

**The City, the Ghetto and Two Books.
Venice and Jewish Early Modernity**

by *Cristiana Facchini*

Abstract

In 1638 two books written by two Venitian rabbis were published in Venice. They were both destined successfully to reach wide circulation over the following decades. This article aims at exploring the intimate connection between Venice, a city which deeply influenced the imagination of European culture during the early modern period, and its Jewish ghetto, the first of its kind to be founded within Catholic lands.

The author suggests that it was here in Venice, within the liminal space of the ghetto, that the theory of Jews as merchants, marked by undertones of utilitarianism was finally drafted. It also suggests that, in conjunction with this well-known theory, other theories based on religious tolerance were elaborated.

The paper also invites the reader to view the ghetto as a space capable of enacting special religious encounters, mainly driven by an interest in religion and rituals. Therefore, the very specific local and tangible conditions of the urban environment – the city and the ghetto – performed a very important undertaking, for example, debates over the place and role of Jews in Christian society.

The most Serene Republic and the ghetto

“And amongst the cities of Europe, Rome and Venice are the most frequented for the pleasures and delights they minister to all the beholders of them. Rome for the exceeding wonderful relics of her ancient greatness, and Venice for the gloriousness of her present and magnificent estate.” (Giovanni Botero)

In the midst of the seventeenth century, when the emersion of the absolutist monarchy was becoming a self-evident political reality, the republic of Venice proudly stood a remnant of an ancient and glorious republican past. Both a port city and the capital of a splendid maritime empire, Venice attracted a lot of interest, and despite the slow demise of its economic might, it was destined to be transformed into an everlasting

myth.¹

Urban scholars have pointed out that Venice had developed features which at a very early stage would become a trademark for ideal city planning. The port city which arose around the Doge's *Palazzo* was composed of settlements originating on the islands. These separate units were organized around the parish, and soon evolved into autonomous polities which were provided with all the main social and political organs – church, market, charity venues, representative political bodies and government members – resembling the structure of the city's government. Every autonomous area was connected by bridges and alleys which in turn integrated each of the individual units into the wider social and economic fabric of the city. “The integration within these parishes was a foundation stone of Venice social stability. The preservation of neighborhood spirit after Venice grew more densely-populated is one reason for considering Venice a model of city planning,” states Lane,² following the suggestion of Lewis Mumford who had emphasized the role of Venice as an example of an ideal city.³

Though much of that vision might sound utopian, not to say even mistaken or outdated, scholars tend to acknowledge the fact that the peculiar geography and ecological structure of the environment determined much of the urban structure and successful development of Venice. As the city developed into a maritime empire, the social and demographic structure diversified. The pertinent role attributed to trade and the mercantile character of the leading aristocracy had a significant impact on the social structure of the city and its culture. Like many other great Renaissance and late Renaissance mercantile cities, Venice was inhabited by a number of different groups. From specialized workers to merchants, Venice's urban texture was a mosaic made up of a highly diversified population. Waves of immigrants fleeing from the eastern territories flocked to the city before and after the fall of Constantinople, contributing to the creation of a “seagoing proletariat.”⁴ The area belonging to the Greeks, which developed around the Arsenal, was home to specialized workers, and later became a safe haven for members of the Hellenic nation, which also comprised of scholars and other professionals. The permission for the establishment of a church

¹ Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 13-61; *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297–1797*, eds. John Martin, Dennis Romano (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

² Frederic C. Lane, *Venice. A Maritime Republic*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 12 (quoting Mumford).

³ On the ideal image of Venice as was envisioned by Mumford see: Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, (Harcourt: Brace and Janovich, 1961). I quote from the Italian edition: *La città nella storia. Dal chiostro al Barocco*, (Milan: Bompiani 2002): 407.

⁴ Elisabeth Crouzet Pavan, *Venice Triumphant: the Horizon of a Myth*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 146.

according to their ethnic and religious tradition was finally accorded and inaugurated in 1565 with the approbation of the Holy See, even though in Rome this wide presence of members of the Greek Orthodox church was perceived as a threat.⁵

Calabi has devoted insightful research to the development of urban areas which were once inhabited by what we would call nowadays religious or ethnic “minorities,” some of which were foreign merchants.⁶ The *fondaco* of Tedeschi (the German Quarter), inhabited by the merchants who arrived from the north of Europe and were deemed pivotal for their trading networks and their merchandise, was established around the area of the Rialto market. Though the Germans lived in many different areas, the *fondaco*, which was rebuilt after the fire of 1505, became one of the most important “ethnic enclaves” of the port city.⁷ Venice was inhabited by Armenians, Slavs, Albanians, Turks, Persians and merchants from other Italian or European lands.⁸ Each area or neighborhood revolved around a few structural principles: religious institutions, ethnic affiliation (defined both by language and geographical provenance) and socio-economic functions. The “ethnic enclave” contributed to the cultural life of the city: Greeks, Germans and Armenians often owned printing enterprises, had their own scholars, *litterati* and artists, contributing in many different ways to the well-being of the city.

Like many European cities, Venice is able to recount a special story with regards to its Jewry.⁹ Home to the first “ghetto” – a name derived from

⁵ Donatella Calabi, “Gli stranieri nella capitale della repubblica Veneta nella prima età moderna”, *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* 111/2 (1999): 721-732, esp. 723-724; H. Porfyriou, “I greci a Venezia e a Roma”, in *La città italiana e i luoghi degli stranieri, XV-XVIII secolo*, eds. Donatella Calabi, Paola Lanaro, (Rome-Bari: Laterza 1998). For a negative perception of Greeks in Venice see: William Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defence of Republican Liberty. Renaissance Values in the Age of Counter-Reformation*, (Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press), 259.

⁶ Donatella Calabi, “Foreigners and the City: an Historiographical Exploration for the Early Modern Period”, *Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei. Working Papers* 15 (2006): 1-41; *Les étrangers dans la ville: minorités et espace urbain du bas Moyen Âge à l'époque moderne*, eds. Jacques Bottin, Donatella Calabi, (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1999); *Cities and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400-1700*, eds. Donatella Calabi, Stephen Turk Christensen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁷ The term *fondaco* derives from the Arab word *funduq*, and defines a structure that worked both as a warehouse and as an hospice for merchants. See: Calabi, “Foreigners and the City”, 12; Idem, “Gli stranieri nella capitale della Repubblica Veneta”, 725-726; Crouzet Pavan, *Venice Triumphant*, 163.

⁸ For oriental minorities in Venice see: Brunehilde Imhaus, *Le minoranze orientali a Venezia (1300-1510)*, (Venice: Il Veltro, 1997).

⁹ Literature on the Jews of Venice is relatively vast and very specialized. The main references are: Cecil Roth, *The Jews of Venice*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1930); Riccardo Calimani, *Storia del ghetto di Venezia*, 1st ed. (Milano: Mondadori, 1995); *Gli ebrei a Venezia*, ed. Gaetano Cozzi, (Milan: Edizioni Comunità, 1987); *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*, eds. Robert C. Davis, Benjamin Ravid, (Baltimore-

a Venetian word relating to the area of the *fonderia* where copper was thrown and melted (*gittata* and therefore *geto* in Venetian) – Venice stands as the first city on the Italian peninsula to create a compulsory residential area for its Jewry.¹⁰

The establishment of the ghetto was the outcome of two cultural traits of Christian society. Scholars acknowledge that a compulsory area allotted to the Jews followed the structure and development of the city where foreigners from various provenances, largely specialized in their functions and religiously or ethnically homogenous, as stated above, were gathered in separate quarters or islands. The establishment of the ghetto was, therefore, the coherent and logical outcome of the city planning process.¹¹ Jews – at least in Venice – similarly to Greeks, Albanians and Turks were positioned on the margins of the city, away from the centre, according to the logic of “spatial marginality.”¹² “Spatial marginality” was implemented in order to control and discipline religious, cultural and ethnic diversity. Nevertheless, Jews were not merchants (or members of a trading nation) – even though they performed economic services, such as money-lending and the trade of used or second hands goods – and religion played a major role in the process of social and urban marginalization. The same fate occurred to the Turks, who would only be permitted an independent *fondaco* in 1621, but never succeeded in receiving permission for a public space for worship.¹³ Protestants were seemingly deemed a political threat and were treated accordingly: worship could be performed only in private dwellings. In contrast to Protestants and Muslims, Jews were allowed a public space for their religious service, as we shall see below.

London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); “*Interstizi.*” *Culture ebraico-cristiane a Venezia e nei suoi domini dal medioevo all’età moderna*, eds. Uwe Israel, Robert Jütte, Reinhold C. Mueller, (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2010).

¹⁰ This article will not deal with the question of the rise and meaning of Italian “ghettoes” in the sixteenth century. For an introduction to the history of the Venetian ghetto see: *La città degli Ebrei*, eds. Ennio Concina, Ugo Camerino, Donatella Calabi, (Venice: Albrizzi, 1991). For an historical outline, see: Benjamin Ravid, “Excursus 1: the Venetian Ghetto in Historical Perspective”, in *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth Century Venetian Rabbi. Leon Modena’s Life of Judah*, ed. Mark R. Cohen, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988 henceforth quoted as *Life of Judah*), 279-283; for a general outline on Jewish quarters and ghettoes see: Donatella Calabi, “Les quartier juifs en Italie entre 15e et 17e siècles. Quelques hypothèse de travail”, *Annales HSS* (juillet-août 1997): 777-797. On papal policy regarding the segregation of the Jews, see: Kenneth Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy, 1555-1593*, (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1977); Renata Segre, “La controriforma: espulsioni, conversioni, isolamento”, in *Gli ebrei in Italia*, 1, ed. Corrado Vivanti, *Storia d’Italia*, Annali 11, (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), 709-778.

¹¹ Calabi, “Gli stranieri nella capitale della Repubblica Veneta”, 731; Idem, “Les quartier juifs en Italie.”

¹² Calabi, “Gli stranieri nella capitale della Repubblica Veneta”, 729.

¹³ Brian Pullan, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice, 1550-1670*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 154-156.

At the outset of the seventeenth-century the Jewish community of Venice had increased and developed into a relatively important settlement – an “estate of outcasts,” as Brian Pullan properly defined it – whose legacy played an important role both in the cultural debate of early modernity and the economic fabric of the city.¹⁴ From 1516, when the ghetto was first established, to the end of the century, political and religious events provoked new challenges to western European Jews. As Protestant reform spread across Europe, gaining states and cities in its path, Catholic policy against the Jews was to be reformulated. The Protestant threat was not only spreading throughout many Italian states, but it contributed to the drastic change to the urban religious landscape around Europe, either radically transforming the social and institutional fabric of a city or dividing it into a religious battlefield.¹⁵ Even if Catholic zeal might have predated the Reformation, as witnessed in Spanish state-building, its outbreak readdressed a number of religious questions which while aimed at “heretics” would definitely also target the new Christians (or *Conversos*) of Iberian descent which had fled from their country during the first decades of the sixteenth century.¹⁶ Because religious zeal and persecution increased within Spanish domains, recurrent waves of *Conversos* fled from the Iberian Peninsula and Flanders heading toward more secure shores.¹⁷ The Jewish community of Amsterdam was founded by former *Conversos* which returned to Judaism, whereas many Iberian *Conversos* (or new Christians) converted to Judaism within the

¹⁴ Ibid., 146.

¹⁵ France is a good example of the war of religion. See Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays*, (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1975). Religious practices survived even when certain groups became religious minorities. For the Dutch case see: Kristine Kooi, “Popish Impudence: the Perseverance of the Roman Catholic Faithful in Calvinist Holland, 1572-1620”, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26/1 (1995): 75-85; C. Scott Dixon, “Urban Order and Religious Coexistence in the German Imperial City: Augsburg and Donauwoerth, 1548-1608”, *Central European History* 40 (2007): 1-33.

¹⁶ *Conversos*, *Marranos*, or crypto-Jews are terms that define Jews from the Iberian peninsula who had been forced to convert to Christianity. Many of them were persecuted by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition as heretics professing hidden forms of Judaism. Some of them were committed Christians, some converted to Judaism or were asked to convert to Judaism (as in Venice, for example); some of them kept double religious identities. The term “*Sephardim*” generically defines Jews (and sometimes conversos) of Iberian descent. For introductory remarks see: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto. Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971); *Jews and Conversos*, ed. Yosef Kaplan, (Jerusalem, World Union of Jewish Studies, 1985); Idem, *From Christianity to Judaism. The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro*, Engl. trans. (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004); Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers. The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*, (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2009), 204 note 3.

¹⁷ On the *conversos* diaspora see: Jonathan Israel, *Diasporas within a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews, and the World of Maritime Empires (1540-1740)*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2002).

cities of the Turkish Empire.¹⁸

Catholic politics directed at the Iberian new Christians and Jews was for the most part controversial and ambivalent. Both Popes Paul III and Julius III – together with the Grand Duke of Tuscany and Ercole II of Este Duke of Ferrara – had expressed their will to invite the Iberian Christian converts and Jews to settle in Italian cities, granting them full protection from religious persecution, especially from the Inquisition tribunals which had been introduced in every Italian state in order to avert Protestant ‘heresy’.¹⁹ The first charters were so liberal that they also included the Turks and other “infidels” in so far as these groups, specialized in economic tasks, would foster trade and thereby improve the economy.²⁰ As a result of such a liberal policy, the Iberian Jews and the new Christians flocked to many Italian cities: of which Livorno, Ferrara, Ancona and Pesaro are amongst the most significant.²¹

The sudden decision of Pope Paul IV to reverse the liberal policy of his predecessors and align himself with the more zealous Spanish ally was inaugurated in 1555, when the papal bull *Cum nimis absurdum* was issued. As the Pope and the Spanish crown increased their means of control over religious beliefs and practices in order to contain religious dissent,²² the official policy on urban and religious segregation came into place and was slowly implemented in many Italian states until the eighteenth century.²³ Moreover, privileges granted for sheer economic reasons to *Conversos* or Jews who had once been Christians were to be quickly revoked, causing the Iberian Jews and *Conversos* to seek new safe havens. When the privileges granted to the Iberian Jews began to be withdrawn in other Italian cities, Venice decided to welcome them and issued a few charters which granted a number of privileges.²⁴ At the outset of the

¹⁸ Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation. Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam*, (Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999); Steven Nadler, *Spinoza. A Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chap. 1.

¹⁹ *L'inquisizione e gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Michele Luzzati, (Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1994).

²⁰ Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, Benjamin Ravid, “Venice, Rome, and the Reversion of New Christian to Judaism: a Study in *ragione di stato*”, in *L'identità dissimulata. Giudaizzanti iberici nell'Europa cristiana dell'età moderna*, ed. Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, (Florence: Olschki, 2000), 151-310.

²¹ On Livorno see the article by Francesca Bregoli in this issue. For Ferrara, see: Renata Segre, “La formazione di una comunità marrana: i portoghesi a Ferrara”, in *Gli ebrei in Italia*, 1, 781-841; Aron di Leone Leone, *La nazione ebraica spagnola e portoghese di Ferrara (1492-1559)*, (Florence: Olschki, 2011).

²² The literature over Protestants in Italy is vast. See Delio Cantimori, *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento*, rev. ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1962); Massimo Firpo, *Riforma protestante ed eresie nell'Italia del Cinquecento. Un profilo storico*, 8th ed. (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2008).

²³ The ghettos of Piedmont were all established in the eighteenth century. See: Attilio Milano, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1961), 286-337.

²⁴ Benjamin Ravid, “The Venitian Government and the Jews”, in *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*, 5-30.

seventeenth century, the Venetian Jewish population had visibly increased. The ghetto had expanded and its social and cultural structure had metamorphosed into a microcosm of different Jewish sub-cultures. The older layer comprised of Ashkenazi Jews and the Italian descendents specialized in money lending and small enterprises; a second layer was composed of Levantine Jews who had been subjects of the Turkish empire and had converted to Judaism in the Muslim land; and ultimately a layer of a more recent migrated population originating from Spain and Portugal, from northern Europe and other Italian states which negotiated a charter at the end of sixteenth century, and were legally recognized as Ponentini Jews.²⁵ Amongst this new immigration wave of Iberian descendents, a small number were and remained Christian converts.²⁶

A city and two books

Venice – like Amsterdam – had many benefits to offer to Jews. Besides the traditional occupations, there were opportunities for business and trade, the chance to attend one of the few universities open to Jews in the nearby city of Padua and partake of the thriving printing enterprise which made the city unique.²⁷ Undeniably, in the seventeenth-century, the Inquisition tribunal provoked a cultural impoverishment as its control over books and human lives increased, even if in Venice it was less intrusive than elsewhere, partly due to the fact that its structure was not wholly under Rome's control.²⁸

The cultural creativity of Venice during the first half of the seventeenth-century reverberated through the walls of the ghetto, inhabited by a multitude of different personalities and crossed by a number of different activities. It is precisely at the intersection between the city and the ghetto that two of the most important books on Judaism were created, written and published. *Historia de' riti Hebraici* written by the renowned polymath, rabbi Leon Modena (1571–1648), and the *Discorso circa il stato*

²⁵ Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 149-152.

²⁶ Federica Ruspio, “Una comunità di marrani a Venezia”, *Zakbor* 5 (2002): 53-85; Idem, *La nazione portoghese: ebrei ponentini e nuovi cristiani a Venezia*, (Turin: Zamorani, 2007); Idem, “La nazione portoghese a Venezia (secc. xvi-xvii secc.)”, in “*Interstizi*”, 371-404.

²⁷ On the relevance of the Studio of Padua for Venice see: David Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), chap. 3.

²⁸ Adriano Prospero, *Tribunali della coscienza: inquisitori, confessori, missionari*, 2nd ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 2009); for censorship on books: Paul Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); for the Inquisition and Jews in Venice see: Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, “Jews, Crypto-Jews, and the Inquisition”, in *The Jews of Venice*, 97-116; Idem, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia contro ebrei e giudaizzanti*, 14 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 1980-99).

de gl'Hebrei, composed by his younger colleague, rabbi and philosopher Simone (Simcha) Luzzatto (1583-1663), were both printed in Venice in 1638.

Leon Modena has been deemed one of the most controversial, misunderstood yet significant, rabbis of the early seventeenth century.²⁹ He was a polymath and a religious leader who wrote extensively in Italian and Hebrew. His extensive works covered all possible literary genres and answered the multifarious needs of a religious community. Although some scholars have pointed out his marginality, he played a pivotal role not only in Venice, but also for the Jewish community of Amsterdam.³⁰ Moreover, Modena's works highlight noteworthy features of religious modernity: his critique of Kabbalah, his autobiographical journal and his innovative polemical work against Christianity, to mention but a few, all indicate the achievements of one of the most brilliant Jewish scholars of the period and the wide range of his interests.³¹

Simone Luzzatto his younger fellow and colleague, was a renowned scientist whose works were highly praised amongst scholars of the time. His fame relied on his oral teachings, if we believe what Isaac Cantarini reported in one of the letters he sent to the Christian hebraist C. T. Unger.³² Indeed, his immense erudition in natural science (especially astronomy) was praised by a number of Jewish scholars: amongst them was Joseph Shlomo Delmedigo who had studied in Padua with Galileo and Jacob Frances, the famed opponent of Sabbatai Sevi.³³

Contrary to Modena, Luzzatto's printed works are few and very specific in genre, mostly written in Italian: the first and most notable was his *Discorso circa il stato de' gl'Hebrei* which has been thoroughly analysed by various scholars in Jewish history.³⁴ His second work, *Socrate*, is a

²⁹ *The Lion Shall Roar. Leone Modena and his World*, ed. David Malkiel, (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press and Ben Zvi, 2003).

³⁰ See: Nadler, *Baruch Spinoza*, passim.

³¹ Modena wrote extensively on many relevant Jewish topics related to Judaism. For a biographical account see: Howard Adelman, *Failure and Success in the Seventeenth Century Ghetto of Venice: the Life and Thought of Leon Modena, 1571-1648*, PhD Dissertation, (Brandeis University, 1985).

³² See the correspondence between Isaac Cantarini and Christoph Theophil Unger in *Otsar nehmad*, 3, (Vienna: 1860), 137 (Heb).

³³ *Sefer elim* was published in Amsterdam by Menasseh ben Israel. See Isaac Barzilay, *Yoseph Shlomo Delmedigo (Yasbar of Candia): his Life, Works and Times*, (Leiden: Brill 1974), 42 and note 4; Ruderman, *Jewish Thought*, chap. 4. Benjamin Ravid, "Biblical Exegesis à la Mercantilism and Raison d'état in Seventeenth Century Venice: the Discorso of Simone Luzzatto", in *Bringing the Hidden to Light: the Process of Interpretation. Studies in Honor of Stephen A. Geller*, eds. Kathryn F. Kravitz, Diane M. Sharon, (Ann Arbor: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 169-186, 169, 170. On Jacob Frances see: Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi. The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 516-518.

³⁴ For the purpose of this article I will always refer to: Simone Luzzatto, *Discorso circa il stato de' gl'Hebrei, et in particolare dimoranti nell'inclita città di Venetia*, facsimile dell'edizione veneziana del 1638, (Bologna: Saletta, 1976). Henceforth quoted as *Discorso*.

fascinating and yet cryptic philosophical work, the content of which has been described as mainly influenced by skeptical strains of thought.³⁵ His Hebrew works were written mainly in the form of legal *responsa*.³⁶

Given the length and scope of this article, I would like to explore the intimate connection between the city of Venice, the ghetto and its Jewish culture and how certain special traits of Venice's early modernity defined the content of these very important Jewish works. Leone Modena and Simone Luzzatto both contributed to a new concept of the collective identity of Jews and their role within Christian society during times of religious strife and fragmentation. In order to shed some light on these questions we might follow the book whose redaction historians know in great detail: *Historia de' riti Hebraici*.³⁷

The rabbi and the ambassador

“When the Torah portions Tazria and Metzora were read in 5389 (April 28, 1629) I preached in the synagogue of the Sephardim, may God their Rock protect them and grant them long life. In attendance were the brother of the king of France, who was accompanied by some French noblemen and by five of the most important Christian preachers who gave sermons that Pentecost. God put such learned words into my

³⁵ Simone Luzzatto, *Socrate, ouero dell'humano sapere*, (Venice: Tomasini, 1651); on this text see: Ruderman, *Jewish Thought*, chap. 5; Ariel Viterbo, “Socrate nel ghetto: lo scetticismo mascherato di Simone Luzzatto”, *Studi veneziani* 38 (1999): 79-128.

³⁶ His works were first mentioned in: Jo. Christ. Wolf, *Bibliothecae hebraeae*, 3, (Hamburg – Leipzig: Theod. Christoph. Felgineri, 1727), 1150-1152.

³⁷ For the redaction of this article I do refer to the Paris edition: *Historia de gli riti hebraici: dove si dà breve e total relatione di tutta la vita, costumi, è riti e osserbanze de gl'Hebrei di questi tempi*, di Leon Modena, Rabi Hebreo di Venetia (Paris: 1637); and the Venitian edition of (1638): *Historia de riti hebraici, vita et osservanza de gl'Hebrei di questi tempi*, di Leon Modena Rabi Hebreo da Venetia, (Venice: Calleoni, 1638). I did use the 1678 edition (Venice: Benedetto Miloco, 1678). Henceforth quoted as *Riti*. The 1638 version was reprinted many times: Venice 1669, 1673, 1678, 1694, 1714, Modena, 1728, Rome 1932-33, Bologna, 1979. A German translation of the *Riti*, based on the two editions and the Venitian manuscript has been recently published: Leon Modena, *Juedische Riten, sitten un gebräuche*, ed. and transl. by Rafael Arnold, (Wiesbaden: Marixverlag, 2007); for the French edition see: Richard Simon, *Les juifs présentés aux chrétiens. Cérémonie et coutumes qui s'observent aujourd'hui parmi les Juifs par Léon Modène* traduit par Richard Simon, suivi de *Comparaison des cérémonies des Juifs et de la discipline de l'église*, eds. Jacques Le Brun – Guy G. Stroumsa, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998). The title of the first manuscript copy reads *Vita, riti e costumi de gl'Hebrei – in brevissimo compendio ma amplamento raccolti et descritti*. This copy was presented in September 1628 to William Boswell and is now at St. John's College Library in Cambridge. See: Howard Adelman, “Leon Modena: the Autobiography and the Man”, in *Life of Judah*, 28-29; Jacques Le Brun, *Ceremonies*, XXI; P. van Roode, “Conception of Judaism as a Religion in the Seventeenth Century Dutch Republic”, in *Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Diana Wood, (Cambridge: Ecclesiastical History Society by Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 307.

mouth that all were pleased, including many other Christians who were present.”³⁸

In a fit of self-praise, while highlighting and praising his own skillful abilities as a preacher, Leon Modena recorded the visit of Gaston, Duc d’Orleans, brother of King Louis XIII, his entourage of Christian nobility and preachers. A few years later, his sermons would be also attended by Henri Duc de Rohan, an eminent Huguenot refugee who was spending his exile in Venice as a commander in chief for the Venetian Army.³⁹ Obviously, sermons were not only an important moment of ritual for Jews, but a sort of religious performance which attracted Christians from different creeds. Christian princes and nobility enjoyed attending the sermons in the synagogues of Western Europe. A short time later however, in a different yet closely related setting, the Prince of Orange, Frederick Henri, and the Queen of England, Henrietta Maria, visited the marvelous Sephardic synagogue in Amsterdam, where Manasseh ben Israel gave a moving sermon especially for the occasion.⁴⁰ Visiting the Venetian ghetto, in the early seventeenth-century, was a cultural experience many travellers could not miss. Starting from the end of sixteenth century, Christian travellers and scholars would seek Jewish ritual in every city they visited. The most famous depiction is provided in the beautiful travelogue by Michel de Montaigne who, contrary to many others, was not pleased with his Venetian stay. In his oft-quoted *Journal de voyage* Montaigne described with accuracy and relative neutrality certain Jewish rituals: a circumcision, a Shabbat service, and conversionary sermons in Rome.⁴¹ Montaigne paid equal attention to Christian rituals as well: as a Catholic he was easily permitted to visit and attend all Roman religious performances which constituted an obvious source of interest and pleasure to him.

The most quoted account with regards to the Venetian Jewish ghetto was penned by Thomas Coryat, an English Protestant traveller who published a book in 1611 devoted to his European tour.⁴² The *Crudities*

³⁸ Leon Modena, *Life of Judah*, 131.

³⁹ Howard Adelman, Benjamin Ravid, “Historical Notes”, in *Life of Judah*, folio 21b, 242.

⁴⁰ *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: the Golden Age*, eds. Marten Roy Prak, Diane Webb, engl. transl. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 219; Yosef Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity. The Sephardi Diaspora in Western Europe*, (Leiden: Brill 2000), 32-33.

⁴¹ I generally refer to the Italian edition: Michel Montaigne, *Viaggio in Italia*, (Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1991).

⁴² Thomas Coryat, *Coryat’s Crudities*, (1611). I refer to the following edition (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1905). This book is often quoted, but information recorded must be taken with caution. See: Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of the Early Modern Italy. Essays on Perception and Communication*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 15-24. On travelers and the ghetto see: Abraham Melamed, “English Travellers and Venetian Jewish Scholars – The Case of Simone Luzzatto and

was not only one of the most important books in English travel literature, but also a disguised form of critique on English polity in the background of the description of the Venetian political system.⁴³ Though the travelogue highlights his European tour through Switzerland, France, Savoy and certain Italian cities, most of it dwells on the details of Venice, its architecture, its social and political institutions, not to mention its religious orders and culture. Coryat's encounter with the Jews is recorded throughout his journey, but he extensively describes the Venetian ghetto, portraying its synagogues, inhabitants, the annual liturgical service, the beautiful women in magnificent dresses and ultimately a famous encounter with a rabbi with whom the Protestant traveller entertained a theological discussion. *Crudities* – like many other travelogues – blends together keen observations based on facts, precise details and fictitious tales, founded on stereotypical images produced by the culture at the time; yet it highlights why Jewish rituals were deemed interesting and significant for certain Europeans.⁴⁴

Modena's private journal and his correspondence with Christian Hebraists implies that the first draft of *Riti* was penned on the behest of an English nobleman who aimed to present it to King James I.⁴⁵ As Cecil Roth argued, the nobleman was likely to be Sir Henry Wotton who was the ambassador for Venice representing the English king, James I, and who lived next to the ghetto. Roth also intimated that the rabbi described in Coryat's travelogue was Leon Modena, and this notion has been widely accepted and repeated by many scholars afterwards. Moreover, during his stay in Venice in the spring of 1608, Coryat described in detail the people who were attending the English embassy.

“Here againe I wil once more speake of our most worthy Ambassador Sr Henry Wotton, honoris causa, because his house was in the same street

James Harrington”, in *Gli ebrei e Venezia*, 507-525; Benjamin Ravid, “Christian Travellers and the Ghetto of Venice: some Preliminary Observations”, in *Between History and Literature: Studies in Honor of Isaac Barzilay*, ed. Stanley Nash, (Bnei Brak, 1997), 111-150.

⁴³ See, Andrew Hadfield, *Literature Travel and Colonial Writing in the English Renaissance 1545-1625*, Oxford 1998, pp. 58-68.

⁴⁴ Coryat's travelogue is rich with description of religious rituals and practices, not to mention conversations with famed scholars, like Casaubon. At the same time, he is a strongly opinionated observer, very often quite flawed, as when describing Greek biblical scholarship in Venice.

⁴⁵ Cecil Roth, “Leone da Modena and the Christian Hebraists”, in *Jewish Studies in Memory of Israel Abrahams*, (New York: Press of the Jewish Institute of Religion, 1927), 384-401; Idem, “Leone da Modena and England”, *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 11 (1929): 206-27; Idem, “Leone da Modena and his English Correspondents”, *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 17 (1951-52): 39-43; Howard Adelman, “Rabbi Leon Modena and the Christian Kabbalists”, in *Renaissance Rereadings*, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-286.

(when I was in Venice) where the Jewish Ghetto is, even in the streete called St. Hieronimo, and but a little from it. Certainly he hath greatly graced and honoured his country by that most honourable port that he hath maintayned in this noble City, by his generose carriage and most elegant and gracious behaviour amongst the greatest Senators and Clarissimoes, which like the true adamant, had that attractive vertue to winne him their love and grace in the highest measure. And the rather I am induced to make mention of him, because I received many great favours at his hands in Venice, for the which (I must confesse) I am most deservedly engaged unto him in all due observance and obsequious respects while I live. Also those rare vertues of the minde wherewith God hath abundantly inriched him, his singular learning and exquisite knowledge in the Greeke and Latin, and the famousest languages of Christendome, which are excellently beautified with a plausible volubility of speech, have purchased him the inward friendship of all the Christian Ambassadors resident in the City; and finally his zealous conversation, (which is the principall thing of all) piety, and integrity of life, and his true worship of God in the middest of Popery, superstition, and idolatry (for he hath service and sermons in his house after the Protestant manner, which I thinke was never before permitted in Venice, that solid Divine and worthy Schollar Mr. William Bedel being his Preacher at the time of my being in Venice) will be very forcible motives (I doubt not) to winne many soules to Jesus Christ, and to draw divers of the famous Papists of the City to the true reformed religion, and profession of the Gospell.”⁴⁶

The information provided in this abstract is rich in detail: above all, it stresses how, even in Venice, the embassy pertaining to a Protestant country was topographically situated near to the ghetto. This proximity might not be coincidental and it bears the logic of “spatial marginalization” as mentioned above: Jews and Protestants had been perceived as outside the Catholic fold and therefore placed, in the city, as contiguous. Second, it clearly states that Protestant worship, which was not allowed in Venice as in many Catholic cities, was performed in private usually in the house of the ambassador, Henry Wotton, whose erudition in ancient languages was highly praised by Coryat. The official preacher of this unofficial religious service was the “solid Divine and worthy Scholar” William Bedell,⁴⁷ an Anglican with Puritanical leanings

⁴⁶ Coryat, *Coryat's Crudities*, 1, 379.

⁴⁷ William Bedell (1577-1644) became a Protestant bishop in Ireland and a translator the Bible into Gaelic. See: Adelman, “Leon Modena: the Autobiography and the Man”, in *Life of Judah*, 25-26. Roth, “Leone da Modena and his English Correspondents”, 41. See also: *A True Relation of the Life and Death of the Right Reverend Father in God William Bedell, Lord Bishop of Kilmore in Ireland*, ed. Thomas Wharton Jones, (Camden Society, 1872), online text (<http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/c/cdl/>); *Two Biographies of William Bedell*,

and chaplain for the embassy, someone who mingled with Jews and befriended Paolo Sarpi and Fulgenzio Micanzio. In 1608 Bedell wrote to an English correspondent, stating that Jewish sermons were much more refined and theologically more sound than those found in Catholic preaching. He later recalled, with great nostalgia, his time in Venice, where he had had the most interesting theological discussions with Jews from the ghetto.⁴⁸ It is noteworthy to say that the English embassy was also close to the monastery of the Serviti Friars, where the most famous Venetian monk and opponent of the Holy See, frà Paolo Sarpi, lived.⁴⁹ Gaetano Cozzi suggested that Sarpi's "golden volume" on the origins of Christianity – *Trattato delle materie beneficarie* – might have been influenced by the dialogues he had had with Venetian Jews.⁵⁰

These historical notes form a reminder that the *Riti* was written under the influence of both cultural and religious constraints, during a time when Venice went through a radical clash against Rome. In the short period of the *Interdetto* Venice became the meeting point of Protestant scholars: Anglicans were seeking Hebrew teachers and Bible advisors. It was during this time that the King James version of the Bible was to be finalized and Giovanni Diodati, the great Calvinist translator of the Bible into Italian also happened to be present whilst endeavoring to influence and implement a rapprochement between the *Serenissima* and the protestant countries.⁵¹ It is worth noting that Diodati, who was in Venice during 1605 and 1608, was in cohorts with Wotton, Bedell, Sarpi and other Philo-protestant members of the Venetian elite. Modena's protestant connection is strengthened by other relationships which were to developed during this period too. For example, the scholarly friendship with Andreas Colvius, a Dutch protestant who resided in

Bishop of Kilmore: with a Selection of his Letters and an Unpublished Treatise, ed. E.S. Shuckburgh, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1902).

⁴⁸ See: Cozzi, "Società veneziana, società ebraica", in *Gli ebrei e Venezia*, 348.

⁴⁹ It is also mentioned in Coryat's book. On Paolo Sarpi and his relationship with Jews of the ghetto much has been hinted at. See: Adelman, "Leon Modena: the Autobiography and the Man", in *Life of Judah*, 26; Talya Fishman, *Shaking the Pillars of Exile: 'Voice of a Fool' and Early Jewish Critique of Rabbinic Culture*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 17-21.

⁵⁰ The definition is given by Edward Gibbon. See: Cozzi, "Società veneziana, società ebraica", in *Gli ebrei a Venezia*, 347-348. For the English version of the book: *Treatise of Beneficiary Matters: or a History of Ecclesiastical Benefices and Revenues*, by Father Paul, of the Order of the Servites, and Consulter of State to the Republick of Venice, translated from the most Correct Copy in Italian extant, printed at Mirandola, 1676 (London – Westminster, 1727).

⁵¹ Giovanni Diodati (1576-1649) was born in Geneve in a family of Protestants from Lucca (Tuscany). His translation of the Bible in Italian was published in 1607 and is deemed as important as the English version of the King James Bible. For a biography of Diodati see: Maria Betts, *Life of Giovanni Diodati: Genevese Theologian*, (London: Charles J. Thynne, 1905); William A. McComish, *The Epigones: A Study of the Theology of the Genevan Academy at the Time of the Synod of Dort, with Special Reference to Giovanni Diodati*, (Allison Park, PA: Pickwith, 1989).

Venice from 1620 to 1627 together with the Dutch ambassador, Johan Berck, whose works appear to have been influenced by Sarpi.⁵²

Modena was very proud of his Christian friends and acquaintances. His recurrent remarks about his intellectual ties with Christian scholars are reiterated topics within his own private writings. Moreover, during the course of his life he devoted some of his time to teaching Hebrew, the Bible, Rabbinics and Kabbalah to the Christians, and his fame increased over the years. Jean Plantavit de la Pause, a renowned Catholic Hebraist whom Modena had taught Hebrew in Florence, offered him a position in Paris as a lecturer in Hebrew.⁵³

There is, though, an ironic flavor to the story. The book Modena devoted to Jewish rituals and ceremonies stands unequivocally at the centre of his learned encounter. It was composed under Protestant influences and meant for a Protestant readership. Nevertheless, it was published in Paris in 1637 sponsored by the Catholic Orientalist Jacques Gaffarel (1601-1681). Gaffarel, who wrote a quite critical preface to the book, and who had met Modena during his travels to Italy while seeking oriental manuscripts on behalf of Cardinal Richelieu.⁵⁴ In 1637, few years after their meeting, Modena penned a missive where he described a moment of great turmoil for the Jews and profound distress for himself:

“Afterwards, on the 7th of Adar 5397 (March 1637) sentence was handed down on all those terrified Jews, and they were ordered to be banished forever⁵⁵ About two years earlier I had given a certain Frenchman who knew the Holy tongue, M. Giacomo Gaffarel, a certain book to read. I had written it more than twenty years earlier at the request of an English nobleman, who intended to give it to the king of England. In it I relate all the laws, doctrines and customs of the Jews at the present time in their dispersion. When I wrote it I was not careful about not writing things contrary to the Inquisition, because it was only in manuscript and was meant to be read by people who were not of the Pope’s sect.⁵⁶ After reading it, that Frenchman asked me to leave it with

⁵² Adelman – Ravid, “Historical Notes”, in *Life of Judah*, folio 20b, 240. For information about Colvius see: François Secret, “Notes sur les hébraisants chrétiens, I: Léon Modène et Gisbert Voetius”, *Revue des études juives* 124 (1965): 157-177, 157-159. For Colvius’ relationship with Sarpi see: Vittorio Frajese, “La selva Arcana Papatus di proprietà di Andreas Colvius: per la storia della fortuna di Paolo Sarpi”, *Dimensione e problemi della ricerca storica* I (1992), 37-60.

⁵³ Leon Modena, *Life of Judah*, 174 and Adelman, Ravid, “Historical Notes”, in *Life of Judah*, folios 35b-36a, 267-268.

⁵⁴ See Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science. The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason*, (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 62-76, 69.

⁵⁵ On this event see: Gaetano Cozzi, *Giustizia contaminata*, (Venice: Marsilio, 1996).

⁵⁶ For Modena’s attitude to the printing press, see: Jacob Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah. Leon Modena, Jewish Mysticism, Early Modern Venice*, (Princeton – Oxford:

him and he would print it in France. I agreed, but did not think of editing out the things that the Inquisition in Italy might find unacceptable in a printed book. Two years later, after I had given up hope that the Frenchman might print it, on the second day of Passover 5397 (April 10, 1637), someone brought me a letter from him, in which he told me that he had printed the book in Paris. He did not divulge to whom he had made the dedication or whether he had changed anything in the book, or the like.

My heart immediately began pounding, and I went to look at a copy of it that I still had from the time I had written it. I saw four or five things of importance of which it is forbidden to speak, much less to write and needless to say to print, against the will of the Inquisition. Heartbroken, I shouted and tore at my beard until I almost lost my breath. I said to myself, ‘When this book is seen in Rome, it will become a stumbling block for all the Jews and for me, in particular’. They will say, ‘How insolent are they to print in the vernacular, informing the Christians not only of their laws, but also of some matters contrary to our religion and belief.’”⁵⁷

If it can be said that Modena was accurate, Gaffarel met him approximately around 1634-35, therefore the first written account of the book must have been written as early as 1612-13.⁵⁸ Jacques Gaffarel who belonged to an influential group of Christian scholars was actively involved with Jewish mysticism, following the path of Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Christian Kabbalists conceived the Jewish esoteric lore as an ancient religious source helping them shed light on Christian dogmas and beliefs. Christian Kabbalists strove to incorporate some of the teachings of the Kabbalah into the body of certain Christian doctrines. These were inspired by a utopian vision, which proved ultimately to be an elaborate concept of universal Christianity while, eventually, upholding the conversion of Jews. Gaffarel belonged to this assorted group of utopian Catholics who aimed, amongst other things, to find a viable solution to the religious divide in Europe.⁵⁹ Gaffarel penned a Kabbalistic work which was printed in 1625,⁶⁰ and another called,

Princeton University Press, 2011), chap. 1.

⁵⁷ Adelman – Ravid, “Historical Notes”, in *Life of Judah*, folio 25b, 146-147.

⁵⁸ Natalie Zemon Davis, “Fame and Secrecy: Leon Modena’s Life as an Early Modern Autobiography”, in *Life of Judah*, 63 note 38. Other scholars offered 1633 as the year of Gaffarel stay in Venice.

⁵⁹ French Catholicism was distressed by religious strife and conflict. It is no surprise that theoretical and theological attempts to find a viable theory of religious tolerance were pursued in this context. See: Massimo Firpo, *Il problema della tolleranza religiosa nell’età moderna. Dalla Riforma protestante a Locke*, (Turin, Loescher: 1978); Peretz Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration came to the West*, (Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁶⁰ *Abdita divinae Cabalae mysteria*, (Paris: Blageart, 1625); for the French translation, see:

Curiositez inouyes sur la sculpture talismanique des Persans, horoscope des Patriarches et lecture des estoiles, published in 1629 which was widely circulated in Europe gaining him both fame and contempt.⁶¹ Even though it encountered Catholic censorship, this latter work, devoted to astrology, talismans, alphabets and the interpretation of nature, along with insight into ancient biblical and oriental religions, was translated into English by Edmund Chilmead who happened to be the first translator of the *Riti*.⁶²

The Venetian ghetto was an ideal place for cultural exchange. A practical Kabbalah, based on a vast production, circulation and consumption of pamphlets on magic, amulets and horoscopes met the curiosity and need of both Christian and Jewish societies. Therefore the ghetto became a providential urban spot where Christians mingled with Jews in search of objects such as amulets, booklets, horoscopes or magical spells in order to be able to cope with the unpredictability and harshness of daily life.⁶³ Modena himself was not alien to these practices: he manufactured and sold amulets and strongly relied upon personal horoscopes. One of his sons, Mordecai, died, possibly poisoned by the fumes he inhaled during an alchemic experiments he conducted, when in cohorts with a priest, he tried to craft silver.⁶⁴ Modena's grandson, Isaac min Haleviim, (or Isaac Levi) to whom Modena left part of his collection of manuscripts as a bequest, was depicted within archival sources, as a major charlatan, and a king of the ghetto providing practical Kabbalah to be quickly used and

Profonde mystère de la cabale divine, (Paris: Beaudelot, 1912) and (Milan: Sebastiani, 1975). On this work see, Saverio Campanini, "Eine späte Apologie der Kabbala. Die Abditia divinae Cabalae Mysteria des Jacques Gaffarel", in *Topik und Tradition. Prozesse der Neuordnung von Wissensüberlieferungen des 13. bis 17. Jahrhunderts*, eds. by Thomas Frank, Ursula Kocher, Ulrike Tarnow, (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2007), 325-351. On Gaffarel and Modena see: Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah*, 157-160.

⁶¹ (Paris: Hervé du Mesnil, 1629). His other works might be very interesting in order to grasp the circulation of religious ideas: *Codicum Cabalisticorum manuscriptorum ...*, (Paris: H. Blageart, 1651); *Iacobi Gaffarelli theologi ...*, (Paris: Carolus du Mesnil, 1645); *In obitum illustrissimae nobilissimaeque dominae d. Annae Lescapier ...*, (Venice: Pinelliana, 1633); *Nihil, fere nihil, minus nihilo ...*, (Venice: Pinelliana, 1634).

⁶² Both published in 1650. Jacques Gaffarel, *Unheard-of Curiosities Concerning the Talismanical Sculpture of the Persians* (London: G.D. for H. Moseley, 1650); Leon Modena, *The History of the Rites, Customs, and Manner of Life, of the Present Jews, throughout the World*, (London: J. Martin – J. Ridley, 1650).

⁶³ Federico Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli. Chiave di Salomone e libri di magia a Venezia nei secoli XVII e XVIII*, (Milan: Sylvestre Bonnard, 2009), chap. 6.

⁶⁴ Leon Modena, *Life of Judah*, 108. For an assessment on magic and Judaism in the early modern period see: David Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: the Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Moshe Idel, "Jewish Magic from the Renaissance Period to Early Hasidism", in *Religion, Science and Magic*, eds. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher, (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 82-117.

consumed.⁶⁵ Even the story revolving around Sara Copia Sullam, the famed poetess from the ghetto highlights an intimacy with magic.⁶⁶ Kabbalah and magic appeared to permeate Jewish life within the ghetto, and more broadly, life in Venice.⁶⁷

Obviously Gaffarel reached the Venetian ghetto with high expectations: during his stay in Italy, one of his main tasks was to collect the manuscripts of Count Pico della Mirandola's translations of Jewish texts. In the ghetto, he could find Kabbalistic manuscripts of any sort, buy amulets and tracts with mysterious symbolisms or any astrological works that could enlighten his knowledge on the mysteries of nature. Gaffarel left Venice with one copy of the *Riti* and a few other valuable oriental manuscripts which he allegedly purchased and illegally smuggled out of the lagoon city.⁶⁸ The Catholic Orientalist probably also encountered Luzzatto together with Modena: no clear evidence has been recovered, but the treatment of the Kabbalah represented in their works, suggest more than an amicable exchange of thought.

An ethnography of Judaism?

It remains unclear why Modena decided to reprint his work on Jewish ceremonies in Venice after supervision by the Inquisition. According to the letter he sent to an English correspondent he had implied his endeavor in overcoming Catholic censorship,⁶⁹ but then fraught at the possibility that his book might be deemed offensive by the Catholic Church (in Rome) and terrorized by local scandal which shocked Venice in 1636, he voluntarily submitted one copy of the *Riti* into the hands of the Inquisition.⁷⁰ The text was revised and reprinted in 1638. Modena

⁶⁵ Barbierato, *Nella stanza*, 311.

⁶⁶ Alberto Fortis, *La bella ebrea. Sara Copio Sullam, poetessa nel ghetto di Venezia del '600*, (Turin: Zamorani, 2003) and bibliographical references there; for the English translation of her works: Sara Copia Sullam, *Jewish Poet and Intellectual in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, ed. and transl. Don Harràn, (Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁶⁷ Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions. Tales of Magic, Marriage and Power at the End of Renaissance*, (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶⁸ According to Barbierato, Gaffarel stole three pichian manuscripts from the library of the monastery of S. Antonio di Castello. See: Barbierato, *Nella stanza*, 312. He quotes Antonella Barzazi, *Ordini religiosi e biblioteche a Venezia tra Cinque e Seicento* (Bologna: Il Mulino 1995), 216-217.

⁶⁹ The letter was addressed to William Boswell. See: Adelman, Ravid, "Historical Notes", in *Life of Judah*, folio 25a, 256; Roth, "Leone da Modena", 40-41.

⁷⁰ See Cecil Roth, "Léon de Modene, ses *Riti ebraici* et le Saint Office à Venise", *Revue des études juives* 87 (1929), 83-88; Adelman, Ravid, "Historical Notes", in *Life of Judah*, folio 25b, 257. They all refer to the archival material: "Relatione de tutti riti, costumi et vita degl'Hebrei", ASV, Santo Uffizio, busta 94, Aprile-Maggio 1637; busta 157, lettera L.

convincingly presents this explanation in his autobiography.

The other reason which might explain his anxiety could be that, that same year Luzzatto's *Discorso* was printed. Maybe Modena fancied that the younger rabbi had plagiarized him. Personal rivalry and the quest for fame might have influenced his decision.⁷¹

Riti is a very concise, short and yet compact manual on Jewish rituals which is designed to describe "the life, customs and beliefs of the Jews at that time."⁷² The tract is comprised of five sections, according to the number of the books on the Torah,⁷³ and divided into 54 chapters of varying lengths, based on the weekly division of the Torah (*parashot*).⁷⁴ The organization of topics is not clearly defined and is rather haphazard, compared to those of other legal *compendia*, but the information provided is extremely detailed.⁷⁵

Modena tried to convey an "ethnography" of Judaism from an "emic perspective": even though much of the information is derivative from textual evidence (being therefore prescriptive) there is a number of details which are taken from historical data. Modena provided many examples of Jewish practices which have been supported by historical documentation: preaching, synagogue practices, mourning rituals, charities, Jewish languages, poetry, and many other historical details which contribute to the creation of a precise picture of Italian Judaism.⁷⁶ His masterpiece on ritual was both an attempt to convey an image of Judaism in his lifetime and to promote an ideal vision of the Jewish religion.

Modena was cautious and introduced himself as a "neutral writer" who had endeavored to "forget he was a Jew."⁷⁷ Likewise, Luzzatto applied the concept of "distance" as if he were an outside observer: in his own words, the observer had to "abstain from any affection or passion" in order to not be emotionally involved in the rendering of his own

⁷¹ Benjamin Ravid, *Economics and Toleration in Seventeenth Century Venice. The Background and Context of the Discorso of Simone Luzzatto*, (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1978), 17; Giuseppe Veltri, *Renaissance Philosophy in Jewish Garb*, (Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2009), 219-220.

⁷² Leon Modena, "Proemio", *Riti* (1678): "mi fosse comandato più volte dargli in iscritto una breve, et vera relatione, della vita, costumi, et osservationi de gl'Hebrei di questi tempi, il che havendo già più anni fatto, e datola ad alcuni, hora altri m'hanno sollecitato, ampliata, e regolata, darla in luce, à commune sodisfatione."

⁷³ Modena, "Proemio", *Riti* (1678).

⁷⁴ Mark R. Cohen, "Leone da Modena's *Riti*: A Seventeenth-Century Plea for Social Toleration of the Jews", *Jewish Social Studies* 34/4 (1972): 287-321, 296.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, 296. Modena would integrate material from medieval legal codes, such as *Tur* or *Shulhan Aruk*, but their structure did not provide a model.

⁷⁶ For the notion of "ethnography" on works devoted to Jewish rituals and written by Christians see the recent critical appraisal in: Veltri, *Renaissance Philosophy*, 175.

⁷⁷ Modena, "Proemio", *Riti* (1678): "Nello scriver, in verità, che mi sono scordato d'esser Hebreo, figurandomi semplice, e neutrale relatore."

culture.⁷⁸ Neutrality, unbiased description and detachment – applauded by both authors – might have been modelled on the rhetorical style of ancient texts such as Josephus who incorporated the idea of neutral witness from Thucydides.

Later on, Modena recalled in one of his letters to an Italian Christian Hebraist, that *Riti* was written in order to refute the renowned German work on Jewish rituals published in 1603 by the prominent Swiss Protestant Hebraist Johannes Buxtorf under the title *Die Judenschul*, the Latin translation of which was published a year later.⁷⁹ The comparison between the two tracts raise a quantity of related questions, and it is undeniable that Modena's effort to assert Judaism's rational and biblical character is one of the main aims of the tract – as Mark Cohen aptly underlined.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, Modena's portrayal of Jewish rituals is more than an apologetic work aimed at aggressive Christian scholars and its scope is much broader than openly admitted. Modena's Biblicism was emphasized in order to avert Catholic censorship and rabbinic sources are not openly cited but alluded to. Critical editions of the text have revealed a layer of rabbinical sources which are generically referred to within the syntagmatic phrasing “i rabbini dicono.” Stroumsa suggested that the *Riti* might be an abridged version of *Shulkan arukh*.⁸¹

Leon Modena's scholarly endeavor should be interpreted as the product of a committed religious leader: his writings are frequently marked by the immediacies of the daily problems he confronted and conveyed his ability to decrypt the many challenges which Judaism was facing. His attention to Jewish ritual is constantly apparent in his works, and despite the reasons which may have led to him to the redaction of the *Riti*, I believe that the question of relevancy of rituals in Judaism was one of his main concerns. The emphasis on rituals can be also detected in many other of his texts, most of which are in Hebrew: if rituals are extensively dealt with in his *responsa*, lengthy treatment of rituality is detectable in his polemical tract against Christianity (*Magen wa-berer*) and in *Kol sakhal*, an anti-rabbinical treatise that has recently been attributed to him.⁸²

Why is Modena's treatment of ritual so important and extensively found

⁷⁸ “Mi sono proposto nell'animo formare compendioso, ma verace racconto de suoi Ritti principali, et opinioni più comuni *dall'universale non dissonanti*, et discrepanti, nella quale applicazione ho procurato con ogni mio potere (benchè io sia della istessa natione) astenermi da qualunque affetto, et passione che dal vero deviare mi potesse.” Simone Luzzatto, *Discorso*, 4r.

⁷⁹ Stephen G. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies. Johannes Buxtorf (1546-1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century*, (Leiden – New York – Köln: Brill, 1996), chap. 3.

⁸⁰ Cohen, “Leone da Modena's *Riti*”, *passim*.

⁸¹ Stroumsa, *A New Science*, 69.

⁸² See: Fishman, *Shaking the Pillars of Exile*; for a different interpretation, see: Ellis Rivkin, *Leon da Modena and the Kol Sakhal*, (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1952).

within his works? One can only make suggestions hypothetically, which then require further investigation.

Modena was preoccupied by the challenges religion faced during his time. Judaism was endangered, not solely by conversion efforts by Christian which were renewed from time to time, but also by internal Jewish conflict over the interpretation of dogmas, rituals and beliefs. This partly explains Modena's involvement with the Jewish controversies in Amsterdam and Hamburg and his attempts to curtail Jewish "heretical" leanings. Ritual, more so than that of dogmas and beliefs, stood as a connecting thread which united all Jews in the diaspora. A portrayal of Jewish rituals and ceremonies which is as strongly rooted in the Bible would more likely convince Jews, especially those coming from Marrano or new Christian experiences, of Judaism and its unity with a biblical heritage to the detriment of Christianity. Iberian *Conversos* would therefore proudly embrace it.

As far as beliefs were concerned, their relevance was not classed as pivotal. Modena wrote extensively on beliefs, as his tract on the immortality of the soul or his anti-kabbalistic treatises indicate, and accordingly devoted the fifth part of the *Riti* to 'ideas' and 'beliefs'. In this section of the *Riti* Modena briefly described Jewish "sects" – "Karaim and other heretics" – and beliefs such as trust in Paradise, Hell and Purgatory, as being considered sufficiently orthodox for the Catholic Church. In the French edition he had also listed the 13 articles of faith according to the Maimonidean tradition,⁸³ to which he added, amongst other things, the belief in metempsychosis which had become very popular amongst Kabbalists.⁸⁴ The 13 articles of faith and the reference to metempsychosis would incur an angry response from the Catholic Church therefore he quickly proceeded to expunge these questions from the Venetian edition.⁸⁵

Somehow, the downplaying of beliefs in relation to rituals might hint at Modena's effort to reduce conflicting polemics engendered by theological discussions over dogmas which were the core of Christian-Jewish debate. Likewise it attempted to simplify the process of a return to Judaism for Iberian new Christians, relieving some of their anxieties about the alleged inconsistencies between rabbinical law and the Bible.⁸⁶

⁸³ Leon Modena, *Riti* (1637), 204-217; Idem, *Les Juifs présentés aux Chrétiens*, 109-139.

⁸⁴ On reincarnation and Judaism see: Brian Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth. Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah*, (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2009); Jeffrey H. Chajes, *Between Worlds. Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

⁸⁵ Cohen, "Leone da Modena's *Riti*", 296 note 47; *Les Juifs présentés aux Chrétiens*, 136-138, 267.

⁸⁶ Criticism of the belief of the immortality of the souls, deemed extremely dangerous by the Catholic Church, was widespread in Venice and Padua. See: Edward Muir, *The Culture War of the Late Renaissance. Skeptics, Libertines, and Opera*, (Cambridge – London: Harvard University Press, 2007); for the same problem in Amsterdam, see: Steven

Therefore, the attempt to portray Judaism as a biblical, rational and reasonable religion met the needs of the Jewish community as a whole while at the same time opposed Christian criticism of rabbinic legal tradition.⁸⁷

In addition, by comparative terms, a collective representation of Judaism in rituals emphasized the unity of Judaism against the fragmentation of post-reformation Christianity, which Modena seems to suggest when describing Jewish sects or heretics.⁸⁸ The reality, of course, was much more complicated: seventeenth century Judaism was torn by religious dissent, and did not resemble the normative model illustrated by Modena. Indeed, beliefs were deemed to be much more important than Modena was willing to acknowledge, with the spread of Messianism or the wide adherence to Kabbalistic teachings.

Luzzatto and his *Discorso* – a place for the Jews in Christian society

I would suggest that, with a different approach, Luzzatto's *Discorso* was aimed at solving a similar problem. The *Discorso* is a refined and sophisticated text, and the first request for toleration that was based on utilitarian and mercantile conceptions.⁸⁹ Divided into 18 chapters called the "*considerazioni*", the *Discorso* comprises two separate sections: the first, covers the chapters from 1 to 10 and the second covers the chapters from 11 to 18.⁹⁰ The first part is economic in scope and deals extensively with issues such as trade, money-lending, collective wealth and the role of the Jews in the city of Venice. It has been suggested that the text was written as a response to the crisis which broke out in 1636, as also cited in Modena's journal, when the Venetian Jewish community was seriously under the threat of expulsion.⁹¹ The recent discovery of a manuscript

Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁸⁷ The first scholar to emphasize the similarity between Jewish rabbinical and Catholic apostolic tradition as normative was Richard Simon. *Les juifs présentés aux chrétiens*, 145-146. A few remarks are to be found in: Cohen, "Leone da Modena's *Riti*", 307. Luzzatto hints at the question in his *Discorso*, but only in passing (*Discorso*, 90v).

⁸⁸ Cohen, "Leone da Modena's *Riti*", 314; see: Modena, *Riti* (1637), 204; Ibidem, (1678), 111; Luzzatto, *Discorso*, 84v-85r.

⁸⁹ On the historical and economic context behind the *Discorso* see: Ravid, *Economics and Toleration in Seventeenth Century Venice*.

⁹⁰ Benjamin Ravid, "Contra Judaeos in Seventeenth Century Italy: Two Responses to the *Discorso* of Simone Luzzatto by Melchiorre Palontrotti and Giulio Morosini", *AJS* 7/8 (1982-1983), 302; Giuseppe Veltri, *Renaissance Philosophy*, 202.

⁹¹ For this interpretation see especially, Moshe Shulvass, "Introduction" to the Hebrew translation of the *Discorso*, 22-23 as mentioned in Cohen, 312; Idem, "A Story of the Misfortunes which afflicted the Jews in Italy", *HUCA* 22 (1949): 1-21 (Heb.); Ravid, *Economics and Tolerationin*, 10; Veltri, *Renaissance Philosophy*, 205.

which contains chapters of the first part supports the idea that the *Discorso* is the outcome of a combination of two separate works, patched together and published in 1638.⁹²

In trying to put across a possible solution to an ongoing question, that being the role of Jews within Christian society, Luzzatto composed his treatise as a disguised conversation with Machiavelli and Giovanni Botero.⁹³ Riccardo Bachi was one of the first to attentively read the *Discorso* and understand the importance of Botero's tract on the wealth of cities, *Delle cause della grandezza e magnificenza delle città*, published in 1588.⁹⁴ Botero, whose works and loyalties were solely addressed for the Spanish monarchy, stated and wrote:

“But if the places where men are driven of necessity to fly have in them besides their safety any commodity of importance, it will be an easy thing for them to increase, both with people, and with riches, and with buildings. In this matter the cities of Levant and Barbary became great through the multitude of Jews that Ferdinand the king of Spain and Emmanuel the king of Portugal cast out of their kingdoms, as in particular Salonica and Rodhes.”⁹⁵

Drawing from historical experience, as mentioned above, and following

⁹² Giuseppe Veltri, “Economic and Social Arguments and the Doctrine of *Antiperistasis* in Simone Luzzatto's Political Thought: Venetian Reverberations of Francis Bacon's Philosophy?”, *Frühneuzeit info* 23 (2011): 23-33, 29 note 8; Giuseppe Veltri, Gianfranco Miletto, Guido Bartolucci, “The Testament of Simone Luzzatto (1583?-1663) and the Only Known Manuscript of the *Discorso* (1638). Newly Discovered Manuscripts from the State Archive of Venice and the Library Marciana”, *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 5 (2011), (in print).

⁹³ For the relationship between Machiavelli and the *Discorso* see: Abraham Melamed, “Simone Luzzatto on Tacitus. Apologetica and ragione di stato”, in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, 2, ed. Isadore Twersky, (Cambridge – London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 143-170; Vasileios Syros, “Simone Luzzatto's Image of the Ideal Prince and the Italian Tradition of Reason of State”, (paper presented at the Third Summer School in Comparative History on “Political Religions: from Antiquity to Postmodernity”, Jerusalem 2002, online article).

⁹⁴ Riccardo Bachi, “La dottrina sulla dinamica delle città secondo Giovanni Botero e secondo Simone Luzzatto”, *Atti dell'Accademia dei Lincei*, rend. d. classe di sc. mor., I (1946), 369-378; Idem, *Israele disperso e ricostruito*, (Rome: La Rassegna Mensile d'Israele, 1952), 95-139.

⁹⁵ Giovanni Botero (1544-1617) was a Jesuit and a philosopher whose works exerted an enormous influence on Italian and European political thought. The founder of the term “ragion di stato”, Botero was the anti-machiavelian thinker *par excellence*. For a brief, yet detailed biographical entry, see: Luigi Firpo, “Giovanni Botero”, *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, ([http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-botero_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-botero_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)). In this article I refer to: Giovanni Botero, *The Greatness of Cities. A Treatise Concerning the Causes of the Magnificency and Greatness of Cities*, now done into English by Robert Peterson, 1606. For the English version I used a kindle edition. Giovanni Botero, *The Greatness of Cities*, loc. 62-69.

the suggestion placed by Botero's, Luzzatto exploited the city of Venice – from its corporate hierarchical order to its trading and mercantile position – in order to find a plausible theory for Jewish tolerance. In a remarkable passage at end of the book (*consideration* 17) Luzzatto maintained that of all cities, port cities were the most ideal for the Jews, especially those which had a relatively large population, a conspicuous presence of foreigners and a well established trading network with foreign countries.⁹⁶

This theory of economic usefulness has been thoroughly analyzed, and at its core stands a Catholic political theory of *raison d'état*. Nevertheless, one should stress once more the originality of Luzzatto's arguments. Luzzatto's concept of the extraordinary abilities which the Jews possessed in their aptitudes for producing wealth for the city were based on historical evidence, as he himself underlines when he mentioned the case of Livorno.⁹⁷ Trading nations, and *Sephardic* Jews being amongst them, were deemed strategically pivotal in the rise of capitalism.⁹⁸ Nevertheless *Sephardim* with wide and powerful trading networks were just a segment of Jewish society, and moreover, some of them remained new Christians or crossed religious boundaries more than once during their lifetime. The striking ability of Luzzatto's arguments lay in the successful attempt to present a general theory based on the assumption that the trading qualities of a minority amongst the Jews stood as a collective feature. Therefore Luzzatto transformed the increasing weakening status of the Jews within the Christian realm into a more stable status, equaling the Jews to that of foreign merchants. A second remarkable tenet in this theory was based on the conception that of all the trading nations, Jews were the best, precisely because of their collective weakness, namely their being stateless and therefore without any political protection. It proves to be striking argument and, somehow, not entirely true. Levantine Jews were often under the protection of the Turks and few new Christians continued to pledge loyalty to Spain and Portugal.⁹⁹

But in addition: when arguing over the lack of a sovereign polity capable enough to protect the Jews, Luzzatto stressed how this political weakness transformed Jews into humble and loyal subjects.¹⁰⁰ John Toland, influenced by Luzzatto's *Discorso*, subscribed to similar beliefs when pleading for the naturalization of Jews at the beginning of the

⁹⁶ "... che le Città che non hanno porto di mare, Popolazione numerosa, concorso di Forastieri, et Commissioni de negotij da tutte le parti del mondo, come ha la città di Venetia, conviene alli Hebrei che in esse dimorano sostenersi in uno de tre modi"; Simone Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 17, 86v.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, cons. 4, 18v.

⁹⁸ This the opinion of Israel, *Diaspora within a Diaspora*.

⁹⁹ For Levantine Jews as Turkish subjects see: Pullan, *The Jews of Europe*, 150; for new Christians as Iberian subjects Ruspio, *La nazione portoghese*.

¹⁰⁰ Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 5.

eighteenth-century.¹⁰¹

At the same time, this argument openly challenged Christian theology on the issue of supersession, much of which had relied on the idea that Jews had been punished by God with the loss of political sovereignty. The belief that exile was the outcome of a divine punishment was also a Jewish theological notion, partly based on the logic of certain Biblical books, especially Deuteronomy. The exile, *galut*, was at that time usually negatively perceived and contributed to the reinforcement of messianic beliefs.¹⁰² Within this theological background the *Discorso* formed an original, challenging and bold attack on Christian and Jewish conceptions of exile and punishment and a positive re-evaluation, perhaps the first to be formulated, on the concept of exile within the language of modern political theory.

Moreover, in consideration 4, Luzzatto dealt extensively on the positive results engendered under duress and need. Within an ironic pun, he wondered why the Romans, who worshipped a number of gods – the protectors of Art and Invention, not to mention the personified Fortune, never established a worship of Need, under whose discipline Jews learned their way of life and their abilities within trade.¹⁰³ Luzzatto seemed to hint at a theory of Jews being “mercurians” – mobile middlemen, competitive, flexible because of their strength developed under unfavorable social and political conditions.¹⁰⁴

The reconfiguration of this notion on exile can be detected in many of

¹⁰¹ John Toland, *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland*, (London: J. Roberts, 1714), 12-13: “Another consideration that make the Jews preferable to several sort of People, is their having no country of their own to which they might retire after having got Estates here”; and moreover: “But the Jews having no such Country to which they are ty’d by inclination or interest of their own, will never likewise enter into any political engagement, which might be prejudicial to ours, as we have known ... certain French refugees to have done, notwithstanding their protection.” On the relationship between Toland and the *Discorso* see: Isaac Barzilay, “John Toland Borrowings from Simone Luzzatto – Luzzatto’s Discourse on the Jews of Venice (1638) the Major Source of Toland’s Writing on the Naturalization of the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland (1714)”, *Jewish Social Studies* 31 (1969): 75-81; Jonathan Karp, *The Politics of Jewish Commerce, 1638-1848*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chap. 1 (kindle edition).

¹⁰² On exile and messianism see: Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*.

¹⁰³ “... Et alcuna volta mi arrecò meraviglia che li Romani conforme allo loro falsa superstitione di errigere altari, e Deificare gl’inventori delle giovevoli professioni, e che infino la fortuna, stimata pure da loro cieca e temeraria, trovò in Roma particolare adoratione, et apertura di molti sontuosi Tempj, al bisogno primo stimolatore e sferzatore all’Imprese degne, e profittevoli inventioni, non si fosse giamai da essi instituito culto, ne verso di lui osservato alcun rito religioso”; Simone Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 4, 19r. Karp traced a similar argument in Paolo Paruta (1540-1598). Karp, *The Politics of Jewish Commerce*, loc. 382-385. A difference source is detected in: Veltri, “Economic and Social Arguments”, 24.

¹⁰⁴ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), chap.1; for criticism, see: Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 11-12.

the chapters and is rhetorically connected with Luzzatto's attempt to define the collective character of the Jews. With this in mind, the first section of the work focused on many interesting issues producing relevant questions for future works, for example, a critique on the idea of a "collective guilt" or an outline on the theory of Biblical tolerance, to mention but a few.¹⁰⁵

The second section of the tract, from considerations 11 to 18, dwells more extensively on cultural issues and appears to address a general problem, namely the role of Jews within Christian states and their collective identity, history and current condition.¹⁰⁶ This section is not wholly coherent and one might suggest that the different chapters (much lengthier than the preceding ones) though assembled, had been written during different periods. The second part of the tract covers a wide number of issues, some of which deal with pre-modern anti-Jewish hostility. Considerations 12 and 15, for example, present a detailed confutation of seventeenth-century anti-Semitism which goes beyond religious polemics, fronting a more differentiated and subtle discourse against the Jews.

As Luzzatto states on the front page of his work, the *Discorso* refers to a lost tract which he had allegedly written under the title "Trattato dell'openioni e Dogmi de gl'Hebrei dall'Universal non dissonanti, e de riti loro più principali."¹⁰⁷ Luzzatto's technical term used to introduce a collective portrayal of the Jews is "universale." In order to describe Jews "universally" it is necessary to take into consideration a number of common features applicable to them all, despite their dispersion, diversity in language, local customs, geography and professions.¹⁰⁸

In chapter 16 Luzzatto offers his idea of Judaism. Rhetorically crafted as a historical outline of Judaism, this chapter discusses at length the collective cultural features of the Jews, endeavoring to answer the more general questions of birth, greatness and fall of the nations. It is interesting to note that Luzzatto presented a theory on nationhood which will be later resumed by nineteenth-century intellectuals, focusing

¹⁰⁵ Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 11. This theory was reworked by Isaac Viva (Isaac Cohen Cantarini). Isaac Viva (pseud.), *Vindex sanguinis*, sive Vindiciae secundum veritatem quibus Judaei ab Infanticidiis & victima humana, contra Jacobum Geusium, (Amsterdam: Adam Jongbloet, 1681), reprinted in Nuremberg. On this text see: Cristiana Facchini, "Il Vindex sanguinis di Isaac Viva. Di una polemica sull'accusa di omicidio rituale", *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 16/2 (1999): 359-378.

¹⁰⁶ When the question of toleration became a central issue, a theory of tolerance was in need, and Luzzatto was one of the first ones to present a Jewish perspective. His attempt shall be integrated into a history of tolerance in Western society.

¹⁰⁷ Title in the front page of the 1638 edition.

¹⁰⁸ The term is used is conveying the notion of "collective." Luzzatto, "Prefazione di tutta l'opera", *Discorso*, 4r-6r and elsewhere.

on the relationship between nation and culture.¹⁰⁹ Luzzatto emphasized that the memory of the ancient nations is communicated by means of culture and war. The Greeks contribution to the culture of humankind was based on their knowledge of sciences and arts, whereas Romans gained posterity with their political systems and skillful warfare.¹¹⁰ If a nation is defined by its antiquity, the Jews thereby, who are the remnants of Biblical Hebrews, have to be judged on the background of their ancient military might, their history and their political system. Ancient Hebrews were protected by Divine providence and were endowed with both capabilities – they were warriors, who heroically fought for their freedom against the Roman empire,¹¹¹ and they created a culture in the guise of the philosophical and religious doctrines which were described by Eusebius, in his *Preparatio evangelica*. Jews therefore held all the great qualities of the ancient nations. Contrary to Greeks and Romans or other ancient nations which have either disappeared or metamorphosed, Jews have survived the test of time, whilst either in captivity or exile, having preserved their essence. When the nation was shattered into small fragments, and spread all over the universe, those fragments retained the essence of its ancient identity.¹¹²

If the biblical period was praised by most scholars, a positive cultural representation of a post-biblical period was more complicated to present. Luzzatto's attempt in chapter 16 is therefore addressed in order to provide a positive image of rabbinical Judaism, a task he shared with Modena's representation of Judaisms in the *Riti*. This effort may be well received as an original and articulate attempt to counter aggressive Christian scholars on Rabbinics, both Catholic and Protestant, whose aim was to despise and belittle Judaism in an attempt to finally convert the Jews.

Luzzatto, in contrast to Modena, who chose a normative model dependant on traditional legal codes, framed his description of post-biblical Judaism on Flavius Josephus' works. Posing as a modern Josephus, he stated that post-biblical Judaism consists of three main

¹⁰⁹ This argument was especially exploited in nineteenth century by the French orientalist and polymath Ernest Renan. See, for example: Ernest Renan, *De la part de peuple sémitique dans l'histoire de la civilisation*, (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1862). On this issue, see: Cristiana Facchini, *David Castelli. Ebraismo e scienze delle religioni tra Otto e Novecento*, (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), chap. 4.

¹¹⁰ “Li Greci s’immortalarono con l’inuentione delle scientie, & arti più nobili [...]. Et li Romani con li trionfi, et Imperij”; Simone Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 16, 73r.

¹¹¹ “... solamente gl’hebrei portione insensibile rispetto alla moltitudine e numerosità d’altri popoli, presero l’armi per rivendicare la loro libertà e diffendere la loro religione”; *Ibidem*, 73v.

¹¹² “La hebreia non li occorre simili mutationi, e cangiamenti, ma bene si spezzò e fu divisa quasi in infinite portioni, distrata, e dispersa per tutto l’universo, restandole in gran parte l’identità della sua essenzialità”; *Ibidem*, cons. 16, 88v-89v, esp. 89r.

schools of thought, strictly related to the interpretation of the Bible, to which Luzzatto adds a fourth one, the Karaites.¹¹³ The Bible is placed at the centre of his dissertation, being the primary source of Jewish practices and philosophical speculation, exactly in the same way Modena had positioned the Bible in his *Riti*.

The first group consists of “rabbis and Talmudists”; the second one is composed by theologians who lean toward philosophical reasoning, and the third one is constituted by Kabbalists who explore the hidden meaning of the Sacred script.¹¹⁴ Rabbis are, according to Luzzatto, those who have preserved Judaism in all its collective guises at all times and in all places (“l’universale degli Hebrei”) because they were responsible for the implementation of Jewish rituals and ceremonies. Though this line of argument may resemble Modena’s representation of Jewish rituals and ceremonies, Luzzatto stressed how rabbinical interpretations might shed light on arguments which were of great importance during the late Renaissance period, for example, time reckoning and the computation of the calendar.¹¹⁵

The second group of interpreters of the Bible included the philosophers who tried to read the Sacred Script through means of reason. The philosophical interpretation of the Bible, as perceived by Luzzatto, would become extremely important in the late eighteenth century. Luzzatto tied the history of this cultural undercurrent to both Philo of Alexandria and Josephus Flavius: the first, Philo of Alexandria, contributed to the development of Christian biblical exegesis (through Origenes) and was soon lost within Jewish tradition. The second interpretative tradition, represented by Josephus Flavius’ *Antiquitates*, provides with an important interpretation of obscure biblical passages.¹¹⁶ Luzzatto emphasized the cultural encounter between the Jews and the Gentiles in ancient times, when mentioning works which were composed in either Greek or Arabic. He provided examples from the great scholars who had contributed to the history of philosophical thought and who had lived under Muslim domain, for example, Saadia Gaon and Maimonides, whose works were later translated into Latin.¹¹⁷ Egypt, according to Luzzatto, gave birth to the most important Jewish leaders and scholars: Moses, the prophet and lawgiver, Philo of Alexandria and Maimonides, stressing the role and relevance of the culture of the

¹¹³ “E’ da sapere che in tre classi principali si riducono li loro studij circa le Sacre Scritture”; Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 16, 75v. See Josephus: *Bellum*, II, 8, 2-14 (119-166); *Antiquitates*, XIII, 8, 9 (171-173); XVIII, 1, 2-6 (11-25).

¹¹⁴ Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 16, 75v.

¹¹⁵ On the relevance of chronology and history, see: Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger. A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*, 2, *Historical Chronology*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Adam Sutcliff, *Judaism and Enlightenment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 61-67.

¹¹⁶ Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 16, 78r.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, cons. 16, 78v-79r.

diaspora. Furthermore he underlines the relevance of authors such as Levi ben Gershon, commentator of Aristotle and Averroes, Hasday Crescas, a critic of Aristotle, Yoseph Albo and Ibn Ezra, all of whom contributed to the definition of the articles of faith and dogmas of Judaism.¹¹⁸ The section devoted to the second group of interpreters of the Bible discusses concisely yet profoundly, a number of very significant issues concerning the relationship between religious philosophy and Jewish law as it developed over time. In one striking passage Luzzatto maintained that Jewish law was flexible, because it was shaped according to the culture and conditions of the times.¹¹⁹ Elsewhere, in chapter 15, dealing with the content of the Bible, Luzzatto hinted at the same question when suggesting that the Bible was written under the influence of cultural conditions during a particular time and place (“supponendo ch’abbiano scritto come conveniva al stato e conditione di quelle genti ne quali erano dispersi”).¹²⁰ Luzzatto’s remarks with regards to the Bible and Jewish law portray a strong sense of what is immutable and therefore “universally” valid at all times and in all places, and what is ephemeral and what is mutable. This argument must be viewed in the context of the seventeenth-century debate over the interpretation of the Bible: it resembled much of Galileo’s biblical hermeneutics as it was developed in his *Lettera a Cristina di Lorena*,¹²¹ and was further elaborated by Spinoza in his *Tractatus theologico-politicus*.¹²²

Luzzatto then described the third school of biblical interpreters, composed by the Kabbalists, whose doctrine was – according to his rendition – mainly spread in the Levant and Poland. He stressed that Kabbalistic teachings were “not compulsory,” because they did not require the approval by the whole nation.¹²³ Luzzatto’s account of the

¹¹⁸ Ibidem, cons. 16, 79v.

¹¹⁹ Ibidem, cons. 16, 79v-80r.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, cons. 16, 53r.

¹²¹ This issue has not been adequately addressed. There is a similar attitude in the *Riti*. The question is also discussed in the Catholic context, namely by Galilei in his *Letter to Cristina of Lorena*, where he suggests that the Bible has been written under determined historical circumstances and therefore cannot be taken at face value. See: Galileo Galilei, *Lettera a Cristina di Lorena sull’uso della Bibbia nelle argomentazioni scientifiche*, ed. Franco Motta, (Genoa: Marietti, 2000); Mauro Pesce, *L’ermeneutica biblica di Galileo e le due strade della teologia cristiana*, (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2005); Alfredo Damanti, *Libertas philosophandi: teologia e filosofia nella lettera alla granduchessa Cristina di Lorena di Galileo Galilei*, (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2010).

¹²² Spinoza will use a similar argument in his argue on a same line in order to separate what is religious from what is not religious. On Luzzatto and Spinoza see: Bernard Septimus, “Biblical Religion and Political Rationality in Simone Luzzatto, Maimonides and Spinoza”, in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Isadore Twersky, Bernard Septimus, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 399-433; Giuseppe Veltri, “La dimensione politica filosofica dei *caerimonialia hebraeorum*: Baruk Spinoza e Simone Luzzatto”, *Materia giudaica* 13/1-2 (2008): 81-89.

¹²³ Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 16, 80r; Modena, *Riti* (1678), 37.

Kabbalah appears as a first attempt at sketching a short historical outline of the esoteric Jewish tradition for a more general readership. This section of the chapter is lengthier than the others, and should be compared to Leon Modena's treatise on the Kabbalah (*Ari nobem*, whose final composition dates at 1639).¹²⁴ In order to describe the Kabbalah to his audience, Luzzatto underlined the literal meaning of the term – Kabbalah. The term itself portrays both the act of “reception” and the relationship between master and disciple.¹²⁵ The Kabbalists – he maintains – received a special wisdom regarding the hidden interpretation of the Holy Script (“così ad essi per la misteriosa esposizione della Scrittura.”)¹²⁶ Kabbalistic teachings are divided into a “practical doctrine,” associated with the permutation of the letters, the computation of its numerical meaning, mainly applicable to the names of God. A second doctrine, more theoretical and scientific (“scientifica”) is based on speculation of the nexus between the natural and the divine realms. The natural realm is connected to that of the divine by channels. The supernal world therefore infuses its energy to the natural world thanks to ten principles which in turn resemble the principles of the Pitagorean tradition.¹²⁷

In my opinion Luzzatto was one of the first Jewish scholars who described the Kabbalah by utilizing a comparative approach, and following certain Christian traditions, he was able to highlight the similarities between Kabbalah and Platonism.¹²⁸ Moreover, he was one of the first to establish a nexus between the esoteric doctrines of the Kabbalah and early Christian heretical groups, such as Gnostics and Valentinians.¹²⁹

By describing the system of the Kabbalists, Luzzatto dwells upon the belief of the transmigration of souls, which he attributed to the Pythagorean tradition. Even if only briefly mentioned, it is worth noting that Modena referred to the same belief in his first version of the *Riti* published in 1637, as mentioned above.¹³⁰

The section devoted to the Kabbalah merits a more detailed analysis and

¹²⁴ See: Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah*.

¹²⁵ “Cabala significa propriamente ricevimento, & ha relatione a colui ch'apprende dal maestro, come la parola di tradizione a quello ch'insegna e infonde la dottrina”; Simone Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 16, 80r.

¹²⁶ Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 16, 80v.

¹²⁷ Ibidem, cons. 16, 81r. See also Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah*, 140.

¹²⁸ Stroumsa claims that Richard Simon was the first one to highlight the relationship between Kabbalah and platonic teachings. See: Stroumsa, *A New Science*, 74; Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah*, 139-141. On Kabbalah and platonism see: Moshe Idel, “Differing Conceptions of Kabbalah in the Early 17th Century”, in *Jewish Thought in Seventeenth Century*, 137-200.

¹²⁹ Luzzatto quotes from the works of Epiphanius and Irenaeus, historian of the early church; Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 16, 83r. See also Richard Simon in his essay on comparative religion. Stroumsa, *A New Science*, 74.

¹³⁰ Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 16, 84v; Modena, *Riti* (1637), 215.

calls for historical reconstruction which would take into consideration the standpoint of the Christians and Jews alike, noting their differences and their overlaps. There are at least two questions worth discussing within this framework: first of all, Luzzatto seemed to oppose Modena's criticism of the Kabbalah preferring instead to offer a different interpretation based upon the similarities between the Kabbalah and neo-platonic philosophical tradition, as first elaborated on by certain Christian scholars. This stance may have answered a profound cultural need which was meant to sustain and endorse the study of natural philosophy.¹³¹

The beliefs of the Kabbalah often overlapped (coincided) with magic, especially during the Renaissance period, and provoked strong criticism from ecclesiastical institutions which had been, since its inception, attentive and skeptical about this body of doctrine, as it became referred to within the Christian fold.¹³² The presence of Gaffarel in Venice certainly indicated how the fascination of Pico's cultural enterprise reverberated into the seventeenth-century, notwithstanding the censorship around his works, which were mainly published outside the Italian territories. This specific case-study of Venice also sheds some light on the reception of certain themes revolving around Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's literary heritage amongst the Italian Jewry, a topic which requires further exploration.¹³³

Finally the chapter ends with a short description of the "fourth class" of the Jewish interpreters of the Scripture, the Karaites who are, according to him and Modena, the descendants of old Sadducees.¹³⁴ At the beginning of eighteenth-century, Christian Hebraists, who were at that time collecting manuscripts and bibliographical information about the history of Judaism, claimed, on the basis of correspondences they had had with Jews in Italy, that Modena and Luzzatto had written an essay on the Karaites.¹³⁵ There is enough internal evidence to demonstrate that the Venetian rabbis collaborated, maybe they had discussed on a book

¹³¹ See: David Ruderman, *Jewish Thought*, chap. 5.

¹³² On Christian Kabbalah see: François Secret, *Les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance*, (Paris: Dunod, 1964) and (Milan: Archè, 1985); Joseph Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944).

¹³³ Pico's works are extensively quoted also in Isaac Cantarini's sermons and in Isaac Cardoso, *Philosophia libera* (Venice: Bertanorum sumptibus, 1673). On this topic see my forthcoming book on Isaac Cantarini and my paper "Italian Jewish Preaching. Images of the Baroque Body and Self" delivered at the AAIS Conference, Pittsburgh (7-10 April 2011).

¹³⁴ On Karaites in the early modern period see: Shalom Rosenberg, "Emunat hakhamim", in *Jewish Thought in Seventeenth Century*, 285-295; Marina Rustow, "Karaites Real and Imagined: Three Cases of Jewish Heresy", *Past and Present* 197 (nov. 2007): 35-74; Stroumsa, *A New Science*, 73.

¹³⁵ Wolf, *Bibliotheca*, 3, 1150. The information is to be found in the correspondence between Yaacov Aboab, from Venice, and C. T. Unger.

relating to Jewish rituals and beliefs, arguing over heated topics such as the question of Karaims or the role of the Kabbalah, as observed in this short analysis. Luzzatto's characterization of the Karaites as interpreters of the Bible is very concise: the Karaites dwelled in some of the cities of the Levant and bore similarities to ancient Sadducees. By contrast, they believed in the immortality of the soul, its spiritual character, and the existence of angels as spiritual beings.¹³⁶

The conclusion of chapter 16 suggests that, according to Luzzatto, rabbinic Judaism's appraisal of culture disguised as speculation on matters of natural philosophy, astronomy and natural science ("scientia") was still in practice and served religious goals in attempting to reach a better understanding of the Godhead. Contrary to Leone Modena, who definitely portrayed a situation of cultural decay amongst the Jews during his time, Luzzatto revealed a more positive attitude, one of self awareness which believed that access to philosophy and natural sciences were endangered because of Jewish religious isolationist trends. Nevertheless, his attempt to positively portray the different groups of Jewish scholars within the culture of his time, discloses his endeavor to maintain that the Jews were, even in exile and politically subjected to Christian politics, capable of producing and pursuing culture under duress.

Liminality and creativity

"Take a view of the Royal Exchange in London, a place more venerable than many courts of justice, where the representatives of all nations meet for the benefit of mankind. There the Jew, the Mahometan, and the Christian transact together, as though they all professed the same religion, and give the name of infidel to none but bankrupts. There the Presbyterian confides in the Anabaptist, and the Churchman depends on the Quaker's word. At the breaking up of this pacific and free assembly, some withdraw to the synagogue, and others to take a glass. This man goes and is baptized in a great tub, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: that man has his son's foreskin cut off, whilst a set of Hebrew words (quite unintelligible to him) are mumbled over his child. Others retire to their churches, and there wait for the inspiration of heaven with their hats on, and all are satisfied" (Voltaire, "On the Presbyterians")

It is more than appropriate to conclude this article with a famous quotation by Voltaire on religious tolerance. Voltaire's remarks are of a different kind and, though somehow they still relate to the image of

¹³⁶ Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 16, 85r.

Venice, the French philosopher stresses the economic element of tolerance. Voltaire's image of cultural religious toleration seemingly plays no role; religious tolerance seems, in this excerpt, to be a matter left to economy. Furthermore, Voltaire suggests that diversity in religion fosters economy and tolerance with virtuous reciprocal feedback: "If one religion only were allowed in England, the Government would very possibly become arbitrary; if there were but two, the people would cut one another's throats; but as there are such a multitude, they all live happy and in peace."¹³⁷

If we look back at the end of the sixteenth-century, we intersect another French advocate of religious toleration who endorsed Venice's myth as a city of tolerance. Bodin's *Heptaplomeres*, was composed around 1588, and portrays a dialogue amongst seven fictional characters representing different religious and philosophical traditions. Solomon, the character who symbolically voices Judaism, is a portrayal of a hidden wisdom grounded in the esoteric understanding of the biblical mysteries.¹³⁸ Moreover, there are clues that the *Heptaplomeres* might also be related to the world of Venice, which we have tried to rediscover here and which may have in addition exerted a certain influence on our protagonists, from Sarpi to Luzzatto, from Modena to the Protestant and Catholic foreigners who roamed the Venetian ghetto.

Therefore, it is noteworthy to stress that by describing a new form of Judaism, both the *Riti* and the *Discorso* represented early attempts to offer a plea for the toleration of Jews within European Christian society. With regards to Luzzatto's *Discorso*, scholars have primarily focused on a concept of economic usefulness when referring to Jewish integration into Christian society. Given that the concept of usefulness became pivotal in discussions of the rise of modern science, it is then no surprise that Luzzatto's theory reached such a wide audience. Nevertheless, other theories of toleration in Luzzatto's *Discorso* can be traced, and are by no means less significant.

I shall briefly point to his attempt at defining a theory of religious toleration based on structural principles within the Christian state, for example Christian mercy ("carità").¹³⁹ This line of reasoning is the least explored and probably the most complicated argument to offer as a plausible theory in religious toleration. Furthermore, in consideration 15,

¹³⁷ François-Marie Arouet Voltaire, *Letters On England*, Letter 6 (1734), (the Pennsylvania State University, Electronic Classics Series).

¹³⁸ Jean Bodin, *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime*, ed. and trans. Marion L. Kuntz, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

¹³⁹ There is no space to develop this line of argument. Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 10; Ravid, "Contra Judeos in Seventeenth century Italy", 308; Idem, *Economics and Toleration*, 92-93.

Luzzatto seems to suggest a theory of Jewish tolerance based on its interpretation of the Bible. It is of the utmost importance because it addressed issues of political and religious dissent which had been discussed in certain European countries.¹⁴⁰ Finally, Luzzatto presented a theory on toleration based on an internal historical Jewish perspective, demonstrating that Jews were still capable of producing culture, as stressed above.

In as far as it goes with reference to Leone Modena's the *Riti*, he offered a theory of toleration mainly based on the concept of Judaism as a biblical religion. Even if his work seemed to suggest more criticism aimed at the cultural position of Judaism during his time, it also expressed a portrayal of Judaism as a rational and sober religion, an idea which came to play an important role during the course of the eighteenth century. From the perspective of the sciences of religion, the *Riti* is one of the first treatises to present Judaism using a phenomenological approach meant to reconstruct religious practices from the perspective of an insider. There is no space for further development on this perspective, but this aspect might explain its immensely successful reception of the book amongst a non-Jewish readership, both Catholic and Protestant.¹⁴¹

The special encounters which took place in and around the ghetto during those critical yet fascinating years in the Most Serene Republic of Venice, highlighted a cultural and religious framework which was able to foster responses to the problems of the time, and in particular on the issue of religious tolerance.

The fragmentation of Christianity, torn by its dogmatic battles and its intolerant zeal, the distress and peregrinations of the Iberian Jews and new Christians contributed to the creation of a new context surmounted by conflict and quandary. Nevertheless, Venice as a city and as a myth along with the liminality of the ghetto and its protagonists – Jews, Protestants and Catholics alike – proved capable of offering a space for confrontation where, beyond control and discipline, books, manuscripts, ideas, more or less hidden and prohibited elsewhere, were circulated and discussed, leaving a lasting mark in European culture.

¹⁴⁰ Luzzatto, *Discorso*, cons. 15. There are few issues that should be compared to Bodin's work in the text.

¹⁴¹ The book had a wide European reception. See also: *The Book that Changed Europe. Picart & Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World*, eds. Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacobs, Wijnand Mijnhardt, (Cambridge – London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), chap. 7.

Cristiana Facchini is Associate Professor at the Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna. She teaches History of Religions, Jewish History and History of Western Christianity. Her scholarly research focuses on Judaism and modernity (*David Castelli. Ebraismo e scienze delle religioni tra Otto e Novecento*, Morcelliana: Brescia, 2005); on cultural Jewish history in the early modern period, and on Catholic Antisemitism. She recently edited a collection of articles on Italian Catholic Antisemitism (*Antisemitismo e chiesa cattolica in Italia (xix-xx secc.)*). *Ricerche in corso e riflessioni storiografiche*, ed. by Cristiana Facchini, *Storicamente* (online journal), 7/2011. She is finishing a book on Isaac Kohen Cantarini and Baroque Jewish culture.

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