, see Michel Conan, Perspectives on Garden Histories (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1999). At first, plants were brought from the Euganean Hills and the Triveneto Region, and eventually from all over the world.

8 Da’at Tevunot, 191, 305.

9 Luzzatto commenced Derekh Hashem thus: “When one knows a number of things, and understands how they are categorized and systematically interrelated, then he has a great advantage over one who has the same knowledge without such distinction. It is very much like the difference between looking at a well-arranged garden, planted in rows and patterns, and seeing a wild thicket or forest growing in confusion” (Derekh Hashem, introduction).

that was lit by torchlight. During lectures, some two hundred students stood in extremely close proximity, all with an excellent view of the professor and the subject of his anatomical lecture. Cadavers, used for about one week until the decay and stench proved intolerable, were dissected prior to the lecture in an adjacent room called the Anatomy Kitchen.

In addition, Renaissance art and architecture flourished in Padua. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, new palaces and churches were constructed, other buildings were restored, artists including Donatello and Titian contributed their talents to the city, and the eleven-kilometer-long city walls were erected. The city had a decidedly mixed heritage of German, Italian, and Oriental cultural heritage: Gothic architecture prevailed in houses and palaces; piazzas, arcades, and frescoes enlivened public spaces, as was typical of cities and towns in the Italian peninsula; and the domes of the basilicas prodded the skyline. Luzzatto himself lived during the Rococo era, but the city readily displayed the grandeur of the Venetian State. As if evoking Luzzatto a half-century before, Johann Wolf Goethe described Padua’s complex eighteenth-century spirit as “an enclosed infinite, the human equivalent of the firmament.”

While Padua did display some measure of administrative and cultural independence, it was ultimately submissive to Venice. Two Venetian nobles, a podestà for civilian affairs and a captain in control of the military, governed the town as elected officials in sixteen-month terms.

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11 For an eighteenth-century account of art and architecture in Padua, see Giovambatista Rossetti, Descrizione delle pitture, sculture, ed architetture di Padova, con alcune osservazioni intorno ad esse, ed altre curiose notizie... (Padova, 1765).
12 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Italienische Reise, vol. 1 (1816), Sept. 27, 1786. Describing the Palazzo della Ragione in the center of the city, Goethe wrote: “Es ist ein abgeschlossenes Unendliches, dem Menschen analoger als der Sternhimmel.” Goethe’s version the Grand Tour served as an inspiration for well-to-do German youth in the beginning of the nineteenth century. In his essay “The Metamorphoses of Plants,” Goethe referred to a palm tree in the Orto Botanico; planted in 1585, the oldest plant in the garden is now named the “Goethe palm.”
In addition, the State Treasury was managed by two chamberlains (camerlenghi), also from Venice, who assumed positions in Padua as political stepping stones. In general, the attitude of the Venetian aristocracy to Padua was not particularly favorable. Venetians regarded the Terraferma as flat, monotonous, and humid, backwater areas that were originally marshy and malaria-ridden. One historian has argued that the villas built on the Brenta Riviera, between Venice and Padua, indicated the mainland’s limited, exploitative attraction to Venetians.  

Similarly, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo’s pastoral engravings in the eighteenth century objectified the Veneto through a romantic lens that provided appreciation from afar.

The Venice-Padua dichotomy, with the former dominating the latter, affected the relationship between the respective Jewish communities. Luzzatto’s leading opposition stemmed from Venice, as several rabbis in that larger and more prestigious city took it upon themselves to deal with the presumed renegade. Though Padua’s rabbinic culture was not particularly linked to Venice – I will later argue that by the eighteenth century the rabbinate was closer to that in Mantua – the political framework of the Veneto influenced inter-communal relations. The Venetian rabbinate was spurred on by Ashkenazic rabbis from abroad with little knowledge of the Italian landscape, and particular rabbis in Venice took it upon themselves to deal with the presumed renegade. Though Padua’s rabbinic culture was not particularly linked to Venice – I will later argue that by the eighteenth century the rabbinate was closer to that in Mantua – the political framework of the Veneto influenced inter-communal relations. The Venetian rabbinate was spurred on by Ashkenazic rabbis from abroad with little knowledge of the Italian landscape, and particular rabbis in Venice took it upon...

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14 On Tiepolo, see Aldo Rizzi, The etchings of the Tiepolos, Complete Edition, trans. Lucia Wildt (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1971); and [David Tunick, Inc.], Italian Prints of the Eighteenth Century: Catalogue Number 11 (New York, 1981). The work of Giovanni Battista (Giambattista) Tiepolo and his son Gindomenico could well be analyzed in the context of eighteenth-century Jewish-Christian relations in Italy. The Tiepolo engravings merged classical tradition (bas-reliefs, pagan sacrifices, pastoral scenes) with romantic sensitivity (magicians, snakes, owls, skulls). While displaying a nostalgic attitude towards the ancient and mysterious, contemporary Rococo was nonetheless the moral focal point of the artistry: the Tiepolos’ depicted Oriental-looking, bearded, hook-nosed magicians – in addition to or similar to obvious Jewish characters – alongside boyish, innocent adolescents.
themselves to extend their religious and communal jurisdiction as a reflection of the political environment. Luzzatto, ever aware of his cultural surroundings, responded to this power play by rejecting it for what it was, as Elisheva Carlebach has pointed out.15

Jews and the State in Padua

Jewish settlement began in Padua in the second half of the thirteenth century and increased through the fourteenth century.16 Merchants, moneychangers, and second-hand dealers (strazzaiuoli)17 were attracted by the court and the growing university. In 1369, the first Jewish loan-banks, which were also engaged in commercial operations, opened in Padua, and Jewish loan-bankers became an integral element of Paduan society, including providing funds to students of the University. In 1415, an attempt was made by the Venetian authorities, at the behest of the Padua Town Council, to lower the interest rate from 20–30% to 12–15%. Jewish

15 Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 235–236.
16 For an inventory of the archives of the Padua Jewish community, see Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, “L’archivio antico della comunità ebraica di Padova,” in Una manna buona per Mantova. Man Tov le-Man Tovah. Studi in onore di Vittore Colorni, ed. Mauro Perani (Florence, 2004), 507–538. For the main work on Jews in Padua, see Antonio Ciscato, Gli Ebrei in Padova (1300–1800): Monografia Storica Documentata (Padua, 1901; reprint 2004); Daniel Carpi, Minutes Book of the Council of the Jewish Community of Padua, 1577–1603 [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1973); and Hatikwà. Il cammino della speranza. Gli Ebrei e Padova, ed. Claudia De Benedetti, 2 vols. (Padua, 1998). Ciscato provided an overview of the community’s history, which is helpful, but sporadic and lacking analysis (and almost anything on the eighteenth century). Carpi’s work presented community records until the founding of the ghetto. The two-volume Hatikwà, published by the Padua Jewish community, consists of several scholarly articles on the history of Jews in Padua until recent times. For the first study of the community during the eighteenth century, see Ariel Viterbo, “Gli ebrei a Padova nel Settecento,” in Ramhal: Pensiero ebraico e kabbalah tra Padova ed Eretz Israel, 13–23. A monograph on the Jews of Padua in the early modern period, exploring their social, economic, and cultural history, would be a valuable addition to several fields.
17 Strazzaria referred to the commerce of rags, but by extension it referred to secondhand clothing and other used items, including household goods and furnishings, sought by a large part of the population. For strazzauoli in Venice, see Roberta Curiel, “A Tour of the Ghetto,” in The Venetian Ghetto, eds. Roberta Curiel and Bernard Cooperman (New York, 1990), 40 (which states that approximately sixty second-hand shops existed in the Venetian ghetto in the eighteenth century); and Giovanni Curatola, “Venice’s Textile and Carpet Trade: The Role of Jewish Merchants,” in Venice and the Islamic World 828–1797. Exhibition Catalogue, ed. Stefano Carboni (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 204–211.
bankers responded by striking, an action supported by the students who relied on them. The Venetian move displayed an attempt, at an early stage of their rule, to appease local citizenship at the expense of the Jewish population. In turn, the Jewish response, and the support they received from the University’s student body, revealed both Jewish strength and a gap between the municipal leadership and the transient scholarly population.

Until the early eighteenth century, Padua’s Jewish community expanded in a political environment largely driven by mercantilism. Assured of security and economic opportunity, many prospered, including several branches of the Luzzatto family. In addition to banking and selling second-hand clothes, Jews in the Veneto were integral to the expansion of the silk trade between Venice and the Ottoman Empire. They even engaged to some degree in production on the mainland. In the mid-seventeenth century, a Jew named Trieste established a silk factory near Padua, and in 1713, Gershon Cantarini, a well-known physician, built a spinning

\[\text{\textsuperscript{18}}\] Ciscato, 38–42; Cecil Roth, The History of the Jews of Italy (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), 125.


\[\text{\textsuperscript{20}}\] Molà, 67–70.
factory in the ghetto. Moreover, records in the Padua State Archives show Jews forming financial alliances with Christians in lending to other Christians; one such document details a group of about a dozen people, including Cantarini and Jacob Vita Luzzatto (father of Moses Hayim), collecting debts from a nobleman remiss in his payment. In addition, many Jews conducted business in the ghetto, and it was not uncommon to do so out of the ground floor of their residences. Luzzatto’s family, for instance, operated a shop (bottegha) on the main floor of their home, across the street from the Scuola Italiana.

To be sure, Padua’s Jews did experience discrimination and were subject to the whim of the State, the Town Council, and the populace. Laws required Jews in Padua to wear a distinguishing hat, prohibited them from employing Christians as servants or wet nurses, and until 1715 compelled them to listen to conversionist sermons in churches adjacent to the ghetto. Occasionally, anti-Jewish verse and images were circulated in the town. One imprint, from the 1740s, described “a Jew who cast his only son into the fiery furnace because [the latter] wished to become a Christian. How he was saved by the Holy Virgin, and the obstinate

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21 Ciscato, 122–123, 263–264 (doc. 12); Roth, History of the Jews of Italy, 416; Viterbo, 16. On Cantarini as a physician, see Marco Osimo, Narrazione della strage compita nel 1547 contro gli Ebrei d’asolo de cenni biografici della Famiglia Koen-Cantarini originate da un ucciso Asolano (Casale Monferrato, 1875), 55–58, 91–100.
22 Jacob Vita Luzzatto’s name appears in such circumstances in the A.S.Pa., Camera dei pegni b19, b20, b21, and b22 (no. 69). The latter document is the most clear: Magnifico Senior Conte Stefano Rosa borrowed money from a group of people that acted like a bank. When it was determined that he could not pay them back, the group sold his collateral (pegni) to acquire the money they were each owed; they gave the remaining money from the sale to the Sacra Monte. Jacob Vita Luzzatto made 43 lire, 8 soldi from the sale; Cantarini made 17, and Jacob Alpron made 4.
23 Discussion of a workshop belonging to Ragina qu. Grassin (Gershon) Cantarini appears in A.C.Pa., no. 202, fol. 23v.
24 For architectural schematics drawn up in the middle of the eighteenth century, housed in the Archivio di Stato di Padova, see Stefano Zaggia, “Gli Ebrei e Padova: Tracce e memorie di una storia secolare (XIV–XVIII sec.),” in Hatikwà, vol. 1, 3–47.
25 Viterbo, 13.
father burnt in the furnace into which he had thrust his son.”

That anti-Jewish material could be distributed freely in public space like a marketplace, where Jews were ostensibly active participants, is demonstrative of the limitation of said participation. Conveying similar sentiment, business transactions between Jews and Christians referred to the Jewish participant as “Pagano” (heathen), rather than the standard honorific title “Nobile Signor” of the second party.

Anti-Jewish sentiment extended, as elsewhere in northern Italy, to book burnings, ghettoization, and violence. In 1556, about three years after the initial destruction of rabbinic books in Rome and Venice, Padua set fire to confiscated Jewish texts. The effect of this particular conflagration must have been profound, because the Church’s most potent anti-Jewish measure of the sixteenth century originated after a dispute between Padua’s chief rabbi, Meir Katzenellenbogen, and a Christian printer in Venice who illegally published his work.

Between 1581 and 1584, city officials agreed in principle to introduce a ghetto like that in Venice or in Rome. In 1601, at the insistence of the Bishop, the Town Council decided, by a sixty-two to six vote in favor, to construct ghetto walls that centered the Jewish district around the Italian and Ashkenazic synagogues. In 1603, Padua’s Town Council confined the Jews to the ghetto, and affixed to the gates a tablet with inscriptions in Latin and Hebrew that prohibited Jews and Christians from approaching the entrances at night.

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27 A.C.Pa., no. 202, fols. 4r–4v.


29 See Ciscato, ch. 3; Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 324. For the text of the tablet, see Zaggia, “Gli Ebrei e Padova,” in *Hatikwà*, vol. 1, 33, with an image from J. Salomonio, *Urbis Patavinae inscriptions sacrae et prophanae*
was not commonplace, but on August 20, 1684, a mob of farmers descended upon the ghetto in search of plunder, destruction, and presumably emotional relief. They assumed that the prolonged resistance of Budapest to Austrian and Venetian troops had been due to the Jews of that city, whom they additionally accused of murdering Christian prisoners-of-war. Linked to the presumed guilt of their coreligionists in Budapest, Padua’s Jews remained indoors for six days; loss of life was averted by the reaction of town authorities, the army, and sympathetic citizens living adjacent to the ghetto.

The burnings, ghettoization, and violence should not be regarded lightly, as has become the trend in recent decades. Loss of knowledge and property, forced settlement within limited space, and the threat of aggression have profound effects on individual psyches and communal cohesion. In attempting to understand Luzzatto’s activities and motivations, it behooves us to at least tacitly emphasize the value and fragility of the individuals who experienced oppressive measures as minority residents of Padua.

Having said that, it is important to acknowledge that Jewish life in Padua was comparatively decent. The mercantilist nature of the Venetian State ensured basic security, which is one reason it took two decades to erect the ghetto and the 1684 pogrom was quelled. Under Venetian rule, Jews in Padua could consider themselves fortunate to have never faced

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30 The Padua Jewish community commemorated the day of thanksgiving as “Purim di-Buda.” At least two authors described the events: Isaac Hayim Cantarini in *Pahad Yitshak* (Amsterdam, 1685), and poet Sema Cuzzeri, who devoted to Padua’s Jews an Italian poem that is still unpublished.

31 At the 45th Annual Conference for the Association for Jewish Studies in Boston, MA, in a session on Salo Baron that also featured Elisheva Carlebach, David Engel, and David Sorkin, Adam Teller rightly called for increased regard for Jewish minority status in Christendom, which revalues Jewish oppression under dominant political, social, and religious forces.
the threat of expulsion: Luzzatto left Padua a decade before Maria Theresa expelled the Jews of Prague and a half-century before Catherine the Great confined Russian Jewry to the Pale of Settlement. Furthermore, Padua had not been home to forced entry for censorship purposes, as the Jews of Mantua and Rome experienced in 1731, nor were Jews there compelled to wear a distinguishing and humiliating hat or badge, as had been reinstated in contemporary Ferrara. To be sure, by Luzzatto’s time, the situation of Padua’s Jews was not as positive as, for instance, that of Jews in Livorno, which had surpassed Venice as the peninsula’s dominant trading center by the second half of the seventeenth century. Luzzatto’s thought and conviction – from his commitment to devekut and ‘Perfected Community’ to his steadfastness in the face of opposition – was enabled by a secure childhood and adolescence that consisted of relative hope and opportunity. The moral principles conveyed in Mesilat Yesharim could not have only been developed or accepted at a mature stage of life. Rather, I believe that nationalistic-based fear and shame were not substantial factors in his upbringing, something that I will address further below when discussing his family.

In general, oppression of Jews in Padua took the form of taxation. In return for political and social tolerance, Jews were required to pay annual taxes and fees to the State that amounted to hundreds of ducats. The State could at any time demand large loans in the

32 The library of the well-known chief rabbi of Ancona, Samson Morpurgo, was impounded (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 139). See Luzzatto’s comment on the confiscations (ibid., no. 15). On the censorship and confiscation of Hebrew books in 1731, see Abraham Berliner, Censur und Konfiscation hebraeischer Buecher im Kirchenstaate (Berlin, 1891), 13; William Popper, The Censorship of Hebrew Books (New York, 1899), 117.
33 Nehemiah Kohen attests to the pitiful state of Jews in Ferrara: the ruler required Jews, including women and children, to wear green hats (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 29).
amount of tens of thousands of ducats, as was the case in 1691 and again in 1704. Similarly, in business, Jews’ rights depended upon political expediency. Cantarini’s silk factory, for instance, was shut down almost immediately due to complaints levied by guilds, to which Jews did not belong, and by the late 1770s Jews no longer took part in the silk industry. Of course, excessive and random taxation of Jews was not unique to Padua, the Veneto, or Italy for that matter. For centuries, Jewish settlement in Europe hinged on Jews serving as sources of revenue. The early decades of the eighteenth century saw the Venetian Republic in general economic and political decline, and taxation of the Jewish community sought to stem the trend.

Ultimately, this form of economic oppression resulted in communal crisis and disorder. By the eighteenth century, taxation and loan demands had burdened the community, the wealthiest members in particular. While the Venetian Senate occasionally exempted individuals from taxes, the commune itself had the right to levy income-tax, which could not be avoided. As community debt grew, and, as in 1736 when the State refused to regulate Jewish communal finances, the most prosperous Jews moved elsewhere. Cantarini left Padua when invited by the Duke of Modena to open a pawn shop. Jacob Vita Luzzatto, meanwhile, followed his son Moses Hayim to Amsterdam, possibly in part to retain his fortune. Reflecting the rapid disappearance of Padua’s wealthiest Jewish families, the ratio between the minimum and maximum tax contributions in 1717 was one to one hundred-seventeen ducats; in 1744, the range was only one to thirty-four. That same year, an Italian broadside published in

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35 In 1691, the Jewish community provided 16,300 ducats in loans, and in 1704, an additional sum of 20,000 ducats (Ciscato, 188).
36 Viterbo, 15; Ciscato, 191, 285.
37 As cited in Mario G. Jona’s preface to Ciscato (reprint 2004), xx.
Venice was disseminated to all Jewish communities of the Venetian State ordering increased taxation of several professions, including silversmiths, merchants, and moneylenders.  

Whereas some 800 Jews lived in the ghetto at the turn of the eighteenth century, a 1787 census listed a mere 438 Jews in Padua.

**Padua Jewish Identity**

In *The Medici State and the Ghetto of Florence*, Stephanie Siegmund argued that ghettoization was integral in formally establishing the Jewish community of Florence. Until the ghetto, Florentine Jews were treated by the government as individuals or families, and did not form an essential community defined by Jewishness. Jews lived and worked among their coreligionists, but so too were they invested in the larger cultural and civic setting. Confined settlement and the formation of a Jewish administrative board forged the separate and distinct Jewish community, as we usually conceive of medieval and early modern Jewry. That is, state political and legal action established Jewish government, and subsequent notions of autonomy. It is an intriguing thesis that could feasibly be applied to Padua, Venice, and perhaps elsewhere in Europe — though the latter possibility requires careful qualification, because ghettoization was mainly limited to the Italian peninsula.

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38 VTL, no. F039. The broadside was to be read by the synagogue sexton on the Sabbath, when the community was together.
39 Viterbo, 14.
41 Even within the Italian peninsula the situation is more complex, for some community registers predate the establishment of the ghetto, including that of Padua. For instance, see Carpi, *Minutes Book of the Council of the Jewish Community of Padua*; and Yaakov Boksenboim, *Minutes Book of the Jewish Community of Verona* [Hebrew], 3 vols. (Tel Aviv, 1989). In a recent article, Yaakov Andrea Lattes argued that the registers reflect “a phase of Jewish political and organizational awareness and thinking,” and must therefore be included alongside ghettoization as
The history of Jews in the Veneto certainly lends itself to considering the relationship between individuality and community, and intra-communal identity, as influenced by the state. In the city of Venice, even after the establishment of the ghetto and its later expansion, Venetian authorities interacted with several distinct Jewish communities—German, Italian, and Levantine—each with its own legal arrangements. One cannot speak of the Venetian Jewish community, but rather of multiple communities partly distinguished by a respective synagogue and confined to the Venetian ghetto. As such, the political identity of Venetian Jewry incorporated an essential ethnic component.

To be sure, cultural distinction and contention helped define early modern European Jewry, as different ethnicities interacted and vied over opportunity and control in shifting geographic settings. Based on Siegmund’s contribution, it seems plausible that governmental authority over Jewish populations significantly influenced internal Jewish relationships. For example, Jewish ethnic separation was stark not only in mercantilist and ghettoized Venice, but also in open cities, such as Amsterdam and Hamburg, where governments did not conceive of all Sephardim and Ashkenazim as part of a single community. In contrast, Jews of different ethnicities integrated socially and politically in Mantua and Livorno, where, like in Florence, integral to the “long-term process of urbanization” (Lattes, “The Type of Community Minute Books—Some Preliminary Conclusions,” in The Italia Judaica Jubilee Conference, eds. Shlomo Simonsohn and Joseph Shatzmiller [Brill, 2013], 85–95). In the same published volume, Ariel Viterbo observed that archives (pinkasim) of the Padua Jewish community “were created to preserve documents needed both for the internal governance of the community and for the administration of relations with the Italian authorities” (Viterbo, “The Conservation of History: the Archives of the Jewish Communities in the Veneto,” in The Italia Judaica Jubilee Conference, 239–246. For an overview of Italian Jewish archives, see Viterbo, “The Archives of the Jewish Communities in Italy” [Hebrew], Archion 14–15 (2007): 9–28.


they functioned as whole and unified communities.44 A two-volume, large-format prayer book entitled *Sha’ar Bat Rabim*, printed in Venice between 1711 and 1716, may best represent the nuanced local-nationalism of eighteenth-century Italy: the title page states that the work was produced for the sake of the Ashkenazic communities of the “States of Italy,” including Venice, Padua, Rovigo, Verona, Mantua, Casale Monferrato, Gorizia, and their surrounding territories.45

In just four lines, quite unintentionally, the printers expressed the multi-layered identities of early modern Italian Jewry: an ethereal Italy, distinct political states within the peninsula, several large northern Jewish communities, and an indeterminate number of smaller communities or families. In addition, these lines presented Venetian Jewry as the central power, followed by other major population centers in the Veneto, and then reached across political boundaries in what amounted to an expression of Jewish nationalism and an appeal for business. Therefore, the question arises: did population size, cultural heritage, and even the larger political environment – including the openness of Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Livorno, or the ghettoization of Venice and Florence – significantly affect Jewish ethnic relations? Or, rather, did state characterization of and interaction with a city’s Jews define a community’s socio-political borders?

Regardless of specific answers, Luzzatto experienced and engaged with the complexity of individual and communal identity among eighteenth-century Italian Jewry. During the early

44 For Mantua, see Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 499–500; though Simonsohn stressed that the ethnic groups asserted themselves in order to prevent a loss of ‘rights.’ For Livorno, see Trivellato, 95 (“Unlike Venice or Amsterdam, where different congregations were set up along ethnic lines and followed different rites, in Livorno all Jews prayed in the same synagogue and the Jewish nation always remained institutionally united, even after it ceased to be a Sephardic citadel during the first half of the eighteenth century;” in n. 147, she says: “The Medici may have participated in this decision, but there does not seem to have been a debate about whether to set up separate synagogues or congregations.”).

modern period, Padua’s Jews were united under a single communal banner, like the Jews of Livorno and in contrast to the Jews of Venice. Yet, like Venice but in contrast to Livorno, Padua was home to multiple synagogues: an Ashkenazic synagogue (Scuola grande) opened in 1525 and served as the communal bet midrash from 1682, an Italian synagogue (Scuola Italiana), erected in 1528 across the street from the Ashkenazic synagogue; and a Sephardic synagogue, built in 1617 on the initiative of the Marini family and rededicated during Luzzatto’s lifetime after a devastating fire. The synagogues functioned separately, with distinct rites and customs, but together they constituted a single corporate and legal entity in the eyes of Venetian authorities. Compared to the populations of other major cities in Italy, such as Ferrara, Livorno, Rome, or Venice, each numbering in the thousands, Padua’s community was small. Moses Shulvass estimated that the Jewish population of Padua was about six to seven hundred during the Renaissance, while at the turn of the eighteenth century approximately eight hundred Jews lived in the city.

As a medium-sized, multi-ethnic, politically amalgamated community, Padua bred both relative communal cohesion and broad cultural perspective. It also enabled Luzzatto to develop his ideas of national unity, which adapted mystical and traditional rabbinic concepts to the

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47 Shulvass, The Jewish Population in Renaissance Italy,” Jewish Social Studies 13 (1951): 15, citing Isaac Cantarini, Pahad Yitshak (Amsterdam, 1685), fol. 10v, who gives some specifics about the history of the community. Shulvass’s estimate is based on the fact that a plague of 1576 killed 220 Jews, and that the population numbered 439 in 1603 and 721 in 1631.

According to Roni Weinstein, Ferrara’s Jewish population in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries varied between 1500 and 2600, with a proportion to the city’s population between eight and ten percent (Juvenile Sexuality, Kabbalah, and Catholic Reformation in Italy, 10; citing Bonfil, “Cristiani, ebrei e cristiani nuovi a Ferrara nell’epoca del Tasso,” in Torquato Tasso e la cultura estense, ed. Gianni Venturi, vol. 3 (Firenze, 1999), 1312–1313; and other articles in the volumes).

48 Viterbo, 14.
diverse social reality in which he lived. Unfortunately, observations from Siegmund and other
scholars about the inception of community in the early modern period do not contribute a
great deal to understanding the understudied eighteenth century, as is often the case in Jewish
historiography. [The notable exception with direct bearing may relate to the preceding
discussion: governmental taxation of the Jewish community, which fell to wealthy Jews who
subsequently relocated, degraded and hindered the very communal authority and community
established by the state.] After all, by Luzzatto’s era, official communal boards were well
ordered and integral to Jewish living.

By the eighteenth century, the Jewish community of Padua had both ‘organic’ and
forced definitions. The Senate viewed the Jews of Padua, Rovigo, and Verona as provincial
partners. Concurrently, Padua’s Jewish community, reflecting an element of the
municipality’s retention of regional importance, exerted control over the much smaller number
of Jews in the nearby town of Cittadella.

Nonetheless, homogeneity did not define Padua’s Jews. When Luzzatto was fifteen
years old, the community faced a dilemma with the arrival of a new rabbi. Upon the close of
the Sabbath on 7 Heshvan 5483 (=October 18, 1722), an aging Isaac Hayim Cantarini, who had
served as a rabbi and physician in Padua for several decades, instructed the communal scribe to
record a proclamation in a communal record book (*pinkas*). The *pinkas* entry describes a
scene in which four nameless community leaders approached Cantarini, entreating him to solve

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49 A.S.Ve. 195, no. 38.
51 A.C.Pa., no. 14, pp. 176–177. The entry consists of seventeen lines of legible, albeit not beautiful Hebrew script. It concludes with the Cantarini’s blessing of the scribe, his confirmation of the accuracy of the text, and his signature.
a problem that had been plaguing them for several weeks. A month prior to this inscription, on September 17th, the communal board had agreed, by vote of eighteen to eight, to hire Nathaniel Levi of Pesaro to serve as the community’s rabbi (moreh tsedek). He would provide halakhic decisions, give weekly sermons on the Sabbath morning, and fulfill other rabbinic duties for one hundred fifty lira per year. Apparently, what had not been pre-determined was the synagogue in which he would pray. Of the three congregations in the community, the Ashkenazic and the Italian were the largest. Each boasted a beautiful building and now each vied for the presence of the rabbi. Tensions rose as the new rabbi proved unwilling to choose one over the other. The Sephardic population was not prominent in Padua, and seems to have operated its prayers and rituals without official rabbinic attention. Cantarini concluded that Levi should divide his time equally between the Italian and Ashkenazic synagogues: the former would host the rabbi from Heshvan until Iyar (winter and spring), with the latter hosting the rabbi from Iyar until Heshvan (summer and fall), whereupon the cycle would repeat itself in perpetuity. “And so,” Cantarini concluded, “walking in the spirit of wisdom, knowledge, and Fear of God is the supreme treasure.”

The document presents a single community that accepted and retained its distinct cultural heritages. The Ashkenazic and Italian synagogues practiced different rites, but they functioned under the same communal banner and shared resources. Moreover, Cantarini’s account presents a rabbinic and lay leadership that functioned relatively smoothly. Following a

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52 See Asher Salah, Le république des lettres: rabbins, écrivains et médecins juifs en Italie au XVIIIe siècle (Leiden: Brill, 2007), no. 541, pp. 353–354. In a responsum on tum’at ha-met, he signed his name Nathaniel ben Meshulam Halevi mi-Modena (Pahad Yitshak, ot tet, fol. 76r). He was in Pesaro at least as early as 1718 (Pahad Yitshak, ot ’ayin, ’eruv).
somewhat democratic process in hiring a rabbi, but with questions remaining, the communal leaders deferred to rabbinic wisdom and willfully compromised with each other. Padua’s lay leadership respected its rabbinic elite, and Cantarini had long been the community rabbi and cantor of the Ashkenazic synagogue. He seems to have retired from his duties by this point, probably due to his advanced age and illness. The unnamed communal leadership, therefore, approached him unofficially out of appreciation for his sagacious abilities. Yet, a single political entity does not necessarily make a unified community. The vote to hire Levi revealed dissension, although the record book provides no hint as to whether objections were to the hiring of Levi, the amount of his salary, or the extent of his duties. Levi himself may not have been the easiest of characters: Isaiah Bassan, a teacher of Luzzatto who was active in Padua at the beginning of Levi’s term, wrote several years later in a letter to Luzzatto that Levi was a “man of strife.” Regardless, the confusion described above reflected an ethnic struggle in Padua’s ghetto. Cantarini’s resolution was apparently acceptable to both parties, but it favored the Ashkenazim. While Levi began his tenure in Padua in the Scuola Italiana, and therein celebrated Hanukkah, Purim, and Passover, the second term, in the Scuola Tedesca, included Shavuot, the Three Weeks of mourning, the High Holidays, and Sukkot. The temporal division may have stemmed from the fact that the situation had come to a head at the beginning of Heshvan, and Cantarini had wished to solve the problem immediately, but the split was nonetheless incongruous. The lopsidedness of the holiday division, both in number

53 Luzzatto’s dirge honoring Cantarini, who died within a year of Levi’s arrival, refers to Raphael Isaac Hayim Cantarini (Simon Ginzburg and Benjamin Klar, eds., Sefer ha-shirim [Jerusalem, 1945], 71–78). The name Raphael, meaning ‘God Heals,’ was often added in soliciting heavenly assistance to overcome illness.

54 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 61. In contrast, Luzzatto and his own family seem to have regarded Levi fondly, extending him an open invitation to visit the Luzzatto home (ibid., no. 41).
and in religious significance, is an indication that the Ashkenazic synagogue, which additionally employed a cantor paid from communal funds, was dominant in the ghetto.

At least two additional factors are noteworthy. Firstly, the Sephardic synagogue, which as mentioned above housed a significantly smaller congregation, did not even enter into the equation. It is possible that the congregation did not require the services of the new rabbi, because Sabbatai Marini and Moses David Valle, both of whom were close with Luzzatto, were rabbis of Sephardic ancestry. However, as Levi’s presence was almost certainly more about prestige than assistance, Cantarini’s missive begs the question of whether the Sephardic population at large was marginalized socially, religiously, or politically. Certainly, Luzzatto himself did not display ethnic prejudice in Padua — though, as I showed in the previous chapter, he was opposed to non-Italian Ashkenazic standards of edification — and he even composed a liturgical service celebrating the Sephardic synagogue’s rededication in 1729.55 Thus, it appears that Sephardim as a whole were sidelined because they were small in number, though Sephardim as individual Jews in Padua were integral to the community. Secondly, Cantarini avoided the obvious and important elements surrounding halakhah and minhag. Communities and sub-communities (congregations) maintained distinct rituals that were jealously guarded. In addition to liturgical variants, the synagogues practiced different customs, carried different tunes, and occasionally recited different prayers. During this very period, Padua’s Ashkenazic cantors corrected and amended the beautifully produced, folio-sized, generic Ashkenazic prayer book Sha’ar Bat Rabim, mentioned above, to accord with their tradition and spiritual sentiment

55 Printed in Venice at the Bragadin press.
What was Levi to do in the respective synagogues with different traditions? What if a synagogue practice differed drastically from his own view — did he, or the congregation, conform? A broad study of inter-communal halakhic practice in early modern Italian Jewish communities, which is eminently doable considering the large number of contemporary printed responsa, would shed light on Jewish ethnic relations at a time of increased and variegated interaction.

**Padua Communal Authority**

The Padua Jewish communal record books are exceptionally detailed and well preserved by the still functioning community. In addition, dozens of broadsides, marriage contracts, and ephemera speak to an active and diverse population. Below, I will present three previously unpublished documents dated to the 1720s and 1730s that, along with the document just discussed, relate to Luzzatto’s experiences, motivations, and undertakings. They concern Jewish religious and political life, rabbinic intra-communal connections, the importance and relative autonomy of the individual in Padua, and the limitations of the rabbinate.

Initially in the sixteenth century, communal matters were handled by a twenty-three-member assembly called a *Consiglio*. It was administered by three *parnasim* or *memunim*.

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56 JTS MS 10663. The original imprint consisted of four volumes, and complete copies exist in several libraries. The Padua *mahzor* at JTS, however, is a carefully produced single-volume book meant for public worship in the Ashkenazic synagogue by the cantor on the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Pages printed for prayer on other days were excised before binding, and any extraneous pages not pertinent to those particular days but present because of relevant text on the verso were covered with thick blank paper in order to keep the cantor attentive to the job at hand. [For instance, a blank page covers the verso of a page of a *yotser* for *Shabbat Teshuvah*, because the Cantor used this prayer book only for the holidays that flank that particular Shabbat (fol. 66v).]

The volume consists of approximately seven different hands, and the annotations span more than a century. Among the annotations and additions: liturgical poems, directions for cantors (for succeeding generations, presumably), kabbalistic intentions (*kavanot*), musical notations, and rabbinic commentary. I intend to write extensively about this printed book-turned-manuscript (and attestation to Padua’s religious and rabbinic culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) in a project on Luzzatto’s reception history.
elected to one-year terms.\textsuperscript{57} The order of the early community gave way to apparent randomness by Luzzatto’s era. Eighteenth-century minute books record upwards of thirty-five names at meetings of the communal board, with as many as five memunim and three parnanism in attendance. Whereas the early minute books indicate that the community originally held direct elections,\textsuperscript{58} the selection process was later based on “balle nel bossolo,” in which the wealthiest (i.e., highest-taxed) members of the community were selected by lot to form a council that in turn elected that year’s officials. The mix of chance and selection, modeled after the convoluted process of electing the doge of Venice,\textsuperscript{59} was supposed to spread the responsibility and burden of running the community. The Consiglio made decisions affecting the community as a whole and dealt primarily with financial matters. Leaders collected and paid taxes, administered charity to the poor, and maintained the synagogues and cemeteries.\textsuperscript{60} In addition, they were entrusted with paying the salaries of the community’s few employees: a rabbi, a scribe, a cantor of the Ashkenazic synagogue, and a teacher of the

\textsuperscript{57} See Carpi, 25–55; Viterbo, 14–15. To compare, see Jay Berkovitz’s forthcoming book on Metz (Protocols of Justice: The Pinkas of the Metz Rabbinic Court 1771–1789 [Brill]), where the communal board consisted of a ninety-nine-person electoral college, thirty-three leaders chosen from each of three social classes.

\textsuperscript{58} Carpi, 30. For the election process used by Venetian Jews in the early seventeenth century, see David Malkiel, A Separate Republic: The Mechanics and Dynamics of Venetian Jewish Self-Government (1607–1624) (Jerusalem, 1991), 11.

\textsuperscript{59} For a detailed description of the process of electing the doge of Venice, see Martin Da Canale, Les Estoires de Venise, trans. Laura K. Morreale (Padua, 2009).

\textsuperscript{60} A.C.Pa., no. 13, p. 181 (and unpaginated folios from November 1730).
school. Special monies were managed so that the community could help fund Jewish communities in the Holy Land and ransom Jewish captives held abroad.

During Luzzatto’s era, Padua’s lay and rabbinic leaders largely complemented each other, sharing and even swapping responsibilities. The former consulted and at least unofficially obeyed the latter, and the latter often took an active role in non-rabbinic matters. For instance, Sabbatai Marini, who granted Luzzatto his first rabbinic ordination and also earned a degree from the University of Padua, often appeared at communal board meetings. He served as parnas at least twice, and issued bans against individuals disobeying communal (and not only halakhic) regulations. Juxtaposed to Marini’s example, lay leaders acted as dayanim on judiciaries for internal disputes. In general, the courts consisted of a rabbinic authority and two members of the Consiglio elected for a period of two years, although there is evidence that three-person courts also consisted solely of lay leaders. Both religious and lay leaders acted as dayanim on judiciaries for internal disputes. In general, the courts consisted of a rabbinic authority and two members of the Consiglio elected for a period of two years, although there is evidence that three-person courts also consisted solely of lay leaders.

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61 Discussions of the sexton of the synagogues appear in the minute books, but the position may have been filled by volunteer or similarly by lot and selection. A manuscript in the JTS library (MS 3595) records the bi-annual ceremonial changing of the shamas of the Scuola Italiana (בית הכנסת הגדולה) in Venice, demonstrating that it was a position of honor. A Moses Luzzatto, possibly a cousin of Jacob Vita Luzzatto, became sexton on 24 Nisan 5450 (=March 24, 1690).

62 A.C.Pa., no. 5, nos. 245 and 637. On 14 Heshvan 5422 (=October 27, 1661), the community board members resolved to provide fifty ducats to ransom five hundred Polish Jews held by Tartars in Persia. On 3 Tevet 5448 (=November 27, 1687), they pledged to give one hundred fifty ducats to liberate six hundred Jews in Belgrade, following the Austrian defeat of the Ottomans. The emissary may have been the father of Nehemiah Hayun (see Scholem, “Hayun, Nehemiah,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 8, 477).

63 In 1727 and again in 1731 (A.C.Pa., no. 13, p. 242, and unpaginated folios from May 1731). Similarly, though to a lesser extent, Isaac Cantarini appeared at the meetings as a member of the Consiglio (for instance, A.C.Pa., no. 14, pp. 174–176).

64 A.C.Pa., no. 15, pp. 157–169.

65 Viterbo, 17. For examples of the former, see A.C.Pa., no. 13, pp. 75, 86 (for Cantarini), and no. 13, unpaginated final folio (Marini); for the latter, see A.C.Pa., no. 15, unpaginated folios from November 1730.

According to Ravid, “while the Venetian government opposed both the establishment of Jewish courts and the imposition of the requirement for all Jews to have recourse to Jewish arbitration, it was only objecting to Jewish jurisdictional autonomy and not the Jewish civil law itself, which it used without questioning in its own civil tribunals” (Ravid, “Translators of Hebrew Documents for the Venetian Government and the Venetian Government as Preserver of Documents of the Venetian Jewish Community,” in *Tov Elem: Memory, Community and Gender in*
leaders were concerned with religious laxity in the ghetto, such as Sabbath desecration, a reduction in Torah study, and the consumption of non-kosher food, as well as moral and ethical issues like gambling and thievery. They discussed these issues in board meetings and, as I will presently discuss, even instituted programs attempting to rectify the evils.

A Weak Bond

In June 1724, Nathaniel Levi and Sabbatai Marini issued a ban (herem hamur) against unknown culprits suspected of thievery. A pinkas recording the tax assessments for the years 1690-1700 had gone missing. After acknowledging that the book may have been lost inadvertently, the rabbis quickly assumed that it was deliberately stolen. The document relates that the community sexton, Gad Terni, whose son Michael became a student of Luzzatto and who was ordained by Marini in 1737, announced the terms of the ban in each synagogue in the ghetto. This relatively benign introduction gave way to a show of spiritual strength and rabbinic authority: roughly two-thirds of the page-long text draws upon the Bible to levy curses upon the criminal (trans) guilty of the theft, and blessings upon whoever would enlighten the authorities with pertinent information. At the conclusion of the text, the rabbis included their

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A.C.Pa., no. 15, fol. 56.

A.C.Pa., no. 17, fol. 20.
signatures: Levi, as the community’s official rabbi, signed first and labeled himself a servant of the community (משרת ק”ק), while Marini signed second in lending support to Levi’s authority.

The willingness of the rabbinate at the behest of the lay leadership to impose a ban over an ethical issue is demonstrative of their close relationship. In Padua, the rabbis wielded spiritual authority, even over socio-economic issues, which the lay leadership could call upon when needed. Similarly, tax regulations from February 1730 repeatedly threatened a “herem hamur” for individuals potentially remiss in paying taxes. Historiographically, we may wish to define theft and tax evasion as essentially ‘secular,’ but early modern rabbinic culture drew no distinction. Such sins reflected an immorality condemned in the religious sphere. Not only did the laymen in charge of the community’s finances rely upon rabbis for moral guidance, the rabbinic leadership was integral to the enforcement of the will of the Consiglio.

Yet, such brandishing also betrays the limits of their respective powers. The document relates that the pinkas was stolen from a box that housed a series of communal books and papers. The perpetrator(s) somehow gained access to the room in which the archive was held, located the particular volume, and secreted it away. Presumably, he or they wanted to suppress knowledge of dues owed to the community. The theft indicated the fragility of the societal framework: if one rebelled against the tax system, and stole and deceived in order to

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69 Israel Meir ben Moses Menahem Yerek, the community’s scribe in 1726, used the same designation when signing his name after copying a rabbinic ordination (A.C.Pa., no. 13, fol. 213).
70 A.C.Pa., no. 15, pp. 238–239.
shield one’s rebellion, the authority of the Consiglio and its leadership were challenged, and the social construct of the community was in danger. Levi’s and Marini’s well-intentioned response to an unethical and destructive act relied upon heavenly retribution, which meant that their show of ‘strength’ was anything but. This is especially evident in the rabbinic signatures. To bolster their statement, Levi and Marini appended the word gozer (גוזר) to their names. In medieval Ashkenaz, ‘gozer’ served as an honorific appellation for a mohel, but Levi and Marini clearly used it to specify that their written words were to be understood as an official rabbinic decree (גזירה). I have found similar usage among several contemporary rabbis directly or tangentially connected to the Padua Jewish community.

Linguistic development aside, rabbinic emphasis of this sort indicated that their signatures alone were weak, which itself betrayed the chasm between rabbinic ‘shepherds’ and their communal ‘flock.’ Essentially, Padua’s rabbis functioned without tangible power — that is, political, social, and economic power. Bans that carried blessings and curses belonged to the spiritual and religious reality of Judaism. They, and their issuers, proved irrelevant if the populace at large did not fear, respect, or believe in them. Although the proliferation of bans and the use of terms emphasizing authority display rabbinic weakness, the existence and cause

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72 In medieval Ashkenaz, ‘gozer’ was an honorific that signified a mohel. See Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 130b (רבי פלוני הגוזר), Jerusalem Talmud, Shabbat 19:1, and Jacob ha-Gozer and his son Gershom ha-Gozer, Zikhron berit la-rishonim (Berlin, 1892). Thank you to Menachem Butler and friends for the references.

73 Benjamin Kohen Vitale and Isaiah Bassan both used the term in a joint responsum issued from Reggio in 1729 and printed in Samson Morpurgo’s Shemesh Tsedakah (Venice, 1743), Even ha-‘ezzer, siman 13. Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea and Judah ben Jacob Mendola of Mantua similarly did so in 1743 ruling about the kashrut of a butcher shop (A.C.Ma., no. 111.11), and Mendola used it again in a Pragmatica from 1747 (A.C.Ma., no. 120.20). Gur Aryeh Finzi, also of Mantua, used the term in a broadside (VTL, no. J003). If “gozer” was used as a self-honorific, why did Vitale, Bassan, Basilea, Mendola, and Finzi use it only in matters of decree and not in the countless number of letters we have from each of them? It would be interesting to observe the use of this word: how common was it, and was it limited to a particular geographic region or to certain rabbinic figures? The five men cited here were all directly or indirectly connected to the Mantua rabbinate.
of this particular ban do indicate that moral and religious issues rested in the hands of the rabbinate. Members of the communal board retained certain authority, as vested by the state and emboldened by their personal fortunes, but communal well-being necessitated, and in fact depended upon, rabbinic direction.

Bridge to the Heavens or the Public

Arguably, the ban described above can be described as a rabbinic ‘fiction.’ It carries only so much spiritual weight as the issuers and recipients provide. Assuming the perpetrators of the theft were not found out and subsequently dealt with temporally, either through communal fines or other censures, Levi’s and Marini’s ban was meant to inspire celestial punishment. Or, more expediently, the rabbis intended their biblical curses to inspire enough fear to recover the missing pinkas. Presumably Levi and Marini opted to emit words of fire and brimstone rather than morality – evoking what is right, just, honest – because the latter was even less useful than the former. Had the synagogue sexton, Gad Terni, stood before the congregations and recited the biblical verse “Thou shalt not steal,” the blank stares and deaf ears in the room would have abounded even more.

The term ‘fiction’ may have a negative connotation, though I use it only to denote something whose existence is established by the unified assumption of multiple parties. The ban, for instance, stands as a fact, and as a useful one at that, if the authors and readers of the ban agree to its validity. The quintessential legal fiction in rabbinic Judaism may be the establishment of an ‘eruv hatserot. An ‘eruv enables Jews on the Sabbath to carry items from one private domain to another, which would otherwise be forbidden by biblical law. The laws
of establishing an ‘eruv are extensive, but it is essentially created by erecting a wall or a string, often circumnavigating a given area, that renders all private and public property within that space one large private domain. The accepted ‘fiction’ is that walking between houses or parks within the ‘eruv is no different than walking from one room to the next in a house.

On the eve of Yom Kippur, 5481 (=October 11, 1720), Padua’s communal scribe recorded the authorization of an ‘eruv hatserot within the city walls of Padua. It would enable Jews on the Sabbath to carry items from the ghetto to the town at large and vice versa. The Padua ghetto itself was completely enclosed and presumably home only to Jews, which thereby allowed books, food, babies, and the like to be moved from one private domain to another through the small Jewish area’s public streets and alleys. However, evidently (and understandably) Jewish residents of Padua did not remain within the ghetto on the Sabbath. Instead, they used the rest day as an opportunity to wander through the city’s bustling market places, open piazzas, and beautiful gardens. In the process, according to this scribe in 1720, “most people were careless about carrying from the ghetto to the outside and from the outside to the ghetto, against the words of the rabbis.” “Most people” probably referred to individuals of all social classes. The materials they carried may have been as simple as food and books, but, considering the negligence in obeying a basic law of the Sabbath, probably included items unrelated to observing the Sabbath. Moreover, carrying items “from the outside to the ghetto”

75 A.C.Pa., no. 13, p. 168. Thanks to Yigal Sklarin for assistance with this document.
76 For ‘eruvin during the early modern period, see Mintz, 132–147.
seems to indicate that they acquired items anew and brought them home, perhaps even through the sin of purchasing on the Sabbath.

In response to this problem, according to the document, two officers of the community, Shemaryah Conian and Samuel Katz Cantarini, the latter of whom was the brother as well as business partner of the physician Gershon Cantarini mentioned previously, initiated the erection of an ‘eruv hatserot encompassing the city walls of Padua. No other entry in the pinkas seems to refer to the ‘eruv, though the concern over this form of Sabbath desecration was undoubtedly discussed privately among lay and rabbinic leaders. The stated purpose of the ‘eruv was to remove the danger of sinning (מכשול ועון) from the masses then ignoring the law. Halakhically, carrying within the ghetto walls had not been a problem. Presumably, the area was home to only Jews, who could fabricate their many private domains with semi-private spaces into a single supra-private sphere by collecting matzoth from different people and keeping it in a place known to all involved. However, to expand the area of the domain into predominately non-Jewish areas required Jews to “rent” the area for the Sabbath. In principle, if Jews wished to carry throughout the city, they would need permission from each non-Jewish property owner. A loophole to this concept allowed Jews to receive permission from the ruler of the city (שר העיר), partially defined as someone who could gain control over all the land and houses during wartime.

Like the ban discussed above, this document demonstrates the gap between authority and community. A remark in a letter from Luzzatto to Isaiah Bassan, who had served as rabbi in Padua between 1715 and 1722 and introduced the young man to Kabbalah, reveals that Bassan
had pushed hard for the ‘eruv’s establishment.\(^{77}\) Although the minute books do not indicate that lay and rabbinic leadership had previously attempted to curtail the violation, it is likely that, as chief rabbi of the community, Bassan had warned against the sin. Apparently unable to mass educate or inspire against flagrant violation of Jewish law, Bassan, with the assistance of Conian and Cantarini, took responsibility for the cosmic well-being of the community. By attaining governmental consent over ‘Jewish’ space, they arranged to save sinful Jews from heavenly retribution. The document clearly specifies that the purpose of the ‘eruv was for these very people, not for pious individuals, for instance, who had been careful not to violate the law and had asked to install an ‘eruv for their benefit.

The psychological breach between rabbi and community was, in this case it seems, one-sided. The individuals guilty of violating the Sabbath while carrying to and from the ghetto presumably would have continued to do so; such people cared little for the ‘eruv and its advocates. Its existence required no action or belief on the part of the negligent individuals in question, nor would it overtly affect the moral or religious character of the community. That the document was written on the eve of Yom Kippur, which that year fell on the Sabbath, indicates an extreme laxity in ritual observance: what were they carrying and where were they going on the Day of Atonement? Were medical students attending lectures or conducting research on the Sabbath? Did some Jews live outside the ghetto, or were Jews eating with non-Jews and interacting on a more personal level outside the public spheres? Regardless, Bassan was concerned with the sin itself, regardless of its perpetrator, and felt he was aiding the

\(^{77}\) Chriqui, Igerot, no. 30, p. 86.
sinners despite themselves. A decade later, Luzzatto celebrated Bassan for having removed, in one fell swoop, an ongoing and widespread spiritual fault of the community.  

The actual establishment of the Padua ‘eruv consisted of a conversation, a letter, and a pair of silk stockings. Conian and Cantarini met with Signor Giacomo Contarini, a camerlengo of Padua, and explained to him the essence of what they wanted. In his kindness, recorded the scribe, Contarini listened and granted permission for the ‘eruv. Apparently a dispute arose within the community when some people insisted they required a physical object, such as the keys of the city, to claim ownership over the land within which Jews would carry on the Sabbath. For direction, the lay and rabbinic leadership wrote to Judah Briel (1643–1722) of Mantua, who responded that, based on the ruling of Moses Zacut (ca. 1620–1697) decades earlier, Mantua Jewry had given a mere ducat to the Duke when establishing the ‘eruv in that city and that the need for keys was a “fallacious dream.” For their part, Conian and Cantarini gave a pair of silk stockings (זוג אחד בתי רגלים של משי) to the camerlengo. The unusual deal – a payment reflecting one of the Veneto’s modern industries and far above the single peruta mentioned in the Talmud or the ducat suggested by Briel – was obviously an attempt to curry favor with Contarini and his office. In return, Contarini granted the community a fifty-year ‘lease’ of the city.

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78 To Luzzatto, it may have been Bassan’s greatest spiritual accomplishment. In the letter, Luzzatto tied establishment of the ‘eruv to R. Akiva’s institution of the law in the Mishnah. In so doing, he linked the souls of Bassan and Akiva, and informed Bassan that he was in fact the reincarnation of the great Mishnaic sage and had rectified their collective spirit through the erection of the ‘eruv (ibid., no. 30, p. 86).
79 Babylonian Talmud, ‘Erufin 62.
80 Jews were permitted to carry throughout the city, except in the Castello Carrarese at the southeast corner of the city on the Bacchiglione River. At the time, the Castello may not have been in use. Between 1767 and 1777, its main tower was transformed into an astronomical observatory known as Specola.
The arrangement is demonstrative of Paduan Jewry’s social and economic integration. Jews resided in the ghetto but lived in the city, and the lay leadership was involved enough with the municipality that an abstract concept of Jewish law could be broached in conversation. Furthermore, not only was the ‘lease’ irrelevant to Venetian law, the stockings were undoubtedly regarded as a personal gift. Additional research in both the communal and state archives of Padua is necessary to determine if Conian and Cantarini previously or subsequently had personal dealings with Signor Contarini.

More than that, however, the personal nature of the deal essentially lobbed a ‘fiction’ upon the ‘fiction,’ for a camerlengo was hardly the sar ha-’ir. Padua, like other major cities under Venetian authority, was ruled by a podestà in charge of civilian affairs and a captain in control of the military, both of whom were subservient to the elected doge in Venice. To be sure, Jewish communal authority presupposed the question of whether the camerlengo qualified as a sar ha-’ir by referring to him as “the district ruler” (תובר השר כהיש אמחא מפורנס בייני). In general, the camerlenghi acted as the Venetian Republic’s cashiers. They accepted all payments, imposed penalties on debtors, and managed expenses. Presumably, Padua’s rabbinic leadership, which included Bassan and Cantarini in consultation with Briel in Mantua, concluded that a camerlengo could be defined as the governor of basic municipal matters.

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81 In contrast, the Jews of Ferrara had an issue of carrying from the ghetto into the oratory of San Crispino, where they were compelled to hear sermons (Isaac Lampronti, Pahad Yitshak, ‘eruv, fol. 153). Perhaps this is an indication that Jews in Ferrara were not permitted to establish ‘ownership’ over the town for the purposes of an ‘eruv hatserot?

82 It is possible that the camerlengo was a Paduan, as opposed to a Venetian appointee.
This was in stark opposition to two near-contemporary responsa that addressed very similar issues.\textsuperscript{83} The first, from Hakham Tsevi Ashkenazi, ruled that the Jews of Hamburg could not construct an ‘eruv solely with the permission of the Burgermeister, the town’s chief official.\textsuperscript{84} The Burgermeister was, after all, appointed by the emperor, and he had no independent right to wage war. Ashkenazi further contended that “the ability to collect taxes does not carry with it the authority to lease the city to the Jews.”\textsuperscript{85} Similarly, Samuel Aboab of Venice, ruled that an ‘eruv established in Genoa was unfit because the protectores, who dealt exclusively with Jews and from whom Jews had leased the city, lacked the authority to unilaterally alter houses or streets.\textsuperscript{86} Following the logic of Ashkenazi and Aboab, the entire republican system seemed to lack the consistency that the rabbinic law originally intended.

Yet, Padua’s lay and rabbinic leadership concluded that Contarini and the office of camerlengo qualified. This fact speaks either to rabbinic creativity, ignorance, or manipulation. Perhaps, Bassan, Cantarini, and Marini rejected Ashkenazi’s and Aboab’s particular readings and determined the camerlengo sufficiently met the spirit of the law. However, considering the fact that they asked Briel a question that the Talmud itself answers, may we conclude that Padua’s rabbis were unaware of the laws of ‘eruv hatserot? This would not necessarily reflect badly upon the rabbinate, particularly if it indicates that ‘eruvin in Jewish communities were

\textsuperscript{83} Discussed by David Katz in a lecture given at the Early Modern Workshop, Jews and Urban Space, 2005 <http://condor.wesleyan.edu/openmedia/emw/video/2005/katz_2005.mov>, accessed September 5, 2012. ‘Eruvin has not been dealt with much in scholarly literature. Katz’s lecture on the Ashkenazi and Aboab responsa raised issues related to space and identity. According to Katz, Christians tolerated Jews who sought to “own” cities, for reasons yet to be determined and probably specific to each case, while Jews capitalized on the opportunity even though they knew that the rulers were only going through the motions of Jewish law.

\textsuperscript{84} Tsevi Ashkenazi, \textit{She’elot u-Teshuvot Hakham Tsevi} (Jerusalem, 2004), no. 6.

\textsuperscript{85} Mintz, 135.

\textsuperscript{86} Samuel Aboab, \textit{Sefer Devar Shemuel} (Venice, 1702), no. 257.
rare in early modern Europe. Or, perhaps, Bassan merely desired approval from an external source, and a more established rabbinic authority, before combatting Aboab’s ruling. After all, rabbis in Venice, including Aboab’s sons, were likely to adhere to his decision, and subsequently challenge the actions of a ‘satellite’ community in the Veneto. Alternatively, emphasizing their intentions to obliterate rampant sin, could Padua’s rabbis have approved the ‘eruv because the city was enclosed by a wall (meeting a basic physical requirement) and Padua was simply not ruled by a king (reflecting the community’s sophisticated political outlook)? In addition to highlighting many of the social, political, and religious issues discussed thus far, the document indicates that the Padua community of Luzzatto’s formative years reflected a closer connection to Mantua than to nearby, prestigious, politically related Venice. Bassan and others promoted relations between the two communities, which proved beneficial to Luzzatto before, during, and after the controversy. For instance, when Luzzatto wished to publish his treatise on

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87 Furthermore, academic scholarship may presuppose too much regarding availability of texts: surely, there was a huge difference between the medieval and early modern periods in knowledge dissemination, but are we correct to assume that particular communities or individuals had access to texts that now seem easily accessible? A larger question concerns the philosophy of halakhah among early modern Italian intellectuals in general, and the way in which Italian kabbalists in particular interacted with halakhah. In Mesilat Yesharim, Luzzatto stressed the deeper issues of love and fear of God, obligatory commandments in themselves and components of fulfilling all other mitzvoth. However, rather than regard observance lightly, Luzzatto stated explicitly that the pietist should follow stringency in the law when possible. As I will discuss in the next chapter, his direct mystical ‘ancestor,’ through Bassan, David Finzi, and Benjamin Vitale, was Moses Zacut, regarded by contemporaries and later kabbalistic authorities as the greatest Italian mystic of the latter seventeenth century. Yet, as Elliot Horowitz has pointed out, Zacut, who wrote extensively on legal matters, vacillated between permitting and forbidding setam yenam, or gentile wine. In a question to his eventual colleague Samuel Aboab of Venice, Zacut asked whether “a rabbinic scholar who abstained from setam yenam at home, but not when traveling, might be deemed trustworthy concerning the provenance of a cask of wine in his own possession.” Aboab, a halakhist without mystical leanings, put his foot down to condemn rampant permissiveness (Horowitz, “Families and their Fortunes,” 620–621, citing Zacut, She’elot u-Teshuvot ha-Ramaz [Venice, 1761], nos. 50–51, and Aboab, nos. 7, 48, 55).

88 See chapter three.
the Hebrew language, *Leshon Limudim*, he did so at the Mantua print house of Raphael d’Italia. As I will show in chapters three and four, the communities connected through the rabbinate, printing, kabbalistic study, the University of Padua, and marriage.

**Torah Study**

On Tuesday, January 23, 1734, two *memunim* and three *parnasim* presided over a meeting of twenty-five community board members to discuss a great “calamity” — the “many ills that encompassed them.” In attendance were four Luzzattos, including brothers Jacob Vita and David (father and uncle of Moses Hayim), four Meshulams, two Triestes, two Treveses, and Hakham Sabbatai Marini. They were troubled by the complete abandonment (*il total abbandono*) of Torah study in the communal *bet midrash*, which had thrived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and had been a source of public pride.

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89 David Finzi and Samson Kohen-Modon, a rabbi and poet in Mantua, provided *Leshon Limudim* with a praiseworthy introduction and poem. The author composed it at only seventeen years of age and it was one of the only works of its kind. According to Abraham Habermann, only Judah Messer Leon’s *Nofet Tsufim* (Mantua, 1477) (the first book printed during an author’s lifetime), David Ibn Yahya’s *Leshon Limudim* (Constantinople, 1506), and Samuel Archivolti’s *Arugat ha-Bosem* (Venice, 1602) are to be compared to Luzzatto’s systemization of the Hebrew language (Abraham Habermann, ed., *Sefer Leshon Limudim* [Jerusalem, 1951], 182). Habermann published a manuscript that differed from the original imprint. [According to Almanzi, a manuscript had passed into the possession of Mordecai Samuel Ghirondi, chief rabbi of Padua in the first half of the nineteenth century (“*Toledot R’ Moshe Hayim Lutsato me-Padovah,*” 127, n. 10).]

90 D’Italia had studied medicine at the University of Padua, receiving a degree in 1717 (Abdelkader Modena [and Edgardo Morpurgo], *Medici e Chirurghi Ebrei Dottorati e Licenziati nell’Università di Padova dal 1617–1816* [=*Biblioteca di Storia della Medicina* 3], eds. Aldo Luzzatto, Ladislao Münster, and Vittore Colorni [Bologna, 1967], 76–77, no. 194), and became close with the Luzzatto family.

In Mantua, d’Italia earned a meager living as a doctor of the community’s poor Jews and as a printer of Hebrew books (Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 715–716). A descendant of the printer Eliezer ben Jacob Italia, d’Italia raised the standard of Hebrew printing in Mantua after a relatively insignificant sixteenth-century output. In 1737, d’Italia informed Mantua’s community council that he intended to transfer his press to Modena if the Mantuan community was unable or unwilling to help financially by subscribing to books in advance of publication. The community acquiesced by subscribing to twelve copies of the Torah commentary of Jedidiah Solomon Norsa, which was printed under the title *Minhat Shai* (Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 684, citing A.C.Ma., no. 110.1). That imprint served as d’Italia’s most important contribution to Jewish scholarship and the history of Hebrew printing, as it became the standard work for public reading of the Torah.

91 A.C.Pa., no. 17, fols. 2r–2v.
Rejection of the community’s great religious legacy was responsible for a multiplicity of evils in
the community, so they met on this winter day to implement an educational program that
would help remedy the situation. The scribe expressed the board’s veneration of Torah study,
referring to it as “holy work” (santa opera) and a “great commandment” (מצוה רבה). Moreover,
he reminded the reader of the pinkas – the lay leadership and the public at large, which would
hear the instructions pronounced in the synagogue – of a Jewish man’s obligation to study
Torah. The idealistic meaning is clear: God gave the Jews the Torah by which to live, and
flouting the Law results in evil and destruction. Torah study, even if burdensome, will benefit
the individual and the community, and simple recognition of these Jewish truths transforms the
burden into willful acceptance and even joy.

Concerned about the loss of Jewish heritage, the leaders of the community passed five
regulations. One, the teachers of the community would proceed to the midrash, housed in the
Ashkenazic synagogue (Scuola Tedesca), after the conclusion of the evening prayer service in
the Italian synagogue (Scuola Italiana). Each of the five teachers listed were obliged to give a
half-hour class from the pulpit once per week, presumably Sunday through Thursday. The
lectures would be “measured by sand” in order to leave ample room for other studies, whether
conducted in “public or private.” Two, the teachers would be obligated to go to the midrash
with their students to study Bible (מקרא) and other subjects, as long as the (unspecified)
minimum number of students were present. Three, when people engaged in Torah study in the
communal midrash, two things were forbidden: Torah study in another venue, whether public
or private, and gambling (gioco). Four, every week thirty men from the community, each over
the age of thirteen, would be drawn by lot to sit in the midrash during the appointed time of
study. Unable to attend, the selected individuals would be permitted to send someone in their stead. Five, two people would be elected each year to assist in implementing the program, which would include collecting money to purchase candles for the night-time study, as well as pay the synagogue sexton. The resolutions were passed nearly unanimously, twenty-four to one in favor, and the scribe concluded the entry with a blessing for those who upheld them (וכל המחזיק בה תבוא עליו ברכת הטוב).

What is readily apparent from this document is that public Torah study in Padua did not meet the expectations of communal leadership. The activities in the bet midrash were subpar when compared with earlier generations in Padua, or perhaps with contemporary communities. It also suggests that Padua’s rabbinate was largely removed from nominal society. In fact, four of the five teachers listed – Luzzatto, Moses David Valle, Jacob Forte [Hazak], and Isaiah Romanin – had habitually pursued mystical studies in Luzzatto’s house for several years. The other teacher was Marini, who had assumed the duties of the community rabbi after Levi’s death in 1726. He had supported Luzzatto and his group, even counting a son as one of Luzzatto’s students, and therefore may have cast the lone dissenting vote to the regulations.\(^92\) However, as rabbi chiefly responsible for the moral leadership of the community, and as the sole rabbinic representative at the meeting, it is also possible that Marini himself served as the impetus for the educational reform. After all, Luzzatto’s yeshiva functioned in a private space, which was important for the mystical piety he espoused, but upset the fabric of society. It may

\(^{92}\) According to Ghirondi, Levi died on 11 Kislev 5486; according to Neppi, he spent his last days in the city of his birth, Modena (Ghirondi, Toledot Gedole Yisrael, 272–273). The names of both Marini and Levi appear on the ordination document of Romanin, Valle, and Luzzatto, dated Thursday, 13 Tishre 5486. Levi is referred to as “רב מקהלינו,” but Marini’s name appears first, perhaps an indication of the former’s illness and the community’s continued respect for him. See chapter three for discussion of the ordination.
be impossible to determine Marini’s part in this, or more specifically to identify the lone dissenting voice. Regardless, supporters of the program included fathers and uncles of Luzzatto and his compatriots, thereby adding a generational divergence to the social and religious issues at hand.

In principle, the Consiglio wished to bridge forcibly what it deemed as a dangerous abyss between the intellectual elite, immersed in study of Torah, and the general public, wallowing in ignorance and immorality. A close reading of the regulations, however, reveal complex interactions between Padua’s rabbis, privileged laymen, and a poorer and less-educated public. Tension within, or perhaps the feebleness of, the established social and religious order pervades the purpose, character, and essential failure of the proposal. Moreover, the document exposes the diverging rabbinic solutions to communal problems then prevalent in Padua.

In order to gain the support of Luzzatto and his compatriots, the first and second resolutions contained qualifying clauses. The classes would be timed so as not to significantly delay their own private studies, and they would be cancelled if the minimum number of students did not attend. Both elements actually signified the Consiglio’s poor expectations, for drawn-out classes would likely lead to poor attendance, which would signify rebellion against the Consiglio and erode its authority. While the educational platform undoubtedly represented good intentions of an established rabbinic culture with a clearly demarcated power structure, the fourth resolution equally embodied selfish motivations of certain powerful members of the community. It stands as a blatant way out for wealthy individuals – perhaps even true believers in the value of the study program – who considered their time better spent elsewhere than in
the *bet midrash*. Presumably, they assumed that if they could find someone to sit in their stead, possibly for a pittance paid to an otherwise poor member of the community (for who else would they find to replace them if most people had to be compelled to attend?), they would not be remiss in their communal duties.

While the members voting that evening were certainly concerned about society’s ills and ostensibly believed that the rabbinic guardians of the Torah could return the community to a likeness of its glory days, their plan was flawed and superficial. This is clear from the third resolution, which spoke of Torah study and gambling in the same breath! Concerned only with ensuring attendance in the *bet midrash*, the signatories of the educational platform essentially deemed study and gambling as equivalent prohibitions. Not study and work, or study and raising children, or study and acts of charity, but study and “play” (*gioco*). If the regulation’s authors juxtaposed the two activities as extremes on a wide spectrum, within which all else fell, they did so ironically at the expense of the uniqueness of Torah study, their proposed solution to the “calamity.” In the process, they offered a dilution of the teachings of the very rabbis they hoped would provide social improvement. The men intent on redeeming the world through mystical means surely did not appreciate the equivalence of Torah study with gambling, and the individuals disinterested in Torah study undoubtedly refused to accept a ‘cure’ through compulsion. The Venetian rabbi Leone Modena, an admitted gambler, lamented his own addiction (Mark R. Cohen, trans. and ed., *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena’s Life of Judah* [Princeton University Press, 1988], 155).

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93 There is no sign that Luzzatto or the members of his group had problems with gambling. The group’s moral protocols signed in 1731, to be discussed in depth in the next chapter, do not mention gambling as a vice to be shunned, an indication, considering the nature of the rules, that it was not an issue that required watchfulness. The Venetian rabbi Leone Modena, an admitted gambler, lamented his own addiction (Mark R. Cohen, trans. and ed., *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena’s Life of Judah* [Princeton University Press, 1988], 155).
decided. The educational platform conflicted not only with their daily activities, but also with their ideals.

Ultimately, the document demonstrates the unity, diversity, and struggles of the Padua Jewish community in the first half of the eighteenth century. Beyond political, economic, and ethnic troubles, communal leaders concerned themselves with the religious and moral character of the ghetto’s hundreds of Jewish residents. They perceived a problem and offered a solution: practical rabbinic investment in the community. The fact that four of the five rabbis delineated in the document constituted the better part of the ghetto’s devoted kabbalists apparently did not bother the lay leadership. They believed that the idealized way of the mystical circle, in this case in a private study house out of sight of most ghetto residents, had had an adverse effect on Torah study throughout the community. As such, the document raises questions about the internal communal power structure: did lay leaders wield financial or political power over rabbis? Apart from Marini, none of the rabbis denoted received a salary from the community in 1734, although it is possible they received a dispensation from paying taxes. Instead, was this a unique case of manipulation, because at least Luzzatto, Valle, and Romanin had grown up in Padua and were the sons of men who sat on the Consiglio? I will address this latter possibility in the next chapter, in the context of the broad communal support Luzzatto received. Regardless, the Consiglio deemed action necessary and passed resolutions that would please few.

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94 See A.C.Pa., no. 15, p. 247, for a rejected request from Forte [Hazak] and Romanin to receive support through a tax in 1730.
Padua as a Jewish Focal Point in Europe

An extensive study of Padua’s Jewish community in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries could illuminate the complex relationships between synagogues, their main power brokers, and rabbinic and lay leadership coexisting in a politically unified community. More than that, it would contribute to our knowledge of Padua’s international Jewish importance, both as a draw for European Jews in general and with respect to Paduan Jewish relations with other communities.

As noted above, the Jews of Padua benefited both intellectually and professionally from their proximity to the University. Medicine was the primary intellectual profession available to Jews in medieval Europe, and Padua was home to the first university in which Jews matriculated. The University of Padua conferred its first medical degree upon a Jew in the early fifteenth century, and by the end of the sixteenth century Jews from cities throughout Europe flocked to Padua in pursuit of education and opportunity. Cecil Roth cited eighty Jewish graduates of the University between 1517 and 1619, and according to Simon Ginzburg one hundred forty-nine Jewish students entered the medical college in Padua during the years 1619–1721.

Abdelkader Modena’s and Edgardo Morpurgo’s detailed catalog of Jewish

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medical graduates from the University between 1617 and 1816 recorded a total of three hundred eighteen graduates.97

The students, sometimes as young as sixteen, embarked on a four-year program that introduced them to the latest scientific research in an intellectual environment unattainable in yeshiva.98 Successive generations of men from the same family often pursued medical practice, many of whom were also members of the rabbinate. Among Luzzatto’s fellow seekers, several earned medical degrees at the University, including Moses David Valle,99 Jekutiel Gordon,100 and Solomon David Treves.101

Jewish participation at the University of Padua reflected both the tolerance and the degradation of the era. On the one hand, Jewish students, or at least graduated physicians,102 were permitted to wear the black headdress of their peers in place of the Jew’s hat, and

97 They listed dozens more as having either attended the University in some capacity without graduating or as having been known as physicians or surgeons without official record of their presence at the University.
98 Even while Jewish students matriculated, some additionally studied privately with masters in their homes. Such arrangements were common at least in the late medieval period and possibly later (Foligno, p. 148). [The first woman to receive a doctorate (of philosophy) from the University of Padua was Elena Cornaro Piscopia, the daughter of a Venetian noble; prohibited from officially enrolling at the University, she was privately tutored and then examined in 1678. On Piscopia, see Jane Howard Guernsey, The Lady Cornaro: Pride and Prodigy of Venice (New York: College Avenue Press, 1999).] In his short overview of Jewish medical students at the University of Padua, Jacob Shatzky mentioned autobiographical prefaces to Hebrew and Yiddish medical books telling of such preparatory instruction for medical training: two Yiddish books by Moses ben Benjamin Wolf of Kalisch, printed in 1677 and 1679, and the Hebrew book Megaleh Sod by Aaron Emmerich, issued in Hamburg in 1765 (Shatzky, 445–446). Wolf’s and Emmerich’s private studies bookended the Luzzatto period and provide a range of almost a century in which to observe the matriculation pattern of Jewish students at the University.
99 “Moyses David Valle filius Samuelis hebrique Patovina” was granted a degree in Philosophy and Medicine on October 24, 1713 (U.P.C.V.A., no. 233, p. 187).
101 “Salomon Daniel [sic] Treves filius de Jacobe” was granted a degree in Philosophy and Medicine on June 27, 1743 (U.P.C.V.A., no. 233, pp. 153–154). Treves’ promotore was Bartholomeus Lavagnoli, who fulfilled the same function for Cervo Conigliano five months earlier (Kisch, 454).
102 Observe portraits of physicians, including Joseph Delmedigo and Sabbatai Marini.
diplomas of Jewish graduates could be as exquisitely decorated as those for a wealthy Christian. Moreover, each student was required to have a promotore, or sponsor within the College, presumably an indication of at least tolerable personal relations between Jews and University officials. On the other hand, Jews were required to pay at least double the price of regular enrollment and supply the student body with sweetmeats upon graduation. In addition, they were excluded from the graduation ceremony in the Basilica, which may have been preferable from the rabbinic point of view of preserving Jewish identity, but which nevertheless exemplified discrimination.

103 See Harry Friedenwald, “The Diploma of a Jewish Graduate of Medicine of the University of Padua in 1695,” *Annals of Medical History* 1:6 (new series) (1935): 629–639; and Kisch, 450–459. It is unlikely that elaborate diplomas were the norm. Jewish students, especially those from abroad, often required financial support to attend the University. The diplomas were commissioned and illuminated by Christian workshops, making the cost prohibitive for poor students set to make the journey home and begin a career. In addition, Conigliano’s diploma includes a depiction of his family’s heraldic device, a legacy of only wealthy individuals.

104 Simonsohn seems to assert that Jews participated in graduation ceremonies: “On the one hand, they [the Catholic Church] had the power to grant or withhold qualification for Jews who completed their studies at the universities (since the final examination and completion of studies involved a Christian ceremony)...” (History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua, 643). In places like Bologna, where the Church notably had greater sway over the University, this may have been the case. In Padua, however, the final examinations were held in the Hall of Medicine, adjacent to the Anatomy Theater, perhaps purposefully an act of independence by the University. For Jews in medicine elsewhere in Italy, see H. Friedenwald, *Jewish Luminaries in Medical History* (Baltimore, 1946), and idem, *The Jews and Medicine*, 2 vols. (Baltimore, 1944); and Moritz Steinschneider, “Jüdische Ärzte,” *Zeitschrift für Hebraeische Bibliographie* 17–18 (1914–1915), 63–96, who lists about thirty Jewish physicians in Mantua.

According to Roth, Jews were excluded from the “nations” into which the student body was divided, but Shatzky cited a letter from a German student written in 1797 that seems to indicate that Jews in fact belonged to the “nation” that corresponded to their origin (History of the Jews of Italy, 335–336). The discrepancy may be in the eventual inclusion of Jews in the “nations” over time. The letter: “Here at the University there are 22 various nations, Jews and Turks among them. A Jew desirous of becoming a doctor has to pay to the University 20 pounds of sweetmeats, of which ten pounds the German nation takes for itself, to be distributed among its members. Since we are a group of 10 students only, thus every one receives one pound. This is an old custom, and so, to a Jew, the privilege of becoming a doctor is more costly than for a German, who has to pay less than one fourth of that amount. This is only because he is (not) a Jew” (Shatzky, 446, citing G. Haumann, *Bruchstücke zur Biographie* (Prague, 1803), vol. 1, 95). Another source states that Jews were taxed 170 pounds of sweetmeat: see Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*, 110; Kisch, 457–459; Ciscato, 213; Friedenwald, *The Jews and Medicine*, vol. 1, 226–227.

Judah Gonzago reported the difficulties he met in earning a doctorate in medicine in Rome in 1717: whereas a Christian student paid thirty scudi, Jews were required to pay ninety scudi, and the diploma was awarded in a small room (Friedenwald, *The Jews and Medicine: Essays*, vol. 2, 592, citing extracts of memoir...
In his pioneering work, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*, David Ruderman argued that the University of Padua helped distinguish Padua’s Jewish community as an intellectual center, particularly of the Veneto and of Italy. Through the first half of the seventeenth century, upwards of fifty percent of Jewish students at the University were from cities north of the Alps; though in the latter part of the century and through the eighteenth century, the majority of Jewish students were of Italian origin. Ruderman convincingly showed that medicine was the primary field that brought Jews into contact with European scientific scholarship. The works of several Jewish products of the medical school suggest a significant Jewish interaction with university curriculum and larger trends in Renaissance and Enlightenment thought. By examining the thinking and influence of several translated by Abraham Berliner, *Jahrbuch* VII, 111–132, and Berliner, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom* (Frankfurt a. M. 1893), II, part 2, p. 69).


107 On early modern Jewry’s general rejection of the Copernican model, see Brown, *New Heavens and a New Earth*, chs. 3–8.

graduates of the University, including Joseph Delmedigo, Joseph Hamiz, Tobias Kohen, David Nieto, and Isaac Lampronti, Ruderman suggested that these university-trained physicians, in conjunction with *converso* graduates of Iberian and Dutch universities, “exerted a decisive intellectual and political impact on Jewish society.”

Ruderman described the encounter between Jewish students and their Christian colleagues, and concluded that Padua was the first source of a definable social and cultural group of Jewish intellectuals. Moreover, according to Ruderman, the Padua experience was unique because: “a large number of Jews graduated from a major medical school and went on to practice medicine throughout Europe”; it provided “intense socialization among Jews from remarkably variegated backgrounds”; it allowed Jewish and non-Jewish students of diverse backgrounds “constant social and cultural contact”; it was a “major vehicle for the diffusion of secular culture, especially scientific culture, within the pre-emancipatory Jewish communities of Europe.”

Ruderman’s cogent theory is solid and has proven influential. However, it noticeably lacks information about the daily social and religious lives of Jewish medical students at Padua. It is short on specifics about the Padua Jewish community, and provides almost no archival evidence for its assertions. In a note, Ruderman did comment that a mid-seventeenth-century document from the community record books indicates that a certain Hayim Polacco requested a loan for housing and financial support while he pursued a degree at the University.

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110 Ibid., 104.

111 At present, it is difficult to identify this Hayim Polacco. Ruderman notes that his name is not found in the catalog of Modena and Morpurgo. This is clearly not the Hayim Polacco connected to the Luzzatto affair (see chapter four), several decades later.
of Padua. The loan was approved, and Ruderman suggests that this was quite an ordinary occurrence. However, an in-depth study of the University of Padua, its Jewish students, and the intermediary position of the Padua Jewish community is necessary not only to confirm this, but to understand the relevance of both the University and its Jewish students to the local community. In fact, one of Luzzatto’s closest associates, Jekutiel Gordon of Vilna, who earned a degree in 1733 and was a major figure in the group in Padua and in spreading Luzzatto’s writings in Poland, complained that the community was indifferent to his plight and was not willing to support him. So, in 1729, he requested the help of the Mantua Jewish community, relating that he lived only on dry bread, with two apples for the Sabbath. It is possible that Gordon’s financial plight coincided with the harsh economic reality hitting the community at large in the early eighteenth century, whereby heavy state taxes precluded the Consiglio’s largesse.

Yet, in my own estimation, the fact that Jews studied at the University of Padua had little to no practical effect on the everyday running of the community. Both the University and foreign medical students are largely absent from the record books. Of course, that does not imply any particular gap between the students and the community, for local students from Padua mainly stemmed from the wealthy families integral to the Consiglio. Instead, the gap in the record speaks to the limitations of current historiography on the subject, and the need to consider the issues more carefully before assuming that Jewish scientific study had particular

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112 Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 457. No reply from Mantua was found, leading Simonsohn to conclude that the ‘indifference’ of Padua stemmed from his belonging to Luzzatto’s circle.
relevance to broad cultural, religious, or social trends in early modern Jewish communities. Ruderman readily admits that his work in *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery* offers only “snapshots” of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. With respect to Luzzatto and his associates, including those who attended the University, kabbalistic activities could hardly be described as having been driven by the study of medicine. Luzzatto himself appropriated science as physically analogous to the spirituality he wished to impart.

A comprehensive study of Jewish students of the University of Padua during the early modern period is a desideratum. We lack a clear definition of Jewish student life, detailed interaction between Jewish students and students of Christian denominations, and the practical benefits and challenges that stemmed from Jewish attendance at the University. To what extent were Jewish students from abroad integrated into the Padua Jewish community? What halakhic issues arose for students? Did Jewish students express any particular sentiments related to their unique opportunity? What intention did the students have in pursuing University studies? Did finances, intellectual interest, or social service figure equally

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113 Thus, Ruderman’s idea that “after a class a Jewish medical student could enjoy both a hearty kosher lunch in the adjacent ghetto and an edifying excursion to view Giotto’s paintings in a nearby church” remains, as he writes, theoretical (Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 106). In my opinion, this attractive thought fantasizes the era, as does the suggestion that students from abroad were those “who found the means and fortitude to make the journey southward” (Ibid., 100). The students required fortitude to cross the Alps and study in an entirely different culture, as well as the means to make the journey itself and begin anew, but they were not so well positioned as to be able to remain at home, without the need to travel thousands of miles to forge a career in medicine. Hayim Polacco and Jekutiel Gordon serve as two examples of students from abroad who requested loans to pursue their studies.

114 Ibid., 100.

115 Moses Vital Cantarini of Padua, who graduated from the University of Padua on February 2, 1686 (Modena and Morpurgo, no. 101, pp. 42–43), wrote a Hebrew treatise on the problem of University use of Jewish corpses for anatomical dissection (Shatzky, 447, citing *Zeitschrift für Hebraische Bibliographie* 16 [1874]: 37). Ruderman also mentions this issue, in addition to dietary laws and Sabbath observance (*Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 109–110). Roth cites two responsa from Joseph Colon on academic garb: he did not consider it to be ‘gentile clothing’ and therefore prohibited (no. 88), and the four-cornered gown required *tsitsit* (no. 149) (Roth, *Jews in the Renaissance*, 40). A perusal of Isaac Lampronti’s halakhic encyclopedia, *Pahad Yitshak*, would certainly produce many more instances of Jewish practical living in proximity to the University.
prominently in their decision to pursue medicine? Did intention, and the quality of the
students for that matter, vary widely? In depth archival research at the University of Padua is
necessary to provide a clear representation of this celebrated period of Jewish history.
Moreover, answers to these questions would elucidate the activities of Luzzatto and his
compatriots, who benefitted from their proximity to the University but nevertheless displayed
singular devotion to Jewish mystical texts.

La Famiglia Luzzatto

Thus far, this chapter has explored Paduan Jewish relations with the State, cultural
influences of the University, Jewish communal identity, and rabbinic-lay coexistence. Each
factored into Luzzatto’s upbringing and development, and is evident in the outlook he displayed
in Mesilat Yesharim. In the next chapter I will discuss the goals of Luzzatto’s mystical fellowship
and its social legitimacy in Padua, which will be followed by a chapter on the controversy. I will
argue that both his experiences and communal influences contributed to his belligerent
attitude in the face of opposition, as well as to his willingness to adapt in relocating to
Amsterdam. In the remaining section of this chapter, I will address his family life, a general
topic recently taken up in historiography, and which arguably provided the firmest foundation
for his embarkation.

Luzzatto descended from a relatively prestigious family. The scholar and most well-
known Luzzatto of the nineteenth century, Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865), traced the
family’s roots to Lusatia (German: Lausitz; Polish: Łuzyca), a territory in the modern-day
German states of Saxony and Brandenburg. Luzzatto’s ancestors probably arrived in northern Italy in the second half of the fifteenth century, along with many other Ashkenazic Jews fleeing persecution. Branches of the family settled in Venice, Padua, Rovigo, Ferrara, and elsewhere. In Venice, the Ghetto Nuovo was home to a small synagogue of the Ashkenazic rite known as the Scuola Luzzatto. Though the adopted surname had various spellings, even for a single individual or within a particular document, it generally consisted of two z’s and two t’s by the eighteenth century. The dispersed and successful family bore a coat of arms, evident on tombstones in the Jewish cemeteries of Venice and Padua: three stars and a crescent hovering over a rooster clutching a shaft of barley in its beak.

Luzzattos featured prominently in elite positions during the early modern period. At least eight men with that surname earned degrees in medicine from the University of Padua in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Salomon ben Abraham Luzzatto may have helped fund the publication of Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno’s Commentary on the Torah in Venice in 1567. Jacob ben Isaac Luzzatto (d. ca. 1587) contributed an introduction to an edition of Menahem ben Benjamin Recanati’s Ta’ame ha-Mitsvot (Basel, 1581), and may have been the

117 Elvio Giuditta, Araldica Ebraica in Italia…, parte 2, p. 63, and parte 3, p. 137, <http://www.socistara.it/studi.php>, accessed September 19, 2012. According to Giuditta, the rooster may allude to Freihan (=hen), the ancient name of the town from whence they came. Alternatively, the rooster could refer to their more general Ashkenazic origin, as it did for the Gallico family (gallo meaning both Gaul and rooster) (see Giuditta, parte 4, p. 181). Thanks very much to Laura Graziani Secchieri of the Archivio di Stato di Ferrara for this reference.
118 Abram di Moise Luzzatto of Cittadella graduated with a degree in surgery on 1 February 1723 (Modena and Morpurgo, no. 206). This may have been Moses Hayim’s uncle, and we have letters referring to Moses Hayim’s travels to relatives in Cittadella (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 3.1).
119 Salomon may have been the first Luzzatto in Padua; a man with that name was mentioned in a pinkas entry in 1584 (Carpi, 162, no. 154).
final corrector of the Basel Talmud (1578–1581). Simone Luzzatto (1583–1663) served alongside Leone Modena in the Venetian rabbinate and assumed the leadership of the Yeshivah kelalit, a rabbinical council, upon the latter’s death in 1648. He became widely known for his halakhic rulings, as well as for an apologetic work written in Italian and dedicated to the Doge arguing for the tolerance of Jews on economic grounds. Benedetto Luzzatto (1627–1669) was an important preacher, poet, and rabbi in Padua, praised by Leone Modena and acquainted with the anatomist and botanist Giovanni Weslingio. Other Luzzattos are cited in Isaac Lampronti’s halakhic encyclopedia Pahad Yitshak.

There is no comprehensive study of the Luzzatto family. S. D. Luzzatto did provide a list of family members who died in the latter half of the sixteenth century, but the bulk of his treatment concentrated on the scholars and the works they brought to press. He supplied little genealogical coherence, and omitted biographical information, including dates and names of relatives, unless they supported the themes of erudition and publication. Parents, children, siblings, and wives are absent, as are physicians who did not publish and wealthy merchants, without the latter of whom the freedom to pursue knowledge and its dissemination would have been impossible. This is not surprising, as early historians of Jewish history emphasized

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120 S. D. Luzzatto, Autobiographie, 4. Ginzburg remarked that Jacob ben Isaac Luzzatto’s rhymed poem at the conclusion of this introduction indicated his German origin (The Life and Works of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, 13).
121 His most notable decision, no longer extant, was the permissibility to travel by gondola on the Sabbath.
123 S. D. Luzzatto, Autobiographie, 12–15.
124 For instance, Joseph ben Moses Ezekiel Aaron Luzzatto is mentioned with Jeremiah Michael ben Samuel Solomon Consigli (Pahad Yitshak, ot samekh).
125 Women are almost entirely absent until S. D. Luzzatto’s extensive comments about his older cousin Rachel Luzzatto-Morpurgo (1790–1871), a poet who influenced him greatly. On Rachel, see Nina Salaman, Rahel Morpurgo and the Contemporary Hebrew Poets in Italy (London, 1924); Howard Tzvi Adelman, “Finding Women's
scholarship over socio-economic matters, but it denotes our limited knowledge of the Luzzatto family and the manner in which historians have viewed Moses Hayim Luzzatto. A work devoted to the Luzzatto clan in the early modern period would contextualize the lives and works of those mentioned above, as well as illuminate intra-communal relations and the bonds between rabbinic and communal leadership.

In my analysis of *Mesilat Yesharim*, I argued that part of Luzzatto’s originality and willingness to challenge authority stemmed from his familial upbringing. In fact, the context of his upbringing was mercantile, not rabbinical study. His father and uncles committed themselves to business ventures, as did two of his brothers later in life. The Luzzattos did produce intellectuals, rabbis, writers, and physicians, but they proved to be only a handful of individuals among many more Luzzattos settled throughout northern Italy. Luzzatto’s immediate family was among the community’s wealthiest, which, combined with his natural intellectual and literary talents, contributed to his confidence and sense of righteousness.

The facts concerning Luzzatto’s background and upbringing are scant. He was born in 1707 in Padua to Jacob Vita (Hai) ben Moses Luzzatto and Diamante bat Judah Luzzatto. There is no indication of how closely Jacob Vita and Diamante were related. Their union was presumably celebrated by the upper class of the Padua Jewish community, because a wedding poem was composed and printed in their honor. The noted scholar and collector of Italian


126 The family tree printed in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (vol. 8, 220), citing Shadal’s autobiography, is inadequate and incorrect.

127 Moses’ birthdate is unknown, but the year of his birth is evident from the chronogram at the end of his first published work, *Leshon Limudim* (Mantua, 1724):

והיה זה בשנת גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות מתורתך שנת טוב לי תורת כיך מאלפי זהב וכסף (cited by Almanzi, “Toledot R’ Moshe Hayim Lutsato me-Padovah,” 127, n. 1). The numerical value of tov is seventeen, giving his age at the time of publication.
Jewry’s epithalamia, Moisè Soave, dated the wedding to 1705 and ascribed the anonymous poem to Isaac Hayim Cantarini, who that same year assumed Padua’s rabbinic post after Samuel David Ottolenghi relocated to Venice. At the time of their marriage, Jacob’s father Moses, after whom Moses Hayim was named, was no longer living. Jacob and his brother David had been residents of Venice before coming to Padua to live with their cousin and business partner Moisè Lampronti. It is unclear if the Luzzatto brothers moved to Padua upon the death of their father and then engaged in business with their cousin, or if Moses Luzzatto had died earlier and the Luzzatto and Lampronti families had already been associates. Generally, early modern Jewry migrated from provincial settlements to urban...
centers, such that immigrants from the Terraferma commonly moved to Venice.\textsuperscript{133} Regardless of the brothers’ reasons for settling in Padua, both Jacob and David succeeded in commerce and for decades served as important members of the Padua Jewish community’s Consiglio. Jacob was likely the elder, as he was always listed first in business documents and the communal record books point to his significant position by the 1710s, whereas David’s name was not prevalent until the 1720s.

Jacob engaged in silk vending, like many wealthy Veneto Jews, and large-scale selling of crops.\textsuperscript{134} A several-hundred page volume in the archives of the Padua Jewish community, labeled “Casa Luzzatto,” details much of the Luzzatto brothers’ economic dealings, including with nobility and prosperous Jewish families in Padua, Venice, Rovigo, and Pesaro.\textsuperscript{135} The family operated a shop (bottegha) on the main floor of their home. Additionally, documents in the Archivio di Stato di Padova show that Jacob loaned money to Christian noblemen in the Veneto as part of a conglomerate that included both Christians and Jews.\textsuperscript{136}

Beyond his business ventures, Jacob exhibited piety and creativity. With religious conviction or not, Jacob moved his family into a home directly across the street from the Scuola Italiana, in the geographic and cultural center of the ghetto. He was involved in the community’s charitable foundation, Hevrat Gemilut Hasadim,\textsuperscript{137} encouraged special support for the cemeteries,\textsuperscript{138} served as a parnas\textsuperscript{139} and a dayan, and led the passing of communal

\textsuperscript{134} A.C.Pa., no. 202; Almanzi, “Toledot R’ Moshe Hayim Lutsato me-Padovah,” 113.
\textsuperscript{135} A.C.Pa., no. 202.
\textsuperscript{136} A.S.Pa., Camera dei Pegni, b19, b20, b21, b22.
\textsuperscript{137} A.C.Pa., no. 13, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{138} A.C.Pa., no. 13, p. 181.
A letter composed by Moses Hayim in 1730 reveals his parents’ generosity in hosting the wedding of his uncle’s servant; it is worthwhile noting that he referred to it only in passing, not as something unusual or sensational but as something matter of fact that reflected the family’s altruistic values. Likewise, the Luzzattos extended open invitations to rabbis, and Jacob himself engaged in ongoing conversation with both Isaiah Bassan and Nathaniel Levi, the Padua community’s former rabbinic authorities. Additionally, Jacob composed poetry, including at least two wedding poems. One such poem, in honor of his brother David’s marriage to their niece, Rebecca bat Moses Uriah Morpurgo, displayed familial pride and emotional intensity. The fourteen-lines of elation end: “Blood in blood, here, in glorious
union / David, true, with the daughter of his sister now / True seed will reap no horror.”

Jacob conveyed his belief that the Luzzattos are singular: they belong together and will benefit from pursuit of their own ideal, as though cosmically decreed. Possible vanity aside, the poem’s salutation showed a deeper conviction: “I desire mercy and not praise / Jacob Vita Luzzatto”. The line preceding his name is a play on Hosea 6:6 (“I desire mercy and not sacrifice”), as in God values truth and loving-kindness over soulless worship. The twist of language demonstrated not only his imagination, but also his knowledge of Scripture and his devoutness. The line stood as a reminder of an ethical and religious ideal, as well as a public declaration that he himself, as a person of stature, sought only good from others and not obsequiousness.

Together, Jacob Vita and Diamante had at least four children: Moses Vita (Hayim), Simon Vita, Lion Vita, and Laura Hannah. They provided each of the children the opportunity and choice to make life decisions. Moses Hayim was the eldest of the children, named after Jacob’s father, Moses, and born within a couple of years of his parents’ marriage. While his writings express more than just a passing awareness of economics, he was given the time
and support to develop his mind and pursue his intellectual interests. Simon was probably the second-oldest son. He was involved in his older brother’s mystical activities at least in the early 1730s, as his name appears among the signers of the group’s regulations. Unlike his brother, he does not seem to have authored any books. Instead, he was deeply engaged in the family’s business ventures, and, even in the midst of the controversy and their respective travels to Amsterdam, he remained loyal to his father and elder brother. Lion was likely the youngest child. He pursued medical studies at the University of Padua briefly in the early 1730s before moving permanently to Amsterdam. He evidently had parental approval for his move, because he maintained his relationship with Moses Hayim and Jacob before and after they each settled in the Dutch city.

Jacob’s and Diamante’s support and love for their children, and the subsequent devotion of each family member, was further manifested in the life and death of Laura Hannah. In 1730, she was engaged to marry Mordecai Treves, the scion of an established Ashkenazic family in Padua. An ancestor, Johanan Treves, had lived in Padua in the mid-sixteenth century and contributed a commentary to a Roman-rite prayer book printed in Bologna in 1540. Moses Hayim was close to two other Treveses – Israel Hezekiah Treves and Solomon David Treves – both of whom were engaged in kabbalistic study and remained student-colleagues of hand; encouraging aspiring pietists to deflect mockery as if engaged in a profit-pursuing business; and reminding arrogant laymen that individuals of lower socio-economic status could be well-beyond them spiritually.

147 See JTS MS 8520a, no. 3, discussed in chapter 3.
148 For Simon as businessman, including as a debt collector for his father, see A.C.Pa., no. 203; and A.S.Pa., Camera dei pegni b22.
149 For reference to Lion’s time at the University, see Modena and Morpurgo, p. 126: “LUZZATTO Lion Vita di Jacob, ebreo romano, immatricolato 1732–33 (UN.AR. 232).” In December 1733, Moses Hayim expressed his wish to join his (unnamed) brother in Amsterdam (Chriqui, Igerat, no. 90). A record of Lion’s marriage in 1737 in Amsterdam is housed in the archives of the Portuguese Jewish community; for a facsimile of the marriage record, see Jakob Meyer, The Stay of Mozes Haim Luzzatto at Amsterdam, 1736–1743 (Amsterdam, 1947), 8–9.
150 Vinograd, Bologna no. 16.
Moses Hayim even after he immigrated to Amsterdam. After the Sabbath had ended on the evening of December 17, 1730, as the wedding approached, Laura Hannah became ill and died unexpectedly.\textsuperscript{151} The tombstone incorporated Mordecai’s name – it is rare to find the name of a fiancé as a monument to the deceased – indicating the depth of the relationships between bride and groom and between the respective families. It also implies that the youngsters were not merely arranged to be married, and that Laura had a say in her marital destiny.\textsuperscript{152} An eight-line poem on her tombstone expressed deep anguish over her death at such an optimistic time: \textsuperscript{153}

\begin{quote}
People, look! The shadow of graves lay beneath me  
A mere shadow of glory, honor, marriage — here I found;  
They are in my wedding home, alone to ruin  
To Rachel, the barren woman, the silent one, I call;  
But, what is good for me, if not the hand of tranquility  
All that is my inheritance is peaceful morality;  
For the might of the Supreme Right, is like a father growing good from glory are ten sons. Selah.
\end{quote}

Her epitaph described her as modest and God-fearing, traits emphasized by her family and in Moses Hayim’s ethical writings. The grief is palpable, and Laura’s death may explain why Jacob Vita’s name is less prevalent in the community record books from 1730 onwards. Although the poem was authored anonymously, it clearly stemmed from a family member; and the mysterious allusions reflect Moses Hayim far more than the little we have from Jacob Vita.

\textsuperscript{151} Almanzi recorded the text of the tombstone in his personal copy of his biography on Ramhal: מצ”ק הבתולה והצנועה יראת ה’ ומשכלת מ’ לאברה חנה בת הגביר כמ”ר יעקב חי לוצאטו היא שודכה אל הבחור הנכבד כ’ מרדכי טריויס י”ץ. ויהי בהקריב ימי חופתה נקרב קרבנה נפשה לה’ ליל מש”ק ח’ טבת ש’ תצ”א (JTS SHF 1987:6, Almanzi’s personal copy of “Toledot R’ Mosheh Hayim Lutsato me-Padovah,” 127). She died and was buried in Padua on 8 Tevet 5491 (=December 17, 1730).

\textsuperscript{152} In the context of discussing sexual immorality, Weinstein mentions youth disobeying family decisions concerning choice of partners (Juvenile Sexuality, Kabbalah, and Catholic Reformation in Italy, 11–12).

Certainly, “peaceful morality” as one’s inheritance foreshadowed the purpose he later expressed in *Mesilat Yesharim*.

Ultimately, the narrative arc from child-prodigy to controversial visionary to quietistic émigré indicates that Luzzatto’s family provided him with exceptional educational, financial, political, and emotional support. Private tutoring in diverse subjects enabled Luzzatto to develop his outstanding intellectual and literary talents. By the time he was twenty, he had received rabbinic ordination (1725); composed *Migdal ‘Oz*, an allegorical drama inspired by biblical, kabbalistic, homiletical, and Italian literature, published a treatise on the Hebrew language entitled *Leshon Limudim* (Mantua, 1727); and penned epithalamia and elegies. His writings dealing with the purpose of creation eloquently equate the father-son relationship with that of God and man, an indication of the strong bond he shared with his father. Not only did Jacob permit Moses Hayim to found and retain a yeshiva in his home, the elder Luzzatto continued to support his son even as the yeshiva inspired ire and throughout the controversy. In fact, Jacob’s social credibility and communal standing helped protect his son in Padua and abroad, and Moses gained additional support from at least one uncle.

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154 *Migdal ‘Oz* was written in honor of the wedding of Israel Benjamin Bassan, son of Luzzatto’s teacher Isaiah Bassan. It was based on Giovanni Guarini’s *Il Pastor Fido*, one of the most famous Italian plays of the sixteenth and seventh centuries. Guarini’s play appeared in over one hundred editions following the first edition printed in Venice in 1590. It was performed as early as 1595 or 1596 in Ferrara, and in Mantua in 1598.

155 The most poignant reference is *Da’at Tevunot*, 258–259.

156 For an indication that Jacob received letters regarding the controversy, see Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 81, p. 244. Meanwhile, Luzzatto’s uncle, Moses Alpron, was charged with safeguarding the condemned mystical writings (to be discussed in the chapter four). To be sure, Luzzatto also had an uncle named Abraham ben Meir who accused him of something scandalous, perhaps making amorous advances towards a cousin, which the young kabbalist denied (Ibid., nos. 61–66).
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to portray key aspects of Luzzatto’s upbringing. The city of Padua, its culture and politics, served as the background for Luzzatto’s diverse oeuvre. The structure and measured integration of the Jewish community similarly influenced his outlook. Furthermore, complexity of practically every aspect of society contributed to his ability to unify disparate elements. Padua’s Jews had lived in a ghetto for more than a century, but they were engaged in the town’s larger cultural life and some wealthy members of the community enjoyed warm relations with the political leadership. Three synagogues functioned under one communal banner, but the lack of overt ethnic tension did not mean all were equal. The community valued its rabbinic legacy, as well as its association with the University of Padua, but a massive gap existed between the intellectual elite and the general community. Rabbinic and lay leadership were so intertwined that it is more appropriate to speak of a single educated, wealthy elite than of distinct groups sharing or competing for power. It is this context that shaped Luzzatto’s familial and communal experience and forged his broad social outlook. As I will show in the coming chapter, this varied background informed Luzzatto’s engagement with Kabbalah and was manifested in his ideals for a ‘Perfected Community.’
Chapter Three
Movement in Italian Hasidism: Luzzatto’s Perfecting Community

The previous chapter presented background about the city, community, and family that influenced Luzzatto’s early years. His self-assuredness and expansive social outlook, vividly evident in Mesilat Yesharim, reflected the relatively positive circumstances of his upbringing. His broad intellectual vantage point, including his ability and desire to dispute various perspectives, stemmed from the intellectual and cultural import of the University of Padua and its effects on a diverse Jewish student body. Meanwhile, widespread religious laxity in the ghetto and the feeble attempts of rabbinic and lay leaders to combat it, readily apparent in previously unpublished documents from the archives of the Padua Jewish community, contextualize Luzzatto’s emphasis on a socio-cosmic redemption that identified singular individuals as spiritually elevating a largely ignorant (and even unworthy) humanity.

This chapter concerns Luzzatto’s kabbalistic activities in Italy. The textual analysis of chapter one revealed his underlying mystical intention in all aspects of daily life, as well as a unifying conception of the world reflecting the supreme divine unity. At present, I intend to present the forging of and context for his spiritual motives. My goal is not to elucidate his cryptic kabbalistic thought, which Isaiah Tishby and Meir Benayahu initiated and which have been taken up in recent decades by a new generation of scholars. Rather, I intend to present the environment in which Luzzatto engaged with Kabbalah. This chapter will discuss some of Luzzatto’s early influences and colleagues, and identify him as part of a trend of intellectual kabbalistic piety in northern Italy at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of eighteenth
centuries. Through analyzing two major documents originating from Luzzatto’s group, I also intend to shed light on the activities and intentions of not only a lone mystic, but a ‘community’ seeking spiritual perfection.

The Padua Rabbinate

During the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Padua was home to a prestigious rabbinitic culture with wide-ranging influence. Judah Mintz (ca. 1405–1508) officiated in Padua for forty-seven years; he attracted numerous pupils from modern-day Italy and Germany, as well as the Ottoman Empire.¹ As one of the most prominent rabbis of his time, he ruled on many halakhic issues; most of his writings seem to have been destroyed during the sack of Padua in 1509.² His son-in-law and rabbinitic successor in Padua, Meir Katzenellenbogen (1473–1565), later published sixteen responsa from Mintz.³

During Katzenellenbogen’s tenure, the Padua yeshiva grew in number and prestige.⁴ He produced several students who went on to contribute to the Italian rabbinate, including Samuel Archivolti, who became a well-known grammarian, poet, and rabbi in Padua. Katzenellenbogen presided over the rabbinitic synod of 1554 in Ferrara, during which rabbis of seven Italian

² The Habsburgs captured Padua, in addition to Verona and other territories, until Venetian troops recovered the area and successfully defended it. The few weeks under Austrian control was the only period between 1405 and Napoleon’s conquests of 1797 that Padua was not under the Venetian banner.
⁴ After Katzenellenbogen’s death, the community solidified his place in their pantheon by affixing a tablet to his seat in the Ashkenazic synagogue stating that “No man [has] sat there till this day.” At least one hundred twenty years later, Isaac Hayim Cantarini attested to its continued presence (Shlomo Tal, “Katzenellenbogen, Meir ben Isaac,” in Encyclopedia Judaica [Detroit, 2007], vol. 12, 19–20).
communities\textsuperscript{5} determined measures to be followed in bringing intellectual property to press. Both at the synod and in contemporary responsa, Katzenellenbogen was deemed the head of the “Venetian community,” indicative of blurred cultural definitions in the Veneto. The appellation “the \textit{av bet din} of the Venetian community” hinged on Venice’s place as the seat of government, but its application to Katzenellenbogen, of the smaller and subservient Padua, demonstrated the significance of rabbinic authority in inter-communal relations. While Venice was home to several thousand Jews and was a center of Hebrew printing, the Jewish population did not form a single cohesive community and the presses were Christian-owned and not exclusively \textit{Jewish} space.\textsuperscript{6} In contrast, Padua’s community was older, more unified, and, due the strength of its yeshiva at that time, more distinguished than that of Venice. The effects of Katzenellenbogen’s leadership increased the community’s prestige to such an extent that it hosted its own rabbinical synod in 1585.\textsuperscript{7} A generation later, Katzenellenbogen’s son, Samuel Judah (1521–1597), came to head the Venetian yeshiva. After a long and distinguished career, the younger Katzenellenbogen opted to be buried next to his father in Padua rather than in his adopted home. Their graves, along with that of the statesman and philosopher Isaac Abarbanel, strengthened the community’s identity as a rabbinic center.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{5} Rabbinic leaders of Venice, Rome, Bologna, Ferrara, Mantua, Reggio, and Modena assembled in Ferrara on June 21, 1554 and enacted \textit{takanot} (ordinances).


\textsuperscript{7} Roth, \textit{History of the Jews of Italy}, 318. That synod was headed by Bezalel Massarani of Mantua.

The rabbinic tradition remained strong in Padua throughout the early modern period. The community at large celebrated the legacy of Katzenellenbogen and others, and remained active participants in the larger rabbinic culture. The city was never home to a major Hebrew printing press, which often signified thriving intellectual and cultural activity, but the Padua yeshiva nonetheless sustained students well into the modern period. The intellectual environment combined traditional Jewish edification with university studies, such as medicine, philosophy, and various languages.

The most prominent rabbinic figure in Padua during Luzzatto’s childhood was Isaac Hayim Cantarini (1644–1723). Cantarini served as a physician and rabbi in Padua for decades, and was a preacher and cantor in the Ashkenazic synagogue. As mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, a poem celebrating the marriage of Luzzatto’s parents has been attributed to Cantarini, who likely served as the officiating rabbi. He was born in Padua, earned a degree from the University of Padua in 1664, and was ordained as a hakham in 1669. He gained considerable reputation for his talmudic and halakhic knowledge, and some of his responsa were printed in Samson Morpurgo’s Shemesh Tsedakah (Venice, 1743) and in Isaac Lampronti’s Pahad Yitshak (Venice, 1750). He published several works, including: Vindex Sanguinis

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10 Modena and Morpurgo, no. 65, pp. 27–29.

11 A.C.Pa., unnumbered copy of original pinkas by Michelangelo Romanin Jacur, recording entry no. 421 [9 Tishre 5430]. On October 4, 1670, Cantarini was ordained as a hakham haver, along with Isaac ben Salomon Marina and Gedalia ben Isaac Romanin: “Isaaco figlio del Rabbino Salomon Marina (haver); medico Ghedalia figlio del Rabbino Isaaco Romanin (hakhham haver).”
(Amsterdam, 1680), a refutation of a blood libel in Latin; ‘Et Kets (Amsterdam, 1710), a treatise of systematic eschatology; a responsum entitled ‘Ekev Rav (Venice, 1711); and occasional poetry. Cantarini’s most memorable publication, Pahad Yitshak (Amsterdam, 1685), described the attack on the Padua ghetto in August 1684. The book is largely a chronicle, and it exhibits Cantarini’s scholarly approach to life and to texts. It consists of accounts of his experiences during the six-day siege, Hebrew translations of relevant State documents, and an introduction that contains population statistics and describes the condition of the community. The book even displays Cantarini’s political erudition, including theories about the practical causes for the attack.\(^{12}\)

As Padua’s chief rabbi, Cantarini dedicated himself to guiding his community morally. His sermons displayed contemporary Baroque influences as a means to inspire listeners and move them to better their behavior.\(^{13}\) References to Stoic philosophy, scientific and medical discoveries, Jesuit writings and Christian preachers, and visual culture were used to reach the ghetto’s broad public.\(^{14}\) Graphic images, in particular, left a deep impression of the essential ideas portrayed in the sermon, or in other cases books. His Pahad Yitshak included a frontispiece depicting the Binding of Isaac that reflected his sentiments about the terrifying

\(^{12}\) Simonsohn cites Cantarini as an example of a kabbalist and rationalist, a combination that shocked a Swedish statesman: Simonsohn, “Halakhah and Society in writings of Leone Modena,” in Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century, 437; for citation, see Samuel Modlinger, trans., Der rabbinische Rationalismus, eine Unterredung des Grafen Gabriel (Tureson) von Oxenstirn mit dem Rabbiner Isac Vita Cantarini aus Padua (1693) (Vienna, 1889).

\(^{13}\) Marc Saperstein, “Italian Jewish Preaching: An Overview,” in Preachers of the Italian Ghetto, ed. David Ruderman (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992), 22–40; reprinted in Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy, ed. David Ruderman (New York, 1992), 85–104. Saperstein shows this in a discussion of a sermon at the funeral of Judah Moscato, which was meant to move the audience to tears (22).

attack on the ghetto. A bearded, youthful-looking Abraham has bound and is ready to
slaughter a pre-pubescent, expressionless, Isaac. Upon Abraham’s tunic appear the words ‘גֶּ דֶּ הָא’ (‘till now’ or ‘till there’), referencing Genesis 22:5, in which the optimistic father informs his
servants that he and Isaac would go “till there” (the mountain) and return after worship. The
retrospective lesson imparted by the visual was that all tribulations were to be regarded only as
divine tests; he modeled himself on the biblical heroes who demonstrated perfect faith and
appropriate action. The frontispiece for Cantarini’s ‘Et Kets, executed by the same artist, shows
Abraham primed to slaughter the trapped lamb in Isaac’s stead, a comforting reminder of the
looming redemption. While the choice of the frontispieces may have rested with the printer,
the inclusion of moralistic artwork reflected the content of Cantarini’s book.

In seeking to contextualize Luzzatto’s literary contribution, early biographers attempted
to denote specific influences that helped produce the diverse and deep thinker. In his 1931
biography of Luzzatto, Simon Ginzburg proposed that Cantarini played the major role in
Luzzatto’s early intellectual and moral edification. Cantarini was highly esteemed in Padua,
even after he retired from his official rabbinic position, and Ginzburg assumed that Luzzatto,
whose family provided private tutelage, gained his tendency for logic and categorization from
the elder rabbi. The young scholar composed a lamentation, as a “soul in anguish” (נפש דאבה),


for the deceased Cantarini, written upon the latter’s death in 1723.\textsuperscript{18} Luzzatto’s teachings did contain a resolute moral message, but they more accurately reflected the general trend, rather than Cantarini’s specific influence. In fact, Roni Weinstein has contextualized Cantarini’s moralistic sermons by linking them to the theatrical genre of Moses Zacut. Zacut had written plays dealing with morality, and Weinstein identified both literary styles as “attempts to reshape religious tradition and retrace the borders between the holy and the profane.”\textsuperscript{19} Weinstein’s observation speaks to Luzzatto’s range of interweaving influences, for, as I will shortly discuss, Zacut helped shape Paduan Jewry’s interaction with Kabbalah.\textsuperscript{20}

For his part, Giuseppe Almanzi, who published a biography of Luzzatto nearly a century before Ginzburg, contended that Luzzatto’s primary teacher in his early years was Sabbatai Marini.\textsuperscript{21} Marini was a generation younger than Cantarini and probably more involved in the activities of the \textit{bet midrash} by the time Luzzatto came of age. He was, in fact, a disciple of Cantarini and of the physician and Talmudist Samson Morpurgo of Ancona. Together, Cantarini and Morpurgo exemplified an Italian rabbinic culture of the late seventeenth century in which rabbi-physicians served as religious and moral guides.\textsuperscript{22} Marini, though never as prolific or established as the elder generation, inherited their mantle. Certainly by the mid-1720s, after

\textsuperscript{18} Ginzburg and Klar, 74–78; Osimo, 137. The poem consists of twenty-four stanzas of four lines each in an ABBA format. According to Ginzburg and Klar, the lamentation was printed in 1728, five years after Cantarini’s death. It is difficult to date broadsides, as they rarely include a date, but if this is so, it may have been intentional on Luzzatto’s part; it coincided with the revelation of his spiritual singularity, and may have been designed to placate potential opponents by reminding them of his respect to an elder generation of rabbis (see chapter four).


\textsuperscript{21} Almanzi, “\textit{Toledot R’ Moshe Hayim Lutsato me-Padovah},” 128, n. 11; Carlebach, \textit{Pursuit of Heresy}, 197.

\textsuperscript{22} This period warrants comprehensive treatment, exploring the personalities, innumerable responsa, communal power structure, and connection between halakhic, philosophical, and mystical thought.
Cantarini’s death, Marini was Padua’s supreme rabbinic authority. He served as Padua’s chief rabbi after Nathaniel Halevi, who had assumed the position following Cantarini’s retirement, relocated to Modena. In this capacity, Marini issued legal rulings, gave sermons, provided moral leadership, and involved himself in the community’s everyday organization. In a show of rabbinic strength and ambition, he ordained Luzzatto and two other students in the autumn of 1725, as well as several more young men in the 1730s and 1740s.

However, the issue as to whether Cantarini or Marini acted as Luzzatto’s principle instructor largely misses the point of Luzzatto’s edification, interests, and outlook. Cantarini and Marini surely influenced Luzzatto, as did the memory of Padua’s rabbinic importance in previous centuries. However, Luzzatto did not follow in their proverbial footsteps. While Luzzatto was adept in Talmud and halakhah, even producing a treatise on talmudic study while living in Amsterdam, he did not publicize any halakhic rulings during his years in Padua. Early eighteenth-century Italy was rife with rabbinic collaboration on Jewish law, readily apparent in responsa published from countless rabbis, including kabbalists, in Morpurgo’s Shemesh Tzedakah and Lampronti’s Pahad Yitshak, but Luzzatto’s name is noticeably absent. Similarly, he did not earn a University degree, as had Cantarini, Marini, Morpurgo, and a myriad of other contemporary intellectuals, including several members of his own kabbalistic group. It is possible that Luzzatto matriculated at the University of Padua in 1723, as would have been consistent with his familial and communal background, and his works did reflect knowledge of

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23 See Modena and Morpurgo, p. 126, recording “LUZZATTO Moisè Vita di Jacob, ebreo romano, immatricolato 1723,” although I did not see a record of his matriculation in my research at the University archives.
and interest in science and technology. However, the inherent value of scientific study was secondary to his pursuit of spiritual truths. Luzzatto devoted himself to a pietistic way of life – to devekut and disseminating his perspective – despite social, economic, or political expectations of the established order.

**Luzzatto's Kabbalistic Influences**

Luzzatto’s mystical outlook and piety was influenced by a range of thinkers, beginning in the Padua ghetto and extending to Reggio Emilia and Mantua. By the early eighteenth century, Padua became home to a prodigious kabbalistic and pietistic fellowship that produced myriad mystical writings. Small kabbalistic confraternities were common throughout Italy in the seventeenth century, but the activity in Padua seems to have been particularly impressive.

Dozens of codices from the period immediately preceding Luzzatto’s arrival on the scene attest to intense dedication to kabbalistic study. Among the rabbis in the city during Luzzatto’s childhood was Samuel David Ottolenghi (d. 1718). Ottolenghi had studied under Moses Zacut.

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24 In my analysis of Mesilat Yesharim, I cited Luzzatto’s references to medicine, surgery, and magnets. In Da’at Tevunot, he also refers to a horologe (169), medicinal plants (191), “osseous vapor” (209), and curing illness (305).

25 For instance, in the introduction to Derekh Hashem, a systematic overview of Judaism based on kabbalistic premises, Luzzatto stated: “[The truth of God’s existence and related principles] can also be logically verified by demonstrable proofs. Their veracity can be demonstrated from what we observe in nature and its phenomena. Through such scientific disciplines as physics and astronomy [חכמת הטבע, ההנדסה, התכונה ושאר החכמות], certain basic principles can be derived, and on the basis of these, clear evidence for these concepts deduced. We will not occupy ourselves with this, however, but will rather set forth the well-known basic principles handed down by tradition” (I:1.2).

In Ma’amar ‘al ha-haggadot, Luzzatto stated explicitly: “The sages also used many scientific and mathematical theories prevalent I their day as a means to transmit the Torah’s secrets. Obviously, then, the scientific or mathematical principle itself was not important to them, so that the truth of the scientific facts they used made no difference to them.” In Da’at Tevunot, Luzzatto contended, undoubtedly describing himself: “the perception and knowledge of the prophet do not correspond to natural perception and knowledge, but they are implanted and engraved in him in such a way that his knowledge is absolutely clear and free of any doubt” (338–339).

26 On Ottolenghi, see Ghirondi, Toledot Gedole Yisrael, 330–332, 335.
and Benjamin Kohen Vitale, leaders of successive generations of Italian kabbalists, and published abridgements of two major seventeenth-century kabbalistic works: *Me’il Shemuel* (Venice, 1705), a shortened version of Isaiah Horowitz’s *Shene Luhot ha-Berit*; and *Keri’ah Ne’emanah* (Venice, 1715), a condensed work based on Aaron Berechiah of Modena’s *Ma’avar Yavok*.

After Ottolenghi assumed a rabbinic position in Venice, the Padua community hired Vitale’s son-in-law, Isaiah Bassan.27 Prior to his arrival in Padua, Bassan had held rabbinic positions in Cento and Ferrara, and his short tenure in the city of Luzzatto’s birth may help to classify him as one of many itinerant rabbis roaming early modern Italy. In addition to teaching, sermonizing, and acting as the community’s moral authority, Bassan also performed ritual circumcisions.28 Throughout his career, he published many responsa, including several in tandem with Vitale; in total, they outnumber Cantarini’s in *Shemesh Tsedakah* and *Pahad Yitshak*, and his son, Israel Benjamin (1701–1790), a rabbi, poet, and friend of Luzzatto, incorporated additional responsa into *Todat Shelamim* (Venice, 1791). Between 1715 and 1722, Bassan became well integrated into Paduan Jewish society. He encouraged the establishment of an ‘*eruv hatserot* and wrote wedding poems for children of esteemed members of the community.29 He seems also to have worked well with Marini and the aging

27 See M. Wilensky, “Notes on the Biography of R. I. Bassani” [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 27 (1951): 113–114. Bassan’s father, Israel Hezekiah, may have been a rabbi in Padua in the 1680s, as an entry in a Padua *pinkas* states that the community would contribute one hundred ducats to the dowry of one of his daughters (A.C.Pa., unnumbered copy of original *pinkas* by Michelangelo Romanin Jacur, recording entry no. 620 [11 Adar 5446]).

28 In a letter to Poppers, Avraham Cracovia stated that Bassan was master of “*Sifra*, *Sifre*, and all of Gemara” (Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 150, p. 409). For the reference to his work as a *mohel*, see ibid., no. 61, p. 198.

29 One was for the grandson of Hillel Padua (JTS MS 9027, v. 8:8), a staunch supporter of Luzzatto and his circle and an integral contributor to the reconstituted Jewish community of Tiberias. Another extant poem was written for Isaac Marini (JTS B (NS) PP568; and VTL, no. F008), the son of rabbi Sabbatai Marini and friend of Luzzatto.
Cantarini. Together the three rabbis memorialized the physician and communal scribe Raffael Rabeni upon his death in 1717, and Marini and Bassan planned a joint Hebrew translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, based on the Italian paraphrase by Giovanni Andrea dell’Anguillara (1517–1570). However, Bassan left Padua for the much smaller community of Reggio Emilia in 1722, the same year Nathaniel Levi arrived as rabbi. An unrelated letter to Luzzatto belittling Levi as a quarrelsome man may indicate that Bassan himself was a difficult character and was forced to leave Padua. Regardless, even after settling alongside and replacing his father-in-law as rabbi in Reggio, Bassan maintained strong ties to Luzzatto and his fellow mystical seekers.

Searching for Luzzatto’s kabbalistic origins, Almanzi, Ghirondi, and Ginzburg credited Bassan with introducing Luzzatto to Kabbalah at a young age and serving as his primary teacher of the spiritual cosmos. For all of their work on Luzzatto’s mystical thought, Tishby and Benayahu did not broadly elaborate on Luzzatto’s socio-mystical connections outside the immediate members of his circle in Padua. Tishby did emphasize Moses David Valle’s independent thought and Jekutiel Gordon’s dissemination of Luzzatto’s works, but Luzzatto’s relationships with other kabbalists, including in relation to his personal development, has been largely overlooked. In contrast to the above-mentioned scholars, in the midst of

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31 Marini accomplished far more than Bassan. The work was never printed, though several manuscripts, including the original in Mantua, are extant (Jefim Schirmann, “Marini, Shabbethai Hayyim,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 13, 545–546).

32 Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 61.

33 Ghirondi draws a direct link from Isaac Luria in Safed to Zacut and Vitale in Mantua, to Bassan and Ottolenghi in Padua (*Toledot Gedole Yisrael*, 330–332).
contextualizing Luzzatto’s mystical ideas within larger trends of European thought, Jonathan Garb has recently argued that Bassan has been “mistakenly described as [Luzzatto’s] teacher.”

Garb believes that Bassan’s writings, particularly his sermons, do not suggest Bassan’s interaction with Kabbalah, and instead contends that Luzzatto’s primary influence was Vitale.

In my opinion, Vitale certainly acted as Luzzatto’s ideal, which I will shortly address, but Bassan was Luzzatto’s initial and influential conduit to Kabbalah and pietism. Although Bassan’s oeuvre consisted mainly of sermons, responsa, and poetry, correspondence to and from Bassan reveal his familiarity with Kabbalah. He possessed several kabbalistic books and was intimately connected to a network of kabbalists in northern Italy. In addition to being the son-in-law of Vitale, who was widely considered the “High Priest” of the kabbalists, letters connect Bassan with other kabbalists, including Menasseh Joshua Padova and Joseph Ergas. Moreover, letters between Bassan and Luzzatto indicate that their primary connection was based on mystical interests. To be sure, Luzzatto was the motivator of this type of relationship; he sent the elder rabbi newly written commentaries or kabbalistic elucidations, and Bassan dutifully, if warily, responded. Still, Luzzatto was drawn to Bassan in a qualitatively different way than the deference he showed the venerable Cantarini or the respect he had for Marini. He dedicated his first publication, *Leshon Limudim*, to Bassan, and composed a drama in honor of the wedding of Bassan’s son, Israel Benjamin. For his part, as I will discuss in depth in the following chapter, Bassan expressed continuous, if cautious, support for Luzzatto when much of

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34 Garb, “Mussar, Curriculum and Exegesis in the Circle of Ramhal,” 7.
35 *Migdal ‘Oz* was composed in 1727, and published for the first time in Leipzig in 1837.
the Italian rabbinate condemned him.\textsuperscript{36} Most importantly, in a letter written to the Venetian rabbinate, Bassan offered a short explanation of Kabbalah as a way of life. He expressed the value of pietistic fellowships and defended the possibility of individualized visionary experiences.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, Bassan’s rabbinic learning\textsuperscript{38} did not conflict with pietistic living, in contrast with scholarly assumptions of kabbalists as purely focused on matters of piety. As seen in \textit{Mesilat Yesharim}, Luzzatto epitomized a broad spectrum of expression, in which all was tied to or stemmed from an overall commitment to Kabbalah.

Through Bassan, and Padua’s long-standing position as a community of rabbinic importance, Luzzatto and his compatriots were connected to a large and loosely connected group of kabbalists in Italy. Just as the connection of Luzzatto’s group to the University of Padua complicates our understanding of early modern Italian pietists and kabbalists, so too should Luzzatto’s proximity to the larger rabbinic society. In addition to Bassan and his father-in-law, Vitale, they included Isaac Lampronti, Nehemiah Kohen, Menasseh Joshua Padova, Judah Briel, Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea, Joseph Ergas, David Finzi, who would later become Luzzatto’s father-in-law, Gur Aryeh Finzi, Judah Mendola, and more. Not all should be classified as kabbalists or pietists necessarily, but all, with the exceptions of Lampronti and Briel, were heavily invested in kabbalistic thought. Most were influenced either directly or indirectly by

\textsuperscript{36} For instance, Chriqui, \textit{Igerot}, nos. 3.1, 4. In addition, the majority of the extant correspondence to, from, and about Luzzatto was assembled by Bassan between the late 1720s and the mid-1730s. See Natascia Danieli, “A Study of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto’s letters as a source regarding the dissemination for the Shabbatean movement, between the second half of the 17\textsuperscript{th} and the first half of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century,” \textit{European Association for Jewish Studies Newsletter} 16 (2005): 100–111.


\textsuperscript{38} For Bassan’s use of classical rabbinic sources, see ibid., no. 145, pp. 391–392, where he cited Rosh and Mordecai.
Moses Zacut’s activities in Mantua in the late seventeenth century. In the previous chapter, a document attesting to the establishment of an ‘eruv in Padua demonstrated the rabbinic connection between Padua and Mantua. This link, combined with personal relationships forged between Paduans and Mantuans, profoundly influenced Luzzatto. He established an independence and broad view of Jewish society outside the confines of the Veneto’s political boundaries, and drew close to a kabbalistic-rabbinic culture in northern Italy. This multigenerational network of scholars, which culminated in Luzzatto but carried on after he left Padua, reflected a trend towards a kabbalistic and rabbinic elite in the latter seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The dichotomy of kabbalists and rabbis, in which the former grew in strength during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries based on charisma and non-legal texts, gave way to a more unified front in Mantua’s (or Zacut’s) orbit. Kabbalists, especially those serving in official capacities, acted as halakhic decisors in the vast responsa literature that proliferated.

Vitale lay at the core of that cosmically associated, though geographically dispersed, assembly. He had studied Kabbalah under Zacut, who, while in Venice and Mantua, had been the chief disseminator of Kabbalah in the Italian peninsula in the mid- to late-seventeenth

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39 For an interesting, if limited, chain of kabbalists, see Abraham Yaari, Te‘alumat Sefer (Jerusalem, 1953), 155:
LURIA – VITAL – HAYIM ROPA – BENJAMIN HA-LEVI, then:
b. Almoni to Jacob Vilna to Meir Bikiam.
c. Melamed to Elijah ha-Kohen of Izmir.
d. Zacut to Avraham Ravigo, Benjamin ha-Kohen Vitale, Isaiah Bassan.
e. Vitale to Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea.
f. Bassan to Moses Hayim Luzzatto.
century. He assumed his first rabbinic position in his native Alessandria in 1674 at the age of twenty-four, and after eight years relocated to Reggio Emilia to take up a post that he faithfully filled for four decades (1682–1722) until his retirement. Vitale promoted a life of piety, mystical contemplation, and communion with God, and his rabbinic career contrasts sharply with notions of both secluded pietists and itinerant rabbis in early modern Italy. He participated along with his contemporaries, like Cantarini and Morpurgo, in the halakhic dialogue, and his name is found among the most established rabbinic figures of his day. He maintained ties with rabbis throughout Italy and in northern Europe, and was celebrated for his pietism. Letters sent from Ashkenazic communities to Vitale frequently address him in glowing terms of piety and Kabbalah, and Italian rabbis often referred to him reverentially as the “High Priest.” A letter dating to the early eighteenth century indicates that Vitale, and possibly Bassan, followed a custom to wear tefilin during afternoon prayers, a stringency reflecting his pietistic emphasis.

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40 An unpublished letter from Vitale to Zacut concerns the partsufim within the concept of bikurim (JTS MS 4201, fol. 19r).
41 On a split between ‘official’ rabbis and ‘wandering rabbi-scholars’ see Simonsohn, History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua, 631.
42 For responsa, see Morpurgo’s Shemesh Tzedakah, and Lampronti’s Pahad Yitshak. He also was the recipient of letters from abroad: in May 1715, a letter, accompanied by the copied correspondence of Judah Briel, Moses Hagiz, and Tsvi Ashkenazi to Jacob Aboab in Venice, was sent to Vitale soliciting his contribution to a ban against an adulterer that would promise that the offender would find no respite or home (JTS MS 4201, fols. 45–48).
43 JTS MS 4201, fols. 57–59. For references to Vitale as “Kohen gadol,” see Chriqui, Igerot, nos. 3.1, 4, 5. Among some Ashkenazic Jews, the same title was bestowed upon Jacob Kohen Poppers of Frankfurt, head of the community’s yeshiva and bet din and an opponent of Luzzatto (ibid., no. 108, p. 317 [in Luzzatto’s confession]; and no. 119, p. 341 [by Hagiz]).
44 JTS MS 4201, fol. 3r. Whether or not Bassan wore tefilin all day, up to and including minhah, is unclear.
In 1727, Vitale’s intellectual and spiritual life’s work was published in Amsterdam\textsuperscript{45} under the title *Gevul Binyamin*.\textsuperscript{46} The large format, three hundred and fifty page imprint was designed to be studied year-round. It contained writings on the weekly portions of the Torah and the Prophets, as well as treatises on specific commandments and rabbinic concepts. The introduction was essentially an ethical manifesto with an underlying critique of contemporary society. Relying primarily on *Midrash Mishle*, Vitale described man as a “parched tree,” which required the spiritual sustenance provided by the Torah in general and the sweet waters of Kabbalah in particular. He encouraged readers to study *agadah*, because familiarity with the behavior of the righteous would help one comprehend and face one’s own divinely ordained challenges.\textsuperscript{47} Moreover, he proclaimed his longing for Jews “to walk in all His ways” (Deuteronomy 12:12), challenging readers’ assumptions that rote performance of Jewish ritual was sufficient to fulfill the commandments. Foreshadowing Luzzatto’s identical use of the verse in *Mesilat Yesharim*, Vitale argued that assumption itself was proof that God’s will was not fulfilled by superficial action. Whether or not Luzzatto absorbed this perspective directly from Vitale, or through Bassan or even in studying *Gevul Binyamin*, Vitale clearly and profoundly influenced Luzzatto’s spiritual outlook. In sending a copy of *Leshon Limudim* to Vitale, published in Mantua the same year *Gevul Binyamin* was issued in Amsterdam, Luzzatto explained that his work of Hebrew grammar was designed to honor the Torah and lead people to serve God. The

\textsuperscript{45} Documents in the Mantua Jewish community archives show that he had completed the book and was in contact with printers in Amsterdam by July 1724 (A.C.Ma., no. 81.15).

\textsuperscript{46} The number of sermons in the various sections of the book correspond to the numerical equivalent of the letters of his name (בְּנִי-מִן): two (ב) on the cosmic importance of the righteous (*tsadikim*); fifty (נ) on the *parshiyot* and *haftarot*; ten (י) on the four special Sabbaths (*Shekalim*, *Zakhor*, *Parah*, and *Hodesh*); forty (מ) on *Shabbat ha-Gadol*, Festivals, High Holidays, and *Shabbat Teshuvah*; ten (י) eulogies; and another sixty (נ) on the *parshiyot*.

\textsuperscript{47} There was a trend among early modern kabbalists to focus on Midrash. For the literature, see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 81. Luzzatto himself composed a short treatise on the subject, *Ma’amar ‘al ha-Agadah.*
young Luzzatto attempted to embody the themes stressed by the elder kabbalist even in a linguistic treatise.\footnote{Chriqui, \textit{Igerot}, no. 1.}

Below, I will show how Luzzatto and other like-minded educated men of his generation assembled and intended to disseminate a kabbalistic way of life. They venerated Vitale, delved deeply into the writings of Zacut and earlier kabbalists, and concluded that Kabbalah was the supreme subject of study. Moshe Idel and Roni Weinstein have pointed out that the main concern of early modern Italian kabbalists was to inform ritual observance with meaning and depth, rather than to create complex and intricate theological structures.\footnote{Idel, \textit{Kabbalah and Eros} (Yale University Press, 2005), 213–214; Weinstein, \textit{Juvenile Sexuality, Kabbalah, and Catholic Reformation in Italy}, 105. Idel sees this as showing up conceptually in the heightened importance of the Shekhinah in the sixteenth century (\textit{Kabbalah and Eros}, 66; see also Weinstein, \textit{Juvenile Sexuality, Kabbalah, and Catholic Reformation in Italy}, 107).} Although Luzzatto intensively engaged with a sort of cosmic structuralism, his ultimate intention was social and religious betterment. The polemical component in the original \textit{Mesilat Yesharim} focused on the established rabbinate, but that only reflected Luzzatto’s existing mindset; in \textit{Da’at Tevunot}, Luzzatto promoted a mystical outlook over and against any alternative perspective. In short, Luzzatto believed that the unified religiosity of Kabbalah provided an answer to every challenge.

Luzzatto’s belligerence may have also had its roots in Vitale’s work. Throughout \textit{Gevul Binyamin}, Vitale expressed derision for philosophy and for scholars who sought to provide rational reasons for commandments. He referred to philosophers as “evil doers” (הרשעים), and criticized Abraham Ibn Ezra, for instance, for attempting to explain the purpose
of kashrut. Notably, the book included a poem in praise of Isaac Alfasi, the eleventh-century Sephardic halakhic decisor, and an Aramaic supplication (hadran) to be recited upon completion of Alfasi’s law code (Hilkhot ha-Rif) that expressed appreciation for the work and a promise to review it anew. Together, the poem and the hadran demonstrate that Vitale preferred Alfasi’s work to the more popular and influential code of Maimonides, the Mishneh Torah, which had been printed several times in Italy by the eighteenth century and was more readily available. A study of Alfasi’s reception in the early modern period, particularly in comparison to other medieval halakhists, is necessary to determine its esteem in Gevul Binyamin. Was Vitale making a statement about the legitimacy or appropriateness of Maimonides? Did he perceive a mystical undertone in Alfasi’s legal rulings? Did he merely favor Alfasi’s code, because it followed the order of the Talmud? Elucidating Vitale’s reasoning and the context of (extensive?) study of Alfasi would be particularly interesting, because his anti- philosophical stance sharply contrasted with the later eighteenth-century trend that helped shape European Jewish intellectualism in the modern era. Just fifteen years after the publication of Vitale’s book, Maimonides’ philosophical masterpiece, Moreh Nevukhim, was issued without approbations in Jessnitz, where it likely influenced Moses Mendelssohn and the Berlin Haskalah.

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Gevul Binyamin, fol. 91v. In addition, he titled the work Boundaries of Benjamin, “because I have not gone out of my boundaries.” The title evokes the biblical Benjamin, whose father Jacob desired to keep at home even after the other sons had descended to Egypt, and the Tribe of Benjamin, which was not exiled from its land as the Ten Tribes had been. In each essay, Vitale contended, he did not attempt to expound upon a subject that he had not mastered. Beyond the humility of the statement, Vitale may have actually extended his polemic against philosophy: drawing a distinction between himself, the kabbalist akin to Benjamin and the Holy Land, and the philosophe, who as the opposite was profane like the rest of the world.

Gad Freudenthal addressed this issue in a paper entitled “Jessnitz Anno 1743: Contextualizing the Printing of Nehmad we-Na‘im,” at a conference on “David Gans (1541–1613). After Four Centuries,” held in Prague, May 27–
Vitale’s decision to publish his masterpiece in Amsterdam through the famous and long-arm of the Proops press, instead of locally in Mantua or even in Venice, indicated that he wished to disseminate his message as widely possible. In his study of the life and ‘after-life’ of Leone Modena’s Ari Nohem, Yaacob Dweck observed that at least three Italian kabbalists in the 1730s promoted kabbalistic study over and against philosophy.\(^{52}\) Not coincidentally, two of the men, each of whom published a book on the subject, were Vitale’s disciples — Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea\(^{53}\) and Joseph Ergas.\(^{54}\) The third man, Luzzatto, composed a book (\textit{Ma’amor ha-Vikuah}, later printed as \textit{Hoker u-Mekubal}) that, due to the controversy that stirred around him, was suppressed before publication.\(^{55}\) Although each of these authors worked independently of the other, the activities of Luzzatto and others in Padua indicate the stirrings of a movement of pietistic kabbalists that sought to assert themselves as Jewry’s definitive voices.

**A Kabbalistic Confraternity**

Under Bassan’s and Vitale’s guidance, Luzzatto read his first kabbalistic books and absorbed their ideas. In Bassan’s words, Luzzatto “extended into the valley of secrets, delighted in love.”\(^{56}\) Sometime in his early adolescence, Luzzatto joined a society of fellows

\(^{52}\) See Dweck, \textit{The Scandal of Kabbalah}, 197–198.  
\(^{53}\) See \textit{Emunat Hakhamim} (Mantua, 1730), fol. 31, 1. See also introduction of Chriqui, \textit{Igerot}, 1, n.1.  
\(^{54}\) See \textit{Shomer Emunim} (Amsterdam, 1736). Ergas’s book was a synopsis of Kabbalah, and he explained to Bassan that he sought to present the complexity of Kabbalah to the larger Jewish public (Chriqui, \textit{Igerot}, no. 46).  
\(^{55}\) See chapter four.  
engaged in kabbalistic study called Mevakshe Hashem (Seekers of the Lord).\textsuperscript{57} In Italian communities and elsewhere in Europe during the early modern period, small groups formed for any number of purposes, including providing charity to less fortunate segments of the community, tending to the sick, dying, and deceased, reciting Psalms, and studying Torah.\textsuperscript{58} Particular social associations served as expressions of individualism and brotherhood. Many tombstones in Padua’s Jewish cemeteries display the moniker “Hevrat Sovvegno” (חברת סוויניו), indicating that the deceased was a member of the medical and scholarly community of that name. In return for a high admission cost and a fixed annual contribution, members would receive a daily allowance and medical and surgical assistance if they became ill and were unable to work.\textsuperscript{59}

There is little evidence detailing the activities of Mevakshe Hashem.\textsuperscript{60} We do not know when the society formed, if it had regulations, how many men were involved, or when Luzzatto joined. Presumably, members of the group helped produce the many thousands of extant pages of kabbalistic texts copied or composed in Padua during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

\textsuperscript{57} According to Tishby, based on Bassan’s statement and the report of Jekutiel Gordon, we can conclude that by 1721 Luzzatto was “already at home in the study of kabbalah” (“Rabbi Moses David Valle (Ramdat) and his Position in Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 299–300). This point was first made by F. Lachower, “Be-sha’ar ha-migdal,” in ‘Al gevul ha-yashan ve-he-hadash (Jerusalem, 1951), 32–36.


\textsuperscript{59} Viterbo, 17–18.

\textsuperscript{60} Luzzatto used the expression in Derekh Hashem (end of introduction, in addressing his readers), and Ergas used the term in a letter to Vitale (JTS MS 4201, fol. 49r).
centuries. Miscellaneous material from the Zohar, Isaac Luria, Hayim Vital, Moses Nigron, Israel Sarug, and Moses Zacut, (undidly) written by a myriad of hands on folios of various sizes, speak to a flurry of activity.

The vast extent of copying may indicate that the writing itself served a purpose beyond mere propagation of knowledge. Perhaps the mystical intent inherent in the study of the texts could be achieved, or at least furthered, through the act of viewing and copying the words. Certainly, magical attributes were ascribed to Hebrew letters and words by early modern kabbalists, and J. H. Chajes has recently shown that sensitivity about mystical permutations of the divine name kept contemporary printers from widely disseminating such knowledge through print. In contrast, the safety of a confraternity enabled group members to engage with this form of mystical speculation and contemplation. Certainly, by the early 1730s, it is clear that some men in Luzzatto’s circle, including two of his most important confidants, were involved in duplicating manuscripts (even while they produced their own writings), which Luzzatto treated as intrinsically valuable.

Putting aside the overt purpose of manuscript copying as a medium for spreading ideas, Elisheva Carlebach’s recent work on Jewish calendars in early modern Europe may shed light on the activities of Mevakshe Hashem and similar groups. Carlebach observed that, despite the abundance of Hebrew printing presses, many hand-copied calendars and calendar guides were

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61 JTS acquired the manuscripts as part of the collection of Mordecai Shmuel Ghirondi, who served as rabbi of Padua from 1831–1852. Also, Luzzatto sent a manuscript to David Finzi (CU MS X93 K17). See M. Benayahu, Kitve ha-kabalah shel Ramhal (Jerusalem, 1979), 66–71, and Kitsur ha-kavanot le-Ramhal (Bnei Brak, 1978), 173–182. A detailed catalog of the dozens of extant miscellanies could reveal what was copied and how often, as well as date, localize, and identify handwriting of the manuscripts.


63 Chriqui, Igerot, nos. 14, 15, 82.
frequently produced for individual use. She convincingly argued that in addition to the practical value of the calendar, the copying itself served as a method to perform vicariously the long-defunct mitzvah of *kidush ha-hodesh* (blessing the new moon). If calendar copyists fulfilled a mitzvah through a performance of imposed religious value, then it is hardly a leap to contend that contemporary kabbalists identified the act and result of writing as mystically significant.

More broadly, these trends – together with the eighteenth-century phenomenon of illuminated manuscripts, particularly *hagadot*, produced for the upper class – may speak to certain segments of educated Jewish society contending with their identities, and securing their links to the past and the spiritual, in the face of significant cultural and technological change.

In addition to copying, contemplating, and studying, members of *Mevakshe Hashem* composed their own works. Interspersed within the kabbalistic canonical writings are commentaries on biblical verses, Psalms, talmudic passages, and liturgy. Such passages are mostly anonymous, an indication of the authors’ goals of replacing ego with divine spirit. However, amidst the myriads of texts, one known example stemmed from the pen of Judah Mendola, who later served as a rabbi in Mantua and steadfastly supported Luzzatto in the midst of the controversy. Mendola composed a tightly-written three-folio commentary on Psalms 23 (מזמור שיר ליום השבת), which is currently bound in a manuscript of kabbalistic varia now housed in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary. He used *notarikon* primarily to explain the meaning of the psalm. Mendola signed his name at the conclusion of the

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commentary (יודא מינדולה), followed by permutations of his name akin to mystical names of God (דולה ימוירן אדולה הלוראנסיומי דולה אמן יומי).

According to Almanzi, when Luzzatto joined Mevaksh She Hashem, the group consisted of “those men of renown who walked in [the way of] the Torah of the Lord ... R. Israel Hezekiah Treves, the physician R. Moses David Valle, and R. Jacob Forte [Hazak].” Luzzatto was several years their junior, and, even if he already had mastered Kabbalah, as Bassan stated, the collective force of the group of pietists undoubtedly influenced him. Valle, who would remain an important kabbalist, rabbi, and physician in Padua until his death in 1777, led the confraternity and set the example as a prolific writer. He produced thousands of pages of mystical literature, including kabbalistic commentaries on biblical books. In 1722, Valle completed a four hundred-page treatise on Jewish theology entitled Les Settes Giornate di Verita (ויכוח על האמונה), a dialogue in Italian prose with Hebrew verses liberally interspersed. Evidently influenced by Vitale, Valle discussed mitzvot, agadah, and history while presenting the supremacy of the Jewish people and the validity of Kabbalah. The work was less enigmatic than traditional Lurianic texts, and, composed in the vernacular in a theatrical style, may have been intended as an introduction to readers interested in kabbalistic thought.

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65 JTS MS 1585, fols. 21r–23r. Mendola, a student of Briel, taught in the yeshiva of Padua until 1723, after which he signed a contract with the community of Mantua to direct the children’s school, assist on ritual rulings, and give sermons in the Great Synagogue (Simonsohn, History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua, 580–581).
66 Almanzi, “Toledot R’ Moshe Hayim Lutsato me-Padovah,” 114.
67 Ibid., 140, n. 41.
68 JTS MS 2213. The manuscript’s codicology is curious: each folio of thick paper was folded eight times, perhaps to help with justification. Although the manuscript was ‘print-ready,’ having undergone editing and written neatly without need of correction, it was, like the rest of Valle’s writings, never brought to press.

In the margin of fol. 69v, Valle ascribed a comment in the main text to “Moise Luzzato padre del R. Moreno R. Benetto Luzzatto,” whose relation to Moses Hayim I have yet to determine.
style and format is reminiscent of Luzzatto’s elucidation of kabbalistic doctrine in Da’at Tevunot, though the latter, written a decade later, deals with more difficult content.

Upon joining Mevakshe Hashem, Luzzatto devoted himself entirely to the collective power of the confraternity. In the early 1720s, Bassan gave Luzzatto a seventeenth-century manuscript of Hayim Vital’s Sefer Otsrot Hayim and other kabbalistic writings. The book, containing Zacut’s annotations, had been passed down from Zacut to Vitale to Bassan, and finally to Luzzatto. The impressionable and eager Luzzatto, in turn, offered it for communal use to the kabbalists of Padua. The gift of the old and valuable manuscript represented more than just an opportunity to absorb a classic of Jewish mysticism. The volume attested to their connection to the preceding generations of kabbalistic masters. Luzzatto’s donation represented the hopes of group members to propel the tradition forward by embodying the selfless ideals of Kabbalah.

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69 JTS MS 1615; see Elkan Nathan Adler, Catalogue of Hebrew Manuscripts in the Collection of Elkan Nathan Adler (Cambridge, 1921), 75. The front paste-down and first fly-leaf each contain an inscription with Luzzatto’s name (אני משה חיים לוצאטו), while the fly-leaf includes one referring to Mevakshe Hashem (זה הספר של חברת מבקשי ה' יצ"ו). Tishby suggested in one article that the sefirotic doodles found on the front paste-down end-paper indicated that the manuscript was acquired by a young Luzzatto as a gift from the Hevrat Mevakshe Hashem after he joined the circle (Tishby, Zion 44, p. 274, n. 24). There are several problems with this theory: there is no indication that the doodles were made by Luzzatto; as the Luzzatto family was by far the wealthiest of the few families represented in the group, Luzzatto could feasibly afford to donate a manuscript to the group, but Valle, Treves, and Forte would not likely donate something to the newest initiate; Luzzatto maintained the closest relationship with Bassan, making it likely that if Bassan gave the book to anyone it would have been to Luzzatto; and the manuscript stayed in Padua after he left Amsterdam and evidently was not deemed private property by Luzzatto. Tishby may have later backtracked from his early assessment (“Rabbi Moses David Valle (Ramdav) and his Position in Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 300–301).

70 A member of Mevakshe Hashem, or possibly of Luzzatto’s yeshiva filled the front end-papers with doodles of kabbalistic cosmic structures and four numerical permutations of the Tetragrammaton (miluyim: 72, 63, 45, 52). The doodles include sefirotic tree, nesting circles, and a Gordian (or Solomon’s) knot. The first two diagrams are two of the most common depictions of the ten cosmic spheres. The latter’s connection to Kabbalah has yet to be determined, although it was a common sight in early modern Italy: the Scuola Levantina in Venice includes windows depicting Gordian knots, and they appeared on plaques in the Cemetery of San Nicolo (Curiel, 139). The doodles may represent the importance of ‘visualizing’ or conceiving of the spirituality imparted by the texts with which they engaged.
Despite the dearth of material about *Mevakshe Hashem*, the group members’ intentions, motivations, and morale were manifested in their decision, at some point in the mid-1720s, to disband as an established confraternity in order to re-form in a new fellowship led by Luzzatto. According to Almanzi and to Mordecai Samuel Ghirondi, chief rabbi of Padua in the first half of the nineteenth century, the group had originally met in a separate room off the community *bet midrash*. At some point before 1727, the kabbalistic fellows removed themselves entirely from the *bet midrash* to study in the Luzzatto household, probably coinciding with Luzzatto’s ascension as spiritual leader. The group’s move to Luzzatto’s house reflected a conviction that deep spiritual work required separation from the mundane, which in this case included the study hall made famous by Mintz and Katzenellenbogen. To be sure, separate synagogues and study halls in private homes was not an uncommon phenomenon in early modern Italy, especially among wealthy and powerful families. However, the socio-economic status of Luzzatto’s family in the eighteenth century paled in comparison to the bankers of Renaissance Florence, who lived in opulent mansions and commissioned beautiful illuminated manuscripts. Instead, *Mevakshe Hashem*’s move to the Luzzatto home – while demonstrating the extensive support Luzzatto received from his immediate family – stemmed

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71 Almanzi, “*Toledot R’ Moshe Hayim Lutsato me-Padovah*,” 130, n. 15; JTS MS 1599, fol. 1; Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle (Ramdav) and his Position in Luzzatto’s Group,” in *Messianic Mysticism*, 295–296, n. 12. According to Almanzi and Ghirondi (citing no source), the room was used in their own time by a kabbalistic confraternity called *Metive Tsa’ad*. Tishby pointed out that Ghirondi called the new group *Metive Sa’ad* (assistance) instead of *Metive Tsa’ad* (step). Considering Ghirondi was himself learned in Kabbalah, he may have been a member of the group and the title he provided is at least as likely as Almanzi’s.

72 Ibid., 131, n. 16, 160–161, nn. 102, 104. According to Chriqui, Luzzatto joined *Mevakshe Hashem* in 1724, the same year he wrote *Leshon Limudim* (Chriqui, *Igerot*, p. 1 [intro.]). This presumably would mean that he joined already as an expert in Kabbalah and immediately assumed leadership duties. It seems more likely that he joined at an even younger age, learned from Valle and the other members, grew in knowledge and perception, and demonstrated his abilities as time went on before taking the leadership position.

73 See Horowitz, “Families and Their Fortunes,” 595.
from the confraternity’s personalized interests, needs, and motivations. In his chapters on
Separateness in Mesilat Yesharim, Luzzatto contended that pietism required secluded
surroundings conducive to moral life and mystical contemplation. Luzzatto, Valle, and the
other group members determined that their values diverged from the community at large, and
to a certain extent its history. The move did not intentionally denigrate the bet midrash and
communal pride, but it revealed that group members believed their spiritual motives
superseded the identity or perceived importance of Padua as an established communal entity.74
However, rather than forming an identity as a sub-community, existentially separate from their
surroundings, Luzzatto and his compatriots intended to develop and fulfill expansive roles that
encompassed all communities, unifying cosmic personality and Jewish society as a whole.

The disbanding of Mevakshe Hashem in order to reconvene in the Luzzatto household
indicated a physical and hierarchical move. Furthermore, it showed that group members were
singularly dedicated to a purpose centered more on the divine than on the self. Valle, Treves,
and Forte were all older and more established than Luzzatto – Valle and Forte had been
ordained already, and Valle had earned a medical degree in 1717 – but they were willing to
suspend the group’s initial arrangement in order to reconvene around Luzzatto. Though he was
the youngest of the group, Luzzatto’s vision and ability were deemed to be of greater
importance than the previously established order. This initial point of establishing Luzzatto’s
yeshiva carried within it the seeds of his belligerence against rabbis who opposed him. To
Luzzatto and his kabbalistic compatriots, age, wealth, and title were meaningless. As Luzzatto

74 A larger issue is the rabbinic value placed on synagogue sanctity, such that it is of greater importance to pray
amid a quorum in the synagogue than privately at home.
later commented, in the midst of the controversy, his associates were “not people who engage in the Torah as a profession to become rabbis in Italy.”

Although the 1734 document discussed in the previous chapter reflected the Consiglio's eventual concern that the group’s perishut detracted from religious life in the ghetto, in the mid-1720s Luzzatto and his compatriots were in fact the young rabbinic stars of Padua. On Thursday, 13 Tishre 5486 (=September 20, 1725), Sabbatai Marini and Nathaniel Levi ordained Valle, Luzzatto, and Isaiah Romanin as haverim, the first rung on the ladder of the rabbinate in northern Italy. The rabbinic titles carried inherent meaning, and their respective statuses would be recognized when the men were publicly called to the Torah in a synagogue.

According to the text of the semikhah (ordination), recorded in a communal pinkas, the rabbis in conjunction with the parnasim determined that the three young men were “worthy of ordination by reason of their excellent character, erudition, understanding, and activities, which are well known, as is the fact that their deeds will draw them near [to God], since they have determined to make their [study of] Torah their occupation.” As detailed by the scribe, the rabbinic and lay leadership uniformly showered the three men with praises, and beseeched the

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75 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 88, p. 237. Although the status of the ordination was an irrelevant feature of their existence, the move to disband and reform around the time of the semikhut may not have been.


77 A.C.Pa., no. 13, p. 213. See Paolo Nissim, “Sulla data della laurea rabbinica conseguita da Moshe Chajim Luzzatto,” La Rassegna Mensile di Israel 20 (1954): 499–503; and Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle (Ramdav) and his Position in Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 304–308. Nissim was the first to publish the document; he included a facsimile of the page and an Italian translation of the Hebrew text. The context of his article is Almanzi’s citation of a letter that referred to Luzzatto as Morenu ha-Rav in 1730. Basing himself on an earlier article by Giuseppe Jaré, Nissim questions the plausibility that a mere twenty-three-year-old could be called by the highest rabbinic level. On the levels of rabbinic ordination, see Bonfil, Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy, 87–95.

The year of Luzzatto’s original ordination is repeatedly misstated as 1726, based on the careless reading of the year without regard for the month (see Nissim, 502).

78 Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle (Ramdav) and his Position in Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 304.
Heavens that they, and their perpetual descendants, be successful as experts in and teachers of Torah. Compared to a handful of other ordinations recorded in the annals of the Padua Jewish community, the Valle-Luzzatto-Romanin document was exceptionally praiseful and lengthy, an indication of the special status of these particular men and their connections to the lay authorities. Even if one were to argue that these are mere records of the ordinations and do not necessarily reflect any particular certificate the newly minted rabbis received, the significance is in how the scribe, at the behest of the rabbinate or Consiglio, recorded the achievements for communal posterity. The record of the ordination of Luzzatto and others, compared, for instance, to that of Cantarini in 1670 or those that Marini conferred in the 1730s and 1740s, is exceptional.

According to Tishby, the joint ordination demonstrated that the ordained individuals “engaged in Torah study in a group” and that it represented Mevakshe Hashem under Valle’s leadership. “In my opinion,” he wrote, “we have here the nucleus of Valle’s group in the Society of Seekers of the Lord in the last stage of its existence before it was superseded by Luzzatto’s newly formed group. Valle’s pre-eminent position among the haverim is given emphasis in the certificate by its application of the title ‘the sage’ [חכם] to him alone”.

Tishby’s assertion about the joint ordination of Valle, Luzzatto, and Romanin seems to imply

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79 The semikhah documents of Cantarini in 1670, and of some of Luzzatto’s compatriots in the 1730s and 1740s, are only a few lines long.

80 Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle (Ramdav) and his Position in Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 304–305. The use of the word “hakham” in this context is curious, considering that it was used as the official title of the second tier of the Italian rabbinate. It seems to have been used in a deliberative way (which was Tishby’s assertion here), even when not used to denote a rabbinic title. For instance, the physician and merchant Grazzin (Gershon) Cantarini, mentioned in the previous chapter, is repeatedly referred to as “hakham” in the Padua pinkasim (for example, A.C.Pa., no. 15, p. 247). In the document memorializing the communal scribe Raffael Rabeni, mentioned above, Cantarini and Marini are each introduced as “hakham,” but Bassan and the other rabbi, Simon Halperin, are not (A.C.Pa., no. 13, p. 101).
that the community at large favored the mystical fellowship. In fact, his assumption that Marini and Levi, in conjunction with the business-minded Consiglio, knew the inner workings of the kabbalistic fellowship, and therefore honored Valle more than Luzzatto and Romanin, is unfounded. While there had been a history of kabbalistic study in the Paduan ghetto, the document itself does not in fact express any recognition of, let alone affinity for, Mevakshe Hashem. In addition, the simultaneous ordination of the three men proves nothing, for all late-seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century rabbinic ordinations recorded in the Padua pinkasim include more than one name.81

Regardless, the document clearly shows that Padua’s rabbinic and lay leadership supported Luzzatto and his compatriots. Their ascension as rabbinic “colleagues” (haverim) brought pride to Padua’s Jews, or at least the city’s Jewish leadership. Luzzatto, Valle, and Romanin, as well as many other members of Mevakshe Hashem and the reconstituted yeshiva in Luzzatto’s home, stemmed from influential families in the community. Furthermore, the 1734 document discussed in the previous chapter, which listed Luzzatto, Valle, Forte, and Romanin, in conjunction with chief rabbi Marini, indicates that the mystics formed Padua’s rabbinic class at large. As I will discuss, moral support offered by communal leadership bolstered the cosmic aspirations of the kabbalistic fellowship, and contributed to the members’ ability to withstand criticism levied from Venice and cities in central and eastern Europe.

81 As we see from record of Cantarini’s 1670 ordination, and the ordinations by Marini in the 1730s and 1740s.
Luzzatto’s Yeshiva

Thus far, I have sought to demonstrate that Luzzatto’s investment in Kabbalah grew out of larger trends in Padua and northern Italy in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. He not only shared mystical interests with other young men in his native town, but he stood as the fourth-generation pedagogical scion of Moses Zacut’s accomplishments in Mantua. In the remainder of this chapter, I will detail the activities of Luzzatto’s group and the personalities involved. The goal of the former is to deepen our understanding of Luzzatto’s vision of a ‘Perfected Community’ and to portray its rudimentary development. The goal of the latter is to further situate Luzzatto among the expansive social network of kabbalists, and to show the varied interest in Kabbalah in the first half of the eighteenth century. Overall, I will argue that Luzzatto attempted to initiate an intellectual pietistic movement, a sort of Italian Hasidism, which served to accomplish the spiritual, social, and religious objectives he later promoted in Mesilat Yesharim.

In contrast to the dearth of documentation on Mevakshe Hashem, primary source material on the Luzzatto-led group is extensive. Dozens of letters to, from, and about Luzzatto are extant, dealing almost entirely with the controversy between 1729 and 1735. The names of his closest colleagues and other students are known, and many of their histories and ideas can be traced in manuscript codices, pinkasim, and printed books. Two of the most significant documents are a letter praising Luzzatto written in 1729 by a key figure in his circle, and the detailed regulations of the group written in 1731. Both are well-known and have been cited

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often in scholarly literature, but neither has been sufficiently analyzed in a social or religious context. In order to contextualize the documents – as well as Padua’s society of mystics and the controversy that relentlessly stirred around them – it is necessary to delve deeper into Luzzatto’s personality.

**Luzzatto’s Self-Conception**

The idealized vision in *Mesilat Yesharim* of a holy man serving God and uplifting the world around him was the author’s autobiographical sketch. The sagacious and adept *hasid* of the manuscript represented Luzzatto’s outlook and belief system. Yet, even the extraordinary description of Sanctity, wherein the actions of a man could miraculously sanctify materiality and a given species, does not capture Luzzatto’s impression of his own spiritual and, more importantly, historical uniqueness.

Either at the outset of re-forming the remnants of *Mevakshe Hashem* around himself, or within a year or two of his yeshiva’s establishment, Luzzatto identified himself as the final link in the long chain of cosmic revelation and redemption. His exceptional interest and adeptness in Kabbalah, the latter evidently confirmed by Padua’s other mystics in gathering around him, was bolstered by his reported personal communications with the divine. The biblical Moses, Shimon Bar Yohai of Zoharic fame, and the sixteenth-century master kabbalist Isaac Luria had initiated, sustained, and prepared the world for the ultimate redemption that Luzzatto understood was his divinely ordained task to complete. As he explained in a letter, Moses’ reception and giving of the Torah activated God’s manifestation in and perfection of the world:

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“Bar Yohai [more than one thousand years later] was worthy to be the vessel to continue this restoration, and so he composed the Zohar; but in truth only one fraction of illumination emerged from that level of restoration. It sustained Israel and the world during the period of exile. But the ultimate restoration should be a ceaseless flow... Yet after Bar Yohai the ‘other side’ came and sealed it off. Thus, [the Zohar] was only a temporary restoration... Until [Luria], when there was an illumination similar to that of Bar Yohai.... Now, in God’s desire to bestow good upon his people, He wishes to release another restoration similar to the Zohar...and in His kindness, He chose me.”

To Luzzatto, Bar Yohai’s and Luria’s celestial accomplishments succeeded in sustaining the world, but did not achieve the final redemption. Despite their piety and the greatness of their revelations, God had refrained from restoring the perfect order of creation; instead, for cosmic reasons, the destined moment of redemption coincided with Luzzatto’s divine revelations. Luzzatto’s identification of himself as the man through which the ultimate redemption would occur was not unique. Numerous messianic and mystical figures dotted the early modern period, and the notion that later teachings were as profound as ancient revelations had already emerged. According to the widely spread hagiography of Isaac Luria, Toledot AR”I, Luria was told that he would obtain a more profound understanding of Zoharic matters than Bar Yohai himself, just as Bar Yohai had revealed the secret elements of Torah to a world that knew only the worldly Torah of Moses.84

Luzzatto’s conviction in his unique cosmic personality was deep-rooted. As Tishby showed, Luzzatto believed that he was a reincarnation, or even the embodiment, of the biblical

Moses.\textsuperscript{85} In a kabbalistic culture that emphasized spirituality, individual identity was linked to the soul and its meta-physical history. Both the Zohar and \textit{Sefer ha-Bahir} discussed the transmigration of souls, as did some medieval commentators on the Bible.\textsuperscript{86} Hayim Vital, a crucial disseminator of Lurianic Kabbalah, devoted an entire book to the subject entitled \textit{Sha’ar Ha-Gilgulim}.\textsuperscript{87} While reincarnation was often relevant to questions of perfection and theodicy, Luzzatto’s conclusions about his own pre-history seems to have served as a confirmation of his special character relative to the world around him. His status as ‘Moses’ solidified personal notions of his validity and importance. In his private letters, Luzzatto casually referred to Moses without the ubiquitous venerating appellation “our teacher.”\textsuperscript{88} His writings not only refrained from self-doubt – he unabashedly described his own works as beautiful and wonderful\textsuperscript{89} – they radiated a powerful voice of authority. His confidence often led to profound declarations stated nonchalantly, as if disclosing celestial secrets were an everyday occurrence:

“\textit{I shall reveal to you yet another deep concept relating to this matter — the general essence of the world in all of its times.}”\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{85} Tishby lists the literature of the scholarly division on whether Luzzatto saw himself as the Messiah (“The Messianic Ferment in Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto’s Group,” in \textit{Messianic Mysticism}, 196, nn. 27–28). Dinur distinguished between one who penetrated the mystery of redemption and one who calculated redemption. Almanzi’s publication of extracts of \textit{Tikunim Hadashim} confirmed Luzzatto saw himself as living at ‘the end of days.’ Tishby, with the discovery of the entire \textit{Tikunim Hadashim}, showed extensive ‘tasks’ of Luzzatto the messianic mover. Meanwhile, Lachower was the first scholar who saw the importance of Luzzatto’s kabbalistic writings for understanding his character and literary activity. “In the period of his great awakening, Luzzatto regarded himself as a sort of reappearance in new clothing, or a new \textit{ibur} of the soul, as understood by Kabbalah, of ‘the faithful shepherd.’” Many of Luzzatto’s homilies on the messiahship of the biblical Moses were written “apparently in reference to his own name” (ibid., 198, citing F. Lachower, ‘\textit{Al gevul ha-yashan ve-he-hadash},’ 68).

\textsuperscript{86} See, for instance, \textit{Sefer ha-Bahir} 122, 155, 184, 185; Nahmanides on Genesis 38:8, Job 33:30; Menahem Recanati on Genesis 34:1; Bahya Ibn Pakudah on Genesis 4:25, Deuteronomy 33:6.

\textsuperscript{87} See Brian Ogren, \textit{Renaissance and Rebirth: Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah} (Leiden, 2009).

\textsuperscript{88} Chriqui, \textit{Igerot}, no. 50.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., no. 81, p. 242.

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Da’at Tevunot}, 154–155.
Luzzatto’s self-definition as the ultimate redeemer depended upon a cosmic outlook that unified spirituality and historicity. His conception of providence bridged the eternal, all-knowing realm of the divine and time- and space-bound humanity. Cosmic unity required the essence of the former to permeate the domain of the latter, and redemption would occur, in Luzzatto’s mind, through a combination of mystic ability and historical circumstance. He did not believe that he had attained the highest level of spirituality, only that his role as final redeemer depended upon his ability to capitalize on his (self-perceived) status as the world’s greatest mystical illuminator at the time that God had chosen to redeem it. Elsewhere, Luzzatto demonstrated sensitivity to broad concepts of time and evolution. In a letter to the Livorno rabbinate during an early stage of the controversy, he implored his detractors to recognize that Luria was not removed from their generation by an inconceivably lengthy millennium. Rather, Luria had died less than a century and half before Luzzatto had been born, and the Padua mystics could trace their kabbalistic lineage in master-disciple relationships almost directly to Luria and the Safed kabbalists. Historiographically, Luzzatto’s direct connection to Vitale and Zacut serves to answer more than his mere influences, for his descent from kabbalistic masters actually informed his historical self-conception. Luzzatto’s temporal placement of himself relative to Luria and his not-too-distant revelations bolstered his identity. Analyzing relationships between early modern kabbalists, and when possible their self-evaluations relative to each other, could enable scholars to trace the dissemination of abstract

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91 In letter to Bassan, Luzzatto stated: “Truthfully, I would require much more strength to repair the external than to repair the internal, but of course the ladder (siyag) of the Ari was far greater than mine, as was his level of perishut” (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 50, p. 164). On the surface, it appears that Luzzatto made a humble claim, but it may merely indicate that as the cosmic needs were different, so too were the redeemers different.

92 Ibid., no. 49, p. 159.
concepts of Kabbalah in specific cultural, social, and religious contexts. In so doing, the intangible structure of early modern Jewish mysticism could be understood in historical and even psychological terms.

To be sure, Luzzatto’s thought was not historicist. His historical consciousness was seamlessly and unchallengingly molded to his spiritual emphasis. It was not dependent upon chronology, per se, and is surprisingly similar to modern theoretical physics, where wormholes hypothetically enable time travel through the fabric of space-time. As evident in the quote above about Moses, Bar Yohai, Luria, and himself, Luzzatto distinguished historical eras according to their mystical rectifications. In *Derekh Hashem*, he portrayed an epic narrative of four historical-spiritual states of humanity in ascending order: one, the first two thousand years of existence, considered to be a period of desolation in which individuals could attempt to rectify sin; two, his own era, during which knowledge of God and retention of Torah was coupled with a lack of prophecy; three, the era of the First Temple, when prophecy existed on an individual level; and four, a future period when devekut would be attained easily. In this description, cosmology depended upon spirituality, and events in the past were on both higher and lower planes than his present circumstances.

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94 In a letter to Bassan, Luzzatto explained the difference between the tikun of the Prophets and the tikun of the Men of the Great Assembly, as they related to spiritual state of Primordial Adam before and after the first sin (Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 52, pp. 177–178).
95 *Derekh Hashem*, II:8.4.
Though clearly not historical, Luzzatto displayed an awareness of history that reflected a
general trend in contemporary European thought. In his seminal 1935 book, Paul Hazard
showed that the study of history figured centrally to every school of thought in the late
seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Invoking history, from whatever vantage point,
legitimized positions. More recently, Donald R. Kelley, synthesizing a massive body of
literature on early modern historiography, detailed various philosophical approaches to history
according to nationality. Whereas German thinkers championed the nobility, French scholars
sought to establish continuity between Rome and France, and English historians pursued a
great pre-history. For their part, Italian intellectuals celebrated a humanist approach and
attempted to bridge ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ histories. Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), for
instance, developed a theory of history that defined the former as time between Creation and
Moses, and divided the latter, which was all subsequent history, into five eras. Ludovico
Antonio Muratori (1672–1750), in addition to dealing with bibliography and historical
reconstruction, probed issues of freedom of thought in religious matters. While Luzzatto’s
historical consciousness did not rely on empirical evidence or give credence to the importance
of bibliographies and encyclopedias, it did vaguely resemble the humanism popular among
some Italian scholars, at least with respect to his emphasis on the individual and the society as

99 In a political contest between the Holy See and the Dukes of Este over the sovereignty of a district of Ferrara, Muratori supported the latter on the basis of historical sources.
a whole. It is possible that Luzzatto read Vico or Muratori, the latter of whom printed books in Padua,\(^{100}\) although general cultural trends may have been sufficiently strong to incline his thought, if only to a minor degree, towards history.

Luzzatto’s use of history paralleled his absorption, but appropriation, of contemporary science and literature. For instance, in his drama *La-Yesharim Tehilah*, Luzzatto adopted the form of the classic sixteenth-century pastoral tragicomedy *Il Pastor Fido*,\(^{101}\) but replaced the intentional frivolousness of the original with a call for redemption, truth, and righteousness. Similarly, although Luzzatto incorporated contemporary scientific thought and discovery into his writings, including for instance the concepts of surgery and magnetism in *Mesilat Yesharim*, he steadfastly adhered to Aristotelian cosmology despite the prevalence of the Copernican theory and the contemporary findings of Isaac Newton.\(^{102}\) To Luzzatto, the observable universe was the manifestation of the cosmos: it was integral to the creation, inherently beautiful, and was not to be avoided, but science – or, for that matter, history and literature – was nevertheless the mere external element of creation, and not nearly as profound as the spiritual core.\(^{103}\) Science could serve as analogies of the spiritual, but kabbalistic study, and individualized mystical revelation, enabled ideal Jewish living.

As such, Luzzatto’s self-conception – an amalgamation of the mystical, historical, and cultural – diverges from current scholarly notions of conflicting systems of early modern Jewish

\(^{100}\) *Anecdota græca* (Padua, 1709); *Anecdota Latina ex Ambrosianæ Bibliothecæ codicibus* (Padua, 1713).


\(^{102}\) Had Luzzatto been interested, he surely could have been exposed to Newton’s discoveries. The latter died in 1727 and his writings were published in Amsterdam prior to Luzzatto’s arrival.

\(^{103}\) *Derekh Hashem*, II:7.3–4.
thought. In his *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*, David Ruderman elucidated a range of intellectual or spiritual viewpoints on science in early modern Italy: one that advocated the integration of studying science and nature with Jewish theology; one that accepted science but rejected philosophy and Aristotelian metaphysics; and one whereby mystics steeped in Kabbalah shunned scientific inquiry.\(^{104}\) Similarly, in his seminal articles on the spread of Lurianic Kabbalah in Italy, Moshe Idel posited a clash in rabbinic culture between traditional, rationalist rabbis and mystico-messianic rabbis in the early modern period.\(^{105}\) In the context of Luzzatto’s perspective, and that of his associates, many of whom earned or pursued degrees at the University of Padua, these portrayals fail to account for an even more complex intellectual environment in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Ultimately, Luzzatto sought to unify every aspect of life. He lived within his cultural environment, and was unwilling to separate intellectual or communal spheres. Rather than conceiving of spiritual unification only in abstract terms of the Godhead, Luzzatto intended for cosmic unity to be manifest in society, a concept that epitomized his self-conception as a central figure in the redemption. For just as God was one, so too would world Jewry be one, embodying a unified vision presented by a single divinely inspired voice. In fact, in *Derekh Hashem*, Luzzatto proclaimed monarchy as the ideal political system, rather than the republicanism under which he lived in both Venice and Amsterdam.\(^{106}\) The reality of

\(^{104}\) See Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, chs. 4–6.


\(^{106}\) *Derekh Hashem*, II:3.1. After describing man’s task in battling his evil urge, faced with a specific challenge and judged from the heavens, Luzzatto wrote: “This situation can be compared to a government, where the king’s
monarchical despotism aside, Luzzatto reasoned that the physical world should reflect the creation’s spiritual structure of God exercising absolute sovereignty over his angelic subjects.\textsuperscript{107} In essence, according to Luzzatto, Moses, Bar Yohai, Luria, and Luzzatto himself, along with other righteous men in each generation, were meant to embody divine revelation as absolute human authority figures. What makes Luzzatto’s theorized self-conception and socialized mysticism exceptional is two-fold: one, rather than failing to grab the attention of anyone, his efforts were supported and adopted by a generation of young kabbalists in Padua; and two, his mystico-messianic vision, which placed himself at the center of the cosmic redemption, called for all men to undertake self-perfection and actually required joint effort to establish a perfected community.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{107} Although he did not write explicitly about the political ‘reality’ of the messianic era, Luzzatto presumably conceived of the establishment of the Davidic Dynasty as a perfect reflection and embodiment of God’s absolute rule over humanity. Was Luzzatto influenced by Enlightenment thought with respect to enlightened despotism?\textsuperscript{108} Tishby claimed that he broke from previous historiography by arguing that there is clear evidence that Luzzatto and his group were active messianists (see “Features of the Shabatean Movement and the Portrayal of Shabetai Tsevi in the Writings of Luzzatto and his Disciples,” in \textit{Messianic Mysticism}, 254–288 [originally published as “Kave ha-tenuah ha-shabeta’it –demuto shel Shabetai Tsevi be-kitve Ramhal ve-talmidav,” in \textit{Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson}, eds. Menahem Ben-Sasson, Robert Bonfil, and Joseph R. Hacker (Jerusalem, 1989), 687–715]). He certainly dealt with it directly for the first time and advanced scholarship on mystical messianism tremendously. However, messianism, if only on a tacit level, was part and parcel of Jewish religious expression, and previous scholars were uninterested in stressing Luzzatto’s messianism but would not have denied it in my opinion.
Revealing Revelation

As summer was coming to a close in 1729 and a new Jewish year was on the horizon, Jekutiel ben Leib Gordon, a Vilna native studying medicine at the University of Padua, sat down to write two letters. One letter was addressed to Rabbi Joshua Heschel, av bet din of Vilna and an in-law of the distinguished and acerbic scholar Jacob Emden. The second letter was sent to Mordecai Jaffe in Vienna, a learned businessman whom Gordon did not know personally. The letters are not identical, but they similarly relate Gordon’s amazement and excitement over what he believed he had encountered in Padua: a holy and exceedingly humble man, who was a reincarnation of the talmudic sage Akiva ben Joseph. More impressively, Gordon wrote, this “young man” was the recipient of a magid, “a holy and tremendous angel who reveals wondrous mysteries to him.”

The existence of a magid was extraordinary but not unheard of among early modern kabbalists. The Spanish kabbalist Joseph Taitatsak was said to have received revelations from a magid prior to the Iberian expulsions. The great Safed kabbalists Moses Cordovero and Hayim

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109 Jekutiel’s family name is known from the medical document quoted in chapter two of this dissertation (originally published by David Kaufmann’s “Contributions a la biographie de Mose Hayyim Luzzatto, Yequetiel Gordon et Mose Hages” [cited above]). Also, in MS Oxford Heb. f. 120, Israel Hezekiah Treves wrote “the learned physician our honored teacher, R. Jekutiel Gordon of Vilna” (Tishby, “How Luzzatto’s Kabbalistic Writings were Disseminated in Poland and Lithuania,” in Messianic Mysticism, 453 [the Hebrew article was originally published as “Darkhe ha-fatsatam shel kitve kabalah le-Ramhal be-Polin u-ve-Lita,” Kiryat Sefer 45 (1970): 127–154; with addenda: “Sefer Mesilat Yesharim, mahadurat Zolkva tak-kha”v,” in ibid., 300, and “Havharot le-he’arot be-inyene Ramhal ve-R’ Yekutiel Gordon me-Vilna,” in ibid., 628].

110 Jekutiel followed the example of other members of his family. Aaron Gordon was at Padua in the first half of the 1690s, and upon returning home he was appointed Court Physician to King Augustus II (the Strong) of Poland (Shatzky, 446, citing P. Kon, “One of the earliest Jewish physicians,” Vivo-Bletter 1 [1930]: 53–61). See also, N. M. Gelber, “Le-toledot ha-rofe’im ha-Yehudim be-Polin ba-me’ah XVIII (=Per la storia dei medici ebrei in Polonia nel secolo XVIII),” in Shai la-Yeshayahu (Tel-Aviv, 1956), 355, n. 23. Jekutiel Gordon is the only Gordon listed in Modena and Morpurgo’s catalog.

111 Chriqui, Igerot, nos. 6, 7.1; Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 202. The original letters were not preserved. Gordon’s letter to Jaffe was copied, presumably accurately, in a letter of the Venetian rabbinate to Bassan, after Moshe Hagiz had sent a copy of the letter to Venice (Hagiz’s letter is paraphrased by Almanzi, “Toledot R’ Mosheh Hayim Lutsato me-Padowah,” 149–150). The exact dates of the letters are unclear, although it appears that the letter to Joshua Heschel was written on August 30, 1729 (=5 Elul 5489).
Vital discussed the essence of a *magid*, and Joseph Karo was reputedly the recipient of such a heavenly voice. Karo identified his *magid* with the *Shekhinah*, the final *sefirah* of the kabbalistic tree, and considered it as the embodiment of the Mishnah.\(^\text{112}\) Reports of *magidim* stem primarily from early modern kabbalistic circles, and their descriptions vary. Karo’s apparently appeared to him while he was awake, while others passed secrets to the pious in dream states or in the form of automatic writing.\(^\text{113}\) The nature of a given mystic-*magid* relationship reflected the elevated state of the individual and the importance of the message. Thus, a verbal communication was deemed to be of greater value, or at least an indication of the recipient’s exceptional ability, than a textual one. Regardless of the particulars, eighteenth-century rabbinic Jewry generally ascribed cosmic (and possibly messianic) importance to the existence of a *magid*.

The bulk of Gordon’s communiqué described Luzzatto’s relationship with the *magid* and other heavenly beings. The *magid*, Gordon wrote, imparted secret knowledge by speaking through Luzzatto’s mouth, though Gordon and Luzzatto’s other disciples were unable to hear the divine voice. It conveyed the will of the Heavens to this “man of God,” and aided him in composing many works, including a Psalter and a new version of the Zohar, as well as a collection of seventy distinct interpretations of the final verse of the Torah. Gordon also explained that Luzzatto was visited by Elijah, Metatron, and the souls of Adam, Abraham, the Messiah, and others. Furthermore, he was aware of all men’s previous incarnations, as well as


the tikunim they were born to rectify. In short, Gordon eagerly announced, “nothing is hidden from him... He knows of all that happens under the sun, all the events of the past and the root of all things.”

Two additional rabbis later testified to having witnessed Luzzatto’s experiences under the influence of the magid. Raphael Israel Kimhi, a Safed emissary who became a staunch supporter of Luzzatto, contended that “God has found him worthy and sent an angel before him.... This is not a natural phenomenon.... I saw with my own eyes...feats impossible for the human mind and hand.”

In fact, kabbalistic manuscripts in Luzzatto’s hand presumably written in a magidic-influenced state are distinct from his other writings, with words appearing messier, more compact, and seemingly without awareness of the borders of the page.

Meanwhile, David Finzi – rabbi in Mantua, student of Zacut, and Luzzatto’s future father-in-law – also reported witnessing Luzzatto in a heightened spiritual condition: “he acquired wings by means of a certain yihud (kabbalistic intention); he had a voice, a voice came to him from a magid.” Luzzatto himself explained that the being would speak through his mouth in a voice distinct from his own, leaving him trembling in awe.

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114 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 8. On Kimhi, see Avraham Yaari, Sheluhe Erets Yisrael (Jerusalem, 1951), 849–850.
115 Prior to living in Mantua, Finzi had been a rabbi in Alessandria, Vitale’s place of residence, and in Mantua, he had joined Zacut’s kabbalistic society and later assumed its leadership. As chief rabbi of Mantua, Finzi advocated a life of piety in the ghetto, condemning widespread gambling and sexual immorality (A.C.Ma., nos. 87.26 and 94.9; see also broadsides in VTL, nos. G007, G014). He formed a bond with other pietists who supported Luzzatto, including Judah Mendola — in the spring of 1742, Mendola’s daughter Deborah married Benjamin Vitta Finzi, son of David Finzi (A.C.Ma., no. 108.23). Upon Finzi’s death in January 1735, the Mantua Jewish community sent a circular to many communities in the Italian Peninsula; they received replies at least from Reggio, Modena, Finale, Verona, Padua, Venice, Casale, Alessandria, Vercelli, Torino, Florence, Livorno, Ancona, Pesaro, Senigallia, Rovigo, Trieste, Rome, and Ferrara (Simonsohn, History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua, 460, n. 433).
116 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 57. On Luzzatto’s use of yihudim and on subsequent revelations by their aid, see Meir Benayahu, “‘Ha-magid’ shel Ramhal,” 300–314.
117 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 41.
In his letter to Jaffe, Gordon reiterated several times that these matters were known to no one outside Luzzatto’s circle. The purpose of the letter, he explicitly stated, was to provide the letter’s recipient with an opportunity to learn of the state of his own soul and the special rectification it required. Gordon himself, he informed Jaffe, had learned from Luzzatto the great secret as to why he was in Padua to study under him, “for there is nothing without a cause.” Having arrived in Padua only a year earlier to study medicine at the University, Gordon was quickly and completely drawn into Luzzatto’s circle. In the spring of 1730, Gordon wrote to Bassan that he had reduced his study of secular literature to only twice weekly, because he was consumed with copying Luzzatto’s works. He had not studied the wonders of Kabbalah in Poland, he explained, and it had since changed his life.\(^{118}\) When Gordon thought to forsake his medical studies in order to devote himself entirely to Torah study with Luzzatto, the latter informed him that the *magid* decried such a move, directing Gordon to “take hold of the one but do not withdraw your hand from the other.”\(^{119}\) The *magid’s* insistence that Gordon pursue a medical degree reflected Luzzatto’s view that “nothing is without cause.”\(^{120}\) Though the world functioned according to some hierarchy, whereby Torah study superseded scientific inquiry and certain men like Luzzatto were on higher spiritual levels than others, all of existence had a purpose to fulfill. Gordon was required to maintain his medical studies while simultaneously pursuing cosmic restoration with Luzzatto. Elsewhere, Gordon described the

\(^{118}\) Ibid., no. 44.  
\(^{119}\) Ecclesiastes 7:18.  
\(^{120}\) “He also told me about my soul and my *tikun* that I was to perform” (Chriqui, *Igerot*, nos. 6, 7.1).
wonders of Kabbalah. Aided by his medical studies, and presumably the doors they would open upon completion of his degree, Gordon would be able to help spread Luzzatto’s teachings.121

The extant copy of Gordon’s letter to Jaffe does not specify the latter’s spiritual purpose, nor does it give an indication as to why Jaffe was fortunate enough to receive the attention of Luzzatto’s magid. Furthermore, while Gordon presumably knew Joshua Heschel in Vilna, which would reasonably explain his excited letter to the rabbi of his native community, he had no apparent connection to Jaffe. Considering the group’s secretive nature, as attested to by Gordon himself, why was the letter sent to not one person outside of Padua, but two? If no one outside Luzzatto’s immediate circle knew of his unique experiences, why was the matter not first brought to the attention of those closest to him, such as Bassan, Marini, or even Judah Mendola in Mantua?

According to Tishby, and maintained by Carlebach, Gordon’s dispatch “was certainly not written on impulse by an enthusiastic admirer but was planned in the group to spread the first news that the Redemption was being prepared in Padua.”122 The disbanding of Mevakshe Hashem and relocation to the Luzzatto household coincided with or stemmed from a concerted effort of Padua’s kabbalists to bring about the cosmic redemption through study and contemplation. Every action of Luzzatto and his closest associates was deliberate. Members of Luzzatto’s inner circle sat in a particular configuration, and study of various subjects was allotted specific time. Moreover, permission was required from Luzzatto to speak of the secrets

121 This line of thought extended throughout the confraternity: Valle earned a living as a physician, having earned a degree in 1713; Isaac ben Sabbatai Marini was a student at the University between 1716–1721, and composed a poems in honor of friends who earned a doctorate (VTL, no. P010).
122 Tishby, “The Messianic Ferment in Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 209, n. 93; Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 204–205.
revealed within his *bet midrash*. The latter component would seem to indicate that Gordon could not send the letter without Luzzatto’s consent, although it is possible that the clause was added to the group’s regulations after the reception of Gordon’s letter proved contentious. Regardless, after Jaffe received the letter with alarm and alerted the heresy hunter Moses Hagiz in Hamburg, which set off a maelstrom of controversy in Venice and other Italian cities, Luzzatto expressed neither displeasure nor surprise. He merely conveyed his desire to discuss the *magid* with Vitale,¹²³ and disavowed responsibility for the letter by stating meekly that he “did not see the letter at all before it was dispatched.”¹²⁴ The group’s confidentiality and his own humility notwithstanding, there is no indication that Luzzatto censured Gordon for sending the letter, while the whirlwind that surrounded Luzzatto and his fellowship seems to have had no negative effect on the group. In fact, rather than inciting internal conflict, sedition, or crisis, the controversy may have inspired deeper camaraderie.

To be sure, there is no direct proof of Tishby’s contention, and it is for lack of evidence that the impetus for and meaning of Gordon’s letters remains unclear. Of course, the arguments that support Tishby’s theory are valid in and of themselves, and indicate that, independently of Gordon’s intention in sending the letters, Luzzatto and his compatriots sought to activate, or believed themselves to be a part of, a movement. While *Mesilat Yesharim* emphasized individualistic quietism, the regulations of his group indicate broader social involvement. From the date of Gordon’s letters until Luzzatto relocated to Amsterdam, the group seemed to inspire increasing numbers of people within the ghetto — a small group in

¹²³ Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 15.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 34.1. It is possible that Luzzatto did not order the letter to be sent, but that once the information was out he believed it necessary or an opportunity to spread the word.
total, but significantly larger than the handful of original members that made up Mevakshe Hashem.

As such, an additional factor related to Tishby’s theory, which may in fact make it relevant beyond the confines of scholarship on Luzzatto, is Ruderman’s labeling of Padua as an intellectual center for European Jewry as a whole. Despite the lack of tangible evidence of specific networks of Jewish physicians and thinkers in the early modern period coming out of Padua, it is feasible, considering the nature of Luzzatto’s group, Tishby’s assertion, and Ruderman’s theory, that Luzzatto and Gordon concluded that they could initiate the spread of their movement either through relationships connected to Padua or through the legitimacy ascribed to the Padua Jewish community. Revealing any and all networks connected to Paduan Jewry, as well as further biographical research on Gordon, Jaffe, and others, may provide concrete reasons for the unusual manner in which Luzzatto’s special powers, so to speak, were publicly revealed. Not only would it shed light on a significant moment in the life of a man who seemingly acted with great deliberation, but it could also reveal the links between the spread of kabbalistic ideas, the widespread revelation of a specific divine-human interaction, and the inspiration of messianic movements in the early modern period.

A Perfecting Community

In June 1731, Luzzatto wrote to Bassan informing him of a set of regulations that he and members of his kabbalistic fellowship had drawn up.125 Luzzatto frequently communicated

125 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 86. The regulations were first published by Ginzburg in his biography of Luzzatto in 1931 and again in his two-volume Igerot Ramhal u-vene doro. More recently, it was republished by Mordecai Chriqui in his single-volume work of the same name, in which he corrected Ginzburg’s reading of the manuscripts, added notes,
with Bassan through letters, sharing personal thoughts or happenings with his former teacher and sometimes commenting on current events. In this particular communication, Luzzatto referred to the collection of talmudic lore then known as ‘En Yisrael, a work first compiled and printed in the sixteenth century and one, with its emphasis on personality and morality, that inspired Luzzatto to compose a short commentary. The bulk of the letter, however, concerned Luzzatto’s interpretation of a new enactment of Church authorities to confiscate rabbinic books. Scholars have long cited 1731 as a year in which house-to-house searches of Jewish homes were conducted in the Papal States, though it has been relegated as a late and relatively insignificant occurrence of Church censorship that had begun and had been most oppressive in the mid-sixteenth century. Nevertheless, the edict was significant to those Jews immediately affected by it, and Luzzatto argued that it was indicative of the imminent redemption in which he played an integral role. He associated the present confiscation and burning of Jewish books with the tikun of the biblical red heifer, which was expected to appear in the End of Days and, through slaughtering and burning, enable the People of Israel to be spiritually cleansed. Thus, Luzzatto wrote to Bassan, he and his compatriots were investing themselves in unceasing and unified efforts to spur the redemptive process forward.

and bolded sentences and phrases in the letters that he deemed important. Two versions are extant, with a significant number of minor variations. The version published by Ginzburg and Chriqui is part of the large cache of Luzzatto material in JTS MS 8520a, no. 3. The second version is found in Almanzi’s personal copy of his biography on Luzzatto (JTS SHF 1987:6). Almanzi acquired the copy from Joshua Heschel Schorr of Brody, publisher of the especially critical maskilic journal He-Haluts in Brody, 1852–1889.

126 ‘En Yisrael became the name of the collection after its original title, ‘En Ya’akov, was placed on the Index Librorum Prohibitorum (Index of Prohibited Books). For a study of the book, see Marjorie Lehman, The En Yaakov: Jacob ibn Habib’s Search for Faith in the Talmudic Corpus (Wayne State University Press, 2011). Luzzatto mentioned the commentary he composed on the work in Chriqui, Igerat, no. 81.
In the spring of 1731, Luzzatto and several associates articulated the confraternity’s intentions and activities. Whereas Gordon’s announcement two years prior had expressed the thought and character of the group, the protocols of 1731 officially established their purpose. The document fixed the cosmic status of each respective member, and detailed the manner in which they were required to interact and use their time. Furthermore, it set the tone for the lifestyle of the participants, and, in turn, offered an alternative communal structure than that offered by contemporary rabbinic and lay leadership.

Consisting of a short manifesto followed by three sections, Luzzatto’s regulations are one of the most extraordinary documents in the history of early modern Jewish confraternities. The first section detailed in ten steps the procedures of Luzzatto’s core mystical group, and was signed by seven men, including Gordon and Jacob Forte. The second section set the guidelines for another, less engaged but equally committed group of students, and was signed by nine men, including Luzzatto’s brother Simon. The third part, larger than the other two, explained the purpose of their work, regulated the decorum of the yeshiva, and provided the study schedule. Whether each member of the group received a copy of the document after having signed it is unclear. What is certain, however, is that the signatories of the contract were expected to adhere to the rules of conduct. In turn they counted themselves as integral parts of the group’s holy work.

The initial statement of the document set the tone with language that evoked the Bible: “These are the elements of the covenant – the decrees, the statutes, and the teachings – that the holy colleagues have come together to proscribe and uphold for the sake of the Holy One (לשם יודה קודשא בריך והא ושכינתה). We do so in order to be as one man, to perform this work,
the service of God ("תבורה ה"). In addition to establishing a covenant (ברית), the group members committed themselves to adhering to “statutes” (חוקים), a word in rabbinic Judaism that designated biblical laws commanded by God without apparent rationale (such as the red heifer). Luzzatto placed himself at the core of the confraternity, and his statutes were to be followed as though they were decrees directly from God. Yet, the covenant and performance of statutes were not intended to replace the cosmic bond between God and Israel, or the statutes found in the Torah. With several men wholly committed to Luzzatto’s way to the divine, the group as a whole would attain spiritual heights that would enable them to act in cosmic unity, as “one man.”

Their covenant represented the unification of a group of like-minded men, though to Luzzatto specifically it stood as a necessary component of life. “When associations are forged below,” he wrote elsewhere, “the light of the covenant shines among them and unites them... [I]n the end there will be peace in the world and all creatures will form one association to worship the only King.”

The group sought to accomplish its mission of serving God as “one man” using the Zohar as their primary means. On a daily basis, beginning after morning prayers until the evening prayers, the men would take turns studying the Zohar, so that the mystical text was absorbed uninterrupted in Luzzatto’s bet midrash. Exceptions to this rule were the Sabbath, the Festivals, and the afternoons preceding these days, as well as Purim, the Ninth of Av, and the day preceding it. The mystics deemed studying the Zohar of supreme importance,

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127 See Nehemiah 8:1.
128 Luzzatto, Adir ba-Marom (Warsaw, 1885), 19.
129 Chiquiri’s transcription of this document incorrectly refers to the הבית המדרש", when the document actually states הבית התפילה - the bet midrash.
130 The document copied by Almanzi does not include Purim or the eighth of Av.
presumably more than other kabbalistic writings and certainly more than Bible, Talmud, and halakhah. The emphasis on the mystical, however, did not lead Luzzatto and his compatriots to trump the importance of normative Jewish practice, which is why study of the Zohar ceased on special days throughout the year. Regardless of their cosmic goals and even accomplishments, Purim continued to require special rituals and a festive meal, while the Ninth of Av warranted only mourning for the destruction of the Temple. The latter factor may indicate that Luzzatto did not believe that he was in fact in the midst of the redemption itself, as had Sabbatai Tsevi, when he suspended fasting on the Ninth of Av and converted the day to one of celebration.\footnote{See G. Scholem, \textit{Sabbatai Sevi: the Mystical Messiah 1626–1676}, trans. by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton, 1973), 599.}

The first set of regulations, consisting of ten clauses and directed at a group of seven men who made up the core of Luzzatto’s circle, is as follows. The first established that group members were not taking vows to participate or to perform this work. Participants’ concern for committing a transgression was so great that the only feasible indiscretion in the forging of this contract – breaking a vow to adhere to these rules – was forsworn upfront. Second, study should not cease until the next man in the rotation had arrived to assume the responsibilities, which meant that one’s individual needs were subservient to that of the larger group. Third, expanding their sense of unity, if one of the group members was elsewhere, his colleagues should imagine as though he were with them. Fourth, this study was not for the sake of receiving reward, but was instead only for the sake of redeeming the Shekhinah and the people of Israel. That is, despite challenges, Luzzatto and his colleagues would commit themselves to selflessly serving God, using their God-given talents and abilities for a larger and selfless
purpose. The fifth clause, recognizing the difficulty of the fourth, served as a disclaimer to the Heavens that they intended to fully accomplish their goals despite the possibility of violations and mistakes. Sixth, in addition to the study of the Zohar, the teachings of “our master Moses Hayim” would be imparted\textsuperscript{132} half of the day. This clause, the document’s first indication that Luzzatto was involved in this confraternity let alone the central figure, reflected an expectation of devotion to Luzzatto and the knowledge he communicated. The seventh clause stated that group members could arrange for someone else to learn in their stead when necessary. This likely stemmed from Luzzatto’s recognition of group members’ practical responsibilities, which reflected both his complex and relatively moderate social outlook, as well as his desire to retain the busy and perhaps less-committed men he inspired to join his mystical fellowship. Eighth, group members should join together to study day and night, a clause that seems to have encouraged additional voluntary study. The ninth article echoed the fourth, stating that the intent of the study was in no way for personal gain nor for the rectification of their own sins, but rather for the redemption of the Shekhinah and of Israel. Tenth, there would be no fixed times of study for each individual, but rather each man would come when he was ready and able. The last clause expressed faith in the men involved that even without a study schedule the goal of constant study of the Zohar was attainable.

Whereas the first set of rules was designed for the group’s core members, Luzzatto aimed the second series of guidelines, also ten in number,\textsuperscript{133} at a peripheral group of students. The outer circle, Luzzatto commented elsewhere, consisted of “fine young men,” each of whom

\textsuperscript{132} The JTS document states שהוא לומד בישיבה, while the Almanzi document states לאומד חדושים.

\textsuperscript{133} It is possible that the two sets of ten were meant to reflect the kabbalistic system of ten Sefirot, although Almanzi’s copy of the document included eleven and eight rules, respectively.
studied the Torah and mystical works “according to his capacity.” In contrast to the practicality of the initial regulations, the second set is noticeably more descriptive about the ideal way of living. The reason is clear, for although each of these rules could benefit the group’s most adept mystics, the expanded nature of the second set of instructions stemmed from Luzzatto’s intention to inspire new men to seek and attain higher aspirations. Correspondence indicates that the yeshiva maintained a separate room for easier, non-mystical study, and it is likely that Luzzatto composed Da’at Tevunot, a mystically philosophical explanation of some of Maimonides’ principles of faith, for the sake of initiating fresh members into his circle.

Although there is no indication in Luzzatto’s treatises that he sought to influence Padua’s youth specifically, there was a generational component latent in his activities and in the controversy that swirled around him. At the time of composing the group’s protocols, Luzzatto was only twenty-four years old, and while Valle, Forte, Romanin and others were older than Luzzatto, some participants were even younger. The group as a whole can be said to have belonged to a single younger generation than that of the authority figures, and Luzzatto seems to have relished his group’s collective pursuit of morality at a time when the elders in Padua and elsewhere decried the corruptible nature of youngsters. Elliott Horowitz has written about the growing sense of adolescence among Jews in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and communal minute books and printed broadsides each point to contemporary concerns of

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134 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 24.
135 Ibid., nos. 14, 40.
rabbinic and lay leadership about youth culture.\textsuperscript{136} Sabbath transgression, theft, revelry, and even violence in the Padua ghetto, which undoubtedly affected Jewish youth, while sources from Mantua and Ferrara refer to youth rebellion and sexual immorality.\textsuperscript{137} As the 1731 regulations show, Luzzatto sought to uplift the lives of his fellow youth by offering a pietistic lifestyle and kabbalistic meaning. During Hanukkah in 1729, he had already rejoiced in a letter to Vitale that “the young men who had previously walked in the ways of youth’s vanities, now, thank God, have turned from the evil way to return to the Lord.”\textsuperscript{138} After the controversy had started, Forte associated the group’s collective youth with both moral purity and divine sanction of the generation: “God knows and Israel will know that from our youth until now we have walked in His ways.”\textsuperscript{139}

The second set of directives was as follows. First, foreshadowing Luzzatto’s elaborate discussion in \textit{Mesilat Yesharim}, the purpose of the group’s work was to serve God truthfully, completely, and with love. Luzzatto not only sought to genuinely inspire, he required men who were already sincerely motivated towards a shared religious ideal. Second, ideally each man

\textsuperscript{136} See Horowitz, “The Worlds of Jewish Youth in Europe,” 92. Horowitz points out that in Mantua in 1740, for instance, it was forbidden to employ youth under the age of eighteen; previously, in matters such as betrothal and concluding education, the age of thirteen had been the cut-off. Horowitz defines “youth” in the “modern sense as the period in life between childhood and maturity” (Horowitz, \textit{Jewish Youth Confraternity}, 37, note 2). See also Ottavia Niccoli, “Rituals of Youth: Love, Play and Violence in Tridentine Bologna,” in \textit{The Premodern Teenager: Youth in Society 1150–1650}, ed. Eisenbichler (Toronto, 2002), 75–94.

\textsuperscript{137} Horowitz, “The Worlds of Jewish Youth in Europe,” 111–112; Weinstein, \textit{Juvenile Sexuality, Kabbalah, and Catholic Reformation in Italy}, 11–12; Simonsohn, \textit{History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua}, 543–547, 668 (see A.C.Ma., no. 94. 9 for a document from David Finzi, Luzzatto’s future father-in-law, regarding rules of morality in comportment with sexual behavior in the ghetto). Immanuel Löw “pointed out that there were various types of youth societies which were created out of a sense of resentment and revolt on the part of the younger generation which believed it was discriminated against by the older men” (Jacob Rader Marcus, \textit{Communal Sick-Care in the German Ghetto} [Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1947], 154, citing Löw, \textit{Gesammelte Schriften} 2 [Bäba, 1890], 153); Low did not document his material, and Marcus remarked that it is difficult to tell whether he was referring to the eighteenth or nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{138} Chriqui, \textit{Igerot}, no. 15.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., no. 131, p. 356.
would serve God in a state of spiritual cleanliness, performing mitzvoth with alacrity and with
the intention of uplifting the Shekhinah. The main concern was not to create a complex and
intricate theological structure, but rather to inform the observance of the mitzvoth with
meaning and depth.\textsuperscript{140} Whereas Luzzatto left virtually no halakhic rulings, he produced a huge
oeuvre of varying genres intent on inspiring an altruistic service of God, including a prayer
meant to be recited before ritual slaughter.\textsuperscript{141} Third, each man was required to love his
neighbor and comport himself in friendship and benevolence. There was no room for anger or
hatred, the clause continued, because relating to others in love and peace is the will of God.
For the mystical adept, the objective was to witness the divine in everything. Fourth, the
secrets revealed within the \textit{bet midrash} were not to be imparted to others without express
permission from Luzzatto. It is this clause that led Tishby to conclude that Gordon sent his
letter of ‘revelation’ as per Luzzatto’s instructions, though, as mentioned, such a conclusion
requires one to assume that the 1731 regulations were already in place in 1729.\textsuperscript{142} Fifth, all
students should endeavor to attend study sessions of the Zohar each and every day at whatever
time they are available. The wording of this clause reflected the lower level of commitment
and availability of Luzzatto’s outer circle, and, like the seventh article of the first set of
regulations, it acknowledged the practicalities of life. Nonetheless, its inclusion speaks to the

\begin{enumerate}
\item JTS MS 6438, fol. 38r; published in Chriqui, \textit{Tefilot le-Ramhal} (Jerusalem: Mekhon Ramhal, 1995), 509. For
Luzzatto’s mystical thought on animal slaughter, see \textit{Adir ba-Marom}, 294–295.
\item Gershon D. Hundert mentions the care of Israel Baal Shem Tov, and other Hasidim, for kosher slaughter,
particularly as some Sabbatianists tolerated non-kosher meat (Hundert, \textit{Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth
Century: A Geneology of Modernity} [Berkeley, 2004], 166).
\item Moreover, Almanzi’s copy states that permission may also be granted by Gordon, so even if Tishby was correct
about the regulations having been written by 1729 (for which we have no evidence), perhaps the Almanzi version
was more accurate, or at least relevant at some point, and Gordon approved his own action.
\end{enumerate}
expansive social nature of Luzzatto’s yeshiva. Rather than acting solely as a secretive, secluded, small-scale mystical society, Luzzatto and his closest compatriots encouraged a wider audience to commit their lives to accomplishing something of cosmic importance.

To be sure, the sixth clause showed that members not only conceived of themselves as separate from the community at large – itself an indication of the limits of contemporary communal system and authoritative structure – but expressed a distinct collective identity. Following the Sabbath’s afternoon prayer service in the bet midrash, all group members were required to attend Luzzatto’s study session. On the day of rest, in the late hour, in the quietude of twilight, there was a demand for group unity. Moreover, the clause seems to indicate that Luzzatto’s circle did not partake of the third meal of the Sabbath (se’udah shelishit), which was ordinarily eaten between the afternoon and evening prayers. Although halakhic texts established the meal as an obligation, an idea stemming from the Zohar proffered the possibility that study of mystical texts in its stead could fulfill the commandment if the individual sufficiently comprehended the kabbalistic meaning of the meal. The idea was ascribed only to Shimon bar Yohai in the Zohar and was otherwise abstract, but Luzzatto, who was undoubtedly aware of the Zohar’s view of se’udah shelishit, apparently believed himself to be on equal footing with Shimon bar Yohai in this regard. Moreover, if the entire assembly

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143 It is difficult to know whether this referred to the bet midrash in the Luzzatto household or that in the Ashkenazic synagogue.

144 The law was codified by Maimonides in Shabbat 30:9, and in Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayim 291. In the seventeenth century, Isaiah Horowitz’s Shene luhot ha-berit (Emor, ele mo’ade) cited the Zohar that Shimon bar Yohai studied Ezekiel’s vision of the heavenly chariot (Ma’aseh Merkavah) in lieu of the third meal when ‘Erev Pesah fell on the Sabbath. Hayim Palaggi in his Kaf ha-Hayim (444:18) explained that Rashbi fulfilled his obligation to eat the meal because he understood its kabbalistic meaning and thereby accomplished the purpose of the commandment. Palaggi ruled that Rashbi’s ability was unique and that eating the third meal remained an obligation.
refrained from the meal, then Luzzatto may have believed that his abilities were transferable to others linked to him — akin to his description in the closing chapter of *Mesilat Yesharim* of the sanctified man manifestly uplifting the human species through a given act. In commanding all members of his yeshiva to attend his Torah lecture at the close of the Sabbath, Luzzatto seems to have intended to use the moment as an opportunity for the group to function collectively as “one man” (his end goal as stated in the first sentence of the protocols). If my reading of this clause is correct, then the fourth article of this second set of regulations – forbidding members to discuss specific group activities – is quite understandable, for abandoning *se’udah shelishit* abrogated normative Jewish law.

With Luzzatto’s disciples forming an identity distinct from the general community, the seventh clause urged members of the group to rebut steadfastly the derision and mocking of others. Including this article in the second set of regulations reflected the challenges experienced by the outer circle. New adherents or less vigilant members still heavily engaged with society at large were likely to face distrust, contempt, or criticism from people, including family members, outside of the yeshiva. The sole answer to mockery, as Luzzatto presented in *Mesilat Yesharim*, was to intensify their service of God, which necessitated nullifying personal desires and selfish conceptions. Students in the outer circle suffered that challenge within the yeshiva as well as out of it, because, as the eighth article specified, the group’s inner and outer circles occasionally functioned separately. If the former required sole use of the *bet midrash* for some private meeting, the latter was required to vacate willfully without expressing grievances. Acknowledging human frailty, Luzzatto directly addressed the problem of jealousy,

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145 Almanzi’s copy does not include this clause.
which could occur even among the spiritually inclined as the more peripheral students noticeably increased their kabbalistic proficiency. The ninth clause, which clarified that Luzzatto hoped to expand his activities, may have been offered to the latter group as a consolation. It stated that anyone who wished to join the group was welcome as long as they adhered to the above rules, indicating not only the significance of anyone who had already joined, but possibly calling for the group to inspire individuals in the community at large towards their spiritual lifestyle.

The tenth and final clause provided the students an ethic by which to live: guard themselves against negative speech; be careful in all ways to act with sincerity and awe before the Shekhinah; and do not minimize the importance of any custom or halakhic stringency. These moral tenets, expounded by Luzzatto several years later in Mesilat Yesharim, promoted profound virtues uncommon in normative society: negative speech referred to negativity in general, not merely speaking badly about others; acting sincerely and with awe required humility and constant awareness of God’s immanence; and keeping even the most minor customs ensured that biblical commandments would be observed with the utmost care.

To Luzzatto and his circle, speech was a paramount component to their platform of serving God and initiating the cosmic redemption. It was, Luzzatto made clear elsewhere, the essence that distinguished man from the rest of creation. Poor use of the “power of speech”

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146 Almanzi’s copy does not include this clause.
147 There is an obvious contradiction here between adhering to all halakhic stringency and refraining from se’udah shelishit.
148 Derekh Tevunot, 226. Man is “a creature with the power of speech.”
relegated man to a mere “creature” unable to accomplish its divinely ordained purpose.

Therefore, the 1731 protocols explicitly warned against speaking falsely, as well as the twin evils of disagreements between students (דברי מחלוקת) and wasting time (דברים בטלים). In either of the latter cases, group members were required to remind offenders of their responsibility by rebuking them with the statement “Give honor to Hashem, the God of Israel!” After all, moments of selfishness or self-centeredness conflicted with the group’s ideals, and precluded the restoration of the Shekhinah and the Jewish people to their proper spiritual positions.

More than that, however, the ban on ‘disagreements’ possibly referred to scholarly dispute (mahloket) in addition to general argumentative behavior. The implication in using the term, as opposed to myriad of other words over which Luzzatto had complete mastery, was that Luzzatto and his confraternity sought to alter centuries-old traditional Jewish study, which, beginning in the talmudic text itself, included debate, argument, and consensus. The group’s emphasis on ‘revealed’ mystical texts, and Luzzatto’s own ongoing state of revelation, conflicted with the pragmatic view that an idea or law must be reasoned and even settled upon due to variant rabbinic opinions. Revelation entailed singularity, truth brought into the world from an otherworldly place. It is not that Luzzatto’s students did not differ. Rather, they suspended their respective opinions before one another in order to gain greater insight than they had held hitherto. Instead of arguing a particular point to reach a legal conclusion, for instance, they approached study with openness for the sake of experiencing and enlightening. Such was the principle behind Luzzatto’s dialogue between the masculine Intellect and feminine Soul in Da’at Tevunot, which intentionally placed the reader in the receptive position.

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149 The verse is from Mekhilta d’rabi Yishmael, be-shalah 13:19.
of the latter. Similarly, Luzzatto played this out in the hasid’s interaction with the hakham in Mesilat Yesharim, both from the start of their meeting and in the midst; when the latter, beginning to adopt the former’s viewpoint, lambasted pseudo-pietists, the former rejected his judgmental attitude as counter-productive.

Beyond the articulated rules themselves, Luzzatto and fellow mystics required behavior conducive to their goal of devekut. To initiate proper thought and intent, and to strengthen group unity, the contract stipulated the procedure for entering and exiting the bet midrash. Upon arrival each man would state, with bowed head, “May the glory of the Lord endure forever; Let the Lord rejoice in His works!” To which those present would reply “Blessed be the name of the Lord, from this time forth and forever.” When leaving the yeshiva, the student would state, “Blessed be the Lord out of Zion, Who dwelleth at Jerusalem. Hallelujah.” Each verse, taken from Psalms, the biblical book most associated with pious living, praised God and was intended to inspire proper intention for the member’s work both in and out of the yeshiva.

Finally, the contract concluded with stipulations concerning the group’s integrated curriculum and program. Every day, a member of the confraternity would recite the text of the Ten Commandments, the 613 mitzvoth, and a section from the lengthy 119th chapter of Psalms. Group members would fast every ten days in rotation, as well as undergo

\[150\] Psalms 104:31.
\[151\] Psalms 113:2.
\[152\] Psalms 135:21.
\[153\] Several medieval scholars composed distinct, albeit very similar, lists of the commandments. Did Luzzatto prescribe the most well-known by Maimonides, or that of the kabbalist Nahmanides?
\[154\] The JTS document, published by Ginzburg and Chriqui, states after the Ten Commandments and the 613 commandments: “ואחר צו’ באהד יְהוָהנא אִבָּר צו’ יְהוָה” These words are the first of eight verses in Psalms 119.
absolutions of ethical rebuke each month to help nullify the ego. In addition, the group as a whole would recite the Tanakh and the Mishnah in their entirety over a month-long period. While the document does not specify learning Talmud or halakhah, the final clause of the regulations stressed observing the commandments stringently, and Luzzatto indicated elsewhere that he studied halakhah daily in order to retain knowledge of the commandments. Certainly, there is evidence that group members engaged in Talmud study; although Luzzatto decried pilpul in Mesilat Yesharim, a letter to Bassan indicated that he elucidated his own system of talmudic study conducive to serving God, which he imparted to the yeshiva as a whole. To be sure, it is difficult to determine what legal texts the yeshiva tackled. In Gevul Binyamin, Vitale had advocated the work of Isaac Alfasi, in contrast to Maimonides or the great Ashkenazic code Arba’ah Turim. The group may have followed their kabbalistic mentor, but it is equally feasible that they relied on Karo’s Shulhan Ārukh. Not only was the latter less intricate than the medieval codes – originally intended as an abridged work to be studied in its entirety once per month – it occasionally offered legal rulings influenced by Kabbalah. It had also spawned several commentaries, including one recently composed by

beginning with the letter bet. It is unclear if “עד הסוף” means to the end of the letter bet or the end of the entire chapter of Psalms. Almanzi’s copy does not include the latter activity.

Study of the latter may have been in order to retain halakhic knowledge, possibly with some mystical significance, à la Joseph Karo.

According to the letter, Luzzatto studied halakhah two hours per day, as had Luria, he said.

Little work, in either academic or contemporary religious circles, has been done on Derekh Tevunot, however an analysis of Luzzatto’s system would not only be beneficial in and of itself, but would enable yet another perspective of Luzzatto’s influence. For a recent publication on Luzzatto’s method, see Avrohom Taibus, Limud HaShas: Based on [Derekh Tevunot of the Ramhal] (Lakewood, 2012). For an analysis of Luzzatto’s method of pilpul, see Jeremy Meyerowitz, “Panim hadashot le-mikhtav torani shel ha-Ramhal,” Yeshurun 22 (New York, [2010]): 913–918.

For discussions of the influence of Kabbalah on halakhah, see Dweck, The Scandal of Kabbalah, 83–84.
the Mantuan rabbi Gur Aryeh Finzi, a kabbalist and close associate of Mendola, and printed by Luzzatto’s friend Raphael d’Italia. Either way, Luzzatto’s intention to spiritually uplift materiality necessitated an approach to halakhic study that sought to apply *halakhah* to daily life (*halakhah le-ma’aseh*). Rather than study the commandments in a theoretical framework or as an intellectual exercise, mystical emphasis called for practical knowledge of the law through which grander designs of loving, fearing, and uniting with God could be manifest. Such was the *hasid*’s explanation of Deuteronomy 10:12–13: that walking in God’s ways and serving God were integral to observing mitzvoth.

The 1731 document, which has been frequently cited but never before comprehensively analyzed, must be understood within the particular time and place of composition. While detailing the ebb and flow of the controversy that swirled around Luzzatto, Carlebach argued convincingly that the group’s covenant was a reaffirmation of their common self-conception as mystico-messianic redeemers. In late 1730, the Venetian rabbinate had persuaded Luzzatto to sign an oath swearing he would desist from writing and imparting mystical teachings. Luzzatto and his compatriots not only privately disavowed the oath, they seem to have doubled their efforts by proclaiming their intentions in this document and itemizing the manner through which they would fulfill their mission.

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160 In a letter from Rapaport, we learn that Finzi and Mendola were in the same kabbalistic confraternity in Mantua (Chriqui, *Igerot*, p. 390).
162 Despite Luzzatto’s own Ashkenazic background, this manner of legal study conformed to Sephardic edification. For an overview, see Hirsch Jakob Zimmels, *Ashkenazim and Sephardim: Their Relations, Differences, and Problems as Reflected in the Rabbinical Responsa* (KTAV, 1993); and for a rich discussion of the making of Ashkenazic study in particular, see Talya Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud: Oral Torah as Written Tradition in Medieval Jewish Cultures* (University of Pennsylvania, 2011), ch. 4.
Despite their comprehensiveness, these protocols neither express the totality of the group’s activities nor entirely communicate Luzzatto’s interaction with other group members. Luzzatto, with his broad literary oeuvre, strong personality, and willingness to adapt, undoubtedly oversaw a dynamic yeshiva. Static rules and lifestyle conflict with Luzzatto’s written expressions of newness and spiritual movement. His iron-magnet analogy in Mesilat Yesharim asserted that spirituality was not fixed, and that if man did not progress towards the divine, he would regress.\textsuperscript{164} As such, the 1731 protocols should be used as a basis for understanding group dynamics, a sort of skeletal structure, while later writings of Luzzatto, Valle, Gordon, Forte, and many others may serve to illuminate interaction, development, and expansion over a period of several years. Such a feat – an encyclopedic biography of a community of kabbalists – is beyond the scope of this dissertation and would take several monographs to accomplish.

\textbf{Cosmic Unification: Individual and Collective, Confraternity and Community}

Just as Luzzatto’s thought reflected but appropriated larger cultural trends, the confraternity externally imitated contemporary establishments. The group’s regulations were akin, broadly speaking, to other confraternities in early modern Italy that espoused an educational model.\textsuperscript{165} The yeshiva’s inner and outer circles paralleled the Consiglio and its relationship to the community at large. The special seating arrangement of the primary members obviously reflected a deep spiritual reality in the group, but it had a model in the

\textsuperscript{164} See also Da’at Tevunot, 304–305.
\textsuperscript{165} Assaf, Mekorot le-toldhot ha-Hinukh be-Yisrael, vol. 2, 313–318, 343–368.
rabbinical courts whereby the head of the tribunal was flanked deliberately by his colleagues. The recitation of specific verses upon entering and exiting the bet midrash imitated the custom to do the same, with different verses, in the communal synagogue, a practice pervasive enough to be printed in many prayer books. Even Luzzatto’s written report to Bassan in January 1731 that Isaac Marini was in Ferrara for some time, reflected the standard language of Padua’s community minutes books recording that a lay leader was “fuori da Citta” or “hutz la-‘ir” (out of town). Finally, the elite status of Luzzatto’s group evoked the special academies formed by university scholars in Padua and elsewhere, in which private gatherings of learned men met regularly to discuss juridical, scientific, and medical subjects. They were privately funded, less formal than university organizations, and oriented towards the increase of knowledge and the development of a scholarly community. Likewise, Luzzatto’s compatriots met in the Luzzatto family home, received private monetary support, and included members of the rabbinate in the same way the academies consisted of university professors. Clearly, Luzzatto and his fellow rabbis felt a need to organize in a setting separate from the rabbinic establishment.

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166 For instance, the rabbinic court of Mantua in the 1730s was presided over by Luzzatto’s father-in-law, David Finzi. Judah Mendola, once a student in Padua and a staunch supporter of Luzzatto, sat to Finzi’s right, after Abraham Isaac Marini and before Gur Aryeh Finzi. To David Finzi’s left sat Abraham Jedidiah Basilea, Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea, and the physician Kalonymous d’Italia (Simonsohn, History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua, 368–369).

167 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 82; A.C.Pa., no. 13, pp. 34, 64.


169 Supporters included Solomon Racach and Hillel Padova, both of whom were residents of Venice. A letter indicates that Racach knew Jacob Vita Luzzatto (who was originally from Venice and who maintained business connections in the city), which may have influenced his support of the younger Luzzatto. Racach’s name appears on the front fly-leaf of the manuscript of Vital’s Otsrot Hayim mentioned above that had been passed down from Zacut to Vitale to Bassan to Luzzatto to Mevakshe Hashem (JTS MS 1615). His name also appears at the end of Ox. 79, among a list of donors to Luzzatto’s group. [Tishby suggested that the list of names was of donors to the manuscript’s scribe, but he provided no evidence or explanation for his theory (Tishby, “Features of the Shabatean Movement,” in Messianic Mysticism, 274, n. 23).]
Yet, the formation of Luzzatto’s circle was quite distinct from the multi-ethnic and socio-economic complexity prevalent in Padua’s Jewish community and Venetian culture at large. While confraternal members did come from across the ethnic and socio-economic spectrum, they pursued a unified spirituality that superceded pragmatic principles of diversity and coexistence. Compromise and political expediency had no inherent value in the inner workings of a yeshiva professing mystico-messianic goals.

As stated from the outset of the protocols, Luzzatto and like-minded men believed that the cosmic redemption would come with confraternal unity. The individuals involved sought to elevate themselves, each to his own ability, to a point where they could all meet in the primordial Adam, thus unifying spiritually as “one man.” The men invested themselves according to their own desires and abilities, and consequently reached varying levels of consciousness, but so too did they express a singular intention focused on spiritual and social unification. Entries in Valle’s diary show the value of group mystical experience: on Rosh Hodesh Heshvan, in the autumn of 1731, “we arrived at the holy lodging-place whose banner and emblem are berakhah tovah;” at the close of the Sabbath, on 16 Kislev 1731, “the day was declared holy by the acclamation of the members;” and on 28 Kislev 1731, he declared “love

170 Beholden to divine providence, the group closed the protocols with a prayer beseeching God for assistance in fulfilling their mystical quest. The scribe combined two verses that represented their aspirations: “For then will I turn to the peoples, a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent” (Zephaniah 3:9), followed by “And the Lord shall be King over all the earth; In that day shall the Lord be One, and His name one” (Zechariah 14:9). The former reflected their intention to serve God as one, with pure hearts as exemplified in the singular characteristic that defined humanity (speech). The latter echoed their utmost desire to fulfill their mission of unifying God and God’s “Name,” signifying the union of God and man, heavens and earth, and the proverbial opposites of creation. Luzzatto also used the latter verse in Derekh Tevunot to describe the process or culmination of God’s illumination, and the ending of God’s concealment (173).
and *brotherhood, peace and friendship.* In another context, Valle described the sublimity of rising to spiritual heights, imparting newfound knowledge to others, and having it received:

“It has long been well known that there is nothing better for man, nor is there any greater joy for him, than rejoicing in the Torah when he is privileged to be among companions who listen attentively to him as he develops new insights into the Torah and expounds them to his hearers; all the more so when it is a word in season that he speaks, so as to perform for everything the *tikun* appropriate to it, as these holy companions do on this night at the ceremonial meal which is before us, carrying out *tikunim* for the sake of Heaven.”

Judging by Valle’s poignant personal recollection, emotional fulfillment came after or at least at the completion of an individual’s mystical ascent. Valle’s desire to be recognized, or, even more importantly, to share with others is profound. Considering the solitary work of the lone mystic, it is not surprising that a fellowship, a social network in which experiences and realizations were shared, embodied the universal union they sought.

With common thought and intention, each member of the group contributed in what Garb has described as a “division of labor.” Of the seventeen names affixed to the 1731 protocols, seven were included after the first set of regulations, indicating their special status as the core of the confraternity: Israel Hezekiah ben Michael Treves, Isaac ben Sabbatai Marini, Jekutiel ben Judah Leib Gordon of Vilna, Jacob Israel ben Abraham Forte, Solomon ben

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171 Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle (Ramdav) and his Position in Luzzatto’s Group,” in *Messianic Mysticism*, 342.
Abraham Dina, Michael ben Gad Terni, and Jacob Hayim ben Asher Castelfranco.\textsuperscript{174} Luzzatto, Gordon, and Moses David Valle served in supervisory roles to ensure the proper execution of the contract.\textsuperscript{175} Several men copied material circulating in the yeshiva, including Gordon, Romanin,\textsuperscript{176} Terni,\textsuperscript{177} Joseph Hamits,\textsuperscript{178} and Solomon David Treves, a later member of the outer circle.\textsuperscript{179} Copying was carried out for internal use, and in order to disseminate Luzzatto’s ideas outside the confraternity. Tishby showed that Gordon succeeded in doing so in several communities in Poland, after he earned his medical degree and returned home in 1733. For his part, Forte, who was principally known for his expertise in Jewish law, led the yeshiva in study of halakhah and pilpul.\textsuperscript{180} He also became the group’s mouthpiece and the author of letters to

\textsuperscript{174} The scribe detailed their seating configuration: with Luzzatto in the central position, Treves, Marini, and Forte sat successively to his right, Gordon, Castelfranco, and Terni sat successively to his left, and Dina sat opposite the master. Valle and Isaiah Romanin, the latter of whom was not included in the signing of the document, apparently did not sit in confluence with the rest of the group because of their respective cosmic ranks (see below).

\textsuperscript{175} Nine men affixed their signatures to the second set of regulations, including Luzzatto’s brother Simon. Gordon headed this latter list, probably indicating his role as overseer of the outer circle.

\textsuperscript{176} According to Almanzi, Romanin was the group’s main scribe (Almanzi, “Toledot R’ Moshe Hayim Lutsato me-Padovah,” 150, n. 71). If so, perhaps this is the reason his name was not included in the protocols — his involvement as author of the contract was sufficient.

\textsuperscript{177} Hamits was the scribe and/or owner of Sabbatian writings (MS Oxford 2239); Neubauer saw it as Romanin’s, but Tishby concluded it was Hamits (Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Vallee’s Mystical-Messianic Diary: a Record of Spiritual Experiences and Visions,” in Messianic Mystics, 384 n. 331 [the Hebrew article was originally published as “Yomam misti-meshihi havayati ve-hezyoni le-Rabi Mosheh David Vale,” in Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1990), 441–472].

\textsuperscript{178} Treves was ordained as haver in 1737 (A.C.Pa., no. 17, after fol. 18), and he earned a medical degree in 1743 (cited above in chapter two). A manuscript in the hand of Mordecai Samuel Ghirondi, includes several folios of likutim ve-remezim in the name of Luzzatto as passed on through Treves (JTS MS 6438, Hilkhot pesukot (Padua, 1817), fols. 32v–38r). [The manuscript includes a prayer written by Luzzatto to be recited before ritual slaughtering, intended to turn the butcher’s mind to the heavens and cosmic unification (fol. 38r; cited above).] Ghirondi added a title page to another manuscript, Sefer Divre Shelomoh, and indicated Treves’s status as a disciple of Luzzatto (JTS MS 6174). He found the manuscript – a homiletical collection of Treves’s writings reflecting musar from a semi-mystical perspective – in the bet midrash of Padua. The manuscript’s third essay is an exposition on the importance of loving thy neighbor as thyself (Leviticus 19:18).

\textsuperscript{179} Chriqui, Igerot, no. 69, p. 216.

\textsuperscript{180} Chriqui, Igerot, no. 89, p. 269. As discussed above, the talmudic sugyot were assigned by Luzzatto. With respect to halakhic study: in letter to Bassan, Luzzatto remarked that he was in a position of readiness to help (he used the term ‘hineni,’ much in the way he used it in the manuscript of Mesilat Yesharim).
Luzzatto after the latter left for Amsterdam.\textsuperscript{181} Israel Hezekiah Treves and Isaac Marini, meanwhile, served as Luzzatto’s principal audience, and were the first members of the group to be notified that Luzzatto was privy to a heavenly voice.\textsuperscript{182}

More importantly, some members held special cosmic roles in the redemption. With Luzzatto as the embodiment of Moses the redeemer,\textsuperscript{183} Valle fulfilled the role of Messiah ben David and Romanin served as Messiah ben Joseph.\textsuperscript{184} Gordon embodied the role of Seraiah of the Tribe of Dan, portrayed in the Zohar and other sources as the military leader of the

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\item \textsuperscript{181} Ibid., no. 166 is in Forte’s name, while nos. 162 and 163 are in the same style. Forte’s status as rabbi, early member of Mevakshe Hashem, and, ironically, age (he was six years older than Valle and eighteen years older than Luzzatto) may have contributed to his prominent position in the group.
\item \textsuperscript{182} Ibid., nos. 24, 32.
\item \textsuperscript{183} Tishby wrote: “from the time that he began to act in accordance with the revelations of the magid, Luzzatto appeared among his group as the representative of the biblical Moses through the mystery of his embodiment of the ibur, and in 1731 he was raised to the rank of Moses himself. But in identifying himself with Moses he did not regard himself as Messiah ben David—which would have accorded with the conventional opinion prevalent even in Shabatean doctrine— but held the view expressed in Raya meheimna that Moses was above the Messiahs, his destiny at the end of days being to lead and unite the redeemers and help them to fulfill their mission in matters both revealed and occult” (“The Messianic Ferment in Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 204).
\item \textsuperscript{184} According to Tishby, Romanin fulfilled the initial redemptive role as Messiah ben Joseph, who would die prior to the ultimate redemption, partly because he was integral to the circle but not among the signatories of the regulations (Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle (Ramdav) and his Position in Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 293; idem, “Rabbi Moses David Valle’s Mystical-Messianic Diary,” in Messianic Mysticism, 384, n. 331). The exact nature of this representation is unclear to me, because Tishby also showed that Luzzatto believed Sabbatai Tsevi himself had represented Messiah ben Joseph (ibid., 361–362, n. 116), an assessment that Joseph Dan has agreed with (introduction to Messianic Mysticism, xix–xxii). Jacob Emden criticized Jekutiel Gordon for describing Sabbatai Tsevi as a “mistake,” rather than “false” and a “lie,” concluding that Luzzatto regarded Sabbatai Tsevi as Messiah ben Joseph and that he “was reserving to himself the kingship of Messiah ben David” (Emden, Zot Torat ha-Kena’ot [Amsterdam, 1752], fol. 55v, cited in Tishby, “Luzzatto’s Attitude to Shabateanism,” in Messianic Mysticism, 224 [the Hebrew article was originally published as “Yahaso shel R’ Mosheh Hayim Lutsato el ha-shabeta’ut,” Tarbiz 27 (1958): 334–357]).

Elsewhere Tishby showed that Valle, who was ordinarily vitriolic towards Christianity, believed in Jesus’s potentially positive mystical role: “We have said in another place that the mamzer was fit to be the Messiah ben Joseph, for a learned mamzer takes precedence over an ignorant high priest, but he did himself injury by his impudence... and he therefore became a mum zar and fell from the Yesod of holiness to the Yesod of the husk, who is the veritable villain” (Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle’s Mystical-Messianic Diary,” in Messianic Mysticism, 361, n. 116, citing Valle’s diary). Tishby suggested that Valle understood Jesus’s timely death as possibly saving his soul for the resurrection. He also mentioned that Luzzatto referred to the Messiah ben Joseph as being profaned through clothing his soul in “Jesus” and experiencing redemption through the sufferings of “Moses.” That Jesus was conceived of in their cosmic drama may mean that their discussion of Sabbatai Tsevi was relegated to the messiah of every generation, and that they could have said similar things about David Reuveni or Solomon Molcho.
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messianic armies. He apparently fulfilled the role as the “staff of Moses” through publicizing knowledge of Luzzatto and the group’s intentions. Meanwhile, according to a later testament from Forte, Castelfranco was identified with Elijah, who heralded the arrival of the Messiah. In a related way, Luzzatto identified Bassan as the reincarnation of the Mishnaic sage Akiva, and all concerned referred to Vitale as the High Priest, associating the latter’s priestly lineage with his status as the elder kabbalist at the onset of redemption. The group’s perception that so many men living in extreme proximity were redemptive figures, and that Luzzatto and Bassan shared the soul of Akiva, epitomized their belief in divine providence and their unique status as a confraternity. God had made and brought them together, so to speak, for the express purpose of celestial restoration.

Although all had roles to play, Luzzatto was undoubtedly the confraternity’s central figure. The group modeled itself after a hallowed paradigm in which enlightened individuals

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185 Tishby, “The Messianic Ferment in Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 203–204, 210 n. 100. Luzzatto wrote that Seraiah was born in Poland and joined the messiah by leaving his homeland (ibid., xvii, 199, n. 55).
186 Tishby, “The Messianic Ferment in Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 199, n. 55, and 210, n. 100.
188 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 30, p. 86.
189 Pietists in Ashkenazic communities did the same when referring to Jacob Poppers of Frankfurt (ibid., no. 108 [Luzzatto confession], no. 119, p. 341 [Hagiz], no. 121, p. 342 [Katzenellenbogen], no. 129, p. 354 [Eliezer of Cracow]).
190 Further meaning of these personifications – the interactions between individuals in Padua, corresponding to celestial relationships, or the significance of Luzzatto acting as the central redemptive figure but not the Messiah – is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Additional scholarly work in this area could reveal the practical implications of cosmic theories, and the influence of the practitioners on society at large.
191 Tishby showed that Valle was a prodigious thinker and writer, and that he should be recognized as having existed alongside Luzzatto, separate from the established circle (Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle (Ramdav) and...
gathered around a central figure for the purpose of redeeming the world and restoring the primordial harmony. In early modern kabbalistic circles, this was typified by Moses at Mount Sinai, Shimon Bar Yohai and the Idra in the Zohar, and Isaac Luria and the community of kabbalists in Safed. For Luzzatto and his compatriots, Zacut’s circle in Mantua and Vitale’s glorified status as the generation’s ‘High Priest,’ served as additional and more personal examples. In the mid-1720s, Luzzatto’s abilities had convinced Padua’s existing kabbalistic confraternity to re-form around him, and for the next decade his charisma attracted many more people, young and old, Paduan and visitor. His single, unified vision was pursued with total conviction, and it is clear that group members were convinced of the validity of the magid. Gordon’s enthusiastic letter typified the group that identified Luzzatto’s teachings as divinely inspired. According to Almanzi’s copy of the group’s protocols, an elaborate, responsive recitation of verses took place specifically when Luzzatto convened members for group learning. Romanin stated that Luzzatto’s wonders were innumerable, and equated Luzzatto with Moses by citing the biblical verse “that Moses was true and his Torah was


Garb has argued that Valle conceived of himself as on an even higher spiritual level than Luzzatto: Valle reserved for himself the level of the Supreme Court, which has no adherence to the forces of darkness, while denying Luzzatto this status; “The latter, famously enjoying angelic mentors, including Metatron (as mentioned by Gordon), reflects the lower courts, whose revelations still come from non-divine worlds, that according to classical Lurianic statements (naturally quoted by Ramhal’s opponents) contain strong admixtures of falsehood” (Garb, “Mussar, Curriculum and Exegesis in the Circle of Ramhal,” 23; ibid., Shamanic Trance in Modern Kabbalah [University of Chicago Press, 2011], 69–71). This idea would seem to conform with Luzzatto’s own cosmological theory that miracles were a lower form of revelation than direct connection to God (Da’at Tevunot, 242–245). Regardless, Valle’s personal freedom testifies that independent study, contemplation, and devekut-seeking journeys were the order at least in the top tier of the group.

In addition, Akiva and his friends in the Mishnah were the paradigm for martyrdom (kidush Hashem) (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 53, p. 173).

Abraham Ferrarese came to study every night (ibid., no. 14, p. 42), and it is “a miracle — from being a heretic, he has almost attained the level of hasidut” (ibid., no. 24, p. 65).

As I will discuss in chapter four, Luzzatto’s support extended to Mantua, Ferrara, and elsewhere.
true.”  Even Finzi chose to define himself publicly according to his relation to Luzzatto — as Hoten Moshe, again an allusion to the biblical Moses, whose father-in-law Jethro is repeatedly described as such in the Book of Exodus.

As a whole, the men connected to the 1731 covenant made up the intellectual, rabbinic, and cultural elite of the Padua Jewish community. Luzzattos, Valles, Treveses, Romanins, Marinis, Cantarinis, and Alprons were names served in both the Padua Consiglio and the Luzzatto yeshiva. Isaac Marini was the son of Sabbatai Marini, chief rabbi of Padua, while Michael Terni was the son of Gad Terni, the synagogue sexton and one of the few official

195 Ibid., no. 58, p. 193.
196 Their names were the same as the biblical redeemer and his wife, signifying the embodiment of the biblical characters and their spiritual endeavors. For an analysis of Luzzatto’s commentary on his own ketubah, see Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valde (Ramdav) and his Position in Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 292–294; “The Messianic Ferment in Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 190–222; and Joseph Dan, On Sanctity (Jerusalem, 1997), 435–455. Also, two wedding poems written for the occasion are extant in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary: one written by Raphael d’Italia (MS 9027, v. 7:1), and one written by Samsone Vita Nahmani (MS 9027, v. 7:14).

Almanzi (“Toledot R’ Moshe Hayim Lutsato me-Padovah,” 118–119) conjectured that the wedding took place in 5492 or 5493, whereas Ginzburg and Klar concluded that by 10 Iyar 5491 Luzzatto was married, because in a letter sent from Mantua he referred to Finzi as “our honored teacher and rabbi, my father-in-law [suocero], may the Merciful One guard him and preserve him in life” (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 84). The ketubah shows that the wedding was in Padua on 27 Av 5491, but he must have been betrothed before 10 Iyar. The wedding took place in Luzzatto’s home in Padua, as seen from his reply to the complaint about the performance of a comedy on the war of Gog (ibid., no. 89).

Finzi’s student, Samson Hayim Nahmani, composed a poem in honor of Luzzatto’s marriage to Tsiyarah and alluded at the beginning of the poem to the union of Moses and Shekinah: “And this man Moses, his right hand has done valiantly, and through the mysteries of the chariot the ways of the world have been made his. How good and how pleasant it is for Zipporah to be the wife of Moses as of old. The enlightened man will understand the secret of my parable, because the bride of Moses is a garden locked, and ‘the bed’ in the mystery of the seal [is] ‘the finest spices’ in [its] inner letters” (Tishby, “The Messianic Ferment in Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto’s Group,” in Messianic Mysticism, 191). There were several other poems composed for the occasion, including by Gordon, Solomon David Treves, Isaac Marini, Gershon Treves, and Abraham Shalom, the latter four of which are found in manuscript in the Schwadron Collection in NIL (Isaac Ben Jacob erroneously referenced the poems as a book in Otsar ha-Sefarim (New York, 1949), shin no. 639), and were published in A. Yaari, “Shene shire hatunah le-Ramhal,” Kiyat Sefer 8 (1931): 266–274.

employees of the Padua Jewish community. Most group members wrote and published poetry, as was common then, and several men, including Valle, Gordon, Marini, and Solomon David Treves worked as physicians during or after Luzzatto led the mystico-messianic confraternity. Luzzatto, Valle, Romanin, Marini, Treves, Forte, and Terni were ordained rabbis, and the 1734 document discussed in the previous chapter, in which the Consiglio directed the rabbis to teach in the communal bet midrash, showed that Luzzatto and his close circle constituted the bulk of Padua’s rabbinate.

Not only were Luzzatto and his compatriots the pedagogical descendants of Bassan, Vitale, and Zacut – and in their minds the cosmic offspring of the Safed kabbalists, the Idra of the Zohar, and their ancestors at Mount Sinai – they were also the heirs of Padua’s great rabbinic culture. Luzzatto linked his yeshiva to Padua’s pantheon of rabbis by instituting annual penitential rites practiced at the ancient cemeteries. On the eves of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the group, with members of the greater community in tow, would seek to inspire repentance and fear of sin by visiting about two dozen graves. The list of Padua’s righteous included: Isaac Abarbanel, Judah Mintz, Meir and Samuel Judah Katzenellenbogen, Samuel

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198 A.C.Pa., no. 15, p. 56 (see chapter two, discussion of stolen pinkas).
199 Valle earned a medical degree from the University of Padua in 1713. Tishby questioned Modena’s and Morpurgo’s record that Valle received his degree at eighteen years of age, but as presented in chapter two the date is correct (see Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle (Ramdav) and his Position in Luzzatto’s Group,” Messianic Mysticism, 296, n. 15).
200 See Modena and Morpurgo, p. 126, recording: “MARINI, Isac di Sabbato, ebreo romano, immatricolato 1716–21 (UN.AR. 233).”
201 A.C.Pa., no. 17, p. 20. Sabbatai Marini ordained Terni on December 9, 1736 as haver, authorizing him to serve in Padua as a teacher in the Talmud Torah and as a leader of prayers. According to the semikhah document, he was recommended for ordination by Marini, the parnasim Ephraim Louria, David Luzzatto (Moses Hayim’s uncle), Menahem Todros, and the “nikhnas” Barukh Foa.
202 More research is necessary to determine the dynamics between Padua’s rabbinic and lay elite, particularly as it played out during and after the controversy stirred, as well as in generational and familial terms (the Consiglio consisted of fathers and uncles of the men active in Luzzatto’s group, after all).
Archivolti, Samuel David Ottolenghi, and Isaac Hayim Cantarini, as well as elder Marinis and Romanins who had lived in the seventeenth century.²⁰³

The majority of the group’s core membership consisted of scholars who served in the rabbinate and contributed to the community at large even in the decades after Luzzatto relocated to Amsterdam. Many men in the group composed treatises, disseminated responsa, or were involved in Hebrew printing. Romanin published Melits Yosher in Venice in 1730, at the height of the controversy, and later provided an approbation for Lampronti’s Pahad Yitshak while serving as chief rabbi of Pesaro.²⁰⁴ Forte produced glosses to the Arba’ah Turim and to the Shulhan ‘Arukh, while his numerous responsa were included in Shemesh Tsedakah and Pahad Yitshak.²⁰⁵ Terni composed a work on the laws and customs of the circumcision rite.²⁰⁶ For his part, Castelfranco edited and authored an introduction for Jacob ben Hayim Berav’s

²⁰³ See Chriqui, Tefilot le-Ramhal, 494–508. The practice of reciting Luzzatto’s composition of penitential prayers at the graves of renowned rabbis continued well into the nineteenth century. Moreover, after their deaths, Forte, Valle, and Treves were added to the rolls, demonstrative of their respective importance in the community’s collective memory (JTS MS 4599; JTS MS 4600).

²⁰⁴ Carlebach observed that the book, along with Luzzatto’s liturgical composition Hanukat he-Aron, was printed without haskamot (Pursuit of Heresy, 331, n. 8). She also stated that neither book “attracted any attention,” though there is little reason to assume that they would. Small publications were often printed without haskamot, and at least in the case of the latter it had the complete support of, and in fact was for, the Padua Jewish community.

²⁰⁵ See Ghirondi, Toledot Gedole Yisrael, 148–150. Forte also published a long responsum against the Venetian Jewish communities for imposing a tax on traders from the mainland. It was written in 1744, but published around 1761 (see Vinograd, Venice no. 1954; JTS MS R1459).

²⁰⁶ JTS MS R1051. Terni’s work was meant to complement the teachings of Zacut, which the Mantuan printer Raphael d’Italia had included in his 1743 edition of David ben Aryeh Leib of Lida’s Sod Hashem. [According to the joint approbation of the Mantua rabbis Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea and Judah Mendola, Zacut had taught the secrets of berit milah to Vitale, who himself taught them to others.] Each page of Terni’s manuscript consists of a halakhah related to berit milah written in large script, underneath which appears an explanation of the law in a smaller script. Terni cited Vitale at the end of the volume, reverentially calling the great kabbalistic sage the Kohen Gadol, as Luzzatto had (fols. 470v–471r). The manuscript appears to have undergone preparation for publication, although it is not ‘print-ready.’ It was self-edited, with whole pages crossed out to be placed elsewhere in the order of the book.
Zimrat ha-Arets (Mantua, 1745), which recounted the rebuilding of the Jewish community in Tiberias.\textsuperscript{207}

Thus, Luzzatto’s yeshiva consisted of educated intellectuals who sincerely pursued the ideals of devekut and social unity.\textsuperscript{208} The members of this mystical fellowship were intent on fulfilling their understanding of the Torah’s ideals, which they believed were ignored, unappreciated, or unfulfilled in contemporary rabbinic culture. Forte typified this sentiment when recounting his knowledge of Luzzatto as a youthful member of Mevakshe Hashem:

\begin{quote}
When Moses Hayim arose, during his youth one could not find a blemish or hear a cross thing from his mouth against the Holy Torah or against our Rabbis. On the contrary, he strengthened the Torah and his house was forever open, and he was meticulous in his observance, as all who know him would testify and recount...[to such an extent] that we concluded that it was God’s will that we go to his house of study to pronounce in God’s Torah.”\textsuperscript{209}
\end{quote}

That is, the same sincerity that Luzzatto presented in Mesilat Yesharim, both with respect to devekut and social and religious unification, was pervasive in this group. The yeshiva consisted of men who freely chose to pursue rigorous intellectual, spiritual, and moral exercises in a

\textsuperscript{207} Jacob Berav, Zimrat ha-Arets (Mantua, 1745), fols. 2v, 4r. In addition to praising God for the miracles He had wrought, Castelfranco commended Solomon Racah and Hillel Padova, who had been staunch supporters of Luzzatto and his kabbalistic fellowship, for providing the funds to the reconstituted community. The community bet midrash was named Mashmi’o Yeshu’a, Castelfranco wrote, equivalent to the gematria of their combined names. There is evidence that Racach also established a yeshiva in Hebron (Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle’s Mystical-Messianic Diary,” in Messianic Mysticism, 345).

\textsuperscript{208} In principle, the men involved in this quest with Luzzatto neither blindly followed him nor competed with each other. Although the group did eventually disband in the wake of widespread and relentless attacks from outside of Padua, former members did not explain away previously held beliefs, as had been the case among other eighteenth-century pietistic movements whose visions had not been fulfilled. [Compare, for instance, with Ben Pink Dandelion, The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford University Press, 2008), ch. 2.] None renounced Luzzatto during or after the controversy, nor retracted their support or their faith in his teachings. Likewise, there is no evidence that Luzzatto faced internal derision, or that the members of the confraternity were anything but fully committed to the ideals of the yeshiva.

\textsuperscript{209} Chriqui, Igerot, no. 131, p. 356.
unified religious order. Padua’s kabbalistic circle was, thereby, a community of choice, rather than one of birth, necessity, or compulsion.

**Conclusion**

Historians have long recognized the existence of specific confraternities in Jewish communities. It is clear that they existed to varying degrees in the medieval era, but a lack of documentation has precluded intensive research. The wealth of information on early modern confraternities, however, has inspired some scholars to examine specific groups or genres and their context. By and large, confraternities have been understood as sub-communities with specific intentions and various requirements. Some groups received the sanction of the community at large, especially those that performed a particular service for the Jewish populace, while others were small, separate, and largely irrelevant to the external environment. The former included burial and charity societies, while the latter primarily consisted of study groups. Despite the pioneering work of Jacob Rader Marcus, David Ruderman, and Elliot Horowitz, a monograph on the history of confraternities among early modern European Jewry, or only in Italian Jewish communities for that matter, is a desideratum.

The need for a survey of Jewish confraternal intent, variety, and import is especially clear when considering the multifaceted subject matter discussed in this chapter. A pre-existing kabbalistic fellowship disbanded to re-organize around the group’s newest and youngest member. The newly formed yeshiva was established in the young man’s home to spur on the cosmic redemption, a unique and difficult mandate to say the least. Rather than
continue as a small group of mystics, the yeshiva expanded to include both an inner and outer circle of participants, all of whom were valued for their efforts and respective abilities. The budding yeshiva grew further by opening its doors to the community at large, and sought even greater exposure by informing lay and rabbinic leadership abroad. The conviction and vision of the group’s leadership intensified their activities; to an extent that it could be said that Padua was home to an actual movement of intellectual piety in the 1720s and 1730s.

Apart from the superficial model of a confraternity, in which a cluster of like-minded individuals banded together for an express purpose, Luzzatto’s group in Padua was exceptional. Besides the yeshiva’s specific characteristics, its goals of expansion contradicted the normal definition of early modern confraternities, particularly those invested in kabbalistic study. In short, Luzzatto and his compatriots sought to inspire a new social and religious movement. They identified themselves as the heirs of Italian Kabbalah and pietism, and hoped to expand what had hitherto been preserved by a few to engulf Padua and beyond. In their view, established rabbinic culture was failing to meet the needs of the community, let alone aspire for the appropriate sanctity of life. So, Padua’s kabbalists worked to influence the world around them, both cosmically through spiritual and social unification, and practically, through inclusion and active instruction of kabbalistic thought and perspective. Despite exceptional individual and collective self-conceptions, the group was not in essence elitist. Although many of the members were of upper socio-economic or intellectual rank, the group’s protocols explicitly permitted the membership of anyone who identified with and adhered to the regulations. They tied their spiritual pursuits to social, religious, and political success, and sought to establish a truly communal confraternity.
In this chapter, I have sought to contextualize Luzzatto’s social and religious outlook. Rooted in preceding generations of pietistic kabbalists, Luzzatto’s thought and intention proved fruitful in Padua’s intimate yet diverse Jewish community. He and his companions were initially influenced by Bassan and Vitale, as well as by images of Zacut’s circle in Mantua and Luria’s in Safed, and came to identify themselves as the culmination of the long cosmic chain of redemption. The immorality and mendacity allegedly present in the ghetto reflected for them the struggle or failure of the contemporary rabbinic establishment, and the activities of Luzzatto’s own circle influenced men inclined towards Kabbalah. Luzzatto advocated nullifying the ego in the service of God, identifying God’s sovereignty, and conforming to one’s mission in the providential plan, and then expanded these personal notions to include society. As such, Luzzatto’s universal goal of spiritual union entailed subverting the status quo, a process that he and his supporters identified with manifesting the divine plan. While rabbis throughout Europe feared Luzzatto’s heretical designs, the ‘subversion’ he advocated was intellectual and spiritual. Externally, they did little more than to unofficially separate from the communal bet midrash, while internally they practiced a spiritualized version of Judaism centered on devekut and total unity.

My goal in this dissertation is to reconcile the extreme images of Luzzatto as both a ‘heretic’ and a ‘hero.’ In the next chapter, I will discuss the controversy that engulfed Luzzatto, during which rabbinic authorities throughout Europe accused him of heresy, destroyed most of his mystical writings, and issued bans against him. I will show that Luzzatto the ‘heretic’ was largely unfounded, not because he was not subversive, but because the accusations were grossly inaccurate and were levied by men who not only did not know him personally, but
sometimes did not know his name. In that sense, the ‘heretical Luzzatto’ was nothing more than an image, or images, in the minds of his opponents. The purpose of the present chapter has been to portray Luzzatto’s spiritual biography. The narrative I have presented is meant to show Luzzatto as a product of a kabbalistic-pietistic environment that appealed to many and that grew under his leadership.
Chapter Four

Rabbinic Spectrum: Movement and Counter-Movement in the Eighteenth Century

For two centuries, academic scholars have been variously aware of and dealt with the controversy that engulfed Luzzatto and his circle of messianic mystics. Almanzi treated the subject as an intriguing aspect of Luzzatto’s life, and published several relevant documents in full. As his biography of Luzzatto was purely documentary, however, his account lacked a particular angle concerning Luzzatto’s choices and experiences. In contrast, many early historians, including Graetz, Dubnow, and Zinberg, mentioned Luzzatto’s difficulties, but glossed over them in order to maintain the conception of Luzzatto as a modern genius. Wissenschaft scholars largely lamented the controversy as a result of Luzzatto’s foolish descent into Kabbalah; the greatest sin, in their minds, was that it deprived later generations of (unwritten) literary masterpieces. Ginzburg followed this line of thought, declaring that Luzzatto was the father of Modern Hebrew literature in the title of his 1931 biography, but he gave his subject slightly more credit by acknowledging that at least Luzzatto believed he was engaged in something worthwhile. Situating his subject in a literary context, Ginzburg likened Luzzatto to Victor Hugo’s hero-victim Jean Valjean, with Luzzatto’s greatest enemies jointly fulfilling the role of Javert.

In her groundbreaking book on Hagiz and rabbinic attacks on Sabbatianism in the eighteenth century, Elisheva Carlebach offered a necessary corrective to long-held conceptions of Luzzatto and his troubles. While providing a detailed and riveting narrative of the controversy, Carlebach analyzed the attacks on Luzzatto within the large and complicated
context of underground heresy in the Sabbatian movement. She used the large and rich cache of letters to, from, and about Luzzatto to present the clash that occurred when the private confraternity of young mystics made itself known to the older, stronger, and more assertive rabbinic collective.¹ Led spiritually by a handful of rabbis in central and eastern Europe, and vigorously policed by the Venetian rabbinate, the anti-Luzzatto campaign profoundly contradicted the hopes and optimism of Luzzatto and his compatriots. In two distinct stages between 1729 and 1736, Luzzatto was defamed, many of his writings were confiscated and destroyed, and numerous bans from individual or consortia of rabbis were issued against him, his work, and his group. In fairly representing two opposing and equally strong-willed sides, Carlebach exposed both the resilience and the harshness that characterized the rabbinic class during Luzzatto’s era.

The impetus for this dissertation stems from the curiosity that Luzzatto, venerated by much of modern Jewry, was deemed a heretic during his life. Luzzatto’s reception history was typified by a range of competing movements appropriating his image. How could Luzzatto be vehemently condemned by Ashkenazic rabbis during his life, but be celebrated a century later as a pillar of the Musar movement? The premise of the question hinges on the assumption that opposition to Luzzatto was total and absolute. Broadly, it assumes that a heretic could not later be praised as a hero if the accuser(s) continued to exercise power. Presumably, change in the socio-political sphere is necessary between the era of the ‘heresy’ and the period in which that person was ‘rehabilitated’: Spinoza, for instance, was excommunicated by a seventeenth-

¹ Natascia Danieli has cataloged the correspondence, which offers an opportunity to quantify an understanding of the controversy; see Danieli, L’epistolario di Moseh Hayyim Luzzatto (Florence, 2006).
century rabbinate, and was accepted by a distinctly non-, anti-, or post-rabbinic class of intellectuals influenced by the Enlightenment. In contrast, Luzzatto’s posthumous rabbinic acceptance was more akin to that of Maimonides, whereby the rabbinate – not an entity, but a culture – developed over time and tolerated, adopted, or appropriated what was at one point deemed offensive.

This conception itself is allowable only in a broad way, for a myriad of historical variables weakens its value. As rabbinic culture developed over centuries, is it accurate to refer to a centuries-old rabbinate? Are the opponents of Maimonides or Luzzatto to be equated with those who later cited their works simply because all involved retained rabbinic ordination? How can we think of a ‘rabbinate,’ and accusations of heresy within that rabbinate, if both the accusers and the accused were rabbis and retained support of fellow rabbis? Are historical memories of controversies and specifically that of Luzzatto, a case of the victors authoring history, or at least the authors of history assigning rectitude or authority to the triumphant?

These questions, along with the diversity of Luzzatto’s experience and acceptance, necessitates a fresh look at the controversy. The present chapter will focus on the controversy as it began in 1729 with the receipt of Jekutiel Gordon’s letter in praise of Luzzatto, through the years of quiet in the early 1730s, and until the issuance of various bans against Luzzatto in 1736. In the midst of providing a relatively short synopsis of the events, I will detail and analyze the positions of Luzzatto’s opponents and supporters, as well as those who remained neutral or

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dispassionate. Furthermore, I will discuss the role of geography, pedagogy, age, and temporal limitations in the anti-Luzzatto crusade.

I intend to show what should be obvious, but what is sometimes forgotten in scholarship on rabbinic culture, that the rabbinate was not a monolithic entity. Dependent upon relationships and consensus, rabbis neither formed an official body nor expressed a unified social or intellectual worldview. Convolution pervaded the accusations and bans against Luzzatto, while he concurrently enjoyed a not insignificant level of rabbinic support before, during, and after the controversy. Thus, when speaking of the Luzzatto controversy, it is more appropriate to refer to rabbinates in the plural, such as the rabbinate of Padua, the rabbinate of Venice, and the Portuguese rabbinate of Amsterdam. Even within communal rabbinates, particular voices were distinct, such that Luzzatto enjoyed the support of individual rabbis in Mantua but not the Mantuan rabbinate as a whole. To be sure, a large segment of the European, specifically Ashkenazic, rabbinate did project a united front against him. The opposition was powerful enough to inspire Luzzatto to break his geographic bond with his mystical circle by moving to Amsterdam. Yet, the opposition consisted of networks of rabbis – often with little to no connection to Luzzatto – acting autonomously against a perceived threat. Meanwhile, Luzzatto was himself an ordained rabbi, was considered integral to the rabbinic class of Padua and, later, Amsterdam, and his polemical manuscript of Mesilat Yesharim reflected the perspective of an important and multi-generational segment of rabbis in northern Italy. Still, even these geographic and cultural demarcations fail to capture the complexity of the era. On the one hand, his Portuguese friends, who provided him with a prominent seat in the magnificent Esnoga, either heavily redacted or did not enable him to publish his original
version of *Mesilat Yesharim* for fear of a backlash; while, on the other, his posthumous acceptance reflected the relative adaptability of rabbinic culture and the traditionalism of Luzzatto’s heavily redacted ideas.

In this chapter, I contend that the controversy reflected rabbinic diversity in the first half of the eighteenth century. Sabbatianism and Hagiz’s influence certainly figured prominently, but the larger context included individuality, rabbinic autonomy, and inter-communal relationships. Rather than conceive of the affair as authority figures pursuing an outsider or rogue individual, I will argue that Luzzatto offered a ‘legitimate’ perspective based on the independence of the Padua Jewish community and his embodiment of Italian pietism. That is, Luzzatto’s self-conception, his group’s intentions, and his later critique of the rabbinate in *Mesilat Yesharim*, represented a counter-narrative, still within a rabbinic tradition, but distinct from and less widespread than that which hounded him for several years. In turn, the variegated responses to the controversy revealed a wide range of social and religious emphases in early modern rabbinic culture. More specifically, the struggles for power and authority among a pan-Italian and pan-European rabbinate served as the backdrop for Luzzatto’s activities in Padua and his composition of *Mesilat Yesharim*.

**Part One: Call to Arms, Varied Response, and a Signed Oath**

*Alarm*

In August 1729, less than a month before Rosh Hashanah, Jekutiel Gordon composed two letters proclaiming the otherworldly nature of Moses Hayim Luzzatto. He described Luzzatto’s exceptional knowledge, character, and spiritual perception, and declared that
Luzzatto had been born with divinely ordained gifts pertinent to the cosmic redemption. Gordon had moved to Padua within the previous year in order to pursue a degree in medicine at the University of Padua. Despite his professional studies, he was drawn to Luzzatto and his circle of kabbalists, and came to devote most of his time in Padua to studying mystical texts, copying Luzzatto’s writings, and assisting new adherents. It is unclear what he, or his compatriots who may have urged the letter’s writing, hoped to accomplish by sharing such intimate and fantastic secrets. Presumably, Gordon, other group members, and Luzzatto were so convinced of their uniqueness that they imagined the world would rejoice over their experiences and abilities. In their minds, they were figuratively (and perhaps literally) a ‘soul family’ brought together to initiate universal restoration, and knowledge of their abilities and intentions should have inspired deep service of God.

In fact, the letters were not well received. One recipient of Gordon’s communique, Mordecai Jaffe, who did not know either Gordon or Luzzatto, reacted with alarm. Like much of the lay and rabbinic establishment, he feared explicit messianism just six decades after the hysteria surrounding Sabbatai Tsevi had ended in delusion, denial, and subterranean Sabbatianism. He immediately sent a copy of the letter to Moses Hagiz, a self-proclaimed heresy hunter then living in Hamburg who was devoted to rooting out deviant elements of the Jewish people. Hagiz had led numerous assaults on Sabbatian figures, including a successful, albeit personally upsetting, campaign against Nehemiah Hiya Hayon in 1717. In that case, Hagiz and his brother-in-law Hakham Tsevi Ashkenazi, then Ashkenazic chief rabbi of Amsterdam,

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3 There is also the possibility that Gordon was drawn to Luzzatto because of his professional studies. Perhaps Gordon, as a medical student, was introduced to Luzzatto through one of the several physicians or medical students associated with the Padua mystical circle.
fought the full weight of the Portuguese community, which had unwittingly supported the Sabbatianist. Hayon’s clandestine efforts to print a Sabbatian tract were thwarted, but Ashkenazi and Hagiz were forced to emigrate from Amsterdam.

Upon reading the copy of Gordon’s account, Hagiz sent letters to rabbis throughout Europe, “mustering the forces as a general,” Carlebach described in her biography of Hagiz, “and declaring the group enemy combatants.” His desire to suppress all potential threats to Jewish communal and theological unanimity (as he defined it) outweighed direct knowledge or civility. He categorically denounced Luzzatto and his associates, with whom he had had no personal contact and about whom no independent report had yet circulated. Luzzatto’s nuanced thought, the social and intellectual make-up of the group, and the socio-political integrity of the Padua Jewish community were deemed irrelevant in a matter carrying potential danger to Jewish well-being.

The most pertinent rabbinic body to receive Hagiz’s missive was the Venetian rabbinate. The specific makeup of that rabbinate is unclear, particularly as early modern Venice consisted of distinct Jewish communities, but the “Yeshivah kelalit” may have functioned as a collection of rabbis in Venice who studied together. Not a confraternity per se and not as close-knit or as singularly devoted as the Padua circle of mystics, but the most significant element of the city’s rabbinic class. Their ethnicities may have been mixed, but, as will become evident, the vast majority of Luzzatto’s opposition consisted of Ashkenazic rabbis. Hagiz’s dispatch to Venice, like many of his later letters, called on its rabbinate to act against the apparent messianic

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5 Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 7.
movement active nearby. He did not know the Venetian rabbis personally, but they represented in his mind a rabbinate that could exercise power over Paduan Jewry. Acquiescing to Hagiz’s demands, out of sincere concern over the accusations as well as an opportunity to extend their authority, the syndicate of Venetian rabbis wrote to Bassan in Reggio. With Luzzatto remaining nameless, the rabbis expressed shock, skepticism, and distress that “there is a prophet in our midst.” They insisted that, as Luzzatto’s primary teacher, Bassan was required to do something to quell the fervor, especially as gentile discovery of renewed Jewish messianism could lead to derision or attacks.

Unlike Hagiz, however, the Venetians evoked a significantly personal element. Coupling their demand for an immediate and thorough response from Bassan was a measure of sensitivity for accusing his student of heresy. In an attempt at conciliation, for instance, they extended their warmest greetings to the “High Priest,” Bassan’s father-in-law Benjamin Kohen Vitale, a man representing moral rectitude to all involved. Similarly, most of the Italian rabbinate initially reacted cautiously, with respect to both enabling and quashing Luzzatto. Compared to the brutality exhibited between 1734 and 1736, which saw eastern European rabbis with no connection to Italian communities issue bans against Luzzatto, the first half of 1730 primarily involved rabbis who knew (or knew of) Bassan and (at least nominally) venerated Vitale. The intention of the established rabbinates was to maintain a regulated community by suppressing a potential messianic and heretical movement quickly and quietly.

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6 Ibid., no. 5. “Let the matter remain concealed from the ignorant masses, for they are likely to spread the news to the Gentiles within our midst who will revile us and attack us; it will make us abominable in their eyes.”
7 Which begs the question: how did Luzzatto’s exceptional standing as a scion of pietistic and rabbinic culture in Padua benefit him in the ensuing controversy, and how did this standing compare to other subjects of anti-Sabbatian heresy hunts?
8 See Chriqui, Igerot, no. 56 (Samson Morpurgo), no. 57 (David Finzi), no. 74 (Gabriel del Rio in Livorno).
The dozens of individual Italian rabbis had their own personal and communal concerns, including basic issues of morality and religiosity discussed in chapter two, and Hagiz’s anti-heretical vehemence was in no way pervasive in the diversity of northern Italy. To be sure, at least two Venetian rabbis came to pursue Luzzatto almost obsessively, and several rabbinites fell in line with the myriad of bans against him. However, as I intend to demonstrate, generally the greater the proximity to Luzzatto of a given rabbinic figure, the less intense the opposition.

By the early months of 1730, rabbis in Ancona, Ferrara, Florence, Livorno, Modena, and elsewhere in northern Italy had gotten wind of Gordon’s report. Hagiz had solicited the aid of Ezekiel Katzenellenbogen, chief rabbi of Altona-Hamburg-Wandsbek, who composed the first open letter of opposition. A descendant of the great legalists Benjamin Slonik and Joel Sirkis, as well as the son-in-law of Yom Tov Lipman Heller, Katzenellenbogen personified Ashkenazic rabbinic authority. He authored several works, including talmudic novella and numerous responsa. In his missive to the rabbis of Italy, he urged all, particularly those in Padua, to suppress the presumed untoward activity of Luzzatto and his friends. “Do not hesitate to nip this growth in the bud,” Katzenellenbogen wrote. “You must be vigilant and investigate thoroughly…. If you find evil, oppress and persecute him and his entire group of sympathizers, and publicize it to all.” The growth analogy was a deliberate swipe at Luzzatto’s youth, for Katzenellenbogen believed that profound spiritual experience came only after decades of learning and training.

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9 Ibid., no. 36; Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 210.
10 He referred to Gordon as ריק, meaning empty.
While many rabbis shared this view, including Joseph Ergas, a Livornese kabbalist who had studied with Vitale, the letter as a whole revealed major gaps between rabbis north and south of the Alps. Writing from northern Europe, Katzenellenbogen exposed his ignorance by calling on the rabbis of Padua to ferret out the culprits. In Ashkenazic communities, it may have been logical to assume that the rabbinate was distinct from the community’s group of pietistic-kabbalists, but in Padua that was certainly not the case. More importantly, he revealed his ethnic prejudice: “If you feel constrained [and are not able to mount a campaign], please inform us, for we have the power to gather the holy flock, those who wage the war of God…. In the company of the rabbis of Poland and Germany, we will issue a ban.” This attitude was shared by Luzzatto’s Ashkenazic opponents in general, and proved integral to the persistence of the opposition. Unsure the Italian rabbinate would work to suppress Luzzatto, Katzenellenbogen and Hagiz assured them that the matter would not be abandoned. Bearing years of anti-heretical experience, and likely identifying themselves as of greater rabbinic stature, the Ashkenazic figures implied that they waged God’s battles and would root out deviant threats no matter where they rested.

Defence and ‘Support’

The significance of Hagiz’s and Katzellenbogen’s ire and the corresponding Venetian response was not lost on Luzzatto or his supporters. About one month after Hagiz disseminated his initial letter, Isaac Marini, son of the chief rabbi of Padua, wrote to Bassan defending Luzzatto and his circle of mystics. He claimed that God was the source of the
wonders, and that Luzzatto and the others were engaged in goodness.\textsuperscript{11} “Surely if we had come upon [Luzzatto’s writings] without knowing who had composed them,” he later wrote, “we would have said, ‘Only a holy man of God could have written these, for the truth is evident in them.’”\textsuperscript{12} As with Gordon’s original epistle, it is unclear if Marini wrote this letter of his own volition or as part of a calculated effort on behalf of Luzzatto. Certainly, it would have been politically expedient to arrange for the group’s initial response to come from such a respectable member. Regardless, the letter displayed excitement, sincerity, and no particular concern over the accusations. After just three short paragraphs, the last of which conveyed blessings to Bassan’s family, Marini signed his name humbly as a “willing servant” and quoted a biblical verse indicating that all, from material wealth to spiritual perception, was a gift from God.\textsuperscript{13} The verse emphasized the group’s approach: that all depended upon God’s will and that Luzzatto’s magidic experiences were divinely ordained. Several months later, Marini expanded upon his position, arguing that God had originally separated light and dark for a purpose, and that the subsequent glowing light within the darkness illuminated the divine path of the ‘straight’ (ישרים).\textsuperscript{14} Appending his exegesis as a postscript of a letter from Luzzatto to Bassan, Marini simultaneously exhibited group unity – members often composed letters together, particularly to Bassan – and portrayed the group’s societal importance in cosmic terms.

Over the next month, through December 1729, Luzzatto himself wrote several letters to Bassan professing his innocence. He described the magnificence of the \textit{magid}, and more

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Ibid., no. 64.
\item[13] The chronogram reads in part: “So God give thee of the dew of heaven” (Genesis 27:28).
\end{footnotes}
importantly the positive effect that he and his closest associates were having on Paduan Jewry. The community was entranced, he explained, with many coming to his young yeshiva on a daily basis. This was meant to resonate with Bassan, who, as chief rabbi of Padua, had worked to curtail widespread sinning, including the profanation of the Sabbath.

Luzzatto gained a boost, personally, when Vitale wrote to him expressing joy over the news. After contemplating how the young Luzzatto had warranted a magid but he, decades his senior, had not, Vitale concluded that Luzzatto was indeed the Moses of his generation and that submitting to this fact was in actuality submission to God. Vitale’s openness to Luzzatto’s youth, based on a spiritualized vision focused on a godly perspective, contrasted sharply with the dismissiveness of Luzzatto’s opponents. Bassan was sent additional letters of support by January 1730, including at least three from Raphael Israel Kimhi, who was visiting Italian Jewish communities in order to collect funds for the Jews of Safed. Kimhi affirmed Gordon’s stunning testimony: during his nearly two-week stay in the Luzzatto house, Kimhi wrote, he had witnessed Luzzatto under the influence of the magid.

In the midst of writing and teaching in Padua, as well as regularly communicating with the heavens, Luzzatto moved to stem the tide of derision and bolster support. Despite his exceptional self-conception and the lofty intentions of his group, Luzzatto carefully crafted his letters to Hagiz, Bassan, and other rabbinic authorities to appear self-deprecating. He showered the recipients of his letters with flowery praises, standard in rabbinic letter writing,

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15 Ibid., no. 14.
16 For discussion of the establishment of an ‘eruv hatserot in Padua, see chapter two.
17 Ibid., no. 20.
18 Ibid., nos. 8, 27, 31.
and concluded with humble salutations that varied according to the tone of the
communication.\textsuperscript{19} To Hagiz, Luzzatto proclaimed that he was “neither a prophet, nor the son of
a prophet.” He performed no spectacular signs, he said, and he categorically denied that he
associated with sinners, including Sabbatians.\textsuperscript{20} To the Livornese rabbinate, he humbly stressed
his youth, an irrelevant matter to him personally but significant enough to others, he hoped,
that they would evaluate matters benevolently. He stated that the “rabbis of Padua”
supported him, referring of course to his compatriots, indicating the gap between assumption
of authority and actual knowledge of the individuals associated with that authority. Perhaps
more importantly, Luzzatto evoked the names of his wise and pious teachers, Bassan and the
recently deceased Vitale,\textsuperscript{21} subtly implying that he himself should be similarly regarded. It is
not that Luzzatto misrepresented himself; he stressed humility and identified his exceptional
status as a happenstance dependent upon divine providence. He sought only to diminish
denunciation, a more passive strategy to cosmic restoration than, say, directly challenging
establishment figures on matters of theology and morality. Undoubtedly aware of Hagiz’s
reputation, and conscious of distrust spreading among the Italian rabbinate, Luzzatto acted
shrewdly.

While writing obsequiously to established figures, Luzzatto hoped to solicit direct
support from friends and acquaintances. The same day in mid-February that he wrote to the

\begin{itemize}
\item[19] Luzzatto used ‘\textit{eved olam}, and ‘\textit{eved eloke yisrael}, although he did not sign his name with \textit{katan} or \textit{tsa’ir} as was common.
\item[20] Ibid., no. 10. Moreover, he professed that he did not know to whom he was speaking in the heavens (no. 41).
\item[21] Vitale died between February 19 and February 25, 1730. In a letter written on the 26\textsuperscript{th}, Luzzatto informed Bassan
that he had composed an elegy for Vitale and recited it at the synagogue that Shabbat (ibid., no. 38). For the
eulogy, see Ginzburg and Klar, 107–110.
\end{itemize}

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rabbits of Livorno, Luzzatto composed a letter to Emanuel Calvo, a Livornese physician. Calvo had earned his medical degree from the University of Padua, during which time Luzzatto had befriended him. At the age of seventeen, Luzzatto had composed a poem honoring Calvo for earning his medical degree. Now, in his letter to Calvo, Luzzatto confirmed his interaction with a magid: under its influence, Luzzatto explained, he had composed upwards of sixteen hundred folios in fifteen books, no less than a miraculous feat ordained by God. Obviously, Luzzatto hoped that Calvo would speak favorably of him to the rabbis of Livorno. He also enjoyed the support of the Mantuan rabbi Jacob Mendola, who had lived in Padua and studied with members of Mevakshe Hashem. Mendola traveled to Padua several times, including to celebrate Passover in the spring of 1730, and reported encouraging news to Mantua’s chief rabbi David Finzi. However, young as he was, Luzzatto’s contacts were limited, and he was largely dependent upon Bassan. Thus, in a note written a day after his letters to Calvo and the Livornese rabbinate, Luzzatto assured his teacher that he was conducting himself appropriately, and just as importantly writing respectfully to the elder rabbis of Italy.

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22 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 32. Calvo was at that point in Florence, as seen from his letter to Luzzatto two days later (ibid., no. 33.1).
23 Modena and Morpurgo, no. 208. Calvo, like most of Luzzatto’s friends, was several years his senior. Despite the development of adolescence and youth culture in the early modern period, which I referred to in chapter three, questions remain about age associations. Was Luzzatto unique to have such friendships? Was it a result of his mature intellectual abilities and interests?
24 Ginzburg and Klar, 10–14.
25 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 33.
26 Ibid., no. 53. Tishby stated explicitly that “Many scholars outside Padua sought to learn Kabbalah from Luzzatto both orally and by correspondence with him, and the expression ‘they [have] asked me’ which occurs repeatedly in these letters tells us that the addressee had approached Luzzatto on behalf of a group.” Tishby stressed one instance referring to Mantua, wherein Luzzatto responded: “And this matter I recall explaining to you, learned sir, when we were in Mantua” (Pithe Hokhmah va-Da’at [Warsaw, 1884], fols. 4b–19a; 19a–30b [here, 29a]), which in my opinion could refer to Mendola.
27 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 34.
For his part, Bassan reacted judiciously. His relationship with Luzzatto was complex – his young student, after all, came to identify himself with the biblical Moses – and his responses over several years included support, hope, doubt, disbelief, and chastisement. By the culmination of the affair, as Luzzatto left Padua for Amsterdam, Bassan moved to salvage his own reputation after Luzzatto’s Ashkenazic opponents had expanded their horizons of condemnation to include even tacit supporters. At the controversy’s inception, Bassan’s platform was broad and largely impersonal. In his lengthy response to the rabbis of Venice, Bassan offered an explanation for Gordon’s description.  

Choosing not to mention Luzzatto by name or acknowledge a problem in Padua, Bassan wrote of the pietistic and kabbalistic lifestyle, which sometimes magnificently resulted in heavenly visions. He cited several pietists and visionaries, including Haside Ashkenaz, Joseph Karo, Isaac Luria, Nathan Nata Shapira, and Menahem Azariah de Fano, the latter of whom had been active in Venice. Bassan’s mention of de Fano may have been intended to flatter the Venetians, not only in order to convey his point, but to soften their grudge against him personally for having established the Padua ‘eruv without their permission.

Although Bassan’s tone in the letter was conciliatory, it also stood as a defense of Kabbalah and its all-encompassing way of life. He attempted to enlighten the Venetians: in contrast to emphasizing non-mystical study of Talmud and halakhah – the legacy of Leone Modena, Samuel Aboab, and Ashkenazic rabbinic culture in general – Bassan endorsed the alternative worldview of pietism and mystical contemplation. He implied that Padua, like innumerable communities outside of Venice, retained its own rabbinic culture, and

28 Ibid., no. 26.
assumptions of Luzzatto’s guilt and unmitigated association of mysticism with Sabbatianism were misplaced. In an article unrelated to the Luzzatto controversy, Carlebach aptly showed that the study of Kabbalah in a post-Sabbatian environment did not necessarily exhibit a Sabbatian influence.\footnote{Carlebach, “Two Amens that Delayed the Redemption: Jewish Messianism and Popular Spirituality in the Post-Sabbatian Century,” \textit{Jewish Quarterly Review} 82:3–4 (1992): 241–261.} While Sabbatianism was a significant problem to the establishment, to which a thriving academic field is devoted, it was clearly not the only representation of Jewish mysticism in early modern Italy. One could certainly read Luzzatto’s mystical writings as entirely in line with pre-Sabbatian Kabbalah, and thereby conclude that his group operated without regard for the corrupted form of mysticism. The vast majority of kabbalists stemming from Zacut pursued mysticism independent of the heretical movement and even of overt messianism.\footnote{To be sure, Vitale’s position in this equation complicates matters, for he was suspected of retaining Sabbatian tendencies (see Sonne, Horeb article). Considering the possibility of Vitale’s Sabbatianism, how did Luzzatto relate to him, and why did Italian rabbis widely regard him as the “High Priest”?} Luzzatto, meanwhile, conceived of a cosmological chain of redemption that linked his contemporary era to that of Luria and the Safed adepts. Moreover, in response to the accusations levied against him, Luzzatto composed a treatise that jointly defended Kabbalah and condemned Sabbatianism; he intended to publish it, though his motives were rejected as charlatanistic.

Bassan’s reply to the Venetian rabbinate rejected and challenged its assumptions that the young kabbalists were a deviant threat, but he did not write to Luzzatto himself with ebullience. Initially, Bassan cautioned Luzzatto to be sure he was not mistaken, that the \textit{magid} could be a result of dangerous and evil elements.\footnote{Chriqui, \textit{Igerot}, no. 47.} After reading some of the \textit{magid}-inspired writings, however, Bassan challenged Luzzatto to explain why he thought he was in touch with
a magid when the work revealed nothing new. As the controversy intensified in the spring, the personal relationship between Luzzatto and Bassan strained from the pressure of the opposition. In April, Bassan got wind of a rumor from within the Luzzatto clan that Moses Hayim had acted (or attempted to act) immorally with a recently engaged female relative. “I have heard terrible things about you,” Bassan lamented. “Do not offer me excuses, for, by the Heavens, I will not accept them; I had faith in you, but the holy spirit cannot reside in impure flesh.... If you do not mend your ways, I will come out against you...for you are desecrating the Name of Heaven.”32 Hurt by his teacher’s presumption without evidence, Luzzatto retorted that Bassan could feel free to join Hagiz, because the number of his enemies paled in comparison to the strength of God’s will.33 Only through the intercession of Isaac Marini and Jacob Castelfranco, members of Luzzatto’s inner circle who themselves had studied with Bassan in Padua, did the teacher and student reconcile.34 However, at no point did Bassan and Luzzatto wholeheartedly unite. The youth, convinced of his cosmic status and perfect intention, desired absolute support from his former teacher, while the elder doubted his student’s validity and feared that his intransigence would have a negative effect on Kabbalah and pietism.

Bassan’s measured response was shared by Ergas, one of the preeminent kabbalists in Italy.35 Like Bassan, he was a mohel and man concerned with the status of Kabbalah and the mainstream perception of the pietists. He had supported Hagiz against the corrupting influence

32 Ibid., nos. 61,62.
33 Carlebach provided a detailed description of the events, though she seems to have, like Bassan, assumed Luzzatto’s guilt purely because the accusation was made. After this short exchange, nothing more is heard of it, and there is as much reason to assume Luzzatto’s innocence as guilt.
34 Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 222.
35 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 46.
of Nehemiah Hayon, but, because of his personal connection to Luzzatto’s teachers, he dealt with this matter quietly. In February, Ergas wrote a condolence letter to Bassan upon the passing of their kabbalistic master Vitale, to which he appended a long postscript about Luzzatto. In that note, and in a letter written in March, Ergas expressed doubts about Luzzatto. “All his words are derived from the works of other kabbalists,” he wrote, having perused at least two of Luzzatto’s newly composed treatises.36 “There is nothing new in them…. Even if we were to allow that he has some original material, why must we be convinced that it was taught by a magid?”37 Or, more directly, a magid was not necessary to assert what was already known. Ergas admitted that Luzzatto was very bright, but he was struck by the young man’s arrogance. Early on, Luzzatto had defended himself by proclaiming that, as the magid was God’s doing, he had not yet ascended to half the level of Luria. Ergas found such a comparison in poor taste and representative of Luzzatto’s overconfidence and feigned innocence. However, for other reasons, for the subjective conclusion that the young man lacked the “scent of piety,” Ergas categorically disqualified him as a candidate for the wonders Gordon described. Luzzatto was, he had heard, unmarried and beardless, and reportedly refrained from performing ritual ablutions prior to the Sabbath.38 While kabbalistic literature did stress seclusion as a means to contemplate the godly and achieve devekut, marriage and procreation were nevertheless mitzvoth and assumed. Growing a beard and taking a ritual bath, meanwhile, were well-established pietistic practices. Writing to Bassan, Ergas exclaimed

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36 The treatises included Ma’amor ha-Hokhmah and Kelalim, a book of kabbalistic principles. For a discussion of the relationship between Luzzatto’s various books of principles (Sefer ha-Kelalim, Kelale Pithe Hokhmah va-Da’at, Da’at Tevunot), see Tishby, “A Collection of Kabbalistic Works…MS Oxford 2593,” in Messianic Mysticism, 31–32 (mentioning there also Hayim Friedlaender’s edition of Da’at Tevunot with Sefer ha-Kelalim [Bene-Brak, 1973]).
37 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 46; Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 211. He cited Sefer ha-Kana in support of this question.
38 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 45; Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 206.
rhetorically: “Why hasn’t his magid chastised him about these? If he does not uphold these pieties, his magid cannot be a holy one.”

Ergas’s criticism aside, he undoubtedly distinguished between Luzzatto and Sabbatianists; or, considering his stated desire to interview Luzzatto himself, he at least gave the Paduans the benefit of the doubt because of their connection to Bassan and Vitale. In addition, as the scion of a wealthy merchant family in Livorno, Ergas may have sympathized with Luzzatto’s background and perspective.

Despite the accusations of heresy from Hagiz and Katzenellenbogen, and the pressure of the Venetian rabbinate, and the doubt of both Bassan and Ergas, Luzzatto remained steadfast. He rejected criticism and defended himself, because he traversed life and ridicule according to his own values. The son of a wealthy and locally influential Paduan merchant, and profoundly successful in drawing followers based purely on his charisma and abilities, Luzzatto felt himself beholden to no man. He adapted the depth of his kabbalistic teachings to contemporary times. Long-held beliefs, including the importance of marriage and refraining from cutting one’s beard, proved irrelevant to him, because fixed rules did not determine heavenly interaction with humanity. With respect to his bachelorhood, Luzzatto replied in a letter to Bassan that according to their rationale, Moses himself, who spoke ‘face to face’ with the Creator after he had separated from his wife, would have come under suspicion. He did not address why he

39 Moreover, he stated, like Bassan did later, that Luzzatto may have been unaware that impure forces were involved in his experiences, a scenario cited in Vital’s Sha’ar ha-Yihudim (Tishby, “A Collection of Kabbalistic Works…MS Oxford 2593,” in Messianic Mysticism, 61, n. 184).

40 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 47 (Bassan’s letter to Luzzatto); see Luzzatto’s responses in ibid., nos. 52, 67.

41 “And yet Rabbi Ergas should not expect his own brothers and cousins to wear a beard. In fact, I wish we knew more about what it meant for some members of the same Sephardic family in Livorno to uphold orthodoxy while others derived their wealth and recognition from forging economic alliances with non-Jews” (Trivellato, 98).

42 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 48. He further stated: “And if I am unmarried – so was Ben Zoma, and he was beloved of the Lord: not that I intend to remain unmarried – but [my present state] is not a disqualification” (ibid, no. 50).
was beardless, which similarly perplexed Bassan and Vitale, although contemporary trends of
cleanshavenness undoubtedly contributed to his decision.\textsuperscript{43} There was no contradiction in his
mind, because, first, \emph{devekut} was attained through spiritual emphasis, and two, as specified
later in \emph{Mesilat Yesharim}, it was occasionally necessary to refrain from overly pious actions in
order to prevent ridicule from the public at large.\textsuperscript{44} Even in moments of despair, including
Bassan’s near abandonment of his defense, Luzzatto’s conviction resonated: “Who is with me
except for our Father in heaven, who wants me to serve him and who has bestowed upon me
His blessings in abundant mercy…. [who has granted me] a stream of grace to stand up to the
challenge and to be a pure sacrifice before Him.”\textsuperscript{45}

Through the spring and early summer of 1730 the controversy intensified. Hagiz and
Katzenellenbogen intensified their letter-writing campaign with a vigor the rabbis in Italian
communities could not ignore. In the end of March, Hagiz urged the Venetians to examine
Luzzatto directly and collect evidence of his actions, writings, and character.\textsuperscript{46} If Luzzatto would
not come to the great \emph{bet din} of Venice, Hagiz wrote, Talmud scholars (\textit{חכמי גמרא}) would need to
tavel to Padua. Obviously, to Hagiz, the burden of proof lay with Luzzatto, from whose circle
unsolicited fantastical stories had originated. He protested Luzzatto’s choice to write in

\textsuperscript{43} Horowitz, “The Early Eighteenth Century Confronts the Beard,” 95–115. Portraiture shows that the beard was
popular in the seventeenth century, but not the eighteenth century. Clement XI (1700–1721) was the first clean-
shaven pope to reign in nearly two centuries (ibid., 98). The portrait of Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Barbarigo,
Bishop of Padua (and Verona and Brescia before that), depicts a beardless man. One could argue, as Horowitz
does, that external societal norms are irrelevant for the kabbalist. There is merit to the contention, although
external appearance itself clearly mattered to the rabbis who insisted that kabbalists should grow beards.
A related question is whether or not Luzzatto grew a beard upon arrival in Ottoman Palestine.

\textsuperscript{44} Mesilat Yesharim, 237.
\textsuperscript{45} Carlebach, \textit{Pursuit of Heresy}, 212.
\textsuperscript{46} Chriqui, \textit{Igerot}, no. 71.
Aramaic instead of in a language that was easy and clear. It spelled secrecy, Hagiz argued, signifying Luzzatto’s intention to subvert the few who could comprehend his subtlety and thereby give way to a heretical movement.

Ignorant of Luzzatto personally, but seeking to eradicate his potential influence, Hagiz denigrated and depersonalized the young mystic by almost exclusively referring to him as the “youth.” The term evoked his unmarried, and thereby incomplete and immature, status. Moreover, it evoked the immaturity of Sabbatai Tsevi, who had begun to proclaim himself to be the messiah at the ripe age of twenty-two.\(^47\) In addition, it distanced Luzzatto from the mystic archetypes Simon bar Yohai and Isaac Luria, for, unlike the youthful Luzzatto to whom everything came without effort, Hagiz argued, they had suffered and studied for many years before reaching supernal heights. [Thus, Hagiz did not deny the possibility of a *magid*, he merely rejected the notion that Luzzatto, and possibly anyone in their contemporary era, retained such contact with the heavens.] Other opponents parroted Hagiz’s age-based assumptions, and still others, including the Venetian rabbi Isaac Pacifico, turned Luzzatto’s age into an insult, calling him a “suckling babe” and “empty-headed boy.”\(^48\) In later years, after his marriage to Finzi’s daughter Tsiporah, Luzzatto’s opponents would refer to him merely as “this man,” a tactic meant to devalue Luzzatto, his past (including his own ordination), and his community. In the March letter to the Venetian rabbinate, Hagiz set the tone for future

\(^{47}\) Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 138–143.

\(^{48}\) Tishby, “A Collection of Kabbalistic Works...MS Oxford 2593,” in *Messianic Mysticism*, 15, citing Montefiore MS 111, fols. 13r–14r. From Casale Monferrato, Abraham Segre similarly fell into ageist disbelief and wrote to Jacob Vita Luzzatto about the reports concerning his son (Chiquisti, *Igerot*, no. 63, p. 205). When the young mystic leader learned of the matter, no doubt from his father who continued to support him morally and financially, he complained to Bassan about the lack of respect. Segre’s position may be contextualized in light of Ergas. He was a student of Briel and a friend of Vitale.
demonization: his sole use of Luzzatto’s name alluded to the Christian messiah and the evil he had wrought.\textsuperscript{49} Fearing Luzzatto’s corrupting influence – he had already fooled the pious Vitale, Hagiz lamented – Hagiz vowed that permitting him to continue his activities in Padua unabated would result in a calamity, particularly if he sought to bring his writings to press.

The letter was lengthy and passionate, and it is clear that Hagiz branded himself as the defender of God’s honor.\textsuperscript{50} As the supreme heresy hunter of the first half of the eighteenth century, Hagiz self-identified as the Moses of his generation and its chief moral and religious guide. He was not like Luzzatto’s revelation-Moses, but rather the Moses who had led his people out of desolation to the Promised Land.\textsuperscript{51} In a letter to Samson Morpurgo, chief rabbi of Ancona, Hagiz proclaimed the people’s need for his involvement, saying “It is incumbent upon us not to abandon the holy flock like a flock of sheep that is without a shepherd.”\textsuperscript{52} His March letter to the Venetians included numerous references to Moses, as well as an evocation of the rebellious Korah and his assembly. The allusion was clear: Hagiz condemned Luzzatto and his compatriots as contemporary evil doers attempting to overturn the divinely ordained rabbinic system.

The elaborate and intense nature of the letter represented Hagiz’s renewed call for action from the Venetian rabbinate, for nothing had been done to stop Luzzatto. Several weeks earlier, the Padua rabbinate – that is to say, Luzzatto’s own compatriots – wrote to

\textsuperscript{49} "...נער זה מבית לוצאטו חיים משה...", whereby the initials of his name spell LeHeM, as in, he came from Bet Lehem, or Bethlehem.

\textsuperscript{50} To Hagiz, successful suppression of subversive elements was necessary to repair the fractured “peace between Israel and their Father in Heaven” (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 35).

\textsuperscript{51} Stressing the absolute truth of his path, Hagiz concluded one letter with the salutation: נב אלוהי משל אבות ישראל (Ibid., no. 115).

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., no. 55, p. 182. Elsewhere, Hagiz displayed self-righteousness based purely on birth: twenty-eight generations of rabbis on father’s side, and eighteen generations on his mother’s side (ibid., no. 149, p. 407).
Katzenellenbogen conceding nothing. Emitting joy and amazement on par with Gordon’s original letter, they described Luzzatto’s bustling yeshiva and celebrated the widespread repentance that had gripped the local population. More importantly, Jacob Aboab, son of Samuel Aboab and a major rabbinic figure in Venice, had responded benignly to the original missives of Hagiz and Katzenellenbogen:

“What will we achieve by suppressing his fame? So long as he casts no blemish or doubt on our Torah or the words of our sages...and his goal is straightforward...to plant the fear of the Lord and observance of His commands into the hearts of the masses. What harm is there in letting him continue?”

Aboab’s voice of moderation exemplified the vast majority of the multifaceted Italian rabbis. Few rabbis jumped on Luzzatto’s bandwagon, but so too did few exhibit Hagiz’s vehemence. Of the many who expressed curiosity or concern about the goings on in Padua, several traveled to the city to see for themselves. Isaac Lampronti, chief rabbi of Ferrara, best remembered for compiling the halakhic encyclopedia *Pahad Yitshak*, spent a Sabbath in the Luzzatto household in the spring of 1730 and studied magid-inspired works. Lampronti neither publicly attested to the validity of Luzzatto’s *magid* nor praised the group’s undertakings, but he did relate to Luzzatto favorably by accepting the kabbalist’s anti-Sabbatian tract. Like Bassan, he did not abandon his worldview or socio-political position for Luzzatto, which required submission and a leap of faith, but unlike Hagiz, he found no reason to suppress his activity. Similarly, Morpurgo, who typified the Italian rabbi-doctor, urged temperance as a means to discern truth. He was

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53 Ibid., no. 40
54 According to Carlebach, Aboab was the source in Venice who provided Luzzatto with copies of the opposition letters (*Pursuit of Heresy*, 216).
56 Ibid., no. 69, p. 217. The letter states that a copy of the book was sent to Amsterdam for printing, an indication of his goal to widely disseminate his teachings.
willing to engage in conversation with both sides, trusting both Bassan’s moral rectitude and Hagiz’s concern for the community at large. Broadly speaking, the tacit support of Aboab, Lampronti, Morpurgo, Mendola in Mantua, and Bassan in Reggio, influenced the Italian rabbinites so that Luzzatto was not ostracized.

**Oath, Ordination, and a Rabbinic Spectrum**

In July, the uproar over Gordon’s letter was resolved with a settlement. Bassan traveled to Padua with Nehemiah Kohen of Ferrara, David Finzi of Mantua, and Jacob Belilios and Moses Menahem Merari of Venice. Luzzatto had not appeared before the Venetian bet din, as Hagiz had demanded, and Bassan had arranged for allies Finzi and Kohen to accompany and temper the unofficial supervisory delegation from Venice. The former had known Bassan through Vitale and had admired Luzzatto’s religious devotion, while the latter had previously visited Luzzatto with Lampronti in the spring and attested to the young man’s exceptional abilities. Hagiz had demanded that Luzzatto promise to hand over all his writings and refrain from teaching in the name of the magid, or he would be subject to excommunication. The arrival of the rabbis in Padua demonstrated the innocuous authority of the local rabbinate, and its communal autonomy for that matter, in a globalized rabbinic culture. Even with the presence

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57 Ibid., no. 60.
58 Ibid., no. 83.
59 On Feb. 5, 1730, he wrote to Bassan: “The affair of Padua concerns me as much as it does you; you are the be commended for your letter to the Yeshiva of Venice...I also appreciate the letter which Luzzatto has written to R. Hagiz, in which he nobly and humbly poured forth his soul.”
Luzzatto, meanwhile, appreciated Kohen and would allow for his investigation because “he will not harm me. I know the man and his ways and he is a gentle person” (ibid., nos. 23, 43, 52).
60 Ibid., no. 71.
of Finzi, Kohen, and Bassan, Luzzatto was presumed guilty, or troublesome enough that
suppression could be utilized to maintain quiet on the Italian front.

Prior to their arrival, Bassan and Luzzatto had composed an oath for Luzzatto to sign.\(^61\) It was designed to give each camp what they desired. Luzzatto’s detractors would be relieved that Luzzatto’s teachings would be suppressed and he would refrain from publicly proclaiming heavenly bonds, while Luzzatto, Bassan, and pietists in general would appear to have a legitimate perspective and authority. Thus, Luzzatto declared:

“I will gather and conceal, in accordance with [Bassan’s] wishes, all the works I have written until this day which were dictated by the magid or holy souls; they will not be made public except with [Bassan’s] permission...because the sages of our generation do not want new treatises on the true lore of Israel [Kabbalah] to be disseminated, lest harm will befall the masses of Israelites.”\(^62\)

Luzzatto additionally offered to refrain from writing in the language and style of the Zohar, even at the behest of the magid, for “it is not my desire to cause strife among the congregation of God.” Such restrictions would obtain so long as he lived in the diaspora, which, as he indicated privately in a letter to Bassan just weeks later, would not be much longer as he hoped to immediately immigrate to the Land of Israel.\(^63\)

In fact, the text and, with it, any semblance of Bassan’s authority and Luzzatto’s validity, or even sensitivity, was rejected. As Carlebach observed, the original version was “too vague and ambiguous for Luzzatto’s foes, and it did not demonstrate sufficient contrition on his

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\(^{61}\) Tishby seems to have surmised that both Bassan and Luzzatto had a hand in the composition (“A Collection of Kabbalistic Works...MS Oxford 2593,” in Messianic Mysticism, 6, n. 22, and 20, n. 61), while Carlebach stated that Bassan was the author (Pursuit of Heresy, 225). Luzzatto was too independent, in my opinion, to have had no say in his own capitulation.

\(^{62}\) Chriqui, Igerot, no. 75 (original manuscript in Schwadron Collection, National Library of Israel).

\(^{63}\) Ibid., no. 80 (August, 1730).
The text disseminated in manuscript and eventually printed by Jacob Emden, who would later take a strong stand against Luzzatto, included additional prohibitions and severer language, and clearly demarcated rabbinic power structure. “[Bassan] has taught me the gravity of fabricating new works in the true lore [Kabbalah], which had not been envisaged by our forebears,” the edited oath affirmed.

“He commanded me to refrain from writing the various works which I had composed of the true lore, particularly those which I wrote in the language of the original Zohar. Although I believe I had composed them at the word of the magid and holy souls, which seemed to have revealed themselves to me, and I wrote as they dictated, my aforementioned master says that I cannot rely on this for harm is likely and error is nigh.”

The oath painted Luzzatto as an inexperienced naïve youth in need of guidance, and in so doing removed his social and religious context. The fact that several educated men, some with rabbinic ordination, had joined forces with him in Padua – and that he retained some level of support from a range of rabbinic voices in Italian communities – was irrelevant to his foes. A harsh and simplistic tone pervaded the text as a means to attain the kabbalist’s total submission.

Luzzatto’s opponents feared his individuality and the unknown that accompanied it. In an article on “Kabbalah, Sabbatianism, and Heresy,” Matt Goldish aptly argued that rabbis

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64 Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 225.
65 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 75.1; Emden, Zot Torat ha-Kena’ot, fols. 51–52. “My master also taught me that the prayers of unity (yihudim) to which I had accustomed myself, and through which, it appeared, I achieved my illumination and strength to compose these works, are not removed from the ways of the demonic side, particularly in the land of the Gentiles.”
during this period feared kabbalistic myth and the flexibility that it provided. The idea of soul roots and the deep, personalized emphasis on messianism countered rabbinic hierarchy and power. Luzzatto’s opponents, therefore, initiated the oath with a warning: “Every Israelite must subjugate and serve the rabbinate and is obligated to listen to their words and judgments and do as they decree. For their statements are true and just and their Torah is God’s Perfect Torah, and even if they say left is right and right is left!” Such a proclamation served to establish absolute authority, even at the expense of defining said authority according to a narrowed viewpoint that rejected any rabbi or rabbinate that supported Luzzatto. The text acknowledged Bassan as the chief rabbi of Reggio, but denigrated him, and obviously Luzzatto and his group, as a “master of youngsters” (אלוֹן נועוֹר). For fear of ongoing harassment from Hagiz, Katzenellenbogen, and the Venetian rabbinate in general, Luzzatto and his variegated supporters tolerated the sharper version of the oath. On the third of Av, in the midst of the annual period of mourning commemorating numerous calamities in Jewish history, Luzzatto, Kohen, Belilios, and Merari affixed their signatures to the document. The significance of the date was not lost on the participants, and it would be quoted by both sides of the divide over the next few years as an indication of the cosmic struggle in contemporary Jewish life of good over evil. Luzzatto’s papers were gathered under Bassan’s supervision and sealed in a trunk entrusted to Luzzatto’s uncle, Moses Alpron, a


67 Cf. Deuteronomy 17:10; Sifra Deuteronomy 154.

68 Resh mata and resh metivta.
prominent member of the Padua community trusted by both sides to retain the documents untouched in his possession.⁶⁹

Despite Luzzatto’s conciliation, the settlement should not be regarded as a simple defeat. Luzzatto himself concluded that the compulsion was divinely ordained, and it is clear that he quickly made his peace with the events.⁷⁰ Carlebach argued convincingly that the persecution left a “deep impression on the character and self-perception of the group,” leading Luzzatto to fold it into his biography of the cosmic redeemer, like Moses’ flight to Midian and Simon bar Yohai’s evasion of the Romans.⁷¹ Luzzatto and his group equated Hagiz and Belilios with Satan,⁷² and labeled the entire ordeal as a ‘prosecution’ (מקטרג).⁷³ Although he abided by the oath in public, he and his compatriots disregarded it completely in the privacy of their yeshiva.⁷⁴ Of course, reactive acceptance of their rejection pales in comparison to their hope of

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⁶⁹ Carlebach states that Alpron remained skeptical of Luzzatto’s powers (Pursuit of Heresy, 226). That is apparent, for he communicated with the Venetian rabbinate over the matter, but so too did he maintain relations at least with Bassan, Forte, and Romanin, let alone his nephew and brother-in-law. Romanin composed a wedding poem for Alpron’s son Jacob, to Clara bat Samuel ha-Kohen (VTL, no. P015).

⁷⁰ Chriqui, Igerot, nos. 79 and 80. In August, just prior to the High Holidays, Luzzatto wrote to Bassan that all is well in a mystical sense, while in October, after learning that Hagiz was pleased that Luzzatto had signed the oath, Luzzatto remarked that he was even more pleased.


⁷² Chriqui, Igerot, no. 82; Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 229.

⁷³ Luzzatto used the word often in letters, and again in Da’at Tevunot in reference to divinely ordained challenges. The use of the word in the latter instance is another indication that he composed the book for members of his group, contextualizing the cosmic drama intertwined in their daily lives.

Earlier, Luzzatto had shrugged off Ergas in one letter by claiming that he did not reach the limits of knowledge (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 50, p. 166), and in another, sent a week later, contended that Ergas did not grasp the depth of his writing (Ibid., no. 51, p. 171).

⁷⁴ According to Benayahu, Luzzatto did not in fact break the oath; see Benayahu, “Shevuat Ramhal lahdol mi-le-haber sefarim al-pi ha-‘magid’, mahuta ve-totse’oteha,” Zion 42 (1977): 24–48; and idem, Kitve ha-kabalah, 8–9, 13–14. Tishby forcibly rejected that claim and accused Benayahu of white-washing Luzzatto (Tishby, “A Collection of Kabbalistic Works…MS Oxford 2593,” in Messianic Mysticism, 20, n. 61, and 68, n. 204). The issue hinged on whether the works were collected from dissemination, and whether his teachings were spread elsewhere and otherwise.
spreading an intellectual piety. Luzzatto composed a prayer that embodied the deep despondency they were forced to overcome:

“We are downtrodden and rejected in the eyes of all who see us, the leaders of our people, as well as the masses. We are ‘brambles, evildoers, fools, lunatics, idiots and heretics against the Torah, God forbid, idolators’. There is no Comforter to console us in the darkness that engulfs us…. We had hoped for light but there was none. We desired to benefit from Your illumination not for our own pleasure, but because You chose us and desired our service.”

Yet, accept the rejection they did, as they redoubled their efforts and established the group covenant within the year.

For his part, Bassan rewarded Luzzatto with a new level of ordination, on top of that which Luzzatto had received in 1725. There is no extant copy of the writ, but two separate letters attest to the fact. Almanzi referred to it vaguely as “semikhat rabanut” and contended that Belilios and Kohen joined Bassan in conferring the ordination. They both referred to Luzzatto as “hakham” when signing the oath, which would presumably indicate their elevation of the young man from the lower rabbinic level of haver. In contrast to Hagiz, who merely desired the suppression of Luzzatto’s activities, the Italian opposition seems to have hoped, at least at this point, to cajole Luzzatto rather than alienate him. As with monarchs and potential rivals in the nobility, bestowal of title and authority was designed to appease and ensure control.

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75 Tishby, “Shirim u-fiutim me-ginze Rabi Moshe Hayim Lutsato,” 125–126. Tishby observed that the downtrodden Israel is a metaphor for the persecuted circle. He expressed detection but ultimate faith in a letter to Bassan in January 1731 (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 82).
76 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 103 (complaint of Venetians to Hagiz).
77 Reported by Safed emissary Raphael Kimhi to Abraham Segre of Casale (Almanzi, “Toledot R’ Moshe Hayim Lutsato me-Padovah,” 152–153).
This may be the reason that Bassan did not attempt to counter the Venetians, not in defense of Luzzatto, but for having been personally insulted and disregarded. After all, he bore the brunt of the anti-Luzzatto letter-writing campaign, was tacitly challenged for being the renegade’s teacher and was bullied into arranging Luzzatto’s oath, and even suffered disrespect in the official oath. While it is possible that Bassan exercised restraint for purely pietistic (though not messianic) reasons, he undoubtedly recognized his powerlessness in the face of Venice’s Yeshivah kelalit and the Ashkenazic rabbinate at large. Knowing he was a step away from becoming a target himself (an outcome that indeed developed), Bassan swallowed his pride. He sought to modestly preserve his father-in-law’s way of life, and acted to prevent adverse effects on the pietists of northern Italy; unlike his more independent and dynamic student, a generation younger, Bassan did not seek to promote pietism communally.

Despite the knowledge we have surrounding the signing of the oath, we are still largely ignorant about the politics involved. What the multifaceted and multi-staged Luzzatto controversy clarifies is the amorphous and relative state of rabbinic power. Although they were present that July day, Finzi and Bassan, Luzzatto’s staunchest supporters among the established rabbinate, did not sign the document. The absence of their names does not necessarily indicate a predetermined bystander status; perhaps they decided to refrain from signing the document after disagreeing with its tone and intention. If so, their rejections of the writ served as autonomous acts of rabbinic authority, albeit on an individual rather than communal scale.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{78} Bassan assured Luzzatto of his devotion by conferring the ordination, and, more importantly to the young mystic who eschewed titles, arranging his engagement to Finzi’s daughter Tsiporah. In addition to buoying the group’s morale – they saw the marriage as the embodiment of the ultimate cosmic union – it strengthened Luzzatto’s relationship with the Mantuan rabbinate and community.
Conversely, Belilios and Merari represented the Venetian rabbinate, a body that did not speak with a unified voice (Aboab, as mentioned above, bemoaned Luzzatto’s persecution) but that was vested with a ‘power’ (or expectation) from rabbis abroad that provided opportunity to extend its influence. The Venetian rabbinate’s authority was greater than that of Reggio or Mantua, but Bassan and Finzi may have each carried greater personal weight in Italian communities than either Belilios or Merari. However, even the extent of Venetian power was very limited: some members of the rabbinate complained to Hagiz that the Italian rabbinate in general did not follow their lead; the oath did not actually curtail Luzzatto’s activities in Padua; and the second stage of the controversy was dominated by Ashkenazic rabbis. Finally, Nehemiah Kohen may best characterize the complexity of the Luzzatto controversy in northern Italy. Although he had previously shown support for Luzzatto, Kohen ultimately signed the document. He may have sought to curry favor with the Venetians for personal or professional reasons, or the inclusion of his participation may have been part of a compromise between the camps. That is, the signed oath may have prevailed as the middle ground between the Bassan-Luzzatto version and an even harsher, lost recension more in line with Hagiz’s charges of heresy. The latter notion would explain why Kohen, a friend of Luzzatto, certified the oath and Belilios, a strong opponent, endorsed the ordination.

79 In the second more virulent stage of the controversy, both Belilios and Merari became largely extraneous in the matter. Also, it appears to me that more responsa from Bassan and Finzi were included in Lampronti’s *Pahad Yitshak* and Morpurgo’s *Shemesh Tsedakah*, although a complete study would be necessary to measure this. Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 29; Carlebach, *Pursuit of Heresy*, 238; Danieli, *L'epistolario*, 237–239.
80 Chriqui, *Igerot*, nos. 114–115). See C. Roth, “Forced Baptisms in Italy,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 27:2 (1936): 117–136; although a letter from Hagiz deploring and lamenting the conversion was written in March 1735, Roth proved that the actual conversion ceremony did not take place until May 1735. The impending baptism of Kohen was
The settlement between the parties highlighted a larger issue concerning the Italian rabbinate in the first half of the eighteenth century. The complete lack of uniformity between Luzzatto, Bassan, Ergas, Finzi, Morpurgo, Lampronti, Kohen, Aboab, Belilios, and others, is clearly indicative of a wide spectrum of rabbis with divergent emphases. As will become clear by the end of this chapter, I do not believe that this range reflected a rabbinate in flux or in crisis. Rather, it was an extension of a complex intellectual and religious environment with a myriad of perspectives. The predominant rabbinic worldview in ethnically and culturally diverse Italian Jewish communities, typified by physician-rabbis like Morpurgo, Lampronti, and Cantarini and Marini in Padua, encompassed relative tolerance and broadmindedness. The controversy over the activities of Luzzatto and his circle in Padua, as with Nehemiah Hayon a generation earlier, started with external pressure. It is not that rabbis in communities south of the Alps did not fear heresy, but the impetus and strategy of the anti-Luzzatto campaign rested with Hagiz, Katzenellenbogen, and others in the north. More research is necessary, but I suspect that Luzzatto’s staunchest opponents in nearby Venice, taking their lead from Hagiz and others in central and eastern Europe, sought to remodel the indigenous outlook with greater emphasis on a unified and authoritative rabbinate with themselves at the helm. Similarly, though inversely stemming from subjective mystical experience and just a small base of pietists, Luzzatto and his perfecting community intended to establish a single voice, one that would not only engulf the diverse Italian front but would dominate and ‘uplift’ rabbinic culture in general.

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82 In her biography of Hagiz, Carlebach argued convincingly that the strength of Hagiz’s conviction and personality repeatedly spurred action against Sabbatianists.
Part Two: of ‘International’ Importance

To Print a Book

Although sources on the Luzzatto controversy are limited to Bassan’s sporadic collection of letters, it is clear that the signing of the oath did not put the activities or uncertainties of either side to rest. In the spring of 1731, Luzzatto and his group established their detailed protocols, in direct contradiction to his signed statement, and by the fall he communicated to Bassan profound confidence and belligerence. “God is with me, Hashem is with me,” he wrote. “I do not fear, for what can man do to me?” While the group covenant was an expression of his strengthened intention to extend his influence, letters to Bassan clearly indicate that Luzzatto faced continued derision despite the oath. In March of 1732, Luzzatto conveyed his impatience with the ban and railed again the rabbinic emphasis on halakhic study. Luria, he remarked, had devoted only a couple of hours per day to practical halakhah, and the rabbis who prevented him from teaching Kabbalah delayed redemption. A letter sent a month later implied that Jekutiel Gordon had faced continued pressure from the Venetians, though in what way or for what particular offense is not discernible. The same letter revealed that Luzzatto and his group had been criticized for staging a theatrical play in his father’s house on the occasion of Luzzatto’s marriage to Tsiporah Finzi. Luzzatto and his fellow mystics had intended the performance to represent the cosmic redemption, and the Venetian rabbis, led by Belilios, condemned the activity. It is unlikely that the Venetians were aware of the players’

83 Chiqui, Igerot, no. 87: “אלוקים לי, ה’ לי, לא אירא, מה יעשה לי אדם?”
84 Ibid., no. 88.
85 Ibid., no. 89. A Paduan layman named Hayim Rozanes had slandered him, he complained to Bassan.
86 Luzzatto’s appropriation of broad cultural trends followed the example of Bassan, Vitale, and Zacut, all of whom composed poetry extensively and the latter of whom published what many scholars consider to be the first modern Hebrew drama.
specific mystical intentions; rather, their condemnation concerned the semi-public act of Luzzatto and his kabbalistic compatriots, regardless of content.\textsuperscript{87} Nearly two years after signing the oath, Luzzatto remained an ongoing target of attacks.

With his yeshiva growing in Padua, but the redemption yet to occur, Luzzatto shifted gears. The spiritual battle of good over evil could carry on through the group’s constant study of the Zohar, but a more direct tactic was necessary to successfully restore the cosmic order. After producing thousands of pages of magidic-inspired texts, Luzzatto set himself to composing theological introductions to Kabbalah, probably to help acclimate his students to deeper concepts and expectations.\textsuperscript{88} By 1733, he decided to further dilute the intensity of his

\textsuperscript{87} Judging by Luzzatto’s letter to Bassan, it is possible that the Venetians expressed derision about the play itself, as if acculturation factored into their derision. Just two years earlier, a communal council in Mantua had been worried by local youths’ attempt to present a comedy in public on Purim (Simonsohn, \textit{History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua}, 668), though obviously without a kabbalistic context.

\textsuperscript{88} For instance, he composed \textit{Kelalim} and \textit{Da’at Tevunot}. The original work was not titled; Tishby believed Ghirondi named it \textit{Da’at Tevunot} (Tishby, “A Collection of Kabbalistic Works...MS Oxford 2593,” in \textit{Messianic Mysticism}, 31, n. 95). The colophon reads: Completed on the fifth day of the week, on the eve of the New Moon of Adar I, in the year 5494” (1734).

Tishby discussed a manuscript of another dialogue between Mar Yanuka and Mar Kashisha (Mr. Child and Mr. Old) (see MS Oxford 2237). Neubauer and Ginzburg falsely attributed it to Gordon, because it appeared in his hand, but Tishby found two additional copies and concluded it was Luzzatto’s treatise (Ibid., 32). The Jerusalem manuscript was a forerunner for \textit{Mesilat Yesharim}: it opens with preliminary paragraphs in which Mar Kashisha is approached by Mar Yanuka, a distinguished student who has learned Torah from his celebrated teacher, “applying the methods of pilpul and sevara in the sea of the Talmud and the early and later posekim,” and who now desires to be rescued from perplexity in his study of the secrets of the Torah. Mar Kashisha willingly agrees “to teach a pupil so worthy, whom I have known to be of good repute since your youth.” This copy has a title page bearing the inscription: “Part 1, behold before you, dear reader, a ladder set upon on the earth, and the top of it reaches to Heaven” (Genesis 28:12).

The second part of the treatise concentrates on a passage in the Zohar (see Tishby, \textit{The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts}, trans. David Goldstein, vol. 3 [Oxford University Press, 1989], 1131–1133, and remarks in 1086–1087): “All those who occupy themselves with the Torah, the Gemara, and the posekim and are full of mitsvot and good deeds will be turned away from all the gates of the Garden of Eden in the world to come, and all their deeds will count as nothing, Heaven forbid” (fol. 84v), if they have not occupied themselves with the study of Kabbalah during their life in this world. Mar Kashisha confirms the truth of this teaching and in explaining it repeats with great vigour that the gates of the supernal Garden of Eden are indeed closed to anyone who has not studied Kabbalah – the science of truth – and has not, by its light, accomplished acts of tikun and attained devekut. The performance of mitzvoth and the study of the revealed Torah are secondary to the main matter, and “mankind have erred in this and reversed their importance; this has caused the inner Torah and true knowledge to
literary output in order to even more broadly disseminate his basic philosophy. He produced a
dialogue entitled *Ma’amar ha-Vikuah*, a defense of Kabbalah in response to Leone Modena’s
early seventeenth-century attack on Jewish mysticism, *Ari Nohem*, and informed Bassan that he
wished to publish the book at a press in Amsterdam. His goal was to present a case for
Kabbalah on as large a scale as possible.

In December, Luzzatto sent a letter to Bassan requesting an approbation (*haskamah*) for
his new book. The 1554 rabbinic synod led by Meir Katzenellenbogen of Padua had ruled that
books printed by or for Jews required rabbinic approval before being brought to press. In
addition to formally protecting printers’ rights, approbations unofficially safeguarded against
the printing, and wide dissemination, of heretical ideas. While not every imprint was
accompanied by approbations, especially those of the biblical or rabbinic canon, print shops did
not entertain a newly authored text without written evidence attesting to its orthodoxy. The
endorsements followed the title page as a way of attesting to the book’s legitimacy, and
because the reputation of the men granting approbations, and the intensity or flowery nature
of their admiration, demonstrated the book’s value to readers.

When Luzzatto wrote to Bassan, he assumed that his former teacher would continue to
stand by him in his efforts to spread their shared pietistic heritage. Bassan did not reply.
Receiving no reply within four weeks, Luzzatto wrote to Bassan again, this time with a sense of

be forgotten by Israel, and they have been left in utter darkness in this world” (fol. 91r) (Tishby, “A Collection of
Kabbalistic Works...MS Oxford 2593,” in *Messianic Mysticism*, 41–42).
89 Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 90.
90 See Meir Benayahu, *Copyright, Authorization and Imprimatur*. For a masterful index of approbations, listing
rabbis who granted *haskamot*, book titles, and publication information, see Leopold Löwenstein, *Mafteah. ha-
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urgency. The boat to Amsterdam was leaving shortly, he explained, and he needed Bassan’s letter immediately. Without it—a letter from the chief rabbi of a community in northern Italy—Luzzatto would have great difficulty in bringing his book to press in a major city not his own.

Again, Bassan remained quiet. Six months later, during which time there is no evidence of correspondence between the two (which does not necessarily indicate their lack of communication), Luzzatto sent a letter to Bassan requesting the return of his manuscript. Although he desired Bassan’s approbation, Luzzatto stated, he was primarily concerned with retaining the book, the sole copy he had penned. Obviously, Luzzatto had not traveled to Amsterdam, and since the end of January he, along with Valle, Forte, and Romanin (as well as chief rabbi Marini), had been compelled by the Consiglio to teach public classes in the community bet midrash. There is little reason to assume the yeshiva had stagnated, but, similarly, its growth in Padua may have plateaued by the summer of 1734.

At the end of June, Bassan finally replied, albeit tepidly. He raised two objections to the book. The first, echoing Ergas’s criticism at the inception of the controversy, was that the book offered nothing new. Bassan noted that other defenses of Kabbalah already existed, including Joseph Delmedigo’s Matsref la-hokhmah and Abiad Sar Shalom Basilea’s Emunat hakhamim, the latter of which had been recently composed and published in Mantua. Additionally, although Bassan made no mention of it, Ergas had produced a book in support of Kabbalah, while semi-kabbalistic midrashic commentaries, including one by Vitale, had been issued by print houses from Amsterdam to Istanbul. Bassan’s assessment may have been

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91 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 92 (January 8, 1734). On January 3, Luzzatto wrote to Bassan as well, to which the elder evidently did not reply.
92 Ibid., no. 94, pp. 275–276.
accurate, but it was also duplicitous. In the midst of the initial controversy, he had reproached Luzzatto for having sent Katzenellenbogen an original kabbalistic commentary on the Torah pericope Mikets. It would have been better to have submitted an explanation of a passage from the Zohar, he told Luzzatto, thereby displaying his talent and sincerity without inspiring concern that he sought to overturn established thought.\(^9^3\)

In contradicting his earlier statement, Bassan betrayed his fear of anything Luzzatto related. He distrusted the unpredictability of both Luzzatto and his enemies, relaying this concern in his second more severe protestation: the book was bound to be attacked “if not because of its contents, then because of its author.” Bassan surmised, rightfully, that the Venetian rabbis would oppose Luzzatto’s attempt to disseminate any knowledge, even if it did not conflict with the oath he had signed. Moreover, he recognized that he himself would become a target in the hunt for Luzzatto’s head, and resented his former student’s “natural hotheadedness.” “If the Lord had not guided me to find a way to silence the multitude of voices,” he wrote, “who knows what the extent of the damage would have been? Now you repay my kindness with ingratitude by forcing me to affix my name to a work that will surely find disfavor!” Identifying himself as both the savior of a disastrous situation in 1730 and as a martyr for the sake of his student and the way of Kabbalah, Bassan complied with the request in the most superficial way. Penning his “approbation” on a separate page, he declared: “The wise author exhibited to me this book of his, called Ma’amor ha-Vikuah, and I perused it and examined his words, and I did not find anything in it that seemed twisted and perverted.

\(^9^3\) Ibid., no. 47.
Therefore, this is permission granted to him to publicize it.”94 Thus, Bassan disavowed himself of Luzzatto’s grandeur, but, because of their strong bond, tacitly supported his efforts.

While Bassan’s approbation left much to be desired, Finzi, by now Luzzatto’s father-in-law for several years, backed the book completely.95 He provided Luzzatto with an approbation advocating the study of Kabbalah. Luzzatto’s dialogue of a kabbalist and a philosopher could serve as a textbook with which to enlighten ignorant Jewry, he stated, for philosophy was the way of the gentiles and acted as a “stumbling block”96 that required removal. “The vain philosophers pursue juvenility,” Finzi had written to Morpurgo during the first stage of the controversy, “and understanding remains far from them.”97 It seems unlikely that Finzi’s lambasting of philosophers exclusively referred to intellectuals who studied philosophy; rather, like Vitale’s polemical introduction to Gevul Binyamin, Finzi was critical of contemporary society driven by Renaissance ideals. While it is possible that his judgment was clouded by his personal connection to Luzzatto – or even that he was terminally ill at the time and felt comforted by the imminence of mysticism – Finzi was generally inclined towards piety. He had studied with Zacut towards the end of the latter’s life, as well as served as rabbi in Alessandria in the midst of Vitale’s tenure, and sought to carry the mantle of Mantuan Kabbalah in the early decades of the eighteenth century.98 Like his teachers, Finzi united his kabbalistic inclination with the halakhic

94 Ibid., no. 94, p. 278.
95 Ibid., no. 99.1, pp. 287–288. Written, he said, by his son-in-law Moses Sapir Kamar, who was doing so with his full authority and in a binding way. Finzi died in January 1735, so the question is whether he was ill at this point.
96 Leviticus 19:14.
97 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 57, p. 191.
98 Moses Zacut had founded a society of kabbalists, Hadashim la-bekarim,” and appointed Finzi to assume leadership after he was no longer fit to do so. After Zacut died, the society relocated to his bet midrash under the leadership of Rafael Modigliani and Isaac Reggio. Finzi independently continued to follow Zacut’s prayers, which led to a dispute with the group over who could claim ownership over these prayers (Simonsohn, History of the
needs of his community. He wrote sermons, poetry, and responsa, but also emphasized the dangers of contemporary vice and promoted piety. Embodying pietistic sentiments, Finzi signed his approbation as “Moses’ father-in-law, the ‘young’ David,” without title or communal affiliation. By presenting himself in relation to Luzzatto, and humbly diminishing his status as the chief rabbi of a major community (and thereby the position itself), Finzi represented a strong voice for kabbalistic legitimacy as a rabbinic way of life. More than merely supporting his son-in-law, who undoubtedly valued it considering Bassan’s reticence, Finzi intended his approbation to promote the next generation of pietism in northern Italy, and, through the medium of print and Luzzatto’s exceptional abilities, world Jewry as a whole.

Bolstered by Finzi’s support and paying no heed to Bassan’s warnings, Luzzatto made plans to travel to Amsterdam. Although Luzzatto could have easily sent his manuscript to a press in Amsterdam via messenger, as Vitale had done when publishing Gevul Binya in the mid-1720s, he may have felt his presence was necessary for the book to be printed. To be sure, if publishing was his sole concern, Luzzatto could have easily traveled elsewhere. Several centers of Hebrew printing in the 1730s existed outside of Italy, including Istanbul, Salonika, and Smyrna in the Ottoman Empire, Tunis and Fez in north Africa, and Prague and Cracow in central and eastern Europe. His life as a pietistic kabbalist may have been celebrated in parts of north Africa and the Ottoman Empire, where no rabbis had derided him, and where Jewish silk

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99 He wrote sermons, and his responsa were printed in contemporary collections (see Divrei Yosef, no. 34; Shemesh Tzedakah, Yoreh De’ah, no. 49, Even ha-Ezer, no. 13, Hoshen Mishpat, no. 9; Pahad Yitshak, nun, 42a, samekh 18a, 111b, 117a, 144a).

100 Pragmatica from 22 November 1729 issued against gambling (A.C.Ma., no. 87.26)

101 In the approbation, Finzi uses the expression “derakh Hashem.”
merchants of the Veneto, a class to which his father belonged, maintained contacts. However, at least three factors played a role in his desire to go to Amsterdam. One, it was, as Venetian rabbi Isaac Pacifico remarked, “a city of publishing without peer.” Printing hubs abounded, but in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Amsterdam surpassed them all with its multiple Jewish-owned presses issuing dozens of books each year. An Amsterdam press could provide him with the largest platform to elevate rabbinic culture from its legalistic emphasis typified by contemporary Ashkenazic rabbis. Two, Amsterdam was an open city, where a person could live without government cognizance. It was tolerant of Jews and other minorities, including Lutherans, Anabaptists, Quakers, Millenarians, and Roman Catholics, and reflected many cultural elements prevalent in Luzzatto’s native Padua, such as mercantilism, scientific inquiry, and artistic expression. Beardless poet-dramatist-grammarian-mystics with intimate knowledge of European languages, culture, and medicine were not in vogue in early eighteenth-century Istanbul or Tunis, while Ashkenazic Prague, even with its interest in Kabbalah, would have been for Luzzatto analogous to entering a lion’s den. Third and perhaps most importantly, as Luzzatto explicitly stated to Bassan in his first letter about going to Amsterdam, his younger brother Lion was then in residence there — a significant draw for a man raised in the close knit and supportive Luzzatto family.

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102 Molà, 67–70.
104 For a study of Kabbalah in Prague, through the lens of Ezekiel Landau, see Sharon Flatto, The Kabbalistic Culture of Eighteenth-Century Prague: Ezekiel Landau and His Contemporaries (Oxford, 2010). Flatto devotes her book to the latter half of the eighteenth century.
105 Arriving alone from Padua, Lion had established a home for himself; in 1737, by which time Moses Hayim had settled permanently in Amsterdam, Lion married a Portuguese woman and possibly earned a living as a physician.
Upon arriving in Venice in the late summer or early autumn to plan his journey to the Dutch city, Luzzatto was faced with the trouble Bassan had predicted. Belilios, Moses Menahem Merari, and Gabriel Padovani, all members of the Venetian Yeshivah kelalit, confronted Luzzatto with two accusations. The first was that, despite his contention to Bassan (and evidently others) that he wished to travel to Amsterdam to see his brother, he was actually intent on publishing his writings. The second was that he had violated his oath by continuing to teach his original works to his disciples. Luzzatto unabashedly rejected both accusations – contending with respect to the latter that the 1730 agreement permitted such instruction in his city – but the Venetians were undeterred. They demanded that he sign another oath, this one stating that he would not study or teach any and all Kabbalah, and that he would submit to them for approval anything he wished to publish. They not only wished to place Luzzatto permanently under their thumb, they hoped to cut him off from the source of his spiritualized, individualized, and subversive ethic. Bassan’s prescience about the Venetian suspicion of Luzzatto was apt precisely because Luzzatto acted provocatively. Luzzatto’s intention to print Ma’amor ha-Vikuah, in the minds of his detractors both an attack on their rabbinic forebear and a defense of a subject intimately tied to Sabbatianism, initiated an

For a facsimile of the marriage record, contracted on February 22, 1737, see Meyer, The Stay of Mozes Haim Luzzatto at Amsterdam, 8–9. The original is found in the Puiboeken (marriage registries), and the text reads: “Compareerden als vooren Leon Wita Lusato, van Padua, oud 27 jaren in de kerk S., geass., met zijn Vader Jacob Wita Lusato & Hester Jeseroen, van Am. Oud 18 Jare woond als voorn geass. Met haar Moeder Gratia Sakoete [Signed] Leon Vita de Jacob Vita Luzzatto / Ester de Eliau Jesurun.”

The reference to Dr. Luzatto, receiving six guilders for house visits, is in SAA 334, no. 530, fol. 130. Perhaps Lion left Padua, and his studies at the University of Padua, to study medicine in Holland. I did not find his name in the Digital Album Promotorum of the University of Utrecht, a database of all doctoral graduates from its founding in 1636 to the present. However, it was more common for Jews to attend the University of Leiden (see W. N. Du Rieu, Album studiosorum Academiae lugduno batavae MDXXXV–MDCCCLXXV: accedunt nomina curatorum et professorum per eadem secula [Hagae, 1875]).

106 Chriqui, Iggerot, no. 96.
international maelstrom immensely more intense and riotous than the events of 1730. As I will address, it was strong enough to stir a debate within the Ashkenazic and Italian rabbinates concerning the social standing of Kabbalah itself.

Both Luzzatto and Isaac Pacifico, the Venetian rabbi who led the charge against Luzzatto in Italy, recounted the incident in letters to Bassan. In letters written at the end of October and the middle of November, Luzzatto retroactively projected his innocence and surreptitiously engaged his elder’s sympathy. He claimed that, contrary to his earlier letters, he had not yet decided to publish the book. Belilios was an agitator and a maligner, Luzzatto wrote, and Venice’s attempts to suppress his activities in Padua were insulting and maniacal. “I answered them that I did not want to hear from them, and that I was not required to listen to them, because I am not enslaved to them at all, for I am from the yeshiva of Padua and not of Venice. Not as a scornful remark but as a fact — that they have no authority over Padua.”

Regardless of his explanation, the Venetian accusers were uninterested in hearing his perspective. They rejected his principle of communal independence, as well as his claim that Bassan had supplied an approbation to his new book and had permitted him to teach in Padua. “R. Bassan is not everything...,” they replied according to Luzzatto, “the writ of Bassan is insufficient and we must issue our own.” Hoping to solicit Bassan’s support, and presumably divest himself of sinful culpability at the same time, Luzzatto explained that apprising Bassan of the low-esteem in which he was held by the Venetian rabbinate was for purely informative

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107 Pacifico soon became chief rabbi of Italy – unsure of year – and is memorialized on a plaque to Venice’s Scola Italiana. Manuscript at JNUL shows him as רב יוסי פעיקו, neither title of which was standard in the previous centuries. For Pacifico’s responsa, see JTS MS 4013, MS 5188.
108 According to Bassan written in December 1735 (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 145), Belilios had “spent the last three years in Livorno in pursuit of fame.”
109 Ibid., no. 99, p. 286.
purposes ("so that your honor will not resent not knowing this"), and not as slander. While slander indeed was not his primary interest, Luzzatto undoubtedly appreciated that the insult to Bassan could mollify the latter’s annoyance with his former student.

In contrast, Pacifico’s account to Bassan was noticeably and intentionally malicious. He intimated that Luzzatto had betrayed his former teachers for Sabbatianism, and that his only motive for traveling to Amsterdam was to publish all that he had written and that had been secreted away. Paciﬁco seemed to suggest a conspiracy, presuming Luzzatto worked with accomplices in Padua to obtain the locked chest of manuscripts, and criticized rabbis in positions of power for not having taken sufﬁcient action against him. Although Paciﬁco initiated his letter to Bassan with customary ﬂowerly honoriﬁcs – used so habitually in early modern rabbinic correspondence as to often mean little – the implication in the main text was that Bassan himself, as well as other moderates like Marini and Morpurgo, were complicit in any crime for not having taken a stronger stand. He worried, as Carlebach pointed out, that this “upstart [would] befoul us in the eyes of the Gentiles.”

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110 Ibid., no. 97.
111 Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 233. Paciﬁco had expressed similar sentiments in repose to Hagiz’s letter of April 18, 1730 (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 58): “What will the representatives of the Gentiles say if Jews scoff at their own Torah and blaspheme against their God?” In the letter Paciﬁco accused Luzzatto of “interpreting the philosophy of Aristotle...in a kabbalistic manner,” and attacked Nehemiah Kohen and Judah Mendola for supporting Luzzatto. See Tishby, “A Collection of Kabbalistic Works...MS Oxford 2593,” in Messianic Mysticism, 15, for excerpts from the letter (citing Montefiore MS 111, fols. 13r–14r).

It is interesting that Paciﬁco expressed fear of Christian condemnation at the same time Luzzatto referred to two Christian acquaintances enamored with Kabbalah. One, a judge in Vicenza named Aquila Ficci, sent a letter to Luzzatto about a debate he had concerning Kabbalah in front of the local minister (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 99, p. 255). Ficci, according to Luzzatto, maintained that Kabbalah “was a sacred wisdom, extremely rareﬁed, and the revelation of the true mysteries of the Torah. But his town resident contradicted him and told him it was vanity,” bringing in support of his argument the words of Leone Modena’s Ari Nohem (Dweck, The Scandal of Kabbalah, 193). The second was French noblewoman from Genoa who “begged me to come to Venice, and she is extremely wise, to talk to her about the truth of the holy Kabbalah. And she truly knows the writings of the Ari from beginning to end, and I was astounded to hear her” (see Garb, “Gender and Sexuality in the Luzzatto Controversy in Early 18th Century Italy,” 9).
Bassan replied to Pacifico with a measured self-control he wished Luzzatto would wield.\textsuperscript{112} His conciliatory letter assured the ‘venerable’ rabbis of Venice, including Belilios (the source of the disparaging remarks against him), that the five years of quiet could and should continue. He contended that Luzzatto had upheld his oath and displayed no intention of breaking it, and that \textit{Ma’amar ha-Vikuah} contained nothing untoward. Avoiding harsh language, Bassan made light of the situation by rhyming, and feebly professed the innocence of Luzzatto’s intention to travel to Amsterdam by informing the Venetians that Tsiporah Finzi Luzzatto intended to remain in Padua.\textsuperscript{113} Bassan had little to argue in support of Luzzatto, not because of the Paduan’s guilt but because of Pacifico’s and Belilios’s intention to suppress his every action. Soon, the ire of the Venetians, along with Hagiz and others in central and eastern Europe, would turn against Bassan himself and he would be forced to defend his own integrity, rather than that of Luzzatto or the study of Kabbalah.

While Pacifico prepared to alert rabbis in Italy and abroad of Luzzatto’s new attempt to publish, Luzzatto hastily arranged his leave. Despite his powerful self-conception, support system in Padua, and belligerence towards his opponents, the years of distrust had taken a toll. He could not tolerate incessant harassment, which was seriously damaging his hopes of disseminating his message. The controversy not only threatened to waylay his attempt to publish his kabbalistic manifesto, it also affected life in his hometown. The ruling of the Padua Consiglio in January of 1734 charging Luzzatto and his closest rabbinic associates with instructing the community at large betrayed a setback to his social platform. Twenty-four of

\textsuperscript{112} Chriqui, \textit{Igerot}, no. 98.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., no. 99, p. 284.
twenty-five sitting board members approved the resolutions requiring Padua’s five most prestigious rabbis to teach weekly classes in the communal *bet midrash*. The voting members that evening included Luzzatto’s father, at least two uncles but possibly five, a handful of relatives and supporters of other group members, and Sabbatai Marini. Whomever the lone dissenting voice belonged to – whoever did not wish to disturb Luzzatto’s perfecting community – the remaining family members supported the resolutions as a means to combat widespread ignorance and sin in the Padua ghetto. That meant that, at best, the majority of pertinent relatives and friends doubted the effectiveness of the group’s mystical activity and, at worst, rejected its validity. To Luzzatto’s school of mystics, seeking to intensify their personal spirituality and develop their perspective as a communal way of life, any externally imposed system, even well-intentioned and Torah-related, interrupted their proscribed curriculum and challenged their authority. Experiencing both external and internal pressure, challenging the success of his vision, Luzzatto decided to leave his home.

To be sure, writing to Bassan just prior to setting off for the north, Luzzatto assured his former teacher that his reason for leaving for Amsterdam was personal. “My reason for going concerns the family business, troubled as it is,” he wrote on November 19, 1734, “and for a long time we have arranged for this with my brother.”114 His brother Lion may have been involved with the Luzzatto business, as their other brother Simon was, and an earlier letter from Moses Hayim does indicate that Jacob Vita had at one time owed a sum of 12,000 ducats that threatened the integrity of his business.115 Yet, the commencement of a supposedly long-

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115 Ibid., no. 87. In this letter, Luzzatto stated that his father had repaid the sum.
planned trip coinciding with a flare-up of the controversy suggests otherwise. First, Luzzatto had stated his intention to voyage to Amsterdam the previous year, for the purpose of publishing his defense of Kabbalah. Second, rather than travel by sea, which had been his original plan, Luzzatto trekked north through the Alps in the brutal winter months, as if hoping to evade the Venetian capital. Perhaps he believed his opponents would turn him over to Venice’s political authorities, concocting a story or tipping them off that he had personal writings with him that necessitated confiscating them for censorship purposes. Third, in a letter to his students sent the first week of December from Bolzano, just south of the mountains, Luzzatto professed that he could not explain his “sudden” departure, that he in fact had nothing to utter about the recent setback.

Finally, and perhaps most powerfully, the tone of his letters to Bassan and his students betray the emotions of a man unsure of the future and his role in it. To Bassan, Luzzatto expressed frustration by reiterating his refusal to be investigated by rabbis whose authority he rejected. Moreover, he confessed that he preferred not to discuss or even mention the existence of the *magid* with anyone. Rather than conclude his letter in his customary manner, which included sending kind regards and an embrace to Bassan, his son, and his

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116 Luzzatto had previously worried about letting his writings out of his possession for fear they would be confiscated (Ibid., no. 15).
117 Ibid., no. 99, p. 286. Even in 1731, while living in Mantua, Luzzatto did not address the existence of the magid with others, including one of the generation’s premier kabbalists, Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea. “During the time Moses Hayim Luzzatto was in Mantua,” Basilea recounted to Bassan, “he did not mention to me even a hint of the this matter with the *magid*, but I heard from him many new and profound expositions on the Ari [Luria] that indicated he was truly an expert in the material. And the confraternity of Rabbi Judah Mendola and Rabbi Gur Aryeh Finzi read his answers to the *Ari Nohem*, and we found his answers truly dear. Likewise his abridged *Sefer ha-Kavanot* lacked even a single perversion. I did not see that such jealousy would arise against the evil composition of *Ari Nohem*...” (ibid., no. 145, p. 390).
household, along with a wish that “the Lord fulfill all his petitions,” Luzzatto expressed sentimentality and finality. Entreating blessings of good from Bassan, he encouraged his teacher to speak only the truth to the Venetian rabbinate, for “ultimately, there is no savior but the One. I go in wholeness and simplicity.... And to your honor, and his son, and his entire household, may they have peace, long days, and years of life. Amen.” His final communication to Padua was similarly poetic and wistful. He found himself, he said, “like a heart without a body, like a bird cast off from her fledglings.”

Yet, I do not believe that Luzzatto was despondent. On the contrary, the message from Bolzano indicates Luzzatto’s deepest religious conviction surfaced amidst his darkest moments. Silent about himself, Luzzatto prayed in his letter for his compatriots, whom he urged to “stand upon the straight path before God,” and their goals. As in 1730, Luzzatto reassessed the world around him rather than reevaluate his own perfection, ability, or decision. He believed himself to be well-intentioned and divinely talented in the midst of a stagnating system of authority and community. He was a man, he explained, who could safely and successfully mine the works of Nathan of Gaza for spiritual gold, leaving “the straw and the chaff for the beasts, and ingesting only that which is worthy of human consumption.”

118 Psalms 20:6.
120 Ibid., no. 107.
121 Ibid., no. 89. Now is the appropriate time to address the historiographical debate surrounding Luzzatto’s Sabbatianism: that is, was he or was he not a Sabbatianist? It has remained a question, though not one addressed by scholars for the eighty-some years of the academic study of Kabbalah. Scholem was largely uninterested in Luzzatto; he referred to him in passing and did not stake a claim as to his Sabbatianist leanings. Joseph Dan, in the introduction to a recent collection of Tishby’s articles, made the case for both possibilities: yes, Luzzatto was a Sabbatianist, because he assigned an “important traditional role” to the failed Messiah; no, he was not, because he did not assign him the role as Messiah (Messianic Mysticism, xx–xi). To me, it is clear that Luzzatto was not a Sabbatianist. There was a spectrum of Sabbatianism, and so too was there a spectrum of non-Sabbatianist
Second and Third Calls to Arm

The same November day Pacifico wrote to Bassan condemning Luzzatto, Venice’s Yeshivah kelalit convened to initiate action against the Paduan. Belilios, Merari, and Padovani provided testimony to other members of the yeshiva regarding their interaction with Luzzatto and the demands they placed upon him. In addition to wanting to prevent him from teaching Kabbalah to “even one student,” they stated that the ban must declare: “He may not give his handwritten works to be copied; and his books may not be printed, neither by himself nor by others, in Hebrew or Aramaic, without the express approval (haskamot) of all of our yeshivot.” The meaning of “all” the yeshivot is unclear, but the implication was that the Venetians required absolute conformity from Luzzatto. Their attempt to suppress Luzzatto was motivated as much by their desire to establish their own authority as by their concern that potential heresy was taking place on the Terraferma. According to their own testimony, when Luzzatto defended himself by stating that Bassan and Finzi were his supporters and would attest to his uprightness, they replied “We aren’t required to listen to

mysticism. Luzzatto’s rejected Sabbatai Tsevi as the Messiah and the perpetuation of the movement, while finding a place for it in the cosmic drama.

Tishby quoted Bassan’s warning that the magid may have been akin to Nathan of Gaza’s: “What difference is there between the two cases? Only that all R. Nathan’s words were along lines drawn towards the single point of the Tsevi, which is not so in your case. But in any event, who is to decide?” Tishby continued: “The opinion that in Nathan of Gaza’s revelations there was a mixture of good and bad, truth and falsehood, had been expressed about thirty years previously by a Shabbatean in the circle of R. Benjamin Hakohen” (Tishby, “Luzzatto’s Attitude to Shabateanism,” in Messianic Mysticism, 228). In keeping with his opposition to Benayahu’s ‘white-washing’ of Luzzatto, he opposed the latter’s viewpoint that according to Luzzatto’s magid, Sabbatai Tsevi’s messianic status had been entirely annulled on account of his apostasy (Tishby, “Features of the Shabatean Movement,” in Messianic Mysticism, 280, n. 83; see Benayahu, “Ha-magid’ shel Ramhal,” 320).

122 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 100, pp. 288–291 (November 11, 1734).
123 Ibid., no. 100, p. 290
124 Research is necessary to determine the structure of the rabbinate in Venice, including the differences and overlapping elements of the city’s yeshivot and Jewish courts.
them.” Although they demanded Luzzatto answer to themselves as the Venetian rabbinate, they unabashedly rejected the opinions of the chief rabbis of Reggio and Mantua.

In the ensuing condemnation of Luzzatto, inter-communal and intra-rabbinate power struggles predominated in Italy. The relative civility that had surrounded the first stage of the controversy, with Morpurgo and Bassan alternately brokering a settlement, was entirely absent during the second. Bassan was marginalized, Morpurgo found himself working to prevent a wholesale ban on Kabbalah, and even Venice’s Yeshivah kelim was subject to political infighting. For instance, in the midst of his testimony, Belilios claimed that back in 1730 he and Merari had uncovered incriminating evidence that proved Luzzatto’s diabolical scheme. They had discovered occultist implements in his possession, including a book of magical oaths, and a disciple of the Paduan mystic had confessed to them that his master’s Psalter had been composed as a replacement for the biblical book. Luzzatto had denied authorship of any such volume, he said, but blushed and stammered when confronted with the evidence. However, Merari rejected this account. He testified that he had not seen the book of magic, or anything in Luzzatto’s hand for that matter. “I only heard of these things from his master [Bassan] and the two rabbis [Finzi and Kohen],” he continued. “I heard from them that he defended himself, saying that the instruments they had found were shaving equipment used to trim his mustache; the candle had become sooty from nightly use.” According to the scribe’s account of the

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125 Ibid., no. 100, p. 291.
126 Ibid., nos. 105–108, 112, 117; Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 233–234. Belilios claimed they found a mirror with a black frame, a knife with a black handle, and a candle of black wax.
respective testimonies, a harsh exchange between the two arose as Belilios demanded Merari corroborate his testimony and the latter refused.\footnote{Chriqui, \textit{Igerot}, no. 102.}

Research into the biographies of the men involved is necessary before we can declare any one person’s motivation, but in the least Merari seems to have been fairer to Luzzatto and less politically or ideologically impassioned than his fellow Venetians. A separate source shows that he was willing to meet with Luzzatto privately during the summer of 1734, just prior to the controversy’s reignition, at the home of Solomon Racach, a wealthy Venetian merchant and supporter of Luzzatto.\footnote{Ibid., no. 93.} The subject matter of their discussion was not revealed in Luzzatto’s subsequent letter to Bassan, but it was serious enough to send Luzzatto to Venice with his father in an instant.\footnote{In a letter to Bassan Luzzatto wrote: “I will tell your honor that I have not forgotten what he has commanded me. I wrote after this past Shabbat to the auspicious (\textit{gabir}) [Solomon Racach] about the known matter, and he answered me in just two days. Thereupon, I went to Venice the very same day his letter arrived to my house, and there I spoke with him face to face immediately upon arrival, and with him was Rabbi Moses Menahem Merari…” (ibid., no. 93, pp. 274–275). Something secretive was discussed, and Luzzatto’s letter indicates that they wanted Bassan to go to Venice. The letter indicates that Racach suggested they inform Hillel Padova, another supporter, but Luzzatto did not want to do so. Interesting that Luzzatto was willing to sprint immediately to Racach, something he did not do with Bassan.} Whether other members of the Venetian rabbinate were aware of their contact or not, the group as a whole chose to accept the testimony of Belilios and disregard that of Merari. The Venetian rabbinate thereupon appended all names to the document condemning Luzzatto, including, in a duplicitous attempt to publicly display communal unity, that of Merari.\footnote{Signing as witnesses were: Moses Menahem Merari; Gabriel ben Eliezer Padovani; and Jacob ben Immanuel Belilios. The judges were Joseph ben Samuel Aboab; Isaac ben Asher Pacifico; Solomon ben Moses Levi Mintz; Solomon Zalman ben Meir me-Levov; Solomon ben David Altras; and Nissim David ben Moses ha-Kohen. The name of Jacob Aboab, who had not been alarmed by Luzzatto in 1729–1730, does not appear on the document. According to the anonymous scribe, “Merari was shocked to see that they had affixed his name to things that he had never said or thought.”}
Within a few days of having written to Bassan and producing the document of testimony, Pacifico sent a letter to Hagiz. Since 1730, Hagiz seems to have avoided harassing Bassan or Luzzatto, but the Venetians knew that in 1734 he would still appreciate their vigilance and harness his influence to prevent Luzzatto’s success. Pacifico warned Hagiz that Luzzatto was leaving Italy for Frankfurt in order to spread his teachings among the students in the city’s famed and large yeshiva. After remaining for a few months, he wrote, Luzzatto intended to move to Amsterdam in order to print his book on the philosopher and the kabbalist. He feared the treatise’s publication would “stir up men to chase after Kabbalah,” and thereby implored Hagiz to prevent Luzzatto from furthering his plans of corruption. Unlike the first stage of the controversy, which had been initiated by Hagiz and spurred by Katzenellenbogen, Pacifico’s letter represented the call to arms of the second stage in the anti-Luzzatto campaign. Whether due to their importance in the matter, or merely as a natural manifestation of Pacifico’s personality, this and other related documents exhibited an air of superiority. The Venetian rabbi boasted of his rabbinate’s might to excommunicate Luzzatto and burn his works, and urged the rabbis of Germany to respond in kind. He and his cohort had done their part to keep the evil man at bay, he contended, and it was now the responsibility of Hagiz and the Ashkenazim to carry the mantle.

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131 Ibid., no. 103.
132 Although Luzzatto gave no indication of such a plan, and it contradicted Pacifico’s earlier assessment that Luzzatto intended to publish Ma’amar ha-Vikuah in Amsterdam, it could offer an additional explanation for Luzzatto’s winter trek through the Alps.
133 He wished to teach and to print and to publicize his vikuah “be-’arba kanfot ha-aretz.”
134 Ibid., no. 103, p. 300.
135 It is interesting to compare Pacifico’s tone to Luzzatto’s, particularly at the same time.
On the third of December, the Venetian rabbinate circulated an open letter (probably written by Pacifico) to all rabbis containing extreme charges against Luzzatto. The young man from Padua had declared himself the messiah, a prophet, the Psalmist’s equal, and the reincarnation of Akiva ben Joseph; as if that were not enough, according to Pacifico, Luzzatto had also declared: “All the sages of Israel are nothing to me, I am their shepherd.... From Moses to Moses [Hayim Luzzatto], none has arisen like Moses.” The letter derided Luzzatto’s knowledge of Latin, mocked his youth and that of Gordon, referring to the latter as ‘bahur’ even though he was married, and chastised Bassan, Jacob Vita Luzzatto, and all who were connected to the yeshiva. In his letter to Hagiz, Pacifico had demarcated rabbinic camps of supporters and opponents. Not only was Luzzatto to be stopped, but Bassan, Kohen, Finzi (“whose eyes have dimmed”), and others should be condemned. Now, they called for a herem and the burning of his books like those belonging to the “heretics and unbelievers.” In so doing, the Venetian rabbinate declared all members of his circle, and anyone in possession of his writings, outside the legitimate boundaries of the Jewish community. The fact that the chief rabbis of Mantua and Reggio possessed such writings, or that Padua consisted of ordained and

136 Signed with the same chronogram as Pacifico used in letter to Hagiz. Signed by Joseph Aboab, Pacifico, Solomon ben David Altras, Solomon Zalman, Solomon ben Moses Levi Mintz, and David ben Moses Ha-Kohen. The order of signatories is different than the letter of testimony from “Merari,” Belilios, and Padovani. The fact that the three witnesses did not sign the document is indicative of its legal status; that is, the signatories are the judges and this stood as their ruling after having assessed the facts.

137 Ibid., no. 104; Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 234.

138 Odd lambasting of connections to Christians, as that was common, though this may mean that in Venetian yeshivot in first half of eighteenth century, rabbis and Christians were not connected (perhaps after 1731 Church regulations).

139 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 104, p. 305.

140 “Who permits teaching the wisdom of Kabbalah to children (with their defects)” (ibid., no. 104, p. 305).

141 “In his house, they allowed people in to pursue cursed things, and it was a desecration of God’s Name that men and women consorted together. There was no humility, or piety, or rectitude; they nullified the Psalms and took oaths using the Tetragrammaton.”

142 Ibid., no. 104, p. 308.
highly educated individuals engaged in a joint venture with Luzzatto – not as followers, but as a vested community within a separate politically defined community – was irrelevant to Pacifico and his associates. Evoking their own form of messianism and exceptional self-conception, the Venetians called for their fellow rabbis in far off communities to follow their lead: “come to the Holy Camp upon wings of eagles.”

The written word, and, as Carlebach pointed out, the prospect of the printed book,\(^ {143}\) drove the Luzzatto controversy. Gordon’s fantastic report about the goings on in Padua initiated a rapid and heavy response from many members of the rabbinic establishment. Luzzatto’s oath was meant to define the status quo, and its ratification proved sufficient to settle the matter for a few years. Likewise, the letters from Pacifico and the Venetian rabbinate propelled the next stage into an ‘international’ event.

Alarmed but not surprised, Hagiz and Katzenellenbogen responded forcefully, notifying the Frankfurt rabinate of Luzzatto’s imminent arrival and spreading the word far and wide that he must be stopped. By the beginning of January, Luzzatto arrived in a surprisingly hostile environment. It had taken about five weeks for Luzzatto to travel the eight hundred kilometers between Padua and Frankfurt, stopping along the way in Verona, Bolzano, Fürth, and a host of other German cities.\(^ {144}\) In Fürth he had met several scholars who valued his teachings and

\(^{143}\) Carlebach saw a direct connection between the reaction to Luzzatto and the mistaken Venetian role in the Hayon controversy, whereby the rabbinate’s approbation accompanied his first work *Raza de-Yihuda* (Amsterdam, 1711).

\(^{144}\) Another letter indicates that the standard route from Padua to Frankfurt went through Verona and Fürth (Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 159, p. 432).
supported his efforts, including Hayim Polacco,\textsuperscript{145} who rejected the Venetian call, attacked one of its signatories,\textsuperscript{146} and actively supported Luzzatto when Ashkenazic rabbinites rushed to issue bans. However, generally Luzzatto was met – personally and via the false intimacy of the pen – with brutal derision.

Upon arriving in Frankfurt, Luzzatto sought out Jacob Kohen Poppers, the community’s chief rabbi and head of yeshiva. Like Vitale in Italy, scholars frequently referred to him as the “High Priest,” denoting both his piety and priestly lineage.\textsuperscript{147} For this reason, Finzi had instructed his son-in-law to petition the pietist’s assistance, assuming he would value Luzzatto’s talent and motivation. Concurrently, Finzi had sent Poppers a letter praising Luzzatto, but the Ashkenazic rabbi paid it no heed.\textsuperscript{148} Despite a joint investment in pietism – itself an undefined (or undefinable) concept variously and independently lived – he knew neither Finzi nor Luzzatto personally, and had received numerous denunciations of the man. As Carlebach mentioned, Poppers was intimately connected to the networks of Jewish elite in Central Europe; he was related to Hakham Tsevi Ashkenazi by marriage, and had worked with Ashkenazi and Hagiz to suppress Hayon and other Sabbatianists in the 1710s.\textsuperscript{149} As such, Poppers was more inclined to follow Hagiz’s lead than tolerate a young and ‘arrogant’ visionary from Padua.

\textsuperscript{145} Polacco had met Luzzatto through Ephraim Fischel, and possibly the chief rabbi Barukh Kahana Rapoport.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., no. 141, p. 378. Polacco was from Lublin and he stated that no one in his community had heard of Solomon Zalman of Lublin, a member of Venice’s Yeshivah kelalit and signatory of the both the testimonial and the open letter, was an imposter.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., nos. 108, 119, p. 341, no. 129, p. 354.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., no. 110.
\textsuperscript{149} He had issued an early ban against Hayon in 1713, and orchestrated further condemnation of Sabbatian treatise Oz le-Elohim by rabbis of Frankfurt in 1714 (Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 123–124). Later, he opposed Jonathan Eybeschuetz (ibid., 176–177).
Poppers’s letter and subsequent proclamations issued from Frankfurt presumed Luzzatto’s guilt from the start. After first pretending to welcome Luzzatto, Poppers explained in his detailed account to Hagiz, he demanded an answer for the Venetian accusations. The Paduan requested and was granted a ‘fair’ hearing before the two rabbinical courts and the yeshiva. Poppers did not detail the trial, but the result was Luzzatto’s willingness to sign an even stronger oath than the one he had agreed to sign in 1730. Signed on January 11, 1735, the ‘oath,’ which contained Luzzatto’s ebullient praise of the Frankfurt community, is patently absurd. The anonymous scribe inaugurated the document with a pun that upturned Luzzatto’s self-conception as a Moses-figure, while the oath itself contained Luzzatto’s affirmation of his earlier vow, as well as a promise to cease studying Kabbalah and to never attempt to circulate or print any work of mysticism. In his own account to Bassan, Luzzatto explained that he was compelled to sign the confession, “emotionless and with silliness.” “Either write and sign that you are an illegitimate thinker,” Poppers said to him, “‘or I will sever your head from you.’…. Wherefore would I find the strength to stand up against the whole world? So they said to me: ‘Why has God not saved you?’ To which I replied, ‘I am His and the world entire is His, and if He desires it so, what do I personally care?’” Powerless before Poppers – unsuccessful in Padua and Venice, without a place to immediately turn, and unwilling to abandon his religious and communal identity (as had other ‘scandalous’ Jews in the early modern period) – Luzzatto relented and affixed his signature to Poppers’s humiliating words. Writing from Amsterdam many months later, Luzzatto angrily, but also futilely, criticized the Frankfurt

150 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 109, p. 319.
152 Ibid., no. 118, p. 338.
rabbinate over his poor treatment: he charged the community with living without a “scent of piety,” and condemned the curriculum where three hundred yeshiva students hopelessly engaged in the “emptiness of talmudic casuistry.”

In addition to composing a letter to Hagiz and disseminating Luzzatto’s renewed oath, Poppers arranged for an open letter concerning Luzzatto and his supporters to be issued by the Frankfurt Jewish community. Under the auspices of the local Hevra Kadisha, with formal approval of Poppers and dignitaries from the yeshiva and rabbinic courts, the Frankfurt community warned European Jewish communities of the dangers of the young man and his unbridled study of Kabbalah. The document declared the excommunication of anyone in possession or conscious of the whereabouts of Luzzatto’s books. As if that did not cover the extent of Luzzatto’s influence, the text specified the danger of printing his writing — an added threat to the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam, who had hosted and published Hayon and who Poppers, Hagiz, Katzenellenbogen, and other Ashkenazic rabbis distrusted. Identifying Luzzatto and his ilk as part of a larger societal problem, they declared their broad opposition to printing any and all kabbalistic material. Not only did it “honor God to maintain its mystery,” its confinement would stave off continued heresy. Thus, the Frankfurt rabbinate called for renewed vigilance in the search and destruction of Sabbatianism, “like hamets before Passover.”

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153 Ibid., no. 118.
154 Ibid., no. 109, p. 319.
155 As a post-script to a letter to Hagiz, Poppers proposed an alliance with Katzenellenbogen (who was an official communal rabbi, as opposed to Hagiz) to suppress Luzzatto. He wished to inform Amsterdam, “because of previous problems there; a sufficiently long statement for those who understand” (ibid., no. 110, p. 323).
156 Ibid., no. 109, p. 320.
A Disjointed Rabbinate

The response to the open letters from Pacifico and Poppers, and their respective rabbinates, was overwhelmingly positive. Bans begat bans, and by the summer of 1735 about a dozen distinct excommunications and polemical manifestos had been issued against Luzzatto by Ashkenazic rabbinates.\(^{157}\) Hagiz and Katzenellenbogen, for instance, jointly denounced Luzzatto’s magidic compositions, and threatened, “by the authority of the heavenly bet din,” that bans and curses would befall any man who publicized his books, whether orally or via manuscript or print.\(^{158}\) Calling upon all rabbis “to accompany us in signing and upholding and enforcing this ban,” Hagiz and Katzenellenbogen dehumanized their prey by evading specifics about Luzzatto. Though they articulated that the books were “heretical at their core from an outright heretic,”\(^{159}\) the decree failed to detail Luzzatto’s name, place of origin, or anything about him or anyone who knew him. In presenting Luzzatto this way, the authors of the ban, who had immediately jumped to heretical conclusions in 1729 without knowledge of Luzzatto himself or anyone in Padua, betrayed their own insignificance. Luzzatto had successfully attracted a following in Padua, one intense enough to attract the attention of rabbis in other communities. Incongruity between a legally focused rabbinate and a culturally diverse community was one of Luzzatto’s primary motivations in expanding his spiritualized social and religious platform. Principled intentions aside, Hagiz and Katzenellenbogen, along with the

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\(^{157}\) They appear in Chriqui, *Igerot*, nos. 120–130. Emden’s ban was preserved in *Zot Torat ha-Kena’ot*, fols. 53v–54r. Hagiz wrote that he intended to publish this collection, “I will leave something inscribed for the [future] generations so they will not sin,” (Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 119), but he apparently never got to it. Emden wrote that Hagiz and Katzenellenbogen printed their original ban (ibid., no. 111), however he refused to print it because he disagreed with the strictures against the kabbalistic writings (*Zot Torat ha-Kena’ot*, 58r).


\(^{159}\) Ibid., no. 111, p. 324.
Venetian and Frankfurt rabbinites, maintained no official authority over other communities. They merely hoped, like Marini and Levi had in response to a stolen *pinkas* in Padua, that the power of their words would compel others to act, thereby giving themselves retroactive authority.

The Moses Hayim Luzzatto to be banned was, in effect, a caricature of an inter-Jewish threat to the rabbinic establishment. Sabbatianism was a clear and present danger—albeit secretive and unorganized—and the combination of fantastic stories about Luzzatto, renewed condemnation from Venice, and his desire to promote a potentially dangerous subject via the world’s most powerful technological medium, understandably stimulated immense concern and even paranoia. Dozens of rabbis with no connection to Luzzatto, Gordon, Padua, Venice, or the Italian Peninsula joined the anti-Luzzatto camp. The calls from Pacifico and Poppers instigated the action, but Hagiz’s fame as the paramount heresy hunter thrust the issue to pan-European proportions. As Carlebach pointed out, several parallel bans against Luzzatto were addressed directly to Hagiz and nearly all indicated that they were written in response to his request.¹⁶⁰

Nevertheless, the assortment of bans indicated the idiosyncratic nature of the early modern rabbinate. Mordecai ben Tsevi Hirsch Lissa of Berlin, for instance, agreed to ban the publication of any all kabbalistic writing for the ensuing twenty-five-year period,¹⁶¹ but he also

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¹⁶¹ Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 122, p. 343 (January 7, 1735). In the honorific introduction, Lissa refers to Hagiz as a kabbalist (*mekubal*). While praiseful introductions must be taken with a grain of salt, particular titles and phrases are relevant. In this case, Lissa’s use of *‘mekubal’* may be important in drawing the line between rabbinic scholars aware of Kabbalah and those completely dedicated to it. Awareness and knowledge of, and respect for, Kabbalah does not equal the kabbalistic intention of Luria, Vitale, or Luzzatto. Lissa’s use of the term betrays his ignorance or disrespect for that fact. Abraham Cracovia described Poppers similarly (ibid., no. 150, p. 410).
singly placed Luzzatto’s adherents in a state of excommunication for seventy years. The (unnamed) chief rabbi of Krotoschin (near Posen), meanwhile, ratified the ban, but displayed unusual sensitivity in the process. He admitted that Luzzatto – whom he did not label, as had almost all other opponents, “the evil man” (איש הרע) – had been praised in his home town, and justified the events as subject to the seductiveness of Kabbalah. Jacob Emden, who lived in the same community as Hagiz and Katzenellenbogen, lambasted Luzzatto’s efforts to “gather a study group to separate himself from the Sages of Israel,” and alleged that Luzzatto wished to supersede Sabbatai Tsevi. Emden argued that Luzzatto was a bold-faced Sabbatian, but nevertheless rejected a broad attack on the study of Kabbalah. Jacob Hirsch Pinchov of Breslau approved the herem of Hagiz and Katzenellenbogen, castigating Luzzatto as a villain, Bassan as careless and irresponsible, and the masses as “stupid, gullible, and weak.” He further insisted that every synagogue in Poland, on the eve of Rosh Hodesh, curse, damn, banish, and excommunicate all who willfully retained the writings of “the evil one.” Aryeh Leib ben Saul Loewenstamm, Emden’s brother-in-law, went further than even Hagiz in his

162 The sanction was like a death sentence, life expectancy for Jewish men in early modern Europe not reaching the age of seventy. The choice of seventy years alludes to the talmudic statement that death sentence was not pronounced by the Sanhedrin once in every seven decade. They cannot be more severe than the Sanhedrin!
163 Ibid., no. 126, p. 350.
164 Ibid., no. 124; Emden, Zot Torat ha-Kena’ot, 58r. “It is quite evident that there was great heresy (минת) in Luzzatto’s heart, and it struck evil roots in this world.” Carlebach discussed Emden’s personality, his tension with Hagiz and Katzenellenbogen, and this period as an important link between Hagiz’s and Emden’s later war against Eybeschuetz. He believed Luzzatto was a Sabbatian of the same rank as Hayon and Eybeschuetz. As Carlebach points out, the documents related to Luzzatto appearing in his Zot Torat ha-Kena’ot are interwoven into the others (Pursuit of Heresy, 251).
165 Emden was offended that he was not invited to co-sign the original ban and warning, and Hagiz remarked that he did not intend to publish Emden’s later letter, along with others, because of space limitations. Emden himself responded in his own publication by omitting Hagiz’s writ, because “he had arrogantly presumed to decree against the study of Kabbalah in general” (Zot Torat ha-Kena’ot, 58r).
166 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 125.
condemnation.\textsuperscript{167} Whereas other authorities had banned Luzzatto’s writings and warned against printing Kabbalah in general, Loewenstamm sentenced Luzzatto and his students to eternal excommunication and called for the burning of his books.\textsuperscript{168}

By the end of 1735, rabbis in Altona, Berlin, Breslau, Brody, Fürth, Krotoschin, Lemberg, Nicholsberg, and elsewhere in central and eastern Europe had issued bans of varying emphasis and strength against Luzzatto, the existence of his writings, and the printing of Kabbalah. The pronouncements amounted to a range of both denunciations of a caricaturized Luzzatto and warnings of uncontrolled kabbalistic study. In general, the rabbinates relied upon each other, based on basic assumptions and mutual interests. From the receipt of Gordon’s letter in 1729 until the height of the rhetoric in 1735, Jewish communities had witnessed a logical progression: Hagiz distrusted any utterance that smacked of messianism; the Venetian rabbinate carried greater authority in Hagiz’s mind than that of Padua; Hagiz was a powerful voice in the counter-Sabbatian movement; the accrual of rabbinic signatures influenced new recruits to sign.

Yet, the spectrum of responses reflected the individualized nature of the rabbinic profession. A pan-Jewish rabbinate existed in theoretical thinking and identity formation, but practical rabbinic culture consisted of networks of rabbinates formed along geographic, ethnic, and familial lines. More importantly, each edict levied in response to Luzzatto carried within it

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\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., no. 123, p. 344.
\textsuperscript{168} Addressed to “the rabbis, the great scholars of Israel for Greater Poland and Lesser Poland,” requesting “that the edict be proclaimed in all the provinces of Polonia on the eve of every New moon that this heretic and his disciples and his retinue of evildoers and his faction be excommunicated and outlawed, set apart and separated from all the holiness of Israel, and that all his books and writings be condemned as books of infidels and sorcerers to be burnt” (Ibid., no. 123, pp. 343–344; Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle’s Mystical-Messianic Diary,” in \textit{Messianic Mysticism}, 343 n. 17, and 417).
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the specific motivation and hope of its issuer. The Krotoschin ban was undoubtedly the most ‘understanding’ and melancholy of the dozen or so bans issued, whereas Loewenstamm’s was especially vitriolic. As Emden’s relative and Hagiz’s associate, Loewenstamm had personal reasons for abiding by their respective calls for action, and he convened a rabbinic conference in Breslau to promote their case. Conveying his passion in person, an even more powerful method than text, Loewenstamm convinced several colleagues to support his edict and compose their own. In a similar manner, Eliezer (Rokeah) Cracow, rabbi in Brody and later Amsterdam, influenced visiting emissaries from Safed to issue an anti-Luzzatto proclamation on behalf of their own community. However, quite distinctively, Eliezer rejected Luzzatto’s greatness on a cosmic basis. It is unbelievable “that one rise in thought to be similar in spirit to the first generations,” he wrote. “Our sages already taught us that the ‘first were like angels,’ and what of the Holy Rashbi [Shimon bar Yohai] and his Holy Community?!.... Who is this...that his fellowship is similar to and reflects that in the Zohar?” Nevertheless, Eliezer’s anti-Luzzatto protégés from Safed justified their right to ban the Paduan by appropriating the same Mishnaic rabbis Eliezer objectified. As representatives of Safed, they not only carried the weight of the community’s rabbinate, but also that of “the Holy Rashbi and the other buried sages in the northern region of the Land of Israel!” Just as Hagiz drew authority from the “heavenly bet din,” the Safed emissaries evoked the deceased rabbis “concealed” in the Galilee to bolster their authority, uniquely relating geographic residence with providential justice.

169 Letter from Jacob of Pinchov (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 125, p. 348).
170 Ibid., no. 128, pp. 352–353.
171 Ibid., no. 127, pp. 350–351. Israel ben David of Brody wrote the bulk of the document, signed his name, and Moses Samuel of Safed appended his name with a comment that he represented the rabbis of Safed. There is no evidence indicating whether or not the emissaries corresponded with rabbis back home to determine the rabbinate’s official position.
Rabbinic distinctiveness was even evident in silence. The Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam were noticeably silent during the uproar, even as the city’s Ashkenazic community moved to hire Eliezer Rokeah as chief rabbi and as Luzzatto arrived at their doorstep. David Oppenheim, who had become embroiled in the Hayon controversy when he unwittingly approved the publication of a Sabbatian tract, appears to have issued no public statement on Luzzatto whatsoever.\(^{172}\) He may have wished to avoid controversy himself, or perhaps he rejected the tactics and conclusions of Luzzatto’s opponents.\(^{173}\) Whatever the reason for his silence, it speaks to the hundreds of rabbinic figures who either staked no claim in the midst of the uproar or were (like Merari in Venice) shunted aside and subsumed under the auspices of a given rabbinate. By and large, Hagiz, Katzenellenbogen, and Poppers succeeded in accumulating immense support, but their victory was not total. For instance, Eliezer Rokeah’s hope of arranging an even larger meeting of scholars than that convened by Loewenstamm failed to materialize. Moreover, the Council of Four Lands, the umbrella rabbinic body of Jewish communities in Lithuania and Poland, did not issue an official declaration against Luzzatto,\(^{174}\) perhaps due to the testimony of Hayim Polacco, who had befriended the renegade

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\(^{172}\) Joshua Falk and Ezekiel Landau, both of whom were active in later anti-Sabbatian controversies, were similarly silent. However, their cases may have been less profound. Landau, born in 1713, had been appointed as a judge (dayan) in Brody in 1734, and would not have been expected to issue a separate proclamation. Falk, meanwhile, had been forced to resign from his position in Metz that same year, and may not have had an official chair from which to issue a proclamation (although that did not prevent Hagiz or Emden from doing so, which again gets into individual personality).

\(^{173}\) For a recent study of Oppenheim, see Joshua Z. Teplishky, *Between Court Jew and Jewish Court: David Oppenheim, the Prague rabbinate, and eighteenth-century Jewish political culture* (PhD diss., New York University, 2012).

\(^{174}\) In an article on the authority of the Va’ad outside of Poland-Lithuania, Moshe Rosman listed ten examples from which to generalize, including the Ramhal dispute (“The Authority of the Council of Four Lands Outside Poland-Lithuania,” *Polin* 22 [2010]: 83–108). He contended that the Va’ad could have issued a ban. It seems unlikely to me for two primary reasons: one, no copy is extant, unlike bans of less authoritative rabbis; two, the Council is not
Thus, condemnations of Luzzatto outside the Italian Peninsula reflected personality, geography, and kinship. The opposition (that is, the ‘rabbinate’ at large) was generally unified, but it was in no way absolute or monolithic — a fact manifested in the far larger quarrels over Jonathan Eybeschuetz and the rise of Hasidism in the ensuing decades.

While bans multiplied in central and eastern Europe, the Venetians moved to permanently snuff out Luzzatto’s group in Padua and his supporters elsewhere. In October 1735, after the majority of the Ashkenazic rabbinate had responded forcefully to their call from the previous winter, the Venetian rabbinate pronounced its own official excommunication against Luzzatto’s writings and those who harbored them.176 “Jews and Jewesses” were given a mere fifteen days to submit their copies of his writings to the authorities. Failure to comply would be met with an all-encompassing excommunication,177 in this world and the next, by the “power of the Torah.” Not only Luzzatto’s kabbalistic treatises, but his prayers, songs, and poems were to be burned like the works of “heretics and blasphemers.” This included his

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175 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 141. According to Tishby, “many important rabbis in Poland and Lithuania were not happy with the persecution of Luzzatto and the banning of his writings” (“How Luzzatto’s Kabbalistic Writings were Disseminated in Poland and Lithuania,” in Messianic Mysticism, 417). While he admitted it was notable that “the Luzzatto controversy was never considered in the Council of the Four Lands,” Tishby erroneously continued that in contrast to Hayon and Eybeschuetz controversies flanking Luzzatto, “not a single rabbi stood up to defend him in public, still less did anyone issue decrees to counter the excommunication.”

176 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 136, pp. 364–365. The Yeshivah kelalit ordered the proclamation to be read in synagogues and squares. Unnecessarily, the epistle was addressed to “the encampment of Israel, specifically Ashkenaz, Holland, Poland, and Denmark.” They knew that a large number of letters had already been disseminated, by rabbis and rabbinates far more pertinent to the ethnic and communal population in said geographic regions. Basking in their own success, the authors listed each rabbinate and community who had trumpeted their call for banning Luzzatto.

The signatories include Joseph Aboab, Solomon Mintz, Solomon Altaras, Isaac Pacifico, Solomon Zalman of Lvov, Nissim David ha-Kohen. Jacob Aboab and Menahem Merari unexpectedly did sign the ban, but Jacob Bellilios’s name is noticeably absent.

177 Nidu’im, shamtot, haramim.
consecration of the Sephardic synagogue in Padua, printed in Venice in 1729 no less, and
eulogies for well-respected rabbis like Vitale and Cantarini. Thus, their intention in banning all
of his writings, regardless of their genre, was to eradicate memory of Luzzatto. Previous
disregard for the Padua rabbinate or for the authority of Bassan had evolved to forcible
divestment of any vestige of Luzzatto’s legitimacy from normative rabbinic culture.

If the Venetians hoped to proclaim themselves the premier rabbinate in northern Italy,
they succeeded only in that rabbis outside the peninsula nominally complied by assigning them
the role of bounty hunter, relative to Hagiz’s prosecutor and Poppers’ judge. Among the
myriad Italian Jewish communities, the Venetian rabbinate did not retain a peninsula-wide
mandate. To begin with, Padua’s lay and rabbinic leadership publicly issued a unified
response.\(^{178}\) Rabbis Marini, Valle, Romanin, and Forte, along with the community’s elected
officials, including several members of the Consiglio who had voted to compel Luzzatto and the
other rabbis to teach publicly in the community’s ancient bet midrash, proclaimed Luzzatto’s
innocence. They decried the aspersions cast upon Bassan, exclaiming his success in
“disseminating Torah in our city for eight continuous years,” and assured the rabbinic public
that the box with Luzzatto’s writings had remained sealed.\(^{179}\) Moreover, they described
Luzzatto’s religious and social virtues:

> “His express purpose was Torah, truth, and well-being. He opened
> his home to study and to teach, to keep and to practice the entire
> Torah in the service of God. Every day he could be heard

\(^{179}\) The letter described a scene in which members of the rabbinate visited Moses Alpron and determined that the
box had not been opened and nothing had been removed. They went further, however, by bringing Alpron to
stand before the ark of the Ashkenazic synagogue in the presence of the rabbi and other scholars and to testify
that it had not been tampered with since it had been entrusted to him by Bassan and Nehemiah Kohen before they
left and closed with iron locks.
approaching the Holy in the Ashkenazic synagogue, ever-honoring
God with perfect intention and a beautiful spirit. Every Sabbath
he sermonized with good and pleasant words, embodying the fear
of Heaven and ethical living. He did all with a benevolent spirit,
without money or any price – even to benefit a little finger – for in
faith in God he did this.”

In referencing Luzzatto’s altruism, and stating explicitly that he had not acted for any monetary
profit, the letter evoked a strong theme promoted in his yeshiva. “My associates are not
people who engage in the Torah as a profession to become rabbis in Italy,” Luzzatto had written
in 1730. “Their souls are holy…. My approach is not that of the other rabbis of our cities, and I
must lead this generation according to its needs.” Thus, the epistle represented the group’s
spiritual resilience and self-righteousness, and the community’s refusal to bend to Venetian
rabbinic authority.

Under the surface of the staunchly supportive letter, however, was community-wide
pragmatism and caution. Unlike Gordon’s or Isaac Marini’s letters of 1729 and 1730, which had
anticipated winning adherents by celebrating Luzzatto’s brilliance, the 1735 communal letter
displayed a more modest goal. In praising Luzzatto’s righteousness and stressing his deep and
pure religiosity, the signatories sought only to defend their fellow Paduan and terminate the
controversy. They condemned the progenitors of the “slander,” and even subversively accused
the general rabbinate of seeking monetary gain, but they were well aware of their essential
impotence in the face of massive opposition. They were not only up against a Venetian
rabbinate attempting to extend its influence; they faced, however unjustly, a myriad of
rabbinates out to destroy the perceived heresy within their community. Even if some readers

180 Ibid., nos. 112–113.
181 Ibid., no. 88.
of their open letter would have sympathized with an overt and equally personal attack on
Pacifico, Belilios, Hagiz, and others, the Paduans concluded that a firm but measured defense
was politically expedient. Regardless of whether the letter was the result of the lay leadership’s
insistence or the evolution of the kabbalists, it reflected the near impossibility of proving
Luzzatto’s, Bassan’s, and their community’s innocence.

Considering their immense task of cosmic redemption, and the sheer number of
opponents, Luzzatto and his supporters could not ‘win’ in any conventional sense. Attempts to
broaden the yeshiva’s influence beyond Padua – in essence to initiate a movement – had been
twice rejected, which necessitated reaction. After Gordon’s letter was met with derision and
Luzzatto was compelled to sign an oath of compliance, group unity intensified and eventually
led to Luzzatto’s attempt to publish a polemic. As I will discuss in the following chapter,
Luzzatto responded to the renewed controversy in 1735 by evolving yet again, swinging from
public diffusor of Kabbalah to quietistic pietist in Amsterdam — though the autograph
manuscript of Mesilat Yesharim, composed in 1738, shows that in his continuous development
he still hoped to sway rabbinic culture and its cosmic destiny. The members of his yeshiva also
developed beyond notions expressed in their covenant; Romanin and Forte, for example,
subsumed their mystico-messianic personas and came to establish themselves as communal
rabbis and halakhic authorities.

More immediately, Bassan concluded that he was unable to stave off the bans against
his former student and moved primarily to defend himself in the matter. He had been unable
to control Luzzatto and held no sway over the Venetians, but he retained the hope of
rehabilitating what had previously been a distinguished and scandal-free career. Thus, in mid-
November 1735, about one month after the Venetians had issued an official edict against Luzzatto, Bassan stood before the rabbinate of Modena to clear himself of charges that had been levied against him. To be sure, Bassan did not conduct his defense in ‘neutral’ space — that is, he did not attempt to stand as a blank slate before unknown rabbis and be judged. That scenario was impossible for two reasons: one, Bassan was well-known and the Italian rabbinates were even more interconnected than their more widely dispersed Ashkenazic counterparts; and two, Bassan, and more profoundly Luzzatto and the Padua fellowship, had been accused, tried, and convicted without a hint of dispassionate impartiality. The categorical rejections of Luzzatto and Padua by Pacifico and Belilios, let alone Hagiz and Katzenellenbogen in the north, betrayed personal biases that projected themselves as the authentic representatives of contemporary Jewry. Within the passionate debates surrounding Sabbatian heresy, open-mindedness and tolerance were detrimental traits, and luxuries Bassan was not afforded. For his part, Bassan exemplified rabbinic culture and the Italian rabbinate no less than the Venetians, only with greater respect for and emphasis on Kabbalah and personal piety. Not only did he follow in the footsteps of Zacut and Vitale, and serve as a link to Luzzatto and his compatriots, he belonged to a network of like-minded rabbinic colleagues. Therefore, Bassan worked to amass letters of support from among his friends. The Modena tribunal,\textsuperscript{182} for instance, included the brother of Bassan’s brother-in-law,\textsuperscript{183} and the brother of the kabbalist

\textsuperscript{182} Three members of the bet din were: Abraham Jedidiah ben Menahem Samson Basiliea, brother of Mantuan kabbalist Aviad Sar Shalom Basleia and an ordained student of Zacut and Judah Briel; Menahem Azariah ben Judah Matsliyah Padova; and Abraham Hai ben Nathaniel Graziano.

The men testifying to the uprightness of the bet din: Samuel Hayim ben Mazal Tov Shalit, who had studied with Vitale; Isaac ben Moses Formiggini; and Judah Isaac Berakhiah ben Abraham Yihya.

\textsuperscript{183} The general head of the Modena bet din, Menasheh Joshua Padova, recused himself from Bassan’s tribunal on grounds that they were brothers-in-law.
Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea, who, along with Finzi and Bassan, had provided Luzzatto with an approbation for *Ma'amar ha-Vikuah*.\(^{184}\) Bassan also retained a ruling from the Padua *bet din*, in no way an impartial body, as well as sympathetic letters from other rabbis in Mantua.\(^{185}\) Objectively, Bassan’s activity could be deemed farcical, and perhaps to neutral, non-rabbinic members of society it was. However, in a similitude to the Venetian calls for support, Bassan hoped his endeavors would prove fruitful in clearing his name among Ashkenazim otherwise ignorant of the specific inter-communal relationships in Italian Jewish communities.

As he turned to his friends, Bassan also acted in desperation. In sharp contrast to a principle he and all other rabbis held dear – rabbinic authority and autonomy – Bassan appealed to the Venetian communal leadership over the heads of the *Yeshivah kelalit* that had issued a ban. He explained that Luzzatto had not produced anything heretical, and beseeched Venice’s council of lay leaders to demonstrate their authority over the rabbis by declaring it null and void.\(^{186}\) In addition, Bassan sought the support of two Ashkenazic rabbis: Poppers, with whom he hoped to make a deal; and Barukh Kahana Rapoport of Fürth, whom he believed would be sympathetic to his troubles.\(^{187}\) The backing of the former, now a key player in the controversy, could clear his name if he fairly judged Bassan to be an innocent man libeled by the Venetians and Hagiz. They corresponded several times, and, in exchange for exoneration, Bassan complied with the Frankfurt rabbi’s demand for the chest of Luzzatto’s writings in Moses Alpron’s possession.\(^{188}\) Rapoport, meanwhile, was a natural ally: he was a well-known

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\(^{185}\) Separate letters from Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea and Moses ben Solomon of Civita.
\(^{186}\) Ibid., no. 142, p. 380.
\(^{187}\) Ibid., no. 145. He wrote a similar letter to Poppers which has not survived.
\(^{188}\) Ibid., no. 151, p. 413. Poppers gave Bassan the choice of sending the papers to Hamburg or to Frankfurt.
pietist who had been taken advantage of by the Venetian rabbinate. Hayim Polacco, a student of Rapoport who had faithfully supported Luzzatto, informed Bassan that the Venetians had erroneously included Rapoport’s name among their list of publicized bans. The pietist was incensed, and considered bringing his own injunction against them. Therefore, writing to a man “after his own heart,” and in contrast to his usually measured style, Bassan “vented his deep anger and frustration.” He mocked Belilios, Pacífico, and Solomon Zalman of Lvov, the latter of whom “eats, is satiated, and grows fat,” and referred to them as the inheritors of the anti-kabbalist Leone Modena. Calling them deceitful and liars, he denied various charges against Luzzatto and himself, and reported that Merari was shouting bitterly that his testimony had been misrepresented and his own name unwillingly added to the ban.

In her detailed account of Bassan’s self-defense, Carlebach claimed that he sought to clear Luzzatto’s name as well. While the charges addressed by the Modena bet din did concern Luzzatto in conjunction with Bassan, it is my opinion that Bassan was then chiefly concerned with vindicating himself. The rabbis in Modena ruled in favor of the co-defendants, but

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189 Bassan appealed to Rapoport’s piety, calling him “הדרת קדש מכתו הר א”ר ויתו”תים” (ibid., no. 145, p. 388).
190 Ibid., no. 141.
191 Ibid., no. 145, p. 394
192 Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 252.
193 A pun on the biblical injunction to bless God after eating to satiety (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 145, p. 389). Bassan also says Solomon Zalman, who Polacco had implied was an imposter, refers to money as part of his work, probably an allusion to the publication of responsa literature in Venice for payment.
194 Bassan states: “my teacher and rabbi Moses Zacut referred to him as Kol Sakhal for repudiating Kabbalah, engaging with earlier rabbinic authorities in a brutal spirit, while relying on foreign and evil ways” (ibid., no. 145, p. 390).
195 Chriqui, Pursuit of Heresy, 393.
196 He was accused of three things: 1) Luzzatto had sworn that he had not composed a Psalter, but the book was discovered in his home; 2) another book had been discovered that had been written with “evil spirit;” 3) Bassan had removed two or three items from the chest of confiscated manuscripts.
197 In general, Carlebach stressed the bad elements of their relationship, which I again disagree with. Though Luzzatto often appeared arrogant before Bassan, he nevertheless respected him and sought his approval. In 1730, Bassan jumped to negative conclusions about Luzzatto when accusations of immorality surfaced and Luzzatto
their account of the proceedings focused primarily on Bassan. He was described as an upright man who desired only truth and justice, whereas Luzzatto was merely mentioned by his initials M.H.L., devoid of rabbinic appellation, and appeared inconsequential. Besides, Bassan advocated burying Luzzatto’s writings — a more favorable fate than burning them, but still in compliance with the demand for their destruction. I do not believe that Bassan wished to intentionally slight Luzzatto; rather his actions and the resulting support he received reflected his own network’s attempts to prevent broad expansion of the opposition’s efforts.

With Luzzatto and his supporters in a state of limbo, Bassan on the defensive, and numerous rabbinates expecting to see Luzzatto shunned and his writings destroyed, Samson Morpurgo moved to counter the widespread hysteria. As with the rest of Luzzatto’s support system, Morpurgo could offer only a measured and calculated response. He had previously preached moderation and tolerance towards Luzzatto and his group, although, after the signing of the first oath in 1730, he had also attempted to mollify Hagiz. “From time to time...they rise against us, from amongst our brothers, they frighten and perplex us,” he wrote. “They pledge themselves to a new covenant and their actions exceed all limits... [but] God installs in each generation cedars of Lebanon to shield the generation.”

Now, with the proliferation of bans against Luzzatto, his writings, and the general study of Kabbalah, Morpurgo hoped to arrange a pulled away until their relationship was mended through the efforts of Marini and others in Padua. However, they always retained a strong emotional relationship, with Bassan acting as Luzzatto’s spiritual father. In Amsterdam, after the Frankfurt event, Luzzatto wrote to Bassan: “My father, my father! Pure of heart and a man of truth” (ibid., no. 118, p. 338). He referred to him as “father” again a year later (ibid., no. 146). It could be said that it was meaningless or expedient, but Luzzatto, now in Amsterdam with a myriad of bans promulgated against him, had little to ask of Bassan and Bassan could do little for him. Having been in Amsterdam a year, after seeing a copy of three testimonials issue from Venetian rabbis (ibid., nos. 100, 101, 104), Luzzatto told Bassan that “I am very sorry for the burden that you have been dealt by the deceitful men” (ibid., no. 146, p. 395).

198 They determined that: 1) “there was no oath taken on Sefer Tehilim;” 2) nothing in Luzzatto’s correspondence with Bassan indicates evil; 3) final charge was untrue.

199 Ibid., no. 76.
compromise and restore Jewish life to what it had been before the uproar. On the one hand, he lambasted the Venetians and complained that Ashkenazi rabbis with no direct connection to the matter had sealed their venomous bans with “rings like that of a king.” On the other hand, he placed the onus for the controversy on Luzzatto. He expressed support for Bassan, and attested to the uprightness of the Padua yeshiva, but so too did he agree that Luzzatto’s writings should be confiscated and destroyed. He defended Luzzatto’s attempt “to save the sages of truth [kabbalists] from the hand of the lion...Judah Aryeh of Modena,” but so too did his correspondence with Hagiz, Poppers, and Rapoport reflect a submissive and placating manner.

In contrast to the large rabbinic contingent intent on demarcating normative society (not necessarily the majority of the worldwide rabbinate, but evidently the loudest and most influential element), and Luzzatto’s pietistic and spiritualized vision of a perfected community, Morpurgo hoped to preserve essential unity and diversity. In letters to Hagiz and the Venetians, he lamented the constant communal strife in their midst, and decried the mutual state of affairs as insulting to the Torah. His solution to the bans was a compromise in which

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200 In letter to Hagiz, he commented that beyond the response from the Venetians, who had personal connections to the issue, other rabbis had matched or surpassed their ban, “sealing with their rings like that of a king” (ibid., no. 144, p. 385).
201 Referred to Luzzatto as “the Terrible” (ibid., no. 139, p. 373), and he seems to assume or imply that Luzzatto had already broken his oath in Amsterdam (ibid., no. 138, p. 368).
202 In letter to Hagiz, he implied that the opposition had foolishly and unjustly accused Bassan; the accusation is the exact opposite of who he is (ibid., no. 138, p. 369).
203 Luzzatto sought only “to save the sages of the truth [kabbalists] from the hand of the Lion, which rose up from the trellis against the kabbalists, the Great Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh of Modena. And Luzzatto’s answer was sent from the crucible of the Great rabbi, his teacher, Isaiah Bassan and the Great Rabbi, his father-in-law, and other rabbis, and all sanctioned his hand, as I have heard from [many]” (ibid., no. 143, p. 382).
204 Ibid., no. 138. Hoping to convince Hagiz of his righteous path of tolerance, Morpurgo proclaimed: “So it will be, and what comes will come.... I am one to vindicate and give the benefit of the doubt.”
205 Ibid., no. 143, p. 382.
Luzzatto’s writings would be buried, not burned. He worried specifically about the writings of Zacut and his school, insisting that in a setting of anti-kabbalistic pandemonium previously sane men would be unable to discern good from evil. A moderate ban against Luzzatto and his magidic writings, however, would sufficiently restore order and enable men to separate the “wheat from the chaff.” Although Morpurgo did not regard as Luzzatto as heretical, or his writings as particularly dangerous, he was willing to concede on the issue for a broader purpose of communal peace. In doing so, he hoped to provide Kabbalah, and the societies of kabbalists integral to the Italian rabbinate, with social legitimacy — not because he himself was a kabbalist, or cared specifically for them, but because they were a fact that would not disappear. The decision of the Tribes of Gad and Reuben to settle on the east bank of the Jordan River had initially raised ire, Morpurgo philosophized, but their action was ultimately accepted as valid.

Conclusion

Morpurgo’s analogy placed him firmly on the side of Kabbalah and kabbalists as integral to rabbinic society. As shown above, Ashkenazic rabbinic authorities generally identified Kabbalah as dangerous to the populace at large or as a subject valuable but not comparable in everyday importance to Talmud and halakhic ruling. Most of the bans issued against Luzzatto

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206 Morpurgo rejected the option of burning the books for religious, legal, and cultural reasons, respectively: Luzzatto’s texts contained holy verses from the Bible and Midrash, as well as statements from the Mishnaic sages (ibid., no. 148, p. 401, and no. 157, p. 425, to Hagiz and Poppers, respectively); the burning of a set of Luzzatto’s writings by one bet din would necessitate the burning of discovered writings elsewhere by another(ibid., no. 149, p. 406); and book burning was a foreign and profane practice (ibid., no. 144, p. 386).

207 Ibid., no. 139, p. 370.
included mitigating the study to some degree, with some calling for a blanket embargo of mysticism. Juxtaposed, Morpurgo’s contra-opposition letters indicated that he respected Bassan, Vitale, and Finzi as examples of communal kabbalists, and understood the Padua phenomenon as an outgrowth of several generations of Italian Kabbalah. If a claim can be made that Kabbalah was more integrated into the eighteenth-century rabbinate and society of Sephardic communities than that of Ashkenazic communities, the ethnic melting pot of Italian communities seems to have reflected a middle ground. In this dissertation, I have presented Luzzatto and his perfection- and redemption-seeking fellow mystics within the multi-generational context of Italian kabbalists in the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Just as Tishby (and more recently Garb) broadened our understanding of Luzzatto by addressing fellow-Paduan Moses David Valle’s mystical aspirations, I have attempted to demonstrate a general trend towards intellectual pietism among a large and growing network of ordained rabbis during this period. Luzzatto’s vision of a perfected community was feasible in Padua because of its diverse history, culture, and thought, and Morpurgo’s defense of Kabbalah reflected its presence as a way of life among the intellectual elite. Morpurgo himself was not a kabbalist, but his backing of the study indicated its pervasiveness among the peninsula’s rabbis. Even the Venetians, who viciously attacked Luzzatto and his compatriots, Bassan and Padua communal autonomy, refrained from issuing a blanket condemnation of kabbalistic study.
Scholars have long described an ongoing rivalry between pietists and talmudists, including between kabbalists and halakhists in the early modern period. As such, it could be tempting to conceive of Luzzatto as an outsider pietist criticizing the institutional rabbinate. After all, he sought to solve practical communal (and thereby rabbinic) problems through devekut and a ‘perfecting community,’ rather than through the mitigating halakhic system of discourse and decree. Moreover, most of the letters and bans related to the controversy unquestionably present him as an external threat to the established order. Yet, this dichotomy is grossly inadequate when considering the social, cultural, and religious contexts of Luzzatto’s (or perhaps any) era. For one thing, his rabbinic heritage and inclusive approach to Kabbalah sharply contrasted with presumptions about pietism and kabbalistic confraternities. Likewise, the bans against Kabbalah primarily represented a social demarcation of the mainstream rather than opposition to its theology; Pacifico, for instance, regarded it (and the Hebrew and Aramaic languages) as so holy that it could not be treated as part of regular study. In addition, the controversy reflected rabbinic disjointedness, signifying that the rabbinate was far from monolithic — not just in Ashkenazic-Italian-Sephardic terms, but even within each ethnic group and geographical locale.

I do not contend that Luzzatto’s influence rivaled that exhibited by his enemies. It is clear that the Venetians, with great help from other rabbinates, were successful in preventing the publication of his books and thwarting the efforts of his mystical fellowship. Moreover, the

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209 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 100, p. 290, and no. 104, p. 305.
respective efforts of Luzzatto, Bassan, and the Padua community were meager compared to the power and relentlessness of his opponents. Nevertheless, I have sought to challenge the inherent assumptions of the sources of the ‘victors.’ Luzzatto’s biography and prominent reception history demand a complex understanding of the controversy outside the bounds of a heresy hunt in which an established rabbinate effectively suppressed an antinomian mystic. 

In this chapter, I have attempted to show, based on the assumption of nominal communal and rabbinic independence, that no particular party was any more powerful than another. In the multifaceted controversy that surrounded Luzzatto, no single rabbi exercised unmitigated power. All factions involved were limited and relied upon support from another: Luzzatto’s absolutism (though not despotism) was essentially confined to Padua; Bassan’s defense depended upon endorsements from friends and tolerance from enemies; Hagiz needed the Venetians to pursue Luzzatto and fellow Ashkenazic rabbis to propel them; the Venetians required rabbinates elsewhere to provide them with legitimacy; and Morpurgo hoped all would relent. In my view, the ‘rabbinate’ was a complex theoretical and socio-religious body, consisting of individuals of various ethnicities, ages, educations, and backgrounds, acting independently but nevertheless reliant upon each other. 

Consequently, issues discussed in this chapter raise larger questions about rabbinic culture in the eighteenth century. What was the nature and extent of rabbinic power on the whole? Was rabbinic power primarily or exclusively exercised over the printing press? What would have happened if Luzzatto had not opted to back down? Would he have been physically assaulted in Frankfurt, or dragged before Christian political authorities, even though fear of Gentile condemnation motivated Pacifico and Hagiz to suppress Luzzatto’s messianism? Did
fear permeate Jewish social spheres, so that the bans were in fact retroactively effective, representing a measure of rabbinic clout and not only communal weakness? Padua’s Jewish public may not have responded to Marini’s and Levi’s showering of curses over a stolen pinkas, but perhaps early modern Jewry was more responsive to charges of heresy.

Yet, the survival of some of Luzzatto’s writings in Italy, and as Tishby showed even Poland, indicates an equally potent rejection of the power and legitimacy of the bans. While the rabbinate as a whole prevented Luzzatto from printing his books and growing his movement, it did not manage to crush his worldview, the socialization of Kabbalah, or, as I will discuss in the coming chapter, his everyday influence. As such, the complexity of the events necessitates careful delineation of ‘establishment,’ ‘subversive,’ and ‘heretical.’ Luzzatto’s theology or the Padua rabbinate’s rejection of the bans may have subverted the rabbinic establishment at large, but they were nevertheless unquestionably ‘legitimate,’ and there is little that can be labeled heretical. For his part, Luzzatto viewed his enemies as unfit for rabbinic leadership and ultimately subversive (if unknowingly) of their divinely ordained positions and religion. The controversy, then, consisted of different social and spiritual reference points — a crucial factor in comprehending Luzzatto’s life in Amsterdam and posthumous reception history.
Chapter Five

Luzzatto and the Nação: Exceptions Meet

In chapter one, I presented Luzzatto’s social and religious worldview as expressed in the original version of his most well-known work, *Mesilat Yesharim*. It set the tone for the dissertation, presenting both his spiritual self-conception and his polemic against contemporary rabbinic society. Chapters two and three dealt with Luzzatto’s communal background and provided a context for his outlook and activities. Chapter four, meanwhile, focused on the controversy around Luzzatto, and showed that Luzzatto himself was only one factor at play. The diversity of opinion expressed, in conjunction with the rabbinic status of Luzzatto and that of many of his supporters, reflected the disparate nature of the ‘rabinate.’ I argued that within the rabbinic class, there were several rabbinates comprised of distinct geographic, political, ethnic, cultural, and religious elements.

This dissertation’s final chapter concerns Luzzatto’s eight-year residence in Amsterdam, a key to understanding the link between his biography and reception history. Evidence of Luzzatto’s life in Amsterdam is extremely limited. The controversy did not rage overtly there, and historians have generally regarded these years as nothing more than a quiet period for Luzzatto and of little consequence to him personally. Almanzi devoted scant attention to Luzzatto’s activities in Amsterdam. He recorded only that Luzzatto published three books in Amsterdam, and that a handful of letters attest to his continued contact with colleagues in Padua. Graetz, Dubnow, and other early historians identified one of Luzzatto’s Amsterdam publications, the drama *La-Yesharim Tehilah*, as the most notable element of his stay. Ginzburg
went a little further by surmising that Luzzatto was a changed man in Amsterdam — contemplative, sad, and defeated. Some scholars of Dutch Jewry, including Jozeph Michman and Irene Zwiep, have dealt with Luzzatto’s influence of the Portuguese poet David Franco Mendes, but have presented no biographical evidence nor related the eight years to his life and experience in Italy.¹ In addition, a few scholars of Jewish thought have addressed certain texts that Luzzatto produced, but Luzzatto’s oeuvre has remained compartmentalized. The sole work explicitly dedicated to Luzzatto’s time in Amsterdam has been a short article by Jakob Meyer, caretaker of the Ets Haim/Montezinos Library following the Second World War. In 1947, perusing record books and manuscript codices of the Portuguese community, Meyer discovered two references to Luzzatto and a few mentions of his acquaintances. The article was more than a catalog, but it lacked significant analysis, was in no way exhaustive, and its publication virtually unknown.²

This chapter will discuss Luzzatto’s place as a member of the Portuguese community and a participant in Amsterdam’s rabbinic and print culture. There are primarily three types of sources that illuminate Luzzatto’s eight years in Amsterdam. The first consists of only a handful of letters, written between May 1735 and March 1739, in which Luzzatto primarily encourages his colleagues and students in Padua to continue the cosmic work they did under his guidance. He undoubtedly wrote more, to family members and other friends about a variety of subjects, but the vast majority of extant correspondence to, from, and about Luzzatto belonged to Bassan. The second is the unpublished material that I found in the archives of the Portuguese

Jewish community. Hundreds of massive volumes, many comprising hundreds of folios, record
the meticulous social, economic, and cultural life of the Nação. Luzzatto’s name is buried deep
within the archive, indicating his presence among the Portuguese Jews. The third type of
source consists of the three books Luzzatto printed in Amsterdam. Two of them, including the
famous *Mesilat Yesharim*, contain glorifying rabbinic approbations and printers’ introductions,
while the third, *La-Yesharim Tehilah*, was privately commissioned and published. The books
best demonstrate Luzzatto’s acceptance in the city, and noticeably contradict the innumerable
bans levied against him. They were also the catalyst for his extraordinary reception history.

As I intend to show, Luzzatto’s life in Amsterdam could be defined in at least three ways,
depending on one’s perspective. One, as just mentioned, the period reflected a respite for
Luzzatto and an opportunity to begin anew after years of strife. He was highly regarded, and
arguably influenced the community’s religious outlook. Two, it was in no way ‘perfect,’ for
Luzzatto did indeed start over in a foreign city, having failed to manifest his grandiose messianic
aims. His students and compatriots did not follow him to Amsterdam, nor did he set up a
satellite yeshiva. Portuguese rabbinic and lay leadership valued, supported, and praised
Luzzatto, but so too did they accept the seriousness of the controversy that had raged east and
southeast in the continent’s Jewish communities. The polemical nature of Luzzatto’s initial
version of *Mesilat Yesharim* was deemed too contentious to a community and a rabbinate
attempting to broaden and include itself among pan-European rabbinic culture. Finally, in
between these two perspectives, Luzzatto himself persisted as he had for years. As all was
from God, he accepted his lot and forged ahead. His seemingly endless self-assurance, driven
by an ‘elevated’ perception of life whereby he negated his external failure and bolstered his
internal spirituality, manifested itself in his interaction with the active Portuguese rabbinate and in the composition of several books. The combination of these three factors – Portuguese acceptance; that it was measured and not total; and that Luzzatto simultaneously pursued pietism while relating carefully to his surroundings – defined Luzzatto’s time in Amsterdam, and ultimately laid the foundation for his glorified reception history.

Welcome
In December 1735, Luzzatto left the land where he had been born and raised, still having resided in his father’s house, leader of a group of kabbalists and aspiring mystics devoted to the cosmic redemption. He made his way north through the freezing and challenging Alps. In the latter decades of the eighteenth century, wealthy and educated northern Europeans, mainly from Britain and France, traversed the Alps, with hired help to guide and to carry their possessions, on their way for a Grand Tour of Italy. Rarely did they do so in the winter, however, for fear of the elements and the sparse population throughout the mountain range. At the tail end of his Grand Tour, William Thomas Beckord described the perils of traveling from northern Italy to Augsburg in January 1781. He remarked, upon descending the Alps safely, that he “never before felt the pleasure of discovering a smoke rising from a cottage... [or] in perceiving two or three fur caps, with faces under them, peeping out of their concealments.”3 In contrast to Beckord, Luzzatto’s push northward was out of necessity, not adventure.4 He faced a concerted effort of intellectual suppression from the rabbis of

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4 No extant letters from Luzzatto address comment on his travels.
Venice. Bogged down by the controversy and unable to expand his efforts in northern Italy, Luzzatto embarked on his thousand-kilometer journey to Amsterdam. A brief stop in Frankfurt resulted immediately in the signing of a new self-defeating oath, and ultimately led to infamy throughout the majority of European Jewish communities.

Despite or because of the shock of his treatment in Frankfurt, Luzzatto moved on to his original destination of Amsterdam. As discussed in the previous chapter, his stated goal in December of 1733 was to travel to the city in order to publish his pro-Kabbalah treatise, *Ma’amor ha-Vikuah*. After many months of deliberation, during which time he was accosted in Venice, Luzzatto ventured north from Padua, but, he said in defense as accusations piled up against him, only for the sake of aiding his father’s business ventures. By the time he arrived in Amsterdam in February 1735, it is unclear of Luzzatto’s short- and long-term intentions. Jacob Poppers, chief rabbi of Frankfurt and the judge in Luzzatto’s ‘trial’ before the Frankfurt bet din, stated in a letter that he had confiscated the treatise and that the young man had not carried any other papers on his person. Judging by his early letters from Amsterdam, Luzzatto felt no desire to return to Italy or even his years-long investment in establishing his perfected community. He wished only to move forward, geographically, emotionally, and spiritually. His development was met congenially by Portuguese Jewish leaders, and Amsterdam provided a measure of tranquility, and ultimately an inroad to extensive (albeit posthumous) influence.
At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Amsterdam was home to roughly 6,000 Jews amidst a population of approximately 200,000 residents. During the seventeenth century, the municipality had grown to become the hub of European, if not global, commerce. Dutch mercantilism and tolerance enabled Portuguese Jewry to develop on the whole as the wealthiest Jewish community in the world. With contacts and relations in the Iberian Peninsula, the Mediterranean coastline, and the colonies of the Western Hemisphere, many Sephardic Jews succeeded in various business enterprises. Jews lived relatively openly and the elite were generally wealthier and more powerful than their cohorts in Italian communities. In 1739, for instance, twenty-two of the city’s thirty-two stockbrokers were Jews. The decision to admit Jews was dependent upon city officials, and Jews that could contribute to a given city’s economic prosperity received relative religious and intellectual autonomy. Of Amsterdam Jewry, the Sephardic author and traveler Hayim Josef David Azulai (1724–1806) wrote: “Of all towns I passed, I saw none of such perfect beauty as Amsterdam; the renown of the Portuguese

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5 J. Israel, *Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477–1806* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 658. See Hubert P. H. Nusteling, “The Jews in the Republic of the United Provinces: Origin, Numbers and Dispersion,” in *Dutch Jewry: Its History and Secular Culture (1500–2000)*, eds. Jonathan Israel and Reinier Salverda (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 52–54, 58–60. According to Herbert I. Bloom, by the second half of the seventeenth century, of 180,000 total population in Amsterdam, 2500 were Portuguese and 5000 were German and Polish Jews (*The Economic Activities of the Jews of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* [Williamsport, PA, 1937]). Nusteling disputes Bloom. He points out that the Esnoga was built in the 1670s to accommodate only 1227 men and 400 women, and cites Bloom’s low figure of households (1200) for the beginning of the 1740s. Most recently, Tirtsah Levy Bernfeld has argued that these estimates are too, because they fail to include the presence of paupers (*Poverty and Welfare Among the Portuguese Jews in Early Modern Amsterdam* [Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012], 61–62).

6 The community’s heraldic symbol depicts a Phoenix suckling three babes — the communities of London, New York, and the Caribbean.

7 M. F. J. Smith, *Tijdaffaires in effecten aan de Amsterdamsche Beurs* (Gravenhage, 1919), 129, 143.
congregation having spread over the entire world. Here everything is found in complete perfection...the academy and the chambers round the Synagogue.\textsuperscript{8}

There were some proscriptions to Jewish settlement in the Dutch Republic, however, including prohibitions against public worship, attempting to convert Christians to Judaism, and engaging in sexual intercourse with Christian women, including prostitutes.\textsuperscript{9} The former proscription forced the Portuguese community to surround their magnificent synagogue with low-lying buildings that housed the chief rabbi, the Ets Haim yeshiva, and more, because the synagogue doors were not permitted to open directly to the main street. Aware of their exceptional position in the Dutch Republic, the communal board, the \textit{Mahamad}, stated in 1717:

“The members of the Mahamad would like to stress how important it is in safeguarding our position to avoid complaints and scandals, lest our neighbors come to hate us or make us appear in an unfavorable light.”\textsuperscript{10} Restrictions were tightly controlled by lay leadership, demanding social conformity, financial commitment, and strict adherence to public (though not private) ritual and religious expression.

In the years leading up to and including Luzzatto’s tenure in Amsterdam, the Portuguese community experienced ongoing financial straits. Around the time of Luzzatto’s arrival in Amsterdam, the community’s economic position worsened as the stock of capital decreased. One Ashkenazic Jew proclaimed in his memoirs in 1752 that “as long as the world shall exist,\

\textsuperscript{8} Gans, \textit{Memorbook}, 205; citing Azulai, \textit{Ma’agal Tov}.
\textsuperscript{9} Miriam Bodian, \textit{Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam} (Indiana University Press, 1997), 61–62.
\textsuperscript{10} Levote Bernfeld, \textit{Poverty and Welfare}, 16; citing SAA, no. 334, no. 21, p. 141 (3 Elul 5477). The warning related to an instruction not to trade in Dam Square on Sundays.
never again will there be a time like these twelve years.” In 1739 (and again in 1751), the economic downturn of the previous decade had forced the famous Academia e Yesiba Ets Haim, the pride of the community, to pay its deficits by drawing on reserves. In a 1748 report on the financial situation of the Portuguese community, Isaac de Pinto reported that in 1743 there were 419 paying members, 180 non-paying members who were not on poor relief, and 750 families receiving financial assistance (equal to about 3000 individuals, assuming a family consisted of four members). The immense wealth that some families accumulated, along with the city’s and the community’s fame as a center of culture, finance, and printing, had for decades inspired an influx of needy individuals hoping for assistance. “We opened it for those from Italy, from France, from England, from the Levant, from Poland, from Barbary and finally from Asia, Africa, and America,” Isaac de Porto wrote, “and thus we, about 400 individuals (jechiediem), find ourselves charged with the care of about 800 families who live or die at our charge.” The situation led some wealthy Portuguese to shirk responsibilities as elected officials, choosing to pay a large fine of 400 guilders rather than support the poor by giving first and most generously as was expected of them. Thus, from the latter half of the seventeenth century onward, intensified during the 1730s and 1740s when Luzzatto was in residence, the Portuguese community moved to limit their generosity in all communal institutions. De Pinto recommended sending the numerous poor as far away as possible, preferably to the Dutch

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colonies of the west. As Tirtsah Leive Bernfeld recently presented in her monumental work on poverty and welfare in early modern Amsterdam, Portuguese leadership limited and then ceased charitable contributions to Ashkenazic Jews, and ultimately refused to admit Italian, German, and Polish Jews to the Ets Haim yeshiva.

This latter element exemplified Luzzatto’s experience in Amsterdam. In Padua, Luzzatto had seen himself as exceptional, both in his own self-conception and in terms of his fellowship’s cosmic mission. Even as that was continuously challenged to varying degrees by his teacher (Bassan), other kabbalists in northern Italy (Ergas), rabbinites in adjacent communities (Venice), and abroad by rabbis with no connection to or knowledge of his activities, Luzzatto retained his theological and personal conviction. There is no extant documentation from or about Luzzatto in the immediate weeks after his run-in with Poppers, but letters written by Luzzatto in the following months attest to his high spirits. With only his faith in God and himself, Luzzatto moved to Amsterdam without assurance of a positive reception. His brother, Lion, who had settled among the Portuguese in the previous year or two to engage in business related to their father’s economic activities in the Veneto, could offer familial warmth but not

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social success. Still, documents I have discovered in the Portuguese community archives indicate that Luzzatto was not only well-received in Amsterdam, but was treated in a way that contradicted the trend and general outlook of Portuguese Jewry.

The earliest reference to his presence in the city is in a *pinkas* recording charitable donations. On 28 Shevat 5495 (=February 20, 1735), Luzzatto received a charitable gift from the community of three guilders. Typically, the charity regulations of the Portuguese, drawn up in the 1620s, confined money payments, ranging between two and six guilders per month, to the needy of good morals and conduct; the maximum contribution was equal to about half the wage of an unskilled paid laborer. Although this one-time grant to Luzzatto was comparable to entries throughout the record book, it paled in comparison to many other grants provided in the listing in which he was entered. His name appears among a list of charity granted to men from abroad, most of whom were collecting large sums for their communities. In contrast to elsewhere in the manuscript, each entry includes the man's name and place of origin, the amount, and the date it was given. Thus, communities from Jamaica, Curacao, Suriname, London, Italy, and the Levant are represented, receiving sums as high as 250 guilders. Women are not represented here, although they are otherwise found to a great extent in Amsterdam *pinkasim*. The name of “Jedad Mendola,” also from Italy and also in receipt of three guilders on the same day, was written just two lines above Luzzatto’s name. The coincidence suggests that this was one and the same as Judah Mendola of Mantua, a former resident of Padua and his staunch supporter throughout the controversy. Although there are

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15 SAA 334, no. 969, p. 315.
16 Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 359.
no indications in the cache of letters written by and about Luzzatto after he left Italy that Mendola accompanied him, Luzzatto’s letters rarely included personal information and it is nonetheless possible that Mendola offered his companionship during a difficult time in Luzzatto’s life.

If it indeed was Mendola, he soon returned to Italy, as we know from the Mantua Jewish community archives and as would have been expected of him as an outsider. Early modern municipalities and autonomous Jewish communities alike generally restricted the time travelers could linger to three days. As Levie Bernfeld showed, the Spanish-Portuguese community of London forbade locals to intercede on behalf of foreigners, and especially resisted the arrival of Jews from north Africa and Italy. A similar attitude, with set time-limit, also existed among Portuguese Jewry in Amsterdam, but poor men and women grew to an overwhelming presence in the city by the early eighteenth century and inspired ire among the wealthy members of the community.¹⁷ Yet, Luzzatto remained in Amsterdam. While he may have initially resided with his brother, which would have eliminated any strain on the community to house him, obtaining charity, coupled with the fact that he was not sent on his way, differed drastically from the communal trend.

Luzzatto’s acceptance of charity confirms his assertion three months earlier that his father – benefactor to his family and yeshiva – was in the midst of an economic downturn. Whether or not he worked with his brother to settle business for his father, Luzzatto evidently arrived in need of funds. By accepting money, Luzzatto expressed his belief in an all-encompassing divine providence. It was the responsibility of a person to accept charity when

needy, Luzzatto explained in *Mesilat Yesharim*, the ethical polemic he composed a few years after his arrival in Amsterdam, because pride prevented spiritual ascent.\(^{18}\) Despite his comfortable background, socio-political independence, and spiritual self-conception, in addition to the suppression in Frankfurt, Luzzatto placed himself at the mercy of Portuguese authority. As I hope to demonstrate, social adaptation typified Luzzatto’s eight years in Amsterdam, a key to his eventual acceptance in mainstream Jewish culture, and he seems to have been willing and able to do so from his first moments in the city.

On May 26, 1735, a day before the festival of Shavuot, Luzzatto sent a letter to Bassan for the first time since he arrived in Amsterdam.\(^{19}\) He expressed regret for having left without warning, as well as for being away from his wife and son. In addition, he lamented the recent death of his father-in-law, David Finzi, chief rabbi of Mantua, whom he had known since his adolescence and who had been a major source of support.\(^{20}\) Contrary to the constant difficulty he had experienced in the Veneto, Luzzatto exclaimed, the “finger of God had placed in the hearts of the entire [Portuguese] community, small and great, a deep love and appreciation for me.” In order to enable him to reside amongst them, he wrote, members of the community

\(^{18}\) *Mesilat Yesharim*, 168. The Sages disallowed people from seeking Separateness if they were unable to do it, and stated “Anyone who needs to take [charity] but refuses to do so, it is as though he shed blood” (*Jerusalem Talmud, Pe’ah* 8:9, 21b).

\(^{19}\) Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 116.

\(^{20}\) Finzi died after Luzzatto left for Amsterdam. Luzzatto composed a eulogy, a copy of which was made by David Franco Mendes in his manuscript *Emek ha-Shirim*, housed in the Ets Haim/Montezinos Library (EH 47 B26). For the eulogy, see Ginzburg and Klar, 123–129.
had provided him with a livelihood, which historians have alternatively suggested involved polishing stones (such as diamonds) or grinding lenses.\textsuperscript{21}

Two and a half months later, Luzzatto again wrote to Bassan.\textsuperscript{22} The bulk of the letter was a rant against his enemies and a description of the events in Frankfurt, where on his way to Amsterdam he had been compelled to sign a ban against himself. In the process, he offered sweeping cultural judgments. In Padua, Luzzatto had lived in a community with separate synagogues for Italians, Ashkenazim, and Sephardim, but the approximately five hundred Jews in the ghetto functioned politically, socially, and culturally under a unified communal banner. In contrast, Amsterdam’s thousands of Jews were clearly divided between Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities. In relation to their non-Jewish contacts, whether in Amsterdam, London, or other western European cities, Portuguese Jews were careful to identify themselves as separate from Ashkenazim. They dressed essentially as their Dutch counterparts; hats and wigs were fashionable, and men, except for rabbis, were beardless.\textsuperscript{23} Ashkenazim, meanwhile, distinguished themselves by preserving German and Polish dress, such as caftans and leather hats. They were generally poorer than Portuguese Jews, earned livelihoods by peddling, and were viewed disparagingly by the ‘high-cultured’ Portuguese. Isaac de Pinto, for instance,

\textsuperscript{21} Abraham S. Isaacs, \textit{A Modern Hebrew Poet: The Life and Writings of Moses Chaim Luzzatto} (New York, 1878), 34; Ginzburg, \textit{The Life and Works of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto}, 113. Meyer denied that Luzzatto was a lens grinder, thinking that it rings too closely to Spinoza. Instead, Meyer adheres to the Amsterdam tradition that has Luzzatto was a diamond-cutter, “tradition that still lived in the mind of the poet Isaac da Costa whose father Daniel Haim, born in 1761, had still personally known David Franco Mendes” (Meyer, \textit{The Stay of Mozes Haim Luzzatto at Amsterdam}, 9–10). During the first third of the eighteenth century, Amsterdam and Antwerp replaced Venice as centers of the diamond trade, and Jews were active participants because the city did not enforce guilds (Gans, \textit{Memorbook}, 49). Chriqui, believing implicitly that Luzzatto engaged constantly in Torah study, doubts Luzzatto’s occupation in the gem business (Chriqui, \textit{Igerot}, no. 132, p. 358, n. 436).

\textsuperscript{22} Chriqui, \textit{Igerot}, no. 118.

\textsuperscript{23} In 1732, the lay leadership protested and ultimately outlawed the voluminous hooped skirts then popular, for many women alternatively suffered accidents “when climbing stairs” and excited “lascivious remarks” from men and youths standing nearby (Gans, \textit{Memorbook}, 195).
defended the Portuguese against Voltaire’s anti-Jewish attacks while simultaneously disparaging Ashkenazim.\textsuperscript{24}

Writing from new surroundings, and accepted by a community ignoring the deluge of warning descending upon the city from Ashkenazic rabbinates, Luzzatto offered a spiritual-cultural critique of contemporary Jewry. In Frankfurt, he told Bassan, he had witnessed three hundred yeshiva students hopelessly seeking understanding and wisdom through the “emptiness of talmudic casuistry” (פלפוליהם המהבילים). Worse than that, and apparently as a cause of it, they were completely devoid of the “scent of piety” (ריח חסידות). Every Ashkenazic community he passed through and those he came in contact with in Holland, he continued, contained religiously committed men incorrectly pursuing love and fear of God. Evoking the chaos of the first day of creation, Luzzatto described Ashkenazic scholarship as void, formless, dark, and without comprehension of “what the Lord, your God, requires of you” (מה ה’ אלהיך שאל עצמך).\textsuperscript{25} The verse evoked Luzzatto’s pietism and his identity as a scion of Italian Hasidism; Benjamin Vitale, the “High Priest” and Bassan’s father-in-law, had utilized the same verse in the introduction to his sermonic tome Gevul Binyamin. Yet, unlike Vitale who hoped only to inspire readers to greater piety, Luzzatto utilized the verse in an ethnic-cultural sense. He vented frustration over the lack of true piety among Ashkenazic Jewry, whose rabbinic leaders had ambushed him in Frankfurt and were working to prevent his influence.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 109, 112–113, citing Isaac de Pinto, Reflexions critiques sur le premier chapitre du Vilme volume des oeuvres de M. de Voltaire (Amsterdam, 1762). De Pinto claimed that beardlessness was proof of the Portuguese Nation’s cultured nature. Gans cites Mendelssohn as having criticized de Pinto for this distinction, but otherwise said “that if the Jewish people had ten writers like de Pinto, the Voltaires of this world would be filled with respect for the Jews!”
\textsuperscript{25} Deuteronomy 10:12–13.
In contrast, Luzzatto praised the Sephardim, among whom he now dwelt, who were treating him with respect and appreciation. He commented that “all of the students” regularly called on him to teach them “hokhmat ha-emet” (Kabbalah), and that “they” desired to place him at the head of their yeshivot. His warm reception was God’s will, he believed, not only a needed respite but a sign of God’s continued love and imminence in his life. Luzzatto found a community in Amsterdam open to him. They, and he, did not seek a meeting of messianic minds, but he was free to live and pursue his interests without condemnation or challenge. He confessed to Bassan that he no longer had the desire to share his kabbalistic knowledge – that which reflected his most intimate thoughts and beliefs – just as he had commented several months earlier in Venice that he intentionally avoided discussing the status of his magid.26 Nevertheless, he valued Portuguese interest in Kabbalah and the intellectual culture of the Ets Haim yeshiva, both of which benefited his personal development and inspired his writing. Among the Portuguese, Luzzatto realized practical purpose and even success, for perhaps the first time in his high-aspirational life. He composed treatises, all serving as introductions to particular topics of interest, meant to educate members of his new and supportive community. All the while, Luzzatto retained both his mystical and social missions: three years after composing this letter to Bassan, Luzzatto polemicized against the Ashkenazic-dominated rabbinate, pitting a hasid and a hakham — the former epitomizing his worldview, the latter typifying his opponents – in an elaborate and mysteriously centered elucidation of the Deuteronomistic verse.

26 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 99, p. 286. Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea told Bassan that Luzzatto did not discuss the magid with him while the young man was in Mantua in 1731 soon after his marriage to Tsiporah Finzi (ibid., no. 145, p. 390).
Ethnicity played an integral role in Luzzatto’s life in Amsterdam, as it had in Padua and in the dynamics of the controversy. Padua was home to a single Jewish community, as defined by the state, composed of three synagogues formed along ethnic lines. The community functioned with relative unity; the Ashkenazic and Italian synagogues were the largest, with the former exercising the most power, but chief rabbi Sabbatai Marini was himself Sephardic. Luzzatto’s yeshiva consisted of men from not only each ethnic group, but, as in the case of Jekutiel Gordon, from exclusively Ashkenazic communities in eastern Europe. In general, however, early modern European Jewry harbored ethnic tension. In circulated letters from 1730 and 1735, Hagiz, Katzenellenbogen, and Poppers, among others, each bolstered their claims against Luzzatto by proclaiming the might and righteousness of the Ashkenazic rabbinate over and against rabbinites of Italian communities. Likewise, Luzzatto, Bassan, Morpurgo, and the Venetians defended their rights during the controversy based on a mix of ethnic and cultural superiority.

The stark ethnic-communal division in eighteenth-century Amsterdam proved beneficial to Luzzatto. Luzzatto managed to set up a new life for himself despite the ferocious condemnation sweeping Europe. His arrival in February 1735 preceded the many

27 Ibid., no. 71.
29 Ibid., no. 111, p. 323. Poppers’ student, Abraham Cracovia, also expressed derision for Italians. Then residing in Venice, Cracovia slammed Pacifico as ignorant and arrogant. “[The Venetian rabbis] are without Torah, Wisdom, and Courtesy,” he wrote to Poppers. “Pacifico, who towers above them, is a scholar to whom one can ask a legal question on any matter – and he will not know the answer. Once, when I praised Talmudic scholarship...he mocked me and said there is no purpose in studying the Talmud as all the laws have been arranged in the Codes, so that one does not have to waste time studying Talmud, which is like a closed book, replete with enigmas. And...he is typical of his cohorts” (Carlebach, Pursuit of Heresy, 252, citing Chriqui, Igerot, no. 150, p. 410).

To be sure, Cracovia may have simply had a personal distaste for Pacifico, in addition to castigating his pedagogy. He was the brother-in-law of Israel Benjamin Bassan, and regularly provided Isaiah Bassan with copies of correspondence from Poppers in the later period (ibid., nos. 150, 152, 155, 159, 160, 161; though one of these appears to be a different hand).
excommunications written against him, but news of his judgment in Frankfurt certainly had not. Hagiz, Katzenellenbogen, Poppers, and Pacifico all warned the Amsterdam communities to guard themselves and their print shops against the Paduan mystic. Although no extant documents directly attest to the Portuguese reaction to the Ashkenazic rabbinic consensus, the community’s enthusiastic interaction with Luzzatto patently demonstrated their rejection of Luzzatto’s opponents. Even as the authors of two of the most vicious served as successive chief rabbis of Amsterdam’s Ashkenazic community during Luzzatto’s tenure bans – Eliezer Rokeah (1735–1740) and Aryeh Leib Loewenstamm (1740–1752) – Portuguese lay and rabbinic leaders demonstrated their independence and autonomy. Scholars such as Yosef Kaplan, Miriam Bodian, and Daniel Swetschniski have demonstrated the importance and prevailing attitude of exceptionalism among Portuguese Jewry. Jewish they were, but with a unique and superior national self-conception as the Nação (Nation). Their background, culture, and success shaped a strong identity essentially distinct from the larger rabbinic culture. At its peak in the seventeenth century, the community functioned independently and in contradistinction to other communities. Rules strictly governed integration with Ashkenazim: study halls and aid

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30 According to Gans, the Ashkenazic community struggled to appoint a new rabbi. A decision by the Burgomasters of Amsterdam on January 31, 1735: “Whereas the Reigning Parnasim and Old Parnassim, or delegates of the German Jewish Nation, had fallen into a dispute about the election and appointment of a Rabbi to their community, their Honourable Worships have, so as to avoid all difficulties, chosen from a list of seven Rabbis proposed to them by the Parnasim, the names of Eliezer of Brody, Jacob Kohen of Frankfort-on-the-Main, and Jehezekel of Hamburg; with express instructions to call first of all upon Rabbi Eliezer of Brody and, should he refuse, on Rabbi Jacob Kohen of Frankfort-on-the-Main, and if the latter should excuse himself, on Rabbi Jehezekel of Hamburg” (Gans, Memorbook, p. 166). Additionally, there was a problem with the coin struck of Eliezer, the first such medal struck during the life of the rabbi (Isserles, Yoreh De‘ah 141:7: custom among Polish Jews never to depict the whole person).
organizations were established exclusively for members of the Naçao, and marriage to other ethnicities could result in the loss of communal status.\textsuperscript{31}

Thus, Portuguese collective identity sheltered Luzzatto from continued attack, and ultimately enabled a celebrated legacy. Yet, as with the issue of charity to and acceptance of an outsider, Luzzatto’s integration into Portuguese society actually challenged this notion of ethnic struggle, and, more importantly, our essential understanding of Western Sephardic identity. The documents to be presented below demonstrate Luzzatto’s assimilation into the communal system, evoking several questions. Was Luzzatto’s acceptance a unique phenomenon? Was his rabbinic status a deciding factor? Was Luzzatto’s prominence as a kabbalist the determinant, and if so did communal leaders blanch at his unwillingness to teach Jewish mysticism — or did Luzzatto partially fabricate his letter to Bassan, such that Portuguese students did not in fact request mystical instruction, or he did in fact provide it? Did systematic segregation indicate that Sephardic-Ashkenazic integration was actually common, just as the proliferation of bans or intensification of religious jurisprudence signified some level of rabbinic ineffectiveness?

Integration

In the autumn of 1735, after only eight months in Amsterdam, Luzzatto welcomed his family from Padua. The arrival of his wife and only child, a son, along with his parents and possibly his brother Simon, indicated that Moses Hayim intended to remain in the city for the

foreseeable future. Upon arriving, Jacob Vita informed Luzzatto’s friends and students that they could maintain their studies in his home, and confirmed that the Portuguese treatment of the family was good.\footnote{Chriqui, Igerot, no. 132, p. 358.} Writing to Bassan, he compared his students to sheep without a shepherd in danger of a wolf pack. He himself was content, grateful for his pressure-less lot in a supportive community, and aware that Bassan would not relent in guarding his students and strengthening them in Torah and in the manner of walking in God’s ways.\footnote{Ibid., no. 135, pp. 360–361.} To his students and compatriots, he evoked his favored Deuteronomic verse,\footnote{“Have courage to stand to serve God, and to keep his commandments in order to fear God and love Him.”} and single-handedly absolved them from the power of the bans: “Do not let your hearts sink on account of the disgracefulness and the vilification....for all the curses are like nothing, considered as emptiness. The curses are what they are; and God will bless. All the banishment, and all the ostracism, and all the curses are permitted to you, are absolved for you, are allowed for you. And He will make death into light, changing for you and all of his people Israel cursing into blessing.”\footnote{Chriqui, Igerot, no. 134, p. 359.} External circumstances had changed since he left Padua, but Luzzatto persisted as the Moses-figure in the cosmic saga. He remained committed to his vision, and projected confidence and absolute conviction in his letters of encouragement. To be sure, he was aware conditions imposed by his opponents had irrevocably, at least for the time being, severed the position he had established for himself and his group in Padua.

I have shown how Luzzatto imagined the power of devekut. The purpose of life, he argued, was to attach oneself to God by replacing the physical with the spiritual. Successful
ascension to the mystical apex could result, if God willed it, in sanctification of the human (and other) species and the cosmic redemption. This way of life entailed living within, but not necessarily of, a given society; in essence, Luzzatto described a dual life in which the mystic engaged in personalized religiosity while ostensibly connected to community. His belief in divine providence – not as an abstract or generalized concept but as an integral element of his being, necessitating conscious acceptance – molded his personality and engagement with the world around him. Thus, Luzzatto accepted financial assistance when he arrived in Amsterdam, not only as a practical requirement, but because it served to acknowledge his divinely ordained circumstance.

Documents showing Luzzatto’s continued receipt of charity and his involvement with the Ets Haim yeshiva attest to his relatively easy adaptation to life among Portuguese Jewry. The Portuguese charitable society, Abodad a Hesed, included Luzzatto on its rolls between 1737 and 1740, providing him with three guilders per month. In this register, men, women, and orphans are listed together, and each received a given sum on Rosh Hodesh of every month of the year. The record book shows that the group’s average yearly income and expenses (rendimento & despesas) totaled about four thousand guilders per year. Relatively small sums were donated by wealthy members of the community in memoriam of someone dear to them, while the remainder of the money was collected in the charity boxes placed at the entrance of the Esnoga. The organization originally served Amsterdam’s poor Ashkenazim, but from 1670

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36 SAA 334, no. 1210, pp. 18–38 (Luzzatto’s name appears on pp. 18, 26, 35).
on it was used to support underprivileged Sephardim on a monthly basis. According to Levie Bernfeld, the Sephardim on the list of Abodad a Hesed received much less than what was stipulated in the statutes, leading her to conclude that they belonged to a less select group than those who received the prescribed allocation. Ordinarily, the Portuguese poor relief was reserved for two groups: those who came directly from the Iberian Peninsula (forasteiro), who received unconditional aid, and those who already lived in Amsterdam. Luzzatto, as a rabbi from Padua of Ashkenazic descent, was an exception to the rules, and his receipt of charity, first upon arrival in 1735 and then for a dedicated period of three years confirms that he was, as he described to Bassan, warmly welcomed. Judging by Luzzatto’s juxtaposition of the praiseworthy Sephardim with the regrettable Ashkenazim, the acceptance was mutual. Having previously lived in a multi-ethnic community, and having formed a multi-ethnic sub-community, Luzzatto adapted to living primarily among Sephardim in a city where the two major groups were palpably separate and ethnicity defined identity. As I will discuss below, in such a context, Luzzatto almost exclusively pursued devekut; his ensuing pietism and quietism could not arouse ire in the midst of a massive campaign of excommunication.

Further research of the records of Portuguese charitable societies may demonstrate whether Luzzatto was a special case of a rabbi receiving regular charity in Amsterdam or if it was the norm. Scholars were not always, or even often, independently wealthy, and the Amsterdam Mahamad arranged to provide some financial assistance to Portuguese men desiring to study full-time. In fact, communal documents show that advanced study was

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37 Levie Bernfeld, “Financing Relief in the Jewish Community in Amsterdam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in Dutch Jewry: Its History and Secular Culture (1500–2000), 70, n. 21. 334
supported by wealthy Portuguese Jews. A pinkas entry from the spring of 1738, which itemized expenditures for the Ets Haim yeshiva, the umbrella educational system responsible for schools of Amsterdam’s Sephardic congregation, demonstrates the extent to which the official community sustained Torah scholarship.\(^{38}\) Funds were primarily provided for the purchase of books, *tsitsit*, *talitot*, and *tefilin*. The purchases of particular study halls, classes, and communal employees were also delineated. For instance, fifteen volumes of Talmud tractate *Ketubot* were ordered for the *Medras Grande*, the highest class of the Ets Haim yeshiva, with an additional copy going to Hakham Isaac Hayim Abendana de Brito, the community’s *av bet din* and premier Talmud instructor. The class also placed an advance order of tractate *Pesahim* at the famous Hebrew press of Solomon Props, while a member of the group, Hazan Aaron Cohen de Lara, was permitted to buy numerous books in Hebrew and Ladino. Meanwhile, David Meldola, a member of the *Medras Grande* who became one of Luzzatto’s closest colleagues in the city,\(^{39}\) received quarterly payments of four guilders to work on “*seu livro*” (his book), perhaps referring to his treatise on the Jewish calendar or the large collection of responsa from the Ets Haim yeshiva that he published as *Divre David* in 1753.

In short, the Portuguese community funded a class of rabbinic scholars dedicated to learning and writing about Jewish religious thought and practice. Judging by the items listed here, the bulk of the study undertaken in the Portuguese *Medras Grande* was of Talmud and rabbinic law. This conflicted with the trend in the lower grades, in which children were taught Jewish subjects in addition to languages (Spanish, Portuguese, French, and eventually Dutch),  

\(^{38}\) SAA 334, no. 1053, p. 52.  
\(^{39}\) SAA 334, no. 1053, p. 57.
mathematics, philosophy, rhetoric, calligraphy, and poetry.\textsuperscript{40} A study of the curriculum, structure, and history of the Ets Haim, and the \textit{Medras Grande} in particular, is a desideratum. It could illuminate the nature of Portuguese Jewry’s rabbinic culture in the eighteenth century, and serve as a juxtaposition to the more widespread and dominant Ashkenazic methods that so bothered Luzzatto. Nevertheless, it is clear that members of the Portuguese community valued and supported full-time advanced study — a practice crucial to Luzzatto’s continued pursuance of religious and intellectual devotion after having left Padua and faced condemnation in Frankfurt.

To some extent, Luzzatto’s receipt of charity foreshadowed his admission to Ets Haim. While the community had long hosted chief rabbis from abroad, including Abendana’s predecessor Salomon Ayllion, the Ets Haim itself, like other communal institutions, was not ordinarily open to outsiders. In the early years of the community, the Ets Haim helped solidify the Nação’s self-perception as inimitable, and in the decades prior to Luzzatto’s arrival students were almost exclusively Portuguese.\textsuperscript{41} Despite the cultural distinction, as well as the myriad of bans against Luzzatto echoing through the rest of Europe, Luzzatto found favor in Portuguese rabbinic eyes. In 1737, 1739, 1741, and 1742, he received a stipend (\textit{aspaca}) of two and a half guilders per year, a pittance, for pursuing his studies in the class with nine other students under


\textsuperscript{41} At least until 1661, a regulation existed that no Italian students were to be admitted to the yeshiva (J. Michman, \textit{David Franco Mendes}, 21; and M. C. Paraíra and J. S. da Silva Rosa, eds., \textit{Gedenkschrift uitgegeven ter gelegenheid van het 300-jarig bestaan der onderwijsinrichtingen Talmud Tora en Ets Haim bij de Portug. Israel} [Amsterdam, 1916], 33).
the direction of Abendana. A document in another communal pinkas records Luzzatto’s concurrent admittance to Jesiba Emet Le Jahacob, privately funded along with a sister yeshiva called Oel Jahacob by wealthy gem merchant Jacob Pereira. Amsterdam’s Portuguese Jews had a history of sponsoring yeshivot. Joseph Sarphatim, for instance, founded Mashmi’a Yeshu’a in 1666 (a fitting name for the year in which Sabbatai Tsevi was declared the messiah, and to whom the group sent a letter), which was sustained after his death by his son Nathan. In 1675, Pereira established the yeshivat under the auspices of the Ets Haim yeshiva, which maintained them after his death through a bequest he provided (conta de legado).

Several of the men who engaged in scholarly activity under Abendana’s tutelage in the Medras Grande also received stipends as part of Pereira’s yeshivot. Some received upwards of one hundred twenty-five guilders per year, the chief rabbis shared one hundred sixty guilders between them, and members of Emet Le Jahacob, like Luzzatto, were granted fifty guilders. The document is an itemized financial record, and it also provides the date of admittance for each member. The short entry detailing Luzzatto’s entrance into the yeshiva, together with

42 SAA 334, no. 530, p. 229; SAA 334, no. 531, pp. 70, 193, 261. The money is listed as 2:10, equal to 2 guilders and 10 stuivers (each stuiver is 5 cents of a guilder). For Dutch monetary measurement, see H. Enno van Gelder, De Nederlandse Munten (Utrecht-Antwerpen, 1965). There was also a medras pequeno (see Gerard Nahon, “The Portuguese Jewish Nation of Amsterdam as Reflected in the Memoirs of Abraham Haim Lopes Arias, 1752, in Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and by Others, 70).

In the spring month of Iyar each year, the elected secretary of charity (gabay da sedaca) gave the designated librarian of the Ets Haim yeshiva (Bibliotecario de Eshaim) fifty guilders to disperse among Abendana and ten senior “estudantes” (studiers) on the anniversary of the death of Abraham Penso Felix. Abendana earned twenty-five guilders, ten times the amount of each student, as part of his annual salary.

During Luzzatto’s tenure, Isaac Judah Leon Templo, well known among bibliographers as a printer of Hebrew books, and Joseph Cohen Belinfante served as the librarians. Belinfante replaced Templo after the latter’s death in 1740 (SSA, 1053, fol. 62).

43 SAA 334, no. 1053, p. 51. In addition, Pereira founded the yeshivas of Bet Jahacob in Jerusalem and Emet Le Jahacob in Hebron (SAA 334, no. 530, p. 135).

44 Franco Mendes, Memorias, x; and David Montezinos, “De werken van David Franco Mendes,” Joodsch Letterkundige Bijdragen I Aanhangsel van het Nieuwe Israëlietisch Weekblad, no. 1–8 (Amsterdam, 1867): 21.


46 SAA 334, no. 531, p. 15; SAA 334, no. 1053, p. 53.
Abraham Mendes Chumasero and Mosseh de Molinas, explains that they were the replacements for three outgoing scholars. It also states that they were selected by the system of *busolo e balas*, modeled on a voting method that combined elements of both chance and selection that was used in Venice to select the doge, and in Padua, among other Jewish communities of the Veneto, to select *parnasim*.

In the spring of 1741 (23 Sivan 5501 = June 7, 1741), Luzzatto joined, or perhaps was promoted to, the *Oel Jahacob* yeshiva, where he received a stipend of eighty guilders. Three other scholars were admitted to *Oel Jahacob* at the same time, with each student supplanting someone previously admitted and with other men replacing them in *Emet Le Jahacob*. The relationship between the yeshivot is puzzling, for this particular document states that Luzzatto vacated a position in *Emet Le Jahacob* in order to join *Oel Jahacob* in 1741, but another document shows that he was considered part of *Emet Le Jahacob* in 1743. Yet, still another document from the spring of 1744 discusses filling Luzzatto’s seat in *Oel Jahacob* because of his emigration to the Holy Land (*Terra Santa*). At present, I have not seen regulations of the Pereira yeshivot that would explain their selection process, but it seems feasible that, just as the *parnasim* were elected on a yearly basis, so too were the salaried positions for scholars filled each year. Regardless, the absence of Luzzatto’s name from some of the yearly rolls of *Ets Haim* indicates that he was not always fortunate to be selected as a participant in the class.

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47 See chapter two.
48 SAA 334, no. 1053, p. 69.
Presumably, he worked as much as was financially necessary during those years and used the remainder of his time to study and write. 49

Much work is necessary to elucidate the communal role of and regard for the Ets Haim and its students, both in general and during the years of Luzzatto’s participation. Historiography on Portuguese Jewry has largely focused on its ethnic identity, welfare system, and engagement with mercantilism, but there is little understanding of the community’s rabbinic cultural development. Luzzatto’s inclusion in the system of Ets Haim may indicate a rise in the importance of the yeshiva and traditional learning in the eighteenth century. There was not necessarily more or less respect for the communal rabbis, but there does seem to have been a move to broaden rabbinic horizons and connect with the European rabbinate at large. In 1728, Isaac Hayim Abendana de Brito and David Israel Athias assumed the positions of the chief rabbinate, following the death of Salomon Ayllion, who had been a popular but controversial figure. 50 They initiated the publication of responsa literature, entitled Peri Ets Hayim, by ordained rabbis and senior students of the yeshiva. Responsa were regularly published as a serial in a bid to disseminate halakhah throughout the Western Sephardic diaspora, as well as, I believe, enter into the larger halakhic discourse among European rabbinates. Nearly one thousand distinct responsa were published in eleven volumes issued

49 During the years that he received a stipend to study, Luzzatto would have acquired the bare minimum on which to live. Scholars have determined that during the early modern period, an adult needed eighty to one hundred guilders per year to meet essential needs. Skilled workers in the Dutch Republic earned approximately three hundred guilders per year. Living with a family of five, one would spend 51–67% of the income on food, with the remainder going to clothes, fuel, soap, and rent (Levie Bernfeld, Poverty and Welfare, 68).
between 1691 and 1798. In addition, the community issued Jacob Sasportas’s responsa in 1737, as well as Meldola’s *Divre David* in 1753.

Yosef Kaplan has pointed out that increased production of responsa literature reflected an intensification of the rabbis’ religious sentiment, rather than the spread of religiosity in the community. Indeed, scholars have assessed that Portuguese adherence to Jewish tradition was in overall decline by the early eighteenth century. The assertion is epitomized by Bernard Picart’s famous engravings of life in the Esnoga in which men around the lectern talk, lounge, doze, and generally disregard the prayer services. However, in my opinion, increased religiosity in the Ets Haim did not occur in total separation from the community at large. Rabbinic culture may long have been typified by a distinction and detachment between religious leadership and laypeople, but social, political, and theological connections remained to varying degrees. While it could appear that the flourishing of Talmud study in the *Medras Grande* during the 1730s and 1740s occurred despite the irreligious inclination of the general public, the consistent publication of responsa reflected the desire of rabbinic and lay leadership in the community to broaden the community’s religious horizons.

As such, Luzzatto’s composition of *Mesilat Yesharim* takes on added meaning. The *hasid*’s dismissal of the *hakham*’s halakhic expertise did more than just echo Luzzatto’s condemnation of a legalistic emphasis typified by Ashkenazic rabbinates. He was convinced that the predominant rabbinic dichotomy and legal emphasis was a failure and did not reflect

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the truth and beauty of God’s dominion on earth. Kabbalah as a way of life, with *devekut* at its zenith, was his aspiration and the only complete answer to societal and religious challenges. Witnessing his adopted community’s expanding platform of rabbinic education, Luzzatto was motivated to emphasize a mystical viewpoint in his pietistic and polemical composition. He hoped to enlighten his immediate surroundings and embolden the expanding rabbinic class of Western Sephardim to combat Ashkenazic dominance. The original version of *Mesilat Yesharim*, therefore, indicated Luzzatto’s goal to once again shift the battleground to inspire a movement of intellectual pietism.

Luzzatto’s persistence did not stem exclusively from his self-conception and unending conviction. He felt emboldened by his acceptance in Amsterdam, the printing “city without peer.” Not only had he found spiritual appreciation, intellectual freedom, and financial support, but Luzzatto was also honored with a prominent seat in the Esnoga. The magnificent synagogue, dedicated in 1675 in great pomp and circumstance, had been modeled on Solomon’s Temple and expressed Portuguese pride and prosperity. It was built with a massive wooden Torah Ark at the east end of the sanctuary, several brass candelabra that together held one thousand candles, and a high lectern from which the prayers and the Torah reading were recited. Approximately twelve hundred seats were available for men from the community to attend services, with another four hundred seats reserved for women in a high balcony. Initially, only a few of those seats were assigned: the chief rabbi sat on a bench in front of the lectern facing the Ark, and the *parnasim* sat together on a raised platform with high-backed benches on the north wall. In the 1730s, however, the *Mahamad* unanimously resolved to
establish a policy of fixed seating in the Esnoga. Although many chairs in the cavernous space were undoubtedly left vacant on a regular basis, some seats were deemed more prestigious or advantageous than others. Confusion and strife consequently plagued the synagogue as men vied for the most important seats. Therefore, the Mahamad, the sole authority in allocating seats, ruled that a given place could be reserved for a period of three years. Positions were frequently changed, even within a given row, resulting in a cumbersome job of managing hundreds of places and demanding individuals. Names were meticulously entered in a pinkas dedicated to the Esnoga’s seating arrangements; each page, headed by a description of the given row’s location, contains the names of the men initially granted permission to sit in the row, followed in subsequent columns by their replacements. Around 1738, Luzzatto was granted seat number twenty-seven in the row described as opposite the Mahamad “at the center door” (Banco da parede enfronte dosseres do Mahamad do Ehal para aporta do Meyo).

Although the pinkas does not include a seating chart, and there are no contemporary diagrams of the synagogue, this can only refer to the benches between the lectern and the Holy Ark facing the seating platform of the parnasim, a conspicuous position that reflected Luzzatto’s distinguished status in the community.

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52 SAA 334, no. 334, fol. 2. The date the resolution passed was 25 Iyar 5490 (=May 12, 1730). Elsewhere, the volume records that on 16 Kislev 5496 (=December 1, 1735) the Mahamad elected to record all place seats in the Esnoga (fol. 32). On seating in the Esnoga, see Y. Kaplan, “Bans in the Sephardi Community of Amsterdam in the Late Seventeenth Century,” in Exile and Diaspora Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Professor Haim Beinart on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday, eds. Aaron Mirsky, Avraham Grossman, and Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem, 1988), 530–532; and Swetschinski, Reluctant Cosmopolitans, 188, 205–207.

53 Luzzatto’s name is written in the second column with the notation “N[ota] B[ene],” a phrase used by the community beginning ca. 1721 (personal communication from archivist of Amsterdam’s Jewish communities, Odette Vlessing). It may note that he changed places, or that the Mahamad decided to add Luzzatto especially.

54 In contrast, for instance, to the contemporary community of Mantua (see the several folios dedicated to arranging seats, which included purchases, in CU MS X893 D549).
One of the members of the Mahamad to provide Luzzatto with a dedicated seat in the
Esnoga was a wealthy merchant named Moses de Chaves. De Chaves’s name is ubiquitous in
the archives of the Portuguese community in the first half of the eighteenth century. He served
variously as parnas, treasurer of the Ets Haim yeshiva, and director of the community
butchery (Carniseria), and was a benefactor of innumerable people and institutions. As a
principal participator of the Utrecht Provincial Chartered Company (Provinciale Utrechtsche
Geoctroyeerde Compagnie), which was engaged in several major projects including building a
canal from Utrecht to the sea, de Chaves was also one of the wealthiest Jews in Amsterdam.
In 1743, he was the Nação’s highest assessed taxpayer, with an income valued at fifty thousand
guilders per year. Like many wealthy residents of Amsterdam, he owned a country-house on
the Vecht River in Maarssen, less than forty kilometers south of Amsterdam and just north of
Utrecht. An inventory of his belongings from 1759 lists gems, jewelry, and paintings by Dutch
and Italian masters.

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55 SAA 334, no. 1053, p. 130.
56 SAA 334, no. 155, p. 40.
57 Meyer, The Stay of Mozes Haim Luzzatto at Amsterdam, 11, citing J. Zwarts, Hoofdstukken uit de Geschiedenis
der Joden in Nederland (Zutphen 1929), 197. To maintain their influence on the board of directors, the name of
Jacob de Chaves, Moses’s son, is mentioned three times: Jacob de Chaves, Jacob de Mozes de Chaves, and Jacob
de Chaves Junior. His name is found among the list of Portuguese Jewish shareholders of the Utrechtsche
Compagnie in J. Zwarts, appendix of documents, 10 (citing document dated 7 November 1720, Rijks Archief
Utrecht, fols. 190, 192v, 193v, 194, 196, 196v, 197).
58 A. M. Vaz Dias, Over den vermogenstoestand der Amsterdamsche Joden in de 17e en 18e eeuw (Tijdschrift voor
Geschiedenis, 51), 174. [“...quohier der Personeele quotisatie anno 1743”]. See also Paraira and da Silva Rosa,
ed., Gedenkschrift...Talmud Tora en Ets Haim, years 1720, 1737, 1738, 1753.
59 Inventory of Jews in Maarssen an Maarsseveen: <http://www.nljewgen.org/content/Joodse%20namenlijst%20Maarssen%20sept.%202010.pdf>, accessed June 19,
2014.
The inventory was notarized by Jan Willem Smit and signed on December 9, 1759. Paintings by Titian and Picart
were among de Chaves’s possessions.
De Chaves epitomized Portuguese communal responsibility and generosity, and he seems to have pursued a genuinely religious and humble life. Though he did purchase European artwork, in contrast to the practices of central European hofjuden for instance, he apparently did not commission a self-portrait as was common among many wealthy early modern Jews and even rabbis. Nor did he echo de Pinto’s complaints about the poor or shirk his charitable and communal responsibilities as a parnas. De Chaves provided loans to the Venetian Jewish community, and strongly supported the Ets Haim yeshiva both financially and functionally. He was a member of Mikra Kodesh, a society of notable figures in the community who met at fixed times every week to study Torah with commentaries. Some scholars have argued that Luzzatto headed the study group, and still others have claimed it as a proto-Haskalah literary society, but both assertions are spurious. The group’s manifesto, which included the names of the seven initial members, makes it clear that the member hosting the

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61 This is particularly interesting in regards to book history, for there was no particular illuminated manuscript tradition in eighteenth-century Amsterdam, although it thrived among Court Jews and other wealthy central European Jews. Emile Schrijver and others have argued that the resurrection of illuminated manuscript production stemmed from a desire among Jews who would not purchase paintings to own beautiful works of art. The lack of such a tradition in Amsterdam, coupled with de Chaves’s example of owning paintings, would seem to support this theory. This is even more interesting considering Amsterdam’s place as a printing center and as an influential artistic center.


63 SAA 334, no. 179, p. 267.

64 A facsimile of the group’s manifesto, which appears on the first page of the Mikra Kodesh register, appears in Meyer, The Stay of Mozes Haim Luzzatto at Amsterdam, 21.

65 Meyer wrote: “Contrary to the generally accepted opinion, Mikra Kodesh is at first the Chewra of the rich Parnassim, not of the pupils of Luzzatto” (The Stay of Mozes Haim Luzzatto at Amsterdam, 16, n. 15). Michman stated that Luzzatto “was not wealthy enough” to join the group (David Franco Mendes, 34–35). The myth may have developed historiographically in an attempt to claim a large position for Luzzatto in Amsterdam.

Meanwhile, within the context of discussing early maskilic activity, Shmuel Feiner mentions Mikra Kodesh as a “society of scholars and literary men” founded in 1740 (Shmuel Feiner, The Jewish Enlightenment, trans. Chaya Naor [University of Pennsylvania, 2011], 26). I do not know how Feiner identified 1740 as the confraternity’s first year.
study session acted as leader in conjunction with the chief rabbi.\textsuperscript{66} Luzzatto’s meager economic status rendered him unfit to join the group, and he was in no position to usurp the roles of either Abendana or Athias. As for the latter claim, rather than probing literature as an exercise in Enlightenment thought, the confraternity was clearly engaged in pious Torah study for the sake of moral edification.\textsuperscript{67} After all, they called themselves the society of the Holy Bible, valued virtue and reflection, emphasized their piety by signing their names with the appellation “\textit{he-hasid}” on the first page of the group’s regulations, and celebrated their yearly completion of the Torah “with appropriate commentaries” on Simhat Torah in the company of the community’s rabbinic and lay leaders.\textsuperscript{68} De Chaves himself displayed his dedication to Jewish religious culture in a poem emphasizing piety and alacrity published in \textit{Tikun Soferim} (Amsterdam, 1725), a beautiful six-volume quarto-edition of the Torah.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{66} The initial members were: Jehiel Foa, Moses Nunes Anrikin (?), Solomon Chotirez (?), Isaac Barukh Pardo, Moses Gomez de Mosquita, Daniel Cohen Rodriguez, and Moses de Chaves. See Michman, \textit{David Franco Mendes}, 11–12.

\textsuperscript{67} Michman criticizes historians who labeled it a literary society, just as they considered Franco Mendes to be a \textit{maskil} associated with \textit{Hameasef}, Mendelssohn, and Wessely. He points out that Franco Mendes was fourteen and twelve years older than each of these \textit{maskilim}, and that the society was organized to study the Bible, as the name suggests (ibid., 11–12, 34–35).

\textsuperscript{68} Gans, \textit{Memorbook}, 190; Meyer, \textit{The Stay of Mozes Haim Luzzatto at Amsterdam}, 25–27.


\textit{Tikun Soferim} is one of the great examples of Amsterdam Hebrew print culture in the first half of the eighteenth century. The volumes included two title pages produced by the famous French engraver Bernard Picart, the sole occasion Picart worked for a Hebrew press. On Picart, see Lynn A. Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, W. W. Mijnhardt, eds., \textit{Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion} (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2010), and idem, \textit{The Book that Changed Europe: Picart & Bernard’s Religious Ceremonies of the World} (2010). The sixth volume includes the \textit{haftarot} and a sixteen-page calendar in Portuguese. The printers printed copies on fine white paper, as well as deluxe copies on vellum and blue paper.
With an emphasis on ethical living and an appreciation for poetic expression, Luzzatto and de Chaves established a personal relationship. There are no extant letters between them, but two sources clearly demonstrate their intimacy. First, in April, 1743, while preparing to embark on a trip out of the Dutch Republic, Luzzatto arranged before witnesses and a notary public for de Chaves’ son Jacob to manage his estate in the city. Jacob was entrusted with administering all of Luzzatto’s financial and legal matters, including the liquidation of his possessions and assets in the event of his death. Secondly, Luzzatto composed La-Yesharim Tehilah in honor of Jacob’s marriage in 1743. De Chaves probably commissioned Luzzatto to compose the moralistic drama, as a mere fifty copies of the work were printed on especially thick paper at Amsterdam’s leading Hebrew press of the Orphans of Solomon Proops.

Luzzatto’s relationship with de Chaves and his acquisition of a prestigious seat in the Esnoga demonstrates that he was valued and respected by Portuguese lay leaders in addition to members of the rabbinic class. In 1739, he composed a poem beginning with the words Le-El Elim in honor of the bridegrooms (hatanim) of Simhat Torah. Hatan Torah and Hatan Bereshit were among the community’s greatest honors, generally given to the wealthiest and most prominent members of the community. Celebrations in praise of the hatanim began in the Esnoga on the eve of the holiday, and continued well into the night and outside of the

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70 SAA 5075, no. 8864, no. 349.
71 Jacob married Rachel Veiga Henriquez, daughter of Isaac da Veiga Henriquez, who was one of the highest-taxed members of the community in 1743 (Vaz Dias, p. 174).
72 Meyer asserted in his article on Luzzatto that La-Yesharim Tehilah, with its emphasis on moral rectitude, referred to the life of the de Chaves family and not his own (The Stay of Mozes Haim Luzzatto at Amsterdam, 19).
73 Davidson lists the hymn anonymously in Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry, v. 3 (New York, 1924), 9, no. 177 (as the author was not cited in the Mahzor).
74 According to Meyer, the “magnificent Gobelin-furnishings for the Chattanim were given which now again form part of the treasures of the community” (The Stay of Mozes Haim Luzzatto at Amsterdam, 27).
synagogue. Distinguished honorees distributed sweets to children and held a reception for members of the community before being (illegally) paraded to their respective homes. The merchant and scholar David Franco Mendes, who became Luzzatto’s admirer and student, recorded in his history of the Portuguese community that composer Abraham de Casseres set Luzzatto’s words to music as a duet for two male soprano voices.\footnote{Franco Mendes, Memorias, x. A facsimile of the composition appears in Jacob d’Ancona, “De Portugese Gemente ‘Talmood Tora’ te Amsterdam tot 1795,” 305. Abraham de Casseres was a well-known composer of liturgical music in Amsterdam; see I. Adler, La pratique musicale savant dans quelques communautés juives en Europe aux xvii et xvii siècles (Paris, 1956), 223–226.} It was performed by cantors Samuel Rodriguez Mendes and Aaron Cohen de Lara in the Esnoga on Simhat Torah, 1739.\footnote{See A. Z. Idelsohn, “Songs and Singers of the Synagogue in the Eighteenth Century: With Special Reference to the Birnbaum Collection of the Hebrew Union College Library,” in Hebrew Union College Jubilee Volume (1875–1925), ed. David Philipson (Cincinnati Hebrew Union College, 1925), 397–424. Mendes was appointed hazan in 1709. Hazan Isaac Cohen de Lara died in 1729, likely making Aaron Cohen de Lara a scion of a cantorial family.\footnote{Seder Mo’adim ke-minhag K’K ha-Sefaradim (Amsterdam, 1771). The Mahzor was originally printed by Samuel Rodriguez Mendes. This edition was issued by Jacob da Silva Mendes, who had a habit of signing his books at the end. [According to Carlebach, printers did this as a way of ensuring readers that the book had passed inspection; see Palaces of Time, 59, with respect to Raphael Hanover, and his Luhot ha-Ibur (Leiden, 1756–1756).] Franco Mendes copied the poem and included it in one of his carefully crafted miscellanies now housed in the Ets Haim Library. Luzzatto’s name is not mentioned in the prayer book. The poem is preceded by the heading “Le-shabeah la-El,” and appears with a few other hymns, including Ki eshmerah Shabat in a section of “bakashot.” In this imprint, Luzzatto’s Le-El Elim took the place of another hymn for the hatanim that appeared in a 1725 Mahzor (these pages of bakashot are exactly the same as the earlier edition except that the first page was altered). For a recent recording of the hymn: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j08qmUR4j9I>, accessed June 14, 2014. The poem was also imitated by Le-El ‘olam segule ram, printed in the collection of Shir Emunim (Amsterdam, 1793), fols. 9r–9v, which is known only from a version for a solo voice (manuscript in The Hague, Ms. 23 D24, 16b–c). Cantors of Amsterdam created new pieces by recycling extant melodies; see Edwin Seroussi, “New Perspectives on the Music of the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogues in North-Western Europe,” Studia Rosenthaliana 35:2 (2001): 306.}} The poem was Luzzatto’s most visible contribution to the community, finding continuous use for several decades; as late as 1771, it was included in a Sephardic-rite prayer book printed in Amsterdam.\footnote{The poem was also imitated by Le-El ‘olam segule ram, printed in the collection of Shir Emunim (Amsterdam, 1793), fols. 9r–9v, which is known only from a version for a solo voice (manuscript in The Hague, Ms. 23 D24, 16b–c). Cantors of Amsterdam created new pieces by recycling extant melodies; see Edwin Seroussi, “New Perspectives on the Music of the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogues in North-Western Europe,” Studia Rosenthaliana 35:2 (2001): 306.}
During his time in Amsterdam, sitting in the Ets Haim yeshiva with access to an extensive library, 78 Luzzatto produced a large literary oeuvre that reflected his desire to reach, teach, and connect with his new community. 79 Besides his pietistic manifesto, Mesilat Yesharim, Luzzatto wrote a systematic cosmology of the universe and spirituality entitled Derekh Hashem, as well as a primer to the study of the Talmud called Derekh Tevunot. Each of the three major books served to one degree or another as introductions, whether to pietism, theosophical Kabbalah, or rabbinic literature, and he concluded the introduction to Derekh Hashem by spurring his readers as Seekers of the Lord (כל מבקש ה.). He also penned two works of logic, Sefer ha-Higayon and Derekh ha-Melitsah, 80 the former of which served as a translation, abridgement, and anthology of Aristotle, Maimonides and other medieval Jewish philosophers, and Renaissance and contemporary thinkers. As Charles Manekin showed in an article on Sefer ha-Higayon, Luzzatto composed a system of logic to fill an express need in the community. 81 Finally, he composed several poems, including a Hebrew translation of a

78 “The library was primarily for scholarly use, and theological and grammatical works are preponderant. It is the accent on usefulness that can perhaps explain the lack of medieval illuminated manuscripts, illustrated hagadot and other specimina of Jewish decorative art” (L. Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld, eds., Hebrew and Judaic Manuscripts in Amsterdam Public Collections, vol. 2 [Leiden, 1973], ix). The Library includes printed books and manuscripts from the last several centuries in Bible, Talmud, halakhah, liturgy, Kabbalah, ethics, philology, belle lettres, and all other literary fields relevant to Portuguese Jewry in the early modern and modern periods. Every era of Amsterdam’s Sephardim is represented, and manuscripts from generations of rabbinic figures are extant.


80 Ets Haim/Livraria Montezinos has two eighteenth-century copies Luzzatto’s rhetorical treatise Darkheh ha-Melitsah (EH 47 C48 and EH 47 E8; see Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld, Hebrew and Judaic Manuscripts in Amsterdam Public Collections, 178f).

81 Manekin, “On Humanist Logic Judaized – Then and Now,” 433, 434. Manekin cited Luzzatto’s introduction to Sefer ha-Higayon: “When I saw the great need we have for this subject [i.e., Logic], without which we cannot enter into the scientific disciplines (hokhmot) and properly delight in their pleasure, I chose to arrange this subject in a condensed matter, according to what I felt necessary for a complete treatment. Most of it I translated from the
Portuguese poem, and enabled the copying of four essays he had written in Padua: *Derekh ha-Hokhmah, Ma’am a r‘al ha-Hagadot, Ma’am a r ha-‘Ikarim*, and *Or ha-Genoz.*

Nevertheless, Luzzatto did not inspire a movement in the community. He was respected and even venerated for his piety, knowledge, and literary acumen, but his influence was particular, not systemic. As mentioned and as will be discussed below, *Mesilat Yesharim* was not printed as Luzzatto had originally intended. *Le-El Elim* was indeed sung for many years on Simhat Torah, but its insertion in 1771 prayer book was without attribution. The sole mention of Luzzatto in Franco Mendes’s eighteenth-century history of the Portuguese community concerned his composition of *Le-El Elim*. More tangibly, the documents detailing Luzzatto’s inclusion in the *Medras Grande* give no indication of a prominent position within the yeshiva. On the contrary, his colleagues included men more prestigious, or at least with larger roles, in the Portuguese community, including De Lara, Meldola, and Jacob Bassan (no relation to Isaiah Bassan), who later became rabbi of the Portuguese community in Hamburg. Meanwhile, the names of three other students were written with the letter “R,” which may have meant rabbi or

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82 EH 47 B26, *Emek ha-Shirim*, fols. 50–51.

83 The manuscripts were probably brought to Amsterdam by family members when they arrived in the autumn of 1735; Poppers had stated that nothing was on his person except *Ma’am a r ha-Vikuah*. For the manuscripts in Ets Haim Library, see EH 47 C22.

84 I do not presently know when Bassan began his tenure in Hamburg. He served as an editor of *Mesilat Yesharim*, published in 1740, and was included in Amsterdam’s Ets Haim as of May 1741 (SAA 334, no. 531, fol. 193). According to Carlebach, Hagiz held a de facto position in the city’s Sephardic community (*Pursuit of Heresy*, 210, n. 53; Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 111, where Katzenellenbogen’s signature was paired with Hagiz’s [“As one with him, Hakham Hagiz”], “indicating an equivalent position”). Perhaps Bassan’s arrival in Hamburg coincided with Hagiz’s move to Jerusalem.
‘robi’ (teacher) and indicated that they taught the lower classes in Ets Haim.\footnote{In the entries in which Luzzatto was included in the yeshiva, the men preceded by “R” were consistently Abraham da Costa Abendana, Abraham de Meza, and Menase Delgado. These men were listed successively after Abendana preceded by “R” for several consecutive years. There is an oral tradition, if it may be called that, among modern Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam that Luzzatto taught in the Ets Haim yeshiva, but the community record books do not give this indication. Meyer assumed that Luzzatto earned a salary as a teacher (The Stay of Mozes Haim Luzzatto at Amsterdam, 22).} Officially, Luzzatto was regarded as one among several in the Medras Grande, and his own ordination as hakham in Italy was evidently irrelevant. Luzzatto was treated well by the community, and his experience was exceptional relative to his ethnic and cultural background, but he remained on the margins of society.

**Connection**

In this dissertation, I have sought to establish how the marginalized and condemned kabbalist was later considered an inspiration to various mainstream, modern, and non-mystical movements. In an article I published in 2010, I argued that Luzzatto’s posthumous acceptance was not rehabilitation per se, but a reception of particular books, formed in the minds of readers. Israel Salanter’s Musar movement, for instance, absorbed psychological and religious teachings of the redacted Mesilat Yesharim, retroactively exalting “Ramhal” without awareness of or care for his past or mystical inclination. The key to that long turn of events in the life and after-life of Moses Hayim Luzzatto was his eight years in Amsterdam. It was there that Luzzatto published three treatises, two of which stimulated separate nineteenth-century movements and all of which, through the medium of print, that helped establish Luzzatto’s social and religious credibility. Portuguese acceptance permitted and may have encouraged Luzzatto to...
compose and publish books in the wake of the controversy that had swept up the European rabbinate.

Without explicit reference to Luzzatto’s first days in Amsterdam, it is difficult to surmise how and why he was actually accepted by the Portuguese. His early claim to Bassan that the community had offered him a major rabbinic post is problematic. Despite his talents and the warm welcome he ultimately received, there is no corroborating evidence for his assertion. The community had previously employed rabbis from abroad, primarily because merchant families encouraged study only until young men were ready to participate in business, but senior rabbinic posts were held for extended periods of time and Abendana and Athias were competent leaders. According to Jozeph Michman, Luzzatto was offered the position to head *Jesiba Oel Jahacob* — feasible only if *Oel Jahacob* and *Emet Le Jahacob* did indeed function separately from the *Medras Grande*. However, there is no firm indication that the *yeshivot* were distinct from the Ets Haim system, and, as mentioned above, the names of the same men appear in reference to both. Instead, Jacob Pereira’s bequeathed “yeshivot” may have merely acted as sources of funding, with all men sitting together in the *Medras Grande*. Therefore, it is probable that Luzzatto’s claim was meant to reassure his compatriots in Padua and inspire them to persist in their mystical quest. As I have already argued, Luzzatto valued humility and piety above all else, but his viewpoint was dependent upon his perception of the divine perspective. Just as he had no compunction in negating his oath of 1730 by teaching Kabbalah

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86 Saul Morteira, Judah Vega, Isaac ben Abraham Uziel, Joseph Delmedigo, Samuel Tardiola, Jacob Sasportas were all well received from abroad in the seventeenth century.
88 Michman, *David Franco Mendes*, 38.
89 Yosef Kaplan related this to me in private communication.
to a growing contingent in his Padua yeshiva, he may have been willing to embellish his welcome as a way of strengthening the fellowship he had abandoned.\textsuperscript{90}

Regardless, questions abound about Luzzatto’s welcome. Were the Portuguese rabbinic and lay leadership not conscious of or concerned about his controversial status? Did his brother, Lion, who married a Portuguese woman in 1737,\textsuperscript{91} have close ties to the community, and was he the reason Moses Hayim received charity and a position in Ets Haim? Did Moses de Chaves act as Luzzatto’s patron as early as 1735, and did he advocate for Luzzatto?

In the least, it depended upon Portuguese willingness to disregard the harsh bans levied against Luzzatto, and his ability to make himself useful and amicable. There had been a history of tolerating Sabbatianists in the community, but so too had there been a practice of suppressing public deviants.\textsuperscript{92} Had they feared uproar – not only from Hagiz or Poppers but from the Ashkenazic rabbinate in their very city, led successively by Luzzatto’s harsh critics, Eliezer Rokeah and Aryeh Leib Loewenstamm – Portuguese leadership could have easily gotten rid of Luzzatto. As mentioned above, by the 1730s and 1740s, the community was sending vagrants away almost immediately upon arrival, and shipping off poor members of the Nação to Dutch colonies in the West Indies. Yet, Luzzatto benefitted from Portuguese autonomy relative to other Jewish communities, and the Dutch cultural milieu of intellectual tolerance. With respect to the former, Yosef Kaplan has argued that Portuguese action during the Hayon controversy – which resulted in the expulsions from Amsterdam of both Hayon and the heresy

\textsuperscript{90} According to Michman, \textit{David Franco Mendes}, 131 n. 9.
\textsuperscript{91} A record of Lion’s marriage in 1737 in Amsterdam is housed in the archives of the Portuguese Jewish community; for a facsimile of the marriage record, see Meyer, \textit{The Stay of Mozes Haim Luzzatto at Amsterdam}, 8–9.
\textsuperscript{92} Examples of Hayon, Spinoza, da Costa. Joseph Delmedigo was found too dangerous to be passed without censorship (signators included Isaac Aboab, Abraham Cohen Herrera, Menasseh ben Israel).
hunting duo of Tsevi Ashkenazi and Moses Hagiz – did not stem from messianic sentiment, but rather reflected Western Sephardic desire to preserve communal authority. While in regards to the latter, Miriam Bodian has described a prevailing air in the community of “liberty of conscience,” in which people were able to believe what they wished as long as it did not upset the established order.

As such, Luzzatto’s personal engagement with various members of the community proved crucial. It is unlikely that Lion’s ability to vouch for a brother who had inspired rabbinic- orated fire and brimstone was particularly useful. If the Mahamad steadily provided Luzzatto with an income, both from the charity rolls and through Ets Haim, it is because the Luzzatto family could no longer afford to support the kabbalist. It is more feasible that Luzzatto made an instantaneous impression on de Chaves, or someone like him, whose clout could ensure Luzzatto’s future among Amsterdam’s Portuguese Jews. By the end of his tenure in Amsterdam, Luzzatto and de Chaves certainly seem to have retained genuine respect for each other. Rather than wholly reflecting what Mario Biagioli termed the “productive system,” in which clients depended upon wealthy patrons and fashioned themselves to achieve a given status, the Luzzatto-de Chaves relationship was based on mutual affinity for pietism. Luzzatto

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93 Evident from removal of Hayon, Hagiz, and Hakham Tsevi.
94 Miriam Bodian presented the topic in a paper entitled “The Idea of Freedom of Conscience among Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Jews,” at the 43rd Annual Conference for the Association for Jewish Studies in Washington, DC. In a paper given on the bicentenary of Luzzatto’s birth, Rabbi Isaac Landman described Luzzatto’s transition from Italy as one to the “city of freedom of conscience — Amsterdam” (“Moses Hayim Luzzatto [1707–1747],” Year Book of the Central Conference of American Rabbis XVII [Frankfort, Michigan, 1907]: 192). Landman’s essay is typically praiseworthy of Luzzatto’s poetry, and condemnatory of the rabbis who pursued him. There is no mention of Mesilat Yesharim or Kabbalah, the latter except in reference to its detrimental quality. Of the many biographical sketches, Landman’s is notable because he claimed that Luzzatto paid a short visit to London, of which there is no evidence (193).
95 Mario Biagioli, Galileo, Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 90–91.
may have authored *La-Yesharim Tehilah* as recompense for de Chaves’s aid, but that does not necessarily suggest that he was compelled to do so. Likewise, Jacob de Chaves’s willingness to serve as executor of Luzzatto’s estate offered no particular benefit to the de Chaves family, and therefore presumably served as an act of kindness. Finally, *Mesilat Yesharim’s* reproach of laymen living well without appreciation for others or the heavenly source of their fortune—arguably a stereotype of wealthy patrons—indicates that Luzzatto did not act obsequiously to his hosts. Moreover, the statement’s presence in a book written before Luzzatto published *La-Yesharim Tehilah* or Jacob de Chaves stood before a notary with him, signifies that de Chaves (though perhaps not other members of the Mahamad) agreed with the sentiment and did not feel personally slighted.

Luzzatto’s relationship with de Chaves may conflict with traditional notions of patronage, but it is supported by the nature of his acceptance among the rabbinic class. In contrast to his Ets Haim colleagues David Meldola and Jacob Bassan, Luzzatto was noticeably absent from Amsterdam’s rabbinic culture. Both men worked as proofreaders or editors in printing houses, provided approbations to newly authored works, and contributed to the halakhic discourse in and out of Ets Haim.96 Meldola’s approbations show he was proud of his place in the Portuguese yeshiva and for having reached a position of respect among the

96 Between 1737 and 1742, he provided introductions and *haskamot* for several books printed in Amsterdam. See G. Nahon, “Les Rapports des communautes Judeo-Portugaises de France avec celle d’Amsterdam au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècles,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 10 (1976): 151–188. *Sefer Ohel Yaakov* (1737); *Sefer Bet David* by David Hayim Korinaldi (1738–39); *Seror ha-Hayim* by Haim Jacob ben Jacob David (1738); *Sama de-Hayai* (1739); *Tefillat Yesharim* (1740); *Mesilat Yesharim; Sefer ha-Tashbets* (1738); and *Sefer ha-Rashbats* by Salomon bar Semah (1742). Article includes appendix of documents between Amsterdam and Bayonne community. Document 25, dated 3 May 1746, concerns David Meldola taking a leave of absence from the *midrash ha-gadol* to go to Bayonne, where his father Raphael had been rabbi a few years previously. On the relationship between the Jews of Bayonne and the Caribbean see Gérard Nahon, “The Portuguese Jewish Nation of Saint Esprit-lès-Bayonne: The American Dimension,” in *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West*, eds. Paolo Bernardini and Norman Fiering (Berghahn Books, 2001), 255–263.
intellectual and religious elite. Yet, in the hundreds of responsa printed in *Peri Ets Hayim* and in Meldola’s *Divre David*, Luzzatto’s name appears only twice, and only tangentially. These publications manifested the studies of the upper levels of the Portuguese yeshiva, and Luzzatto’s absence as an author of even one halakhic essay reflected his persistent dedication to kabbalistic study over and above legal inquiry. His letters to Padua, as late as 1739, continued to urge his colleagues and students to maintain kabbalistic intentions, and he evidently pursued his own path irrespective of the surrounding rabbinic culture.

Rather than condemn, distrust, or shun him, the community’s scholars valued Luzzatto’s pietism. In general, the community saw an increase in confraternities devoted to piety and Torah learning in the eighteenth century, perhaps as a consequence of invigorated activities at the Ets Haim. Both references to Luzzatto in the community’s responsa literature referred to him as a *hasid*. Although rabbis regularly and sometimes meaninglessly (as letters among bitter adversaries attest) showered each other with titles and accolades, the term ‘pietist’ was not flippantly used. In the approbations and prefaces for the first printing of *Mesilat Yesharim*, Abendana and Athias, providing a joint approbation as the community’s respective *hakham* and *av bet din*, praised Luzzatto for his wisdom and lauded the book as essential to living a pious life. Meldola, meanwhile, evoked the biblical Moses – not as Luzzatto himself conceived but nonetheless significant – stating “from Moses to Moses none has arisen like Moses.”

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97 In his introduction to *Derekh Tevunot* and his approbation to Samson Morpurgo’s *Shemesh Tzedakah*, Meldola stated that he sat in the tent of learning (יהושע באתיה) of the *midrash ha-gadol* of Ets Haim. His father, Rafael, similarly recorded his presence in the *midrash ha-gadol* of the Ets Hayim in Livorno. In a *haskamah* for Samson Morpurgo’s *Shemesh Tzedakah*, David Meldola also provided a *haskamah* to *Shemesh Tzedakah*, and he similarly remarked that he studied in the *midrash ha-gadol* of the Ets Haim in Amsterdam.


99 והמשנה[Unit 250] נמלת ל ל חמים חמים המאיר.
declaration had been commonly made about the great medieval thinker Maimonides, but it also appeared on the tombstone of the Ashkenazic halakhist and theologian Moses Isserles (1520–1572). Meldola’s unabashed use of the phrase indicated the respect for Luzzatto and pietism in the Ets Haim. Such praise was echoed and even amplified two years later when Luzzatto published Derekh Tevunot. Abendana, Athias, and Meldola again honored Luzzatto, elucidated the benefits of studying this work, and encouraged scholars to approach the Talmud using his method.

There is no further indication that Abendana or the other rabbis utilized Luzzatto’s Talmud study technique in the Medras Grande or that the Ets Haim purchased multiple copies of the book. Nor is there evidence that Luzzatto taught Kabbalah during his long stay, in keeping with his initial aversion. However, it is telling that the rabbinic class regarded Luzzatto as beneficial to the rabbinic class. David Franco Mendes, a poet and the Ets Haim’s first full-time librarian, lauded Luzzatto’s talents:

“Glory of the land. Some balm and some honey of the exceedingly great praise for the Rav...this is the perfect scholar, the godly kabbalist, glory of the poets (פייטנים) and crown of the authors (מליצים)...the revered teacher Moses Hayim Luzzatto, whose soul dwells in purity in the Holy Land. Moses was heaven-graced and made others partake of his grace by making many books without end, all of them full of wisdom, knowledge, and

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101 Franco Mendes was an unsuccessful merchant. Fuks points out in his introduction to the Memorias that in 1742 Franco Mendes’s name was not mentioned in the list of those assessed a special income-tax with an income of eight hundred guilders or more (Franco Mendes, Memorias, viii; citing W. F. Oldewelt, Kohier van de Personeele Quotisatie te Amsterdam over het jaar 1742 [Amsterdam, 1947]). Until the relatively recent discovery of Luzzatto’s autograph of Mesilat Yesharim, it was supposed that all known copies of Luzzatto’s books were written in the hand of Franco Mendes (Michman, David Franco Mendes, 30).
fear of the Lord. How good was it for me that I was privileged to be his disciple, that he may rest in glory for ever and ever.\textsuperscript{102}

Franco Mendes’s poetic rhetoric and subsequent action signified reverence for Luzzatto as educator. He may not have been tapped as an official instructor, but his presence was efficacious to the growing rabbinic class. Franco Mendes preserved copies of several of Luzzatto’s treatises and poems; in addition, he included the text of a halakhic query he himself had sent to Luzzatto in an illustrated miscellany that otherwise consisted of his own literary compositions.\textsuperscript{103}

Is there a link between Luzzatto’s acceptance in Ets Haim, the Portuguese rabbinate’s praise of his pietism, and Luzzatto’s authorship of a slew of introductory works while in Amsterdam? The answer is yes, and it is found in the publication of \textit{Mesilat Yesharim}. In 1737, the year before Luzzatto composed his dialogue between the \textit{hasid} and \textit{hakham}, the Proops printing house in Amsterdam issued Elijah de Vidas’s \textit{Reshit Hokhmah}, a kabbalistic exposition of piety and morality. De Vidas, a disciple of Moses Cordovero, had composed his book in 1575 with the intention of disseminating mystical religiosity beyond the community of Safed kabbalists. Quoting an extremely wide range of sources bolstering his argument, de Vidas emphasized sexual purity and delineated the spirituality attained through the performance of certain mitzvot. The book is encyclopedic, divided into five large ‘gates’ – Fear, Love, Repentance, Holiness, and Humility – each with multiple chapters. De Vidas commenced the

\textsuperscript{102} Franco Mendes published a poem in the introduction of Luzzatto’s \textit{Derekh Hokhmah} (Amsterdam, 1783): “And I took up my parable: What virtue can you still practice in your rest / Master Luzzatto, the praise of our tongue? / There is none among us who can sing as you / In order to honour you, as our heart bids us. / And yet, you have enough: your works are with us, / Eternal signs in memory of you....” Signed by him “who mourns over his death and in whose love he shall always be high” (Zwiep, “An Echo of Lofty Mountains,” 293).

\textsuperscript{103} Luzzatto’s eulogies for Isaac Hayim Cantarini and David Finzi appear in \textit{Emek ha-Shirim} (EH 47 B26).
second section, the Gate of Love, by quoting Deuteronomy 10:12–13 — “What the Lord, your God, requires of you;” the verse used by both Luzzatto and Vitale had previously served as a benchmark for one of the foremost kabbalists of the sixteenth-century. Moreover, de Vidas’s devoted much of his Gate of Love to an exposition of Pinhas ben Yair’s ladder of saintliness, the *baraita* that served as the structural basis for *Mesilat Yesharim*. Yet, in addition to having been written for a scholarly and mystically adept readership, de Vidas addressed only some of the steps of the *baraita*, leaving the reader with interest piqued but comprehension lacking. He wrote extensively about *Taharah*, and the cleansing experience of submerging in a ritual bath, for instance, but he did not elucidate the process of rising from Vigilance to Alacrity to Blamelessness and so on.

As such, I suspect that Portuguese rabbis or students asked Luzzatto for an in-depth explanation of the *baraita*. It was obviously of interest to contemporary thinkers, for Moses Hagiz, Luzzatto’s relentless pursuer, had also addressed it in his *Mishnat Hakhamim*, and Ezekiel Landau would do so in the coming decades. While Luzzatto may not have received an official request, or even one for a written composition, he used the opportunity to address underlying principles of Kabbalah as a way of life. *Ma’amer ha-Vikuah* had been confiscated in Frankfurt, but Luzzatto still had a social and religious agenda. He therefore composed his polemic against the rabbinic establishment, in which a humble hasid enlightens an arrogant

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104 *Reshit Hokhmah* inspired an abridgement called *Tapuhe Zahav* by Jehiel Mili. It was printed in Manuta in 1740 at the press of Raphael Hayim d’Italia, a friend of the Luzzatto family. Italy was home to several abridgements; as mentioned in chapter three, Samuel David Ottolenghi published an abridgement of Aaron Berakhiah of Modena’s *Ma’avar Yavok*.

105 *Mishnat Hakhamim* (Wandsbach, 1735), fols. 80r–80v (beginning of *Tohorah*).

hakham, couched in the structure of the *baraita*. The opening exchange of the dialogue attests to that fact:

“*The hasid* said: *We can follow the order of the verse* [Deuteronomy 10:12–13] *or the order of the sages* [*baraita*], whichever you choose. Choose the order you prefer and I will do as you say.

*The hakham* said: Though both are essentially the same, I prefer that you adopt the order of the Sages. For in that way we will learn two things at once — the details of perfect service and the order in which to acquire them by degrees, as we must if we are to succeed in them.”

Using both characters as mouthpieces, Luzzatto expressed an eagerness to be useful and a belief that he could convey the underlying truth from which the biblical and rabbinic dicta both stemmed. In this light, the *hasid’s* expressions of “*hineni*” (Here I am) and the *hakham’s* about-turn did more than articulate an ideal. The former conveyed Luzzatto’s role in Amsterdam, while the latter expressed his hope for the Portuguese rabbinate.

Still, there is little tangible evidence that Luzzatto exerted much influence or was remembered in any general way after he left the community. This likely reflected the relegated status of rabbinic culture among Western Sephardim, as well as the desire of the contemporary Portuguese rabbinate to not raise ire as it attempted to engage with pan-European Jewry, increasingly dominated by central and eastern European communities. Regardless, Luzzatto’s marginal status in Amsterdam’s Portuguese community was consistent with the semi-isolationism of both the Nação and Luzzatto himself. Official Portuguese policy limited intra-communal interaction, and Luzzatto’s pietistic goals necessitated seclusion. What is clear is

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107 *Mesilat Yesharim*, 43.
that his long-term stay depended upon several factors: Portuguese communal autonomy, a
general appreciation for pietism in Amsterdam rabbinic and print culture, and Luzzatto’s
conscious and continued refashioning consistent with his conception of his cosmic role in the
world.

Disconnection
As discussed in chapter one, the published version of Mesilat Yesharim, issued many
dozens of times during the nineteenth century and adopted as a foundation text for the
Lithuanian Musar movement, diverged drastically from the author’s original manuscript. To be
sure, the manuscript did not undergo heavy editing: the printed book used the same chapter
format, based on the baraita of Pinhas ben Yair, and followed much of the manuscript
verbatim. Luzzatto’s initial pedagogic style was converted relatively easily, for the vast majority
of the dialogue consisted of the hasid’s monologues. Yet, removing the characters and the
opening narrative, which set the tone for the polemic, substantially diluted the effects of the
text.

Why did the printed version of Luzzatto’s pietistic manifesto differ from the original?
Did Luzzatto’s relatively marginal status in Portuguese society trump the level of appreciation
he experienced from both lay and rabbinic leadership? Was ethnicity so prominent a concept
in the collective mentality of the Nação that even the adoration and support of the chief rabbi
and the wealthiest Portuguese Jew in Amsterdam could not rally the community behind him?
Or did Portuguese communal autonomy, which had enabled Luzzatto’s settlement in the wake
of relentless and brutal calls for his excommunication, not extend to the print shop?
In an article on Luzzatto’s *Sefer ha-Higayon*, Charles Manekin discussed changes in Luzzatto’s writing style following his move to Amsterdam.\(^{108}\) According to Manekin, Luzzatto was heavily influenced by Ramist theories on rhetoric, logic, and pedagogy then popular in Holland but virtually unknown in Italy. Ramism stressed the systemization of knowledge and encouraged the use of charts as intellectual topography to organize material; consequently, the use of voice or dialogue was discouraged. Manekin contended, after looking at Luzzatto’s treatise on logic and his other works from Amsterdam composed in the same format, that Luzzatto abandoned the use of dialogue in favor of a more efficient textbook-style of conveying information. While I agree that Luzzatto’s pedagogic output differed during his stay in Amsterdam, and although Manekin is correct about the influence of Ramism,\(^{109}\) his broad argument about Luzzatto is unconvincing. First, the first book Luzzatto ever produced, *Leshon Limudim*, was a systemized work in non-dialogue format. Second, his moral drama *La-Yesharim Tehilah*, written in 1743, was fundamentally discursive; considering Luzzatto’s social and religious intentions in general and in poetry, it is problematic to separate the work from his other treatises purely on the basis of literary genre. Finally, with respect to *Mesilat Yesharim*, which was completed in the autumn of 1738 and printed sometime in 1740, it is highly unlikely that Luzzatto, having living in Amsterdam for four years, happened upon Ramist books in 1739.


and felt compelled to edit the most personal of all his books in a manner that coincidentally
removed his biting and overt critique of the rabbinic establishment.¹¹⁰

The print-ready status of the manuscript, completed so close to the imprint’s release,
indicates Luzzatto’s approval of his original version. As such, Luzzatto was either prohibited
from printing his manuscript or was warned prior to submission that it was too controversial. In
the author’s acknowledgements in the printed book’s concluding page, Luzzatto profusely
thanked his friends David Meldola and Jacob Bassan, both of whom had provided approbations,
for their work in preparing the book for publication:

“I applaud the grace of a man after my heart, my sacred charge,
my diadem and the seal on my right hand, my beloved and my
friend, my master, companion and dear comrade, the
distinguished sage…Jacob…Bassan…who assumed the bulk of the
burden, privileging me in all stages of this project by printing,
proofreading, and completing all the work in the most perfect
way. Likewise his second, a man of renown, widely acclaimed, a
man of reason, industrious, praised above all proofreaders, skillful
at his craft, of high repute among scholars, the distinguished
sage…David…Meldola.”¹¹¹

Crediting Bassan with the “bulk of the burden” alludes to a more significant role in the book’s
publication than the standard proofreading and printing of which most authors had no part
anyway. Luzzatto’s two Ets Haim colleagues may have advised him that, despite his positive
intentions and the fact that his ethical treatise did not fall under any ban, the power of the
European-wide rabbinate at the press would preclude the printing in its original form. Their

¹¹⁰ The manuscript’s colophon states that Luzzatto completed the work on 25 Elul 5498 (=September 10, 1738),
and the title page of the printed edition records 1740 as the year of publication. Raphael Meldola’s haskamah is
dated January 19, 1740, so within a little over one year, the finished manuscript had been reshaped. Meldola,
served as av bet din of the Sephardic congregations in Pisa and Bayonne, before heading the Ets Hayim yeshiva in
Livorno. See the heading of Rafael Meldola’s approbation for Samson Morpurgo’s Shemesh Tsedakah (Venice,
1743).

¹¹¹ Mesilat Yesharim, 525–526.
work in preparing the manuscript for publication, then, consisted of not mere copy editing, but of censorship.

If so, it would suggest that Bodian’s description of the community’s “liberty of conscience” in the seventeenth century had both expanded and tightened its borders by the first quarter of the eighteenth century. In contrast to Spinoza and Uriel da Costa, who had been seen as threats and were summarily suppressed from within, Luzzatto was regarded as a potential danger (or annoyance) to the community if external rabbinites deemed his activities to be offensive. In my opinion, the polemical manuscript may not have raised ire among his well-placed admirers in the community, but the uproar its publication would have engendered proved disconcerting. Thus, the circumstance of Mesilat Yesharim’s publication suggests that Portuguese Jewish leadership did not prevent Luzzatto from releasing the book he desired, but neither did it extend its support to ensure the book’s publication.

In fact, although Bassan and Meldola acted as editors, Mesilat Yesharim was printed at the Ashkenazic-owned press of Naphtali Hirts Levi Rofe. Luzzatto’s two other published works in the city, Derekh Tevunot and La-Yesharim Tehilah, were also printed by Ashkenazim with Portuguese underwriters or laborers. It seems that little to no separation between Ashkenazim and Sephardim existed in Amsterdam’s print shops, akin to the porous borders in Venice’s famous publishing houses that had facilitated Jewish-Christian interaction in the sixteenth-century. Sephardic presses in Amsterdam regularly employed Ashkenazim as typesetters or editors during the seventeenth century, and it appears that over several decades the trend had expanded and mirrored itself to a point of free exchange of personnel and publication. In 1737,
for instance, Abraham Athias published regulations for the Ashkenazic community. In 1740, Meldola printed different versions of his treatise on the calendar, Mo’ed David, at the presses of Rofe and the two Athiases. Despite stark differences between the ethnic communities in Amsterdam, Hebrew presses themselves seem to have operated according to an open business model. Printers presumably had specific interests and attempted to fill niches, such that ethical treatises published in Amsterdam during Luzzatto’s tenure were issued exclusively by Ashkenazic print houses: Elijah de Vidas’s Reshit Hokhmah (Proops: 1737); Bahya Ibn Pakudah’s Hovot ha-Levavot (Proops: 1738); Isaac Aboab’s Menorat ha-Ma’or (Rofe: 1739); Luzzatto’s Mesilat Yesharim (Rofe: 1740); and Jonah Girondi’s Igeret ha-Teshuvah (Rofe: 1742). This fact contrasts with Luzzatto’s characterization of Ashkenazic intellectual culture as devoid of piety, although, to be sure, presses intended to sell books to any and all potential buyers. For purely commercial reasons, Luzzatto’s work on religious thought and morality may have interested Ashkenazic presses but not those of his adopted community.

In any event, it is highly improbable that printers living in Amsterdam’s Ashkenazic community would have tolerated the overt critique (or chastisement) of contemporary rabbinic culture displayed in Luzzatto’s dialogue of Mesilat Yesharim. There are no extant references to Luzzatto in Amsterdam’s Ashkenazic community archives, or in material stemming from the contemporary chief rabbis, both of whom had virulently opposed Luzzatto in the controversy of 1735. Did Luzzatto cross paths with Eliezer Rokeah or Aryeh Leib Loewenstamm during his eight years in the city? With the Esnoga and the Ashkenazic Great Synagogue on opposite sides

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112 Vinograd, Amsterdam no. 1478.
113 Ibid., Amsterdam nos. 1515–1517.
of the same canal, how did the Ashkenazic rabbinate address Luzzatto’s acceptance among the Portuguese? Did they simply ignore Luzzatto’s presence as long as he did not inspire messianic fervor or teach Kabbalah? This policy would have conflicted with Loewenstamm’s public and vicious calls for Luzzatto’s total excommunication, but, in general, rabbinic interaction necessitated convenient and not always straightforward relations. Even David Finzi, Luzzatto’s father-in-law, solicited Hagiz in 1732 for support against a group of laymen in his community who challenged Mantua’s communal integrity.114 There is some indication that Amsterdam’s Ashkenazic and Sephardic rabbinates did in fact interact, because Meldola published at least three of Loewenstamm’s responsa in his Divre David.115 However, their contact was perhaps largely unofficial and through the openness of the print shops. Therefore, if Eliezer Rokeah or Loewenstamm tolerated Luzzatto’s existence in the city, as well as swallowed pride or concern over their irrelevance to Portuguese Jewry as a whole, they undoubtedly did what they could to prevent Luzzatto from receiving free reign in the printing houses.

The mysterious story behind the printing of Mesilat Yesharim indicates that something far more complex than bifurcated communities (or even consistent relationships) persisted. One need not look far: in 1737, David Meldola, again working for Naphtali Hirts Levi Rofe, issued a Kitsur Tsitsat Novel Tsevi by the memorable anti-Sabbatianist and former Portuguese chief rabbi Jacob Sasportas (1610–1698). The imprint consisted of Sasportas’s fierce attack on Sabbatianism, and was evidently printed to bolster the heresy hunters in pursuit of their

114 Teplitsky deals with the case extensively, mentioning all of the prominent individuals engaged in the Luzzatto controversy (Between Court Jew and Jewish Court, 166–172); see also Simonsohn, History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua, 390–391.
115 Divre David (Amsterdam, 1753), nos. 10, 53, 81.
deviating prey. Did someone commission Meldola or Rofe to publish the work? Were the Amsterdam rabbinites officially involved, either to profess their righteousness (Portuguese) or to frighten an accused Sabbatianist newly resident in the city (Ashkenazic)? Did Meldola know overtly or perceive surreptitiously after his work on the book that Luzzatto would be unable to publish an unedited version of his dialogue between the hasid and the hakham?

Likewise, in 1743, Athias and Abendana submitted an approbation for the publication of *Shemesh Tsedakah*, the collection of responsa from Samson Morpurgo assembled by the latter’s son and printed in Venice.\(^{116}\) They stated that “the wise [and] perfect” Isaac Pacifico, head of Venice’s *Yeshivah kelalit*, had solicited their approbation. While there was no particular ire between the Venetian and Portuguese rabbinites, was Luzzatto not the proverbial elephant in the room? Why did Athias and Abendana write highly of Pacifico, or at all, knowing that he had viciously attacked Luzzatto? While it is conceivable that the Venetian printers wanted the approbation of Amsterdam’s Sephardic rabbinate, did Pacifico not have compunction requesting it from men who had steadfastly supported the heretic he had condemned? As with Rokeah and Loewenstamm in the Dutch city, what was the status of the bans in the minds of those who issued them? Were the dozens of rabbis who had hurried to suppress Luzzatto, or rather the caricature of the deviant from Padua, content because nothing controversial had been brought to light since 1735? Perhaps, for Jacob Emden remarked that from the time of Luzzatto’s arrival in Amsterdam, “we have heard nothing from him that was bad; and he published two small treatises, *Mesilat Yesharim* and *Derekh Tevunot*, with which I could find no

\(^{116}\) David Meldola and his father Raphael Meldola also submitted separate approbations, as did Moses Hagiz.
fault.” Emden’s comment indicated his persistent suspicion of the author, but it also ratified the care that all members of the Amsterdam apparatus (Luzzatto, Meldola, Bassan, Rofe, and others) had shown in seeking to issue nothing that could appear problematic. Did Emden’s remark reflect a subtext of tolerance in rabbinic culture, or at least the realization that rabbis exercised limited power beyond the threat of the ban? Jekutiel Gordon, the man whose letters had sparked the controversy in 1729, returned to Italy in 1751 as an emissary on behalf of the community of Brisk; he not only had inspired confidence in his home community, he had actually received a letter of recommendation from rabbis of Breslau, Glogau, Lissa, Berlin, Vienna, and Venice, with signatures affixed by men who had issued bans against Luzzatto just fifteen years earlier.

The variegated rabbinic culture of Luzzatto’s life reflected an era of diversity and complexity. Definitions of controversy, mainstream, rabbinate, and acceptance are complicated by Luzzatto’s thought, experiences, and relationships. Scholars have recently challenged the notion that this was a period of rabbinic decline and crisis, a historiographical trope for generations. Still, much work remains to be done before we will fully grasp the nature of Jewish life in the decades between the rise of Sabbatianism and the fall of the ghetto. A detailed analysis of the work and workers in Amsterdam’s Jewish-owned print shops, for

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117 Emden, Zot Torat ha-Kena’ot, fol. 57b. Lampronti also noted the book under an entry for piety (חסיד) in his Pahad Yitshak.
118 Tishby, “How Luzzatto’s Kabbalistic Writings were Disseminated in Poland and Lithuania,” in Messianic Mysticism, 438–439. Signatories included Mordecai of Lissa, David of Berlin, and Jacob Belilios, Solomon Levi Mintz, and Moses Menahem Merari of Venice.
example, is essential to understanding Sephardic-Ashkenazic interaction in an otherwise separated communal setting. This could in turn serve as a model in evaluating ethnic conflict and coexistence in other communities, as well as elucidate broad questions about early modern Jewry because of Amsterdam’s importance on the global market of books and ideas. Significant study of books – what was printed, why, and by whom, with attention to the manner in which readers and thinkers understood or appropriated a text – would also illuminate Luzzatto’s eight-year stay in Amsterdam, contextualizing his life and enabling a deeper understanding about his legacy.

A previously unpublished letter sent to Luzzatto by David Franco Mendes sheds additional, if faint, light on the nature of Luzzatto’s acceptance in Amsterdam. On 22 Shevat 5504, Franco Mendes sent a halakhic query to Luzzatto who by then had left Amsterdam and settled in Acre. Luzzatto had not been known as a halakhist, either in Padua or Amsterdam, but Franco Mendes, and presumably the entire Portuguese rabbinic class, had stumbled upon a new problem. He explained that a Portuguese man had purchased a Torah scroll from an Ashkenazic man, and later discovered that the word daka (Deuteronomy 23:2) was spelled with a heh (דכה) rather than with an alef (דכא). Adhering strictly to the latter tradition, which followed the opinion of Maimonides and David Kimhi’s Sefer ha-Shorashim, Franco Mendes

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120 Ets Haim/Montezinos Livraria, MS 47 B 3, p. 38. The letter was in response to Luzzatto’s letter to Franco Mendes and his cousin, and future brother-in-law, David da Fonseca (Chriqui, Igerot, no. 165).
121 Azulai, Le-David Emet 11:16. He said that if the only available Sefer Torah is one in which the word is spelled with an alef, then it may be used but the berakhot accompanying the reading should not be recited. In contrast, the Aleppo Codex has an alef. Practical searches of Torah scrolls have turned up inconsistent findings (private communication with Ari Kinsberg in discussion about the dozens of scrolls at the JTS Library). By the twentieth century, Ovadia Yosef stated that some Ashkenazim spell daka with an alef, most spell it with a heh, and Sephardim generally spell it with a heh. He ruled that the difference does not make the Torah unfit, and that a blessing may be recited (Yehaveh Da’at 2:3.19; see also, Yabi’a Omer 8, Yoreh De’ah 25).
asked Luzzatto whether the scroll was suitable for ritual use. In the context of Luzzatto’s integration into Portuguese society, the letter is surprising. He was known as a kabbalist, admired for his piety and pedagogy, and virtually absent from the halakhic discourse in the Ets Haim. The sole reference to Luzzatto in the responsa serial *Peri Ets Haim* portrayed a pietist sitting unaccompanied in the *Medras Grande*: upon hearing Meldola and others discuss the kosher status of a pheasant, Luzzatto off-handedly mentioned that Jews in Italy did indeed regard the bird as fit for consumption.\footnote{Divre David, no. 42. This interaction between Luzzatto and his colleagues in the *Medras Grande* points to two interrelated issues that need to be considered. One, Luzzatto’s opinion was noted, but not absorbed without further debate. The text of the responsa does not conclude with the anecdote, rather it continues with written halakhic sources. The indication is that Meldola appreciated Luzzatto’s comment, but was unable to definitively rule on its basis. The reason for that may have stemmed from the second, more important issue: may one community rely upon the tradition of another community? In the nineteenth century, Judah Azsod (יועד) (1796–1866) ruled in his *Yehudah Ya’aleh* (Lemberg, 1873), no. 92, that a community required tradition (*mesorah*) to establish the kashrut of a bird, despite the fact that this was not a Talmudic requirement (Rema on *Yoreh De’ah* 82:3). See <http://onthemainline.blogspot.com/2011/11/how-jewish-communities-ought-to-view.html>, accessed June 8, 2014.}

On the surface it is astonishing that no one in Amsterdam could answer the question. The highest class of Ets Haim was regularly engaged in Talmud study, halakhic analysis, and writing responsa. To a certain extent, the historical issue evokes Isaiah Bassan’s query to the Mantuan rabbinate about establishing an ‘eruv in Padua. Just as Bassan may not have been competent in the laws of ‘eruvin, or, perhaps more likely, may have been in need of outside rabbinic support to bolster his opinion, Franco Mendes’s solicitation of Luzzatto reflected complex circumstances. Quite simply, there was no precedent for this problem. Scholars have partially defined early modern Jewish history by geographic movement and ethnic interaction,\footnote{D. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, ch. 1.} and eighteenth-century responsa, particularly from rabbis in small communities...
with competing traditions, reflected the ensuing communal dysfunction and confusion. In addition to doubting the ritual permissibility of the ‘imperfect’ Torah scroll, Franco Mendes, and the rest of the Portuguese intelligentsia, feared or disregarded the possibility of addressing the issue with their Ashkenazic counterparts. As rabbi of a community that used the spelling in question, Loewenstamm was liable to reject the question out of hand, which would leave Amsterdam’s Western Sephardim with two equally unpleasant scenarios: one, to publicly reject the validity of the scroll and thereby raise the ire of Ashkenazim everywhere; or, two, tolerate the difference and thereby challenge Portuguese exceptionalism at a tenuous time of increased interaction. Apparently, Franco Mendes believed or hoped that Luzzatto, an Italian of Ashkenazic background who had lived most of his life in the multi-ethnic politically unified community of Padua, would be able to provide insight.

Luzzatto’s reply to Franco Mendes is not extant. His answer, assuming there was one, would be invaluable to the study of early modern Jewish cultural, intellectual, and social history, but it also would be oddly uncharacteristic. Luzzatto adhered to halakhah, but he primarily invested himself in mitzvoth as the culmination of a process of loving and fearing God. His treatises are as notable for what they don’t say as for what they do. Mesilat Yesharim, Luzzatto’s guide to practical living, is deep and elaborate, but very short on specific examples. Of course, Franco Mendes’s letter may indicate that Luzzatto interacted with the Portuguese poet differently than he did with Meldola, or the kabbalist Mendola for that matter. Enigmatic though he was, and despite few sources from or about him in his final years, it is clear that

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124 Yigel Sklarin has done much (unpublished) work on this with respect to Ezekiel Katzenellenbogen in Altona-Hamburg-Wansbach, as found in She’elot u-Teshuvot Keneset Yehezkel (Altona, 1732).
Luzzatto was a man who did not define himself by external circumstances. Through the controversy and his settlement in Amsterdam, Luzzatto retained his mystical conception, reevaluated his mission according to perceived providential circumstances, and continuously adapted in order to succeed spiritually.

While it may be tempting to conceive of Luzzatto as a failed messianic figure, a tragic victim of a rabbinic defense system, he did not define himself as such. His mystical fellowship in Padua, and his composition of *Mesilat Yesharim* in Amsterdam, point to Luzzatto’s persistent emphasis on divine providence and *devekut* regardless of the proliferation of bans against him. As such, Luzzatto’s relative quietism among the Portuguese must be conceived as a conscious and contented choice. The polemical element of his dialogue reflected the prevailing truth that had largely defined his interaction with the rabbinic establishment, but his ability to acclimate to Portuguese society indicated that he was not consumed with wrath for the injustice that had been done to him. As such, Luzzatto’s adaption and ultimate legacy distinguishes him historically from other early modern provocateurs. In accepting the controversy as God’s will and evolving both spiritually and socially, Luzzatto forged a path distinct from Sabbatai Tsevi’s conversion to Islam, Spinoza’s contented abandonment of Jewry, and Solomon Molkho’s martyrdom before the Catholic Church. In addition to his historical distinctiveness, however, Luzzatto’s willingness or desire to adjust to his surroundings actually enabled his lasting influence. His emphasis on piety and humility in Amsterdam, in a community that did not regard him as the redeemer but valued his learning and spirituality, resulted in the creation of a legacy.
After eight years in the most cosmopolitan city in Europe, comfortable and warmly treated by the Portuguese community, Luzzatto immigrated to the Holy Land. He had found respite from two all-consuming elements: one, condemnation from the widespread rabbinic establishment; and two, his own messianic vision and yearning for its manifestation. In Amsterdam, Luzzatto was able to refocus on pietistic principles without expectation or harassment. Mesilat Yesharim stood as both a reflection of his current quietistic lifestyle, and a role-playing catharsis for his years of incessant struggle in service of God. He had traveled to Amsterdam to visit his brother, assist in his father’s business, print a book promoting the study of Kabbalah, or to escape his enemies. In 1743, after establishing for himself a new life and producing work valuable to his adopted community (and ultimately influential in propelling his legacy), Luzzatto decided to move on. From his perspective, the “finger of God had placed in the hearts of the entire [Portuguese] community, small and great, a deep love and appreciation for me.”¹ His ascent to the Holy Land would similarly reflect his connection and dedication to the divine.

On April 19, 1743, three years after the release of Mesilat Yesharim and soon after he had authored La-Yesharim Tehilah, Luzzatto appeared before Jan Barels, a notary public in

¹ Chriqui, Igerot, no. 116.
Amsterdam used frequently by Portuguese Jews. He declared his intention to empower Jacob de Chaves, for whom he had composed the above-mentioned drama, to “manage and direct all his affairs...both here in this country and elsewhere in Europe during his time abroad.” De Chaves would deal with any and all business matters that involved Luzzatto, even liquidating his estate and providing for his heirs in the event of his death. Besides demonstrating further the intimate connection between Luzzatto’s and the de Chaves family, the document reflected Luzzatto’s practicality, consistent with the perpetual adaptation he displayed in manifesting his spirituality and self-conception. He was intent on travelling abroad and wished to ensure the well-being of his wife and son who would remain in the city for the time being. Another notarized document similarly indicated Luzzatto’s ability to engage with and adjust to worldly matters, this time with respect to his father’s business and the unscrupulous behavior of a former business partner. On January 8, 1742, two witnesses, Isaac Porto and Christoffel Sluyter, testified that Luzzatto had gone to the house of Abraham Jacob Hiddink to request permission to copy books and documents regarding trade between Hiddink and Luzzatto’s father. The text states that Hiddink rebuffed Luzzatto, replying repeatedly “I don’t know.

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2 SAA 5075, no. 8864, no. 349. Barels notarized documents in 1737 recording large loans from Portuguese Jews to the bankrupt Jewish community of Venice (SAA 334, no. 179, p. 267). In 1739, he notarized a gift of one hundred guilders from Rachel de Medina Chamis, widow (viúva) of Joseph Henriquez Medina, to Ester Silva Folis (SAA 334, no. 531, p. 70). The same pinkas entry allocating funds to “D[oc]tor Luzato” (see previous note) provided Barels with 6:12 in May 1735: “ao Notario Baerels por Sua conta em mayor somma – 6:12.” For two notaries with large Jewish clientele in the seventeenth century, see Bloom, The Economic Activities of the Jews of Amsterdam, xvii, n. 10.

3 SAA 5075, no. 10340, no. 29. The document gives Venice, rather than Padua, as the residence of Jacob Vita. He may have moved to Venice after business had soured and Moses Hayim had left the Veneto, because the Luzzatto household seems to have been taken over by his brother David. I have been unable to determine the identity of Christoffel Sluyter, who swore by “solem oath.” Luzzatto may have established a trusting relationship with a non-Jewish citizen of Amsterdam, for there is evidence of his and his family’s close interaction with Christians in the Veneto. However, it is also possible that Isaac Porto had the relationship with Sluyter and asked him to serve as a witness.
anything about it,” but there is no indication of the eventual outcome. Nevertheless, the document shows that Luzzatto was an active participant in the established socio-economic order; he neither feared the world at large nor did he have issue with taking established steps to assure the security of his (or his father’s) fortune. The Separateness described in Mesilat Yesharim was psychological and spiritual, and Fear was reserved for the Almighty.

By the autumn of 1743, Luzzatto had made his way to the Holy Land with his wife and son (despite the suggestion otherwise in the notarized document). In January or February of 1744, at least seven months after Luzzatto had sent a letter to Franco Mendes telling of his arrival in Acre, Luzzatto’s tenure in the Ets Haim was officially terminated. The unusual nature of the pinkas entry (positions in the Ets Haim yeshiva were ordinarily filled at a fixed time of year), coupled with the extended period of time yeshiva administrators waited to act on the vacancy, indicated that the Portuguese parnasim had hoped or assumed that Luzzatto would return from abroad and resume his studies in the Medras Grande. Perhaps he did not intend to leave the Dutch Republic permanently. He had thought of emigrating to the Holy Land for at least a decade, but the April 1743 notarized document seemed to indicate travels on the continent at most.

To a certain extent, Luzzatto’s exit from Amsterdam imitated his entry. He had traveled to the Dutch city with little planning, relying on his faith in God and himself, and settled quite impermanently on the margins of Portuguese society. He now ventured to do the same in the Land of Israel. Rather than traveling inland to Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, or Tiberias, the four

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4 Chriqui, Igerot, no. 165 (22 Tamuz 5503 [=July 14, 1743]).
5 SAA 334, no. 1053, p. 69. The document records the ascension of two students in his stead.
holy cities from which emissaries regularly visited diasporic communities to collect charity, Luzzatto chose to live in the port city of Acre. He does not appear to have made arrangements to join a community, nor to use his connections or talents for his own benefit. For instance, yeshivot in Jerusalem and Hebron had been endowed under the auspices of the Amsterdam Ets Haim, but Luzzatto did not seek to study there. Likewise, he did not attempt to join the newly founded Yeshivat Bet El or Bet Midrash Kneset Yisrael, centers of kabbalistic study in Jerusalem, even though his expertise could have served the city’s mystics following the recent death of Hayim ben Attar. More profoundly, Luzzatto did not join the reconstituted community of Tiberias, which was being funded by Solomon Racach and Hillel Padova (both of whom had supported him in the Veneto) and was said to be the final resting place of the mishnaic sage Akiva ben Joseph, with whom he believed he shared a soul. It is unlikely that Luzzatto was not welcome in any of these communities; although Safed, whose emissaries had banned Luzzatto in 1735, had been home to Moses Hagiz since his ascent to the Holy Land in 1738.

6 In 1691, Pereria founded the yeshivas of Bet Jahacob in Jerusalem and Emet Le Jahacob in Hebron (SAA 334, no. 530, p. 135; see Franco Mendes, Memorias, 95, 97).
7 The Moroccan kabbalist and exegete Hayim ben Attar established Keneset Yisrael in the 1730s, after having lived in Livorno for several years. He settled in Acre before moving to Jerusalem. His student, Abraham Ishmael Sanghoneti may have met Luzzatto, for he arrived in Acre from Jerusalem on the way to Livorno on Rosh Hodesh Kislev 1744. See B. Klar, “Ketavim hadashim le-toledot ‘aliyat Ba’al Or ha-Hayim,” in Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 105–123.
8 Hayim Abulafia (1660–1744), a kabbalist and rabbi of Izmir, was invited by Ottoman authorities to rebuild the community of Tiberias. Jacob Berav (not of sixteenth-century fame) composed Zimrat Ha-Arets, printed in Mantua in 1745 with the assistance of Luzzatto’s compatriot Jacob Castelfranco. In his introduction to the book, Castelfranco commended Solomon Racach and Hillel Padova for providing the funds to the reconstituted community. The community bet midrash was named Mashmi’a Yeshu’a, Castelfranco wrote, equivalent to the gematria of their combined names (fols. 2v, 4r). There is evidence that Racach also established a yeshiva in Hebron (Tishby, “Rabbi Moses David Valle’s Mystical-Messianic Diary,” in Messianic Mysticism, 345).
As such, Luzzatto must have deliberately chosen to live in Acre. Members of the community may have asked him to stay, or he may have deemed it a place where he could best devote himself to his deep but inclusive social and religious platform. Perhaps Luzzatto identified a need for his presence in the town that welcomed new arrivals traveling by ship to the Holy Land. Unfortunately, in contrast to the vast documentation detailing his life in Padua and Amsterdam, there is almost nothing on the three years he lived in Acre. Only two indigenous sources testify to Luzzatto’s presence in the Holy Land, both of which were published posthumously after a plague struck him and his family in 1746 or 1747. The documents provide no specific insight into Luzzatto’s activities or thought during the last years of his life, but they do indicate his general state of being and the manner in which he interacted with others. The more well-known of the two is a eulogy written in his honor by the rabbis of Tiberias:

“A heavenly voice emerges from Tiberias and proclaims: to the mountains I lift my tears and my wailing, sitting alone in lamentation.... Hear, O heavens, and Listen, O earth, because the chief of rabbis, the holy kabbalist, the Chariot of Israel and his horsemen, the light of Israel, “the holy lamp” [butsina kadisha], our teacher and master, Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto died, he and his entire family, of the plague, before God on the 26th of Iyar in the city of Acre.... And he was buried in Tiberias at the grave of Rabbi Akiva. Blessed is he in this world and in the world to come, but woe to us for the crown of our heads has fallen.... No one will rise again in Israel like Moses....”

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9 Chriqui, *Igerot*, no. 167; Ghirondi, “Mikhtav heh,” *Kerem Hemed* 2 (Vienna, 1836): 61–62; Almanzi, “Toledot R’ Moshe Hayim Lutsato me-Padovah,” 126; A. Yaari, *Igerot Erets Yisrael* (Tel Aviv, 1943), 270–272; Ginzburg, *The Life and Works of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto*, 72. The anonymous eulogy was copied in Italy and is found in JTS MS 4022, fol. 4v. The author of the eulogy provided the day and month of Luzzatto’s death, but not the year.
The text is short but powerful. The author heaped mystical honorifics upon Luzzatto, associating him with the biblical Moses and Shimon bar Yohai and labelling him a supreme kabbalist. More profoundly, however, they lamented their loss, an indication that Luzzatto did in fact establish relationships with the reconstituted community of Tiberias.

The only other contemporary document referring to Luzzatto is a folio-sized broadside of petitions seeking charity for the Jewish community in Kefar Yasif. Located about fifteen kilometers northeast of Acre, Kefar Yasif was home to a small community in the eighteenth century and served as a burial site for wealthy Jews of the port city who doubted whether Acre was indeed part of the Land of Israel. In the late summer of 1747, just prior to the High Holidays, the community of Kefar Yasif sent an emissary named Solomon Abadi to scour the diaspora for funds to construct a bet midrash and, if possible, a synagogue. Hoping to inspire the Jewish communities of “Ashkenaz, Holland, England, France, Italy, and Tunis,” the petitioners proclaimed their integral importance to the Jewish people as a whole by virtue of their geographic position. Akin to the claim of the Safed emissaries who had condemned Luzzatto with the authority of interred sages of the Galilee, the leaders of Kefar Yasif evoked the names of famous burial tombs nearby: the prophet Elisha, (‘David’s friend’) Hushai the Archite, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Abraham Ibn Ezra, Moses [ben Raphael] Malkhi, and “Hayim Lusato” (חיים לוסאטו).

11 Dated 15 Elul 5507 (=August 21, 1747).
In contrast to the Tiberian eulogy, the Kefar Yasif petition may indicate that Luzzatto was not well-known by members of the community so close in proximity to his adopted town. While the misspelling of “Luzzatto” (לוצאטו) could be attributed to the similarity of the letters samekh and tsadi in Sephardic pronunciation, the absence of the name “Moses,” which had driven Luzzatto’s identity from a young age, suggests that the leadership of Kefar Yasif was personally unfamiliar with Luzzatto. He may have connected with the community in Tiberias due to his friendships with Racach, Padova, and Jacob Castelfranco, but otherwise opted for solitude pursuant of piety and devekut. Of course, one could argue that Luzzatto dropped the name “Moses” in Acre, having learned of Hayim ben Attar’s claim that the Messiah’s name was “Hayim” while wishing to manifest his messianic vision, but one would have to ignore the full use of his name in the other document. Moreover, the lack of overt messianic sentiment in the eulogy, and the lack of further references to Luzzatto’s few years there, belies the notion that Luzzatto hoped to inspire a new movement. Besides, Luzzatto had not attempted to do so in Amsterdam, and Moses Hagiz and Eliezer Rokeah would have undoubtedly reignited their campaign against him had they suspected him of deviant behavior. In the least, these documents attest to Luzzatto’s high status as a kabbalast among Jews in the Land of Israel: both communities claimed Luzzatto for themselves and posthumously celebrated him as a saint.\footnote{Or ha-Hayim on Deuteronomy 15:7.}

\footnote{There is a debate concerning Luzzatto’s place of burial. The general claim is that Luzzatto was indeed buried in Tiberias, evidenced by a tomb overlooking the Kineret, which was remodeled by the State of Israel. However, scholars have generally argued that Luzzatto was buried in Kefar Yasif. See A. Yaari, “Efo nikbar Ramhal,” Moznaim 4 (1932): 9–11; Haim Zohar, “R. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto in the Land of Israel” [Hebrew], Sinai 30 (1952): 281–294; M. Benayahu, “Aliyato shel Ramhal le-Erets Yisrael,” in Mazkeret...ha-Rav Yitshak Itsik ha-Levi Hertzog (Jerusalem, 1962), 467–474. Both documents seem to claim Luzzatto was buried in their respective community. While the Tiberian eulogy is the more enlightening, and seemingly reflects true knowledge of Luzzatto, it is nevertheless problematic.}
Thus, Luzzatto’s self-imposed anonymity fit a mature vision of himself and his purpose. He could have remained in Amsterdam to write and grow in stature, just as he could have swallowed his pride in the early 1730s and bided his time in order to establish himself amidst the rabbinate. However, one of Luzzatto’s (and the famous baraita’s) initial steps in spirituality was Alacrity — to pursue perfection by serving God without delay. In his early years, Luzzatto believed his cosmic role entailed expanding the intellectual pietism of his forebears throughout Padua and beyond. After some time, he turned further inward, toned down his rhetoric and expectation, and attempted to publish books that would propel Jewish society in the appropriate direction. In the Land of Israel, however, Luzzatto seems to have concluded that the totality of his mission was in devekut, in the realm of Sanctity that he described in Mesilat Yesharim. He could uplift himself spiritually by virtue of his presence in the Holy Land; he was not required to participate in the activities of kabbalists in Jerusalem, or as leader of a community elsewhere. Perhaps he settled in Acre simply because that was where he first set foot on land.

In contrast to his stay in Amsterdam, which was long shrouded, Luzzatto’s final years in Acre will likely remain a mystery. That may be fitting with respect to Luzzatto’s self-conception

Tiberias is about sixty kilometers from Acre, a full day’s journey by foot. It seems quite unlikely that Luzzatto would have been buried so far from home. Of course, he may have requested to be buried next to his spiritual ancestor Akiva, but carrying the victim of a plague in the summer for hours on end and ascending the hills of the Galilee seems unlikely (Jost made the point about carrying a victim of plague in “Die Verfolgung Luzzatto’s,” Israelitische Annalen 6 [1839]: 44). Still in contrast to the widespread tradition of Luzzatto’s burial in Tiberas, parallel stories with respect to Kefar Yasif did not develop. There is no tradition of Luzzatto’s burial in Kefar Yasif; the presumption that he was buried there stems from the inclusion of his name among several other men buried nearby. ‘Nearby,’ however, is the operative word, for an analysis of the resting place of each of the men listed in the broadside reveals an assembly of deceased holy men scattered throughout the north of Israel. Thus, there is reason to question the claim of Luzzatto’s burial in Tiberias, but there is no real evidence that he was buried elsewhere.
and life's work: with each subsequent stage, like the rungs on the ladder of saintliness, the more enigmatic Luzzatto projected.
Conclusion

Throughout his career, Moses Hayim Luzzatto’s writings were diverse and rich, displaying expert knowledge of Bible, Talmud, Kabbalah, rhetoric, science, several languages, literature, and more. Over two centuries of modern scholarship, his work has been divided into various genres, each distinct from each other as though his personality could be separated into competing aspects. Yet, Luzzatto did not have isolated creative periods in which he was driven by whim. Rather, from a young age, he was singularly focused on a life devoted to the pietistic service of God as envisioned by his kabbalistic masters. This form of piety was supported by his family and complemented by compatriots in Padua and elsewhere intent on submitting to the will of God as they perceived it. Luzzatto was motivated by an all-encompassing, if amorphous, notion of serving God that he regarded as true and good.

In my analysis of Mesilat Yesharim, I contended that Luzzatto envisioned a world that unified the spiritual and physical. Though he did divide the two spheres in principle, manifested clearly in soul and body, Luzzatto argued that devekut enabled man to see them as part of a single whole. Such a level elevated not only the individual, he contended, but the world around him — the ‘human species,’ as he penned it. Luzzatto devoted his ethical treatise to spiritual elevation, an amalgamation of individual, social, political, and religious existence. Although devekut stood as the ideal, Luzzatto admitted that it was largely unattainable; instead, perpetual betterment of the self and, for the rabbinic reader, the community was the goal. Luzzatto’s consideration of the individual and societal diversity was a social leveler, but,
ironically, his conception of the cosmos and of individuality itself retained a hierarchical structure.

In this dissertation, I have argued that Luzzatto epitomized a multi-generational group of pietists in northern Italy. Neither tangential, distinct from, nor opposed to society at large, Italian pietists were an active segment of the rabbinate. Although I have not claimed that they wielded exceptional or even significant power, I have attempted to show that they were not an insignificant element. Movement in intellectual Hasidism in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italy depended upon individual charisma and the assembly of like-minded individuals. Zacut, Vitale, Bassan, Finzi, Mendola, Luzzatto and others exhibited varying successes on the socio-communal plane, let alone their perceived cosmic level. The network that formed never developed as a movement, but Luzzatto and his compatriots in Padua sought to expand the notion of kabbalistic confraternity. Within the larger context of inter-communal relations, Jews in the early modern period were connected but not defined by their relationships with each other. Even with increased migration and communication, communities functioned separately and according to their own internal dynamics and logic.

The Luzzatto controversy was equally a reflection of rabbinic fear of Sabbatian heresy and the cosmic and social self-conceptions of Luzzatto and his compatriots in Padua. Despite the settlement, belligerent voices of intolerance ultimately prevailed. Hagiz and Katzenellenbogen kept up the pressure, enabled and fulfilled by a handful of rabbis in Venice, and Luzzatto and his circle of mystics refused to relent. This is not surprising, for each side was engaged in a struggle for supremacy – the former against possible heresy and the latter for the sake of redemption – that naturally eschewed capitulation. If the signed oath represented a
compromise in line with the voice of the nominal Italian rabbinate, then the controversy’s continuation signified the weakness of that voice, the conviction, optimism, and relative success of Luzzatto and the Padua fellowship, and the strength of external Ashkenazic rabbinic authority.

Simon Ginzburg’s 1931 biography of Luzzatto presented the young author as a tragic hero ensnared by mysticism and unjustly pursued by rabbinic authoritarians. Some sixty years later, Elisheva Carlebach presented the controversy more objectivity, aptly showing both sides as confrontational. Yet, Hagiz, not Luzzatto, served as the subject of Carlebach’s book, and the Paduan’s intense insolence was highlighted as a compelling justification for the elders’ harassment. In my own reading of the sources, Luzzatto’s resistance, based on his exceptional self-image, propelled the controversy no less than the incessant pursuit of his enemies. Had he relented, or obeyed Bassan and Morpurgo by permanently quieting himself, the uproar would have lessened. Had Luzzatto’s yeshiva remained in essence a small confraternity, without the dissemination of Gordon’s letter or Luzzatto’s later attempt to publish a book on Kabbalah, it is unlikely any controversy would have surfaced. Instead, he fought a hard campaign to defend himself and to change the minds and hearts of his detractors.

As stated previously, the most celebratory and widespread characterizations of Luzzatto proliferated among Ashkenazic Jewry during the nineteenth century. Positive memory of Luzzatto did endure in Padua, but Jewish cultural centers shifted dramatically to eastern Europe in the decades after Luzzatto’s death. It is thus ironic considering that the second stage of the controversy, which began in the autumn of 1734 and after a near-conflagration ceased in the summer of 1736, was led by rabbis north of the Alps. The controversy was reignited by the
Venetians, but the nearly two-year ordeal, during which Luzzatto’s particular communal intentions were crushed, also saw Ashkenazic rabbinates write or approve harsh bans against Luzzatto and his group. The Paduans defended themselves, some supporters rallied behind them, and Morpurgo and others preached tolerance and quiet, but Italian rabbinic authority and cohesiveness was noticeably absent — a phenomenon suggesting that Jewish cultural dominance in the first half of the eighteenth century already lay with Ashkenazic populations in central and eastern Europe.

Although historians have predominantly viewed Luzzatto as a mystic and poet, his place in the pantheon of religious Jewish communities was mostly established in relation to his authorship of Mesilat Yesharim as a ‘ba’al musar,’ an ethicist. The disconnect between living memory without respect to history, as characterized by Jewish orthodox religious society, and reconstructed history without respect to living tradition, may be bridged in a historical analysis of Luzzatto’s ethical treatise. Although I have not set out to define Luzzatto’s influence, the study of the reception history of Mesilat Yesharim can illuminate the development of orthodoxy among modern European Jewry. The Musar movement and nineteenth- and twentieth-century mitnagdic yeshivot adopted and appropriated the message of the book while shaping their religious sentiment in the modern era. In the process, Lithuanian Jewry produced the most robust and celebrated memory of Luzzatto, or ‘Ramhal’ as he became venerably called. In contrast, Hasidic groups, celebrating a given dynasty or living rebbe, preserved little to no memory of Luzzatto. Yet, Luzzatto’s emphasis on individual religious piety, and Mesilat Yesharim’s publication in eastern European cities in the late eighteenth century, may speak to
his influence in the early developments of Hasidism among the students of Israel Baal Shem and their close students. Research into what was printed when, where, and by whom in the first decades of Hasidism, coinciding with increased publication of Luzzatto’s books, could reveal correlations previously overlooked. Thus, the *Mesilat Yesharim*’s long-term appropriation by one orthodox community and its dismissal by another provide a unique lens through which to view the religious transitions from the early modern period to the more spiritually demarcated modern era.
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*Camera dei pegni* b 19, b 20, b 21, b22. Documents concerning loans made by Paduan conglomerates, some in which Jacob Vita Luzzatto took part.

*Ducali* b 123.

State Archives, Venice (Archivio di Stato di Venezia [A.S.Ve.])

195: Inventario Inquisitorato agli Ebrei

  No. 12. Contains documents concerning Jacob Vita Luzzatto.

  No. 17. Contains letters from Portuguese Jews of London, sometimes referring to Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam, sent to Venice.


  No. 38. Documents pertaining to Jewish communities of Padua, Rovigo, and Verona.

  No. 50. Hebrew documents, including printed broadsides and poems.

University of Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana

ROS. 289. Collection of polemical tracts copied by David Franco Mendes (Amsterdam, ca. 1770).
ROS. 406. *Otsrot Hayim* (Italy, 18th century) – with annotations by Moses Zacuto and Benjamin ben Eliezer Kohen Vitale.

ROS. 557. *Sefer 'asifat ya'akov* (Hamburg, ca. 1740) – mystical annotations on several subjects copied for Luzzatto.

University of Padua (Università degli Studi di Padova, Archivio Antico [U.P.C.V.A.])

Collegio Veneto Artisti


Valmadonna Trust Library, London/New York (VTL)

   No. F008. Epithalamia for wedding of Isaac Marini, composed by Isaiah Bassan (Mantua, 1725).
   No. G007. Pragmatica, 1722.
   No. G014. Pragmatica, 1740.
   No. J003. Instructions for levying taxes on individuals actively engaged in business in Mantua without being official members of the community.
   No. P010. Poem by Isaac Marini in honor of Jacob ben Moses Hai Cirido de Silva earning his medical degree.
   No. P015. Epithalamia for wedding of Jacob ben Moses Alpron, composed by Isaiah Romanin.
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