

A Study of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto's letters as a source regarding the dissemination of the Shabbatean movement, between the second half of the 17th and the first half of the 18th century

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After the Shabbatean storm had subsided,¹ the struggle continued clandestinely, but there is insufficient information to allow for a clear account of this underground movement. It was only logical that it alarmed the rabbinic authorities, who considered the children of these sectarians as bastards and therefore no longer admissible to the fold. It is evident that quite a few of the most influential moral preachers and authors were in fact secret Shabbateans, on the moderate and Hasidic wings. While all of these developments mainly took place in a twilight or underground atmosphere and received little general attention, from time to time the struggle would resurface. The most famous dispute in Europe was that of the opposition to Nehemiah Ḥiyya Ḥayon (ca. 1655 – ca. 1730), who was suspected of being Shabbatean. This storm is fundamental in order to reach an understanding of another dispute which took place in Italy and concerns the question of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto (Padua 1707 – Acre 1746).

As a typical young Jew, born in the Italian peninsula during that period, Luzzatto studied both the Halakhah and secular literature, above all the poetry and the rhetoric; but this archetypal *curriculum studiorum* was further enriched by his application to the study of the Kabbalah. In 1727 he declared that he had seen a *maggid* who revealed divine secrets to him daily. He subsequently founded a kabbalistic circle, in order to hasten the restoration of the *Shekhinah* and also of Israel.² The foundation of this circle was immediately interpreted by the rabbinic courts as a Shabbatean activity and on 17 July 1730 Luzzatto was obliged to sign a document which forbade him from either learning or teaching the Kabbalah.³ This episode formed the end of the first phase of Luzzatto's dispute. From 1731 to 1734, Luzzatto did not make statements in public. In 1731 he married the daughter of a prominent rabbi and kabbalist from Mantua,

¹ On the subject of the Shabbatean movement, see G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi. The Mystical Messiah 1626–1676* (translated from Hebrew by R.J.Z. Werblowsky), Princeton 1973.

² On the activity of Luzzatto's circle and its members, see N. Danieli, "Il circolo cabbalistico patavino di Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto", in: *Materia giudaica* 7 (2002), pp. 145–154.

³ S. Ginzburg, *Rabbi Moshe Ḥayyim Luzzatto u-vene doro. Osef iggerot u-te'udot*, Tel Aviv 1937, 2 vols., letter 75, pp. 176–177.

Ṣippora Finzi, and for a brief period he lived and studied in Mantua with his father-in-law, David Finzi. In 1734 Luzzatto asked Isaiah Bassani for permission to print his kabbalistic work, *Hoqer u-Mequbbal* (“A Philosopher and a Kabbalist”).⁴ This event opened the second phase of the dispute. When the Venetian rabbis heard of this, they issued a new restrictive document and once again sent three emissaries to Padua,⁵ but Luzzatto refused to sign this new document. The continuing dispute in Italy forced him to leave for Amsterdam in 1735. At first he went to Bozen, then to Frankfurt on the Main, where he was summoned before the *bet din* and, after much discussion, was obliged to sign another document denouncing his revelations and his kabbalistic teachings as false. In the meantime, the Venetian rabbis had announced that these writings should be burned. In 1735, Luzzatto settled in Amsterdam, having been well received by the Sephardic community. Here he wrote on many subjects, but he did not openly teach the Kabbalah. In 1743 he went to Erez Israel, probably in order to escape from the prohibition on teaching the Kabbalah. He lived in Acre for a short time: both he and his family died there of the plague.

Gershom Scholem never wrote too much concerning Luzzatto's dispute, but the following brief note is of great interest regarding this matter:

The heated controversy about the revelations of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto in Padua, which began in 1727, and the messianic tendencies of his group engaged much attention in the following ten years. Although even in their secret writings Luzzatto, Moses David Valle, and their companions repudiated the claims of Shabbetai Zevi and his followers, they were without doubt deeply influenced by some of the paradoxical teachings of Shabbatean Kabbalah, especially those concerning the metaphysical pre-history of the Messiah's soul in the realm of the *kelippot*. Luzzatto formulated these ideas in a manner which removed the obviously heretical elements but still reflected, even in his polemics against the Shabbateans, much of their spiritual universe. He even tried to find a place for Shabbetai Zevi, though not a messianic one, in his scheme of things.⁶

Scholem correctly underlined how Luzzatto persisted in the denial of his own Shabbatean faith, whereas if the truth were to be told, he practised it frequently and in various ways. His most significant act was the writing of the *Kin'at ha-Shem Zeva'ot* (“The Lord of Hosts' Zeal”) – a polemical work, which was written in answer to the accusation that his works and activities were Shabbatean in nature. He clearly indicated his negative attitude towards both the Shabbatean heresy and antinomian practices, but he did not deny that there was some truth in the Shabbatean kabbalistic ideas. It is unnecessary to say anything

⁴ Ibid., letter 90, pp. 242–245.

⁵ Ibid., letter 96, pp. 248–249; document 100, pp. 257–260.

⁶ G. Scholem, “Shabbetai Zevi”, in: *EJ*, vol. 14, coll. 1219–1254: 1251.

else on this subject, because a detailed article written in Hebrew by Isaiah Tishby is specifically dedicated to “Moshe Ḥayyim Luzzatto’s Attitude to the Sabbatian Doctrines”.⁷ On the contrary, no scholar has ever conducted an investigation into the messianic attitude of the greatest number of the rabbis involved in Luzzatto’s dispute. This paper will centre on the study of the most important documents concerning this period in Italy: Luzzatto’s letters, and by means of these letters and replies to them, it will try to demonstrate how widespread the Shabbatean doctrines were in Italy in the second half of the 17th century and in the first half of the 18th century.

Luzzatto’s letters were actually collected by one of his teachers, Isaiah Bassani (Verona 1673 – Reggio Emilia 1739), and were preserved in two manuscripts and now are in the Jewish Theological Seminary Library in New York: manuscripts 4022 and 8520. In 1937, Simon Ginzburg found, reorganized and published them in two volumes, under the title *Rabbi Moshe Ḥayyim Luzzatto u-vene doro. Osef iggerot u-te‘udot*.⁸ In 2001, Mordecai Shriqui published a new edition of them, entitled *Iggerot RaMḤaL*.⁹ In fact, he republished Ginzburg’s edition of the manuscripts and added some more letters.¹⁰ Ginzburg’s edition includes 176 letters in Hebrew. They were written from 1727, the year when Luzzatto declared that he had seen his *maggid* for the first time, to 1746, which is the year Luzzatto and his family died in Acre, in Erez Israel. This edition also includes six letters which had originally been written in Italian, with some sentences and passages in Hebrew, but they have all been translated into and published in Hebrew.¹¹

The nucleus of the collection of letters was written by Luzzatto: sixty-five letters in total; and respectively, nine letters were written by his teacher, Isaiah Bassani, three letters were written by his pupils and members of his kabbalistic circle namely Jekuthiel Gordon (born at the beginning of the 18th) and Isaac Marini (Padua 1690–1748), and Jacob Forti (Padua 1689–1782) who wrote only

⁷ In: *Tarbiz* 27 (1958), pp. 334–357.

⁸ S. Ginzburg, *Rabbi Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto and His Generation. A collection of Letters and Documents* (Hebr.), Tel Aviv 1937.

⁹ M. Shriqui, *RaMḤaL Letters* (Hebr.), Jerusalem 2001. This edition was published by the *RaMḤaL Institute* in Jerusalem. Founded in 1984 by Mordecai Shriqui, this institute has dedicated itself to collect and publish Luzzatto’s works.

¹⁰ These added letters had already been published in: A. Ben-Isch, “Te‘udot le-toledot RaMḤaL”, in: *Mezudab* 3 (1945), pp. 213–228. They are: 1.1 written by Moses Ḥagiz to Jacob Kohen Poppers, pp. 35–36; 33.1, written by Immanu’el Calvo to Luzzatto, pp. 96–98; 33.2 written by rabbinic authorities of Leghorn to Luzzatto, pp. 98–99; 34.1 written by Luzzatto to Ezekiel Katzenellenbogen from Hamburg, pp. 104–107.

¹¹ This translation was completed by Yonatan Prato and Nachum Levonsky; cf. Ginzburg, *Osef iggerot*, pp. 412–418.

one letter. On the other hand, Luzzatto's principal opponent, Moses Ḥagiz (Jerusalem 1672 – Safed 1750) wrote a total of only four letters. These letters contain the names of many rabbis; hence, they have become a precious aid for the construction of a picture of rabbinic institutions during the first half of the 18th century. There are thirty four correspondents and more than fifty five other names are merely mentioned in passing. The above-mentioned were mainly rabbis and kabbalists, and were not only Italian but also Ashkenazi and Polish. A description of the rabbinic structure during that period was given by Joseph Dan:

When Sabbatianism went underground and its adherents practiced their belief in secret, a group of Jewish rabbis, scattered in many countries, made it their business to expose and denounce them, especially if they acquired positions of leadership and influence in Jewish communities.¹²

In fact, among the names of the rabbis present in Luzzatto's letters, some were in all probability still believers in Shabbetai Zevi, and the others were opponents to every type of Shabbatean idea or initiative. Since Shabbetai Zevi had converted to Islam, the fight against Shabbatean activities concealed a hidden struggle for power among the rabbis. In the first half of the 18th century, on the one hand, there were Italian rabbis who had a passion for studying the Kabbalah in secret circles, such as *hevrot*.¹³ On the other hand, the Ashkenazi rabbis managed to revive a new field of kabbalistic studies, under rabbinic control. The Polish rabbis did not take sides, either with the Italian or Ashkenazi rabbis, and maintained an ambiguous position, as Luzzatto's correspondence testifies.

When Moses Ḥagiz read the letter sent by Jekuthiel Gordon to Mordecai Jaffe of Vienna, he immediately wrote to the Venetian rabbinic, both because it was the nearest *bet din* to Padua and was also the most conservative one in Italy. On 1 November 1729, he warned them of the danger he believed the kabbalistic circle signified.¹⁴ The rabbis turned for help to Isaiah Bassani, who tried to defend Luzzatto. Samuel Aboab, who was one of the most energetic opponents of the Shabbatean movement and who had instructed the Venetian rabbinic on this subject when Nathan of Gaza reached Venice, was no longer living there.¹⁵ During the years of Luzzatto's dispute, the *bet din* of Venice was

¹² J. Dan, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History*, New York – London 1987, p. 307.

¹³ S. Siegmund, "La vita nei ghetti", in: *Storia d'Italia. Annali*, vol. XI.1: *Gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. by C. Vivanti, Torino 1996, pp. 846–892; E. S. Horowitz, "Jewish Confraternal Piety in the Veneto in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", in: *Gli ebrei e Venezia (secoli XIV–XVIII)* [Atti del Convegno internazionale organizzato dall'Istituto di storia della società e dello stato veneziano della Fondazione Giorgio Cini], ed. by G. Cozzi, Milano 1987, pp. 301–314.

¹⁴ Ginzburg, *Osef iggerot*, documents 5–8, pp. 16–23.

governed by Samuel Aboab's sons and some other rabbis, who were less powerful than Samuel Aboab and without his authority.

Following the sending of the letter by Moses Ḥagiz to the Venetian rabbis, Luzzatto in person tried to explain his position in a letter dated 27 November 1729. Luzzatto denied that he was Shabbatean by nature¹⁶ and claimed that he was hostile to the spreading of his *maggidic* revelations. This explanation was not sufficient; on 22–27 January 1730 Moses Ḥagiz replied to Luzzatto and suggested that “he should return into the right path”. Finally, he advised Luzzatto to read the section of the *Sefer Ḥasidim* which starts with the words *Elle ha-mizvot* and which Moses Ḥagiz had written himself.¹⁷ Later between 1729–1730, two antagonists, Luzzatto and Moses Ḥagiz, each in his own way, looked for supporters. Luzzatto wrote to Abraham Ḥayyim Senigallia from Modena and to Isaac Canton from Turin, but this correspondence has not survived. However, his letters to Immanuel Raphael Calvo (Salonica end of 17th century – Leghorn 1772)¹⁸ and to the rabbis of Leghorn are preserved in his collection of letters.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Moses Ḥagiz wrote to Jacob Kohen Poppers (d. Frankfurt on the Main 1740)²⁰ and also to the Italian rabbis, who had helped him in the dispute against Nehemiah Ḥiyya Ḥayon.

The decision to write to the rabbis of Leghorn and Modena was not taken casually by Luzzatto and Isaiah Bassani. Scholem asserted that there were two Shabbatean centres in Italy, the first in Leghorn, where Moses Pinheiro (d. Leghorn 1689) was active, and the second later on in Modena, where Abraham Rovigo (Modena, ca. 1650–1713) was devoted to the kabbalistic doctrines. This could signify that the attitude of the rabbinate to the Shabbatean believers was more understanding in these two cities than in others. Moreover, it is a well-known fact that Abraham Rovigo (ca. 1650–1713), and the rabbi of Reggio Emilia, a friend of Luzzatto's and Isaiah Bassani's father-in-law – Benjamin ben Eliezer Ha-Kohen Vitale (Alessandria 1650 – Reggio Emilia 1730),²¹ Judah Briel

¹⁵ In 1668, Samuel Aboab interrogated Nathan of Gaza on his beliefs and activities and obliged him to declare his prophecy was vain and void: Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, pp. 764–768.

¹⁶ Ginzburg, *Osef iggerot*, letter 10, pp. 24–26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, letter 35, pp. 77–79.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, letter 32, dated 18 February 1730, pp. 69–71.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, letter 33, dated 18 February 1730, pp. 71–73, and letter 49, dated 23 March 1730, pp. 108–110.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, letter 10.1 (the composition date is unknown), pp. 35–36.

²¹ On the character of Benjamin ben Eliezer Ha-Kohen see S.A. Horodetzky, “Benjamin (Vitale) ben Elieser Ha-Kohen aus Reggio”, in: *EJ(D)*, vol. 4, coll. 118–119; G. Scholem, “Benjamin Ben Eliezer Ha-Kohen Vitale of Reggio”, in: *EJ*, vol. 4, coll. 531–532; but above all: Benjamin ben Eliezer Ha-Kohen, *She'elot u-teshuvot ha-RaBaK*, ed. by J. Nissim, Jerusalem 1970.

(Mantua 1643–1722),²² Aviad Sar-Shalom Basilea (Mantua ca. 1680–1743) and Abraham Jedidiah Basilea²³ had all studied the Kabbalah together in the most important kabbalistic circle, in the latter half of the 17th century: that is the one founded by Moses Zacuto (Amsterdam ca. 1620 – Mantua 1697). Moses Zacuto's disciples watched for any sign of a new upsurge, and reported to each other the news they received from their visitors and correspondents. Revelations from the heavenly *maggidim* and additional interpretations of the *Zohar* and other kabbalistic matters were then common, so they were very sensitive to the emissaries' anecdotes, and especially to anything regarding Luzzatto's dispute. Some of Moses Zacuto's disciples were personally involved in Luzzatto's dispute, so what Scholem said about them is noteworthy:

[...] Zacuto's essentially conservative temperament, though some of Zacuto's favorite disciples became and remained staunch adherents of the Sabbatian movement.²⁴

Even if Moses Zacuto's disciples were not Shabbateans, they definitely knew of and had studied Shabbatean doctrines, so that each of them, in the community where one of them was active or had acted in the past, was potentially a valid partner for Luzzatto. For these reasons, Luzzatto wrote to the Leghorn rabbinic dignitaries on 23 March 1730. In Leghorn, the community had previously been directed by Abraham Rovigo, then by Joseph Ergas (Leghorn 1685–1730), Malachi Ha-Kohen (Leghorn 1700–1777), and subsequently by Gabriel Del Rio (Leghorn, 18th century). In this letter, Luzzatto explained how the information about his *maggid* had been divulged and why. However, his real intention was to hide the divine revelations. The dissemination of these revelations was in fact the result of a letter written by one of his pupils, Jekuthiel Gordon, and the stories told by an emissary from Jerusalem, whom he had met in Reggio Emilia the previous year²⁵ and whose name was probably Raphael Israel ben Joseph Kimḥi (b. first half of 18th century – Smyrna 1737). On 10 July 1730, Isaiah Bassani wrote to Gabriel Del Rio from Leghorn, and testified to having read, together with his father-in-law, the above-mentioned disciple of Zacuto Binyamin Kohen Vital, the much contested *Sefer ha-Tiqqunim* by Luzzatto. This is a commentary on the last verse of the Pentateuch “And in all that mighty hand” (Dtn 34:12). They found it to be rich in wisdom. According to Isaiah Bassani, Moses Ḥagiz's real aim was to create a dispute among the Jewish communities in Italy, but he was much mistaken, because “he had excluded the possibility of

²² On the character of Judah Briel: S. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, Jerusalem 1977, pp. 698–699.

²³ On the Basilea brothers see *ibid.*, pp. 696–697.

²⁴ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, p. 769.

²⁵ Ginzburg, *Osef iggerot*, letter 49, pp. 108–110.

the advent of the messiah during their generation”²⁶. Isaiah Bassani had also a very good relationship with the rabbis of Modena, so he visited them many times during the years 1730–1735. It has been established that in 1730, Isaiah Bassani spent a long period in Modena, as Luzzatto testified in a letter written to him on 16 April 1730.²⁷ Isaiah Bassani’s reply to this letter confirmed the fact that he was living in Modena and made a comment about his personal dispute with rabbi Nethanel ha-Levi (Modena ca. 1660–ca. 1730) who was, on the contrary, a friend of Luzzatto’s.²⁸ On 17 November 1735 Isaiah Bassani submitted his own defence document to the *bet din* in Modena. This defence is similar in nature to a manifesto confirming his religious integrity and stated that there was no truth in the rumour that he had assisted his pupil. The document was not submitted to Modena’s rabbinic court by chance but because one of its members, Manasseh Joshua Padova was Isaiah Bassani’s brother-in-law. However, because of his kinship with Isaiah Bassani, Manasseh Joshua Padova was not amongst those who signed it and the document was signed by Abraham Jedidiah Basilea of Mantua, who was living temporarily in Modena, Menahem Azariah Padova (Florence, d. 1775), who was Manasseh Joshua Padova’s brother, and Abraham Ḥay ben Nethanel. All of the above were rabbis, and probably also kabbalists.²⁹

As we have said, Moses Ḥagiz wrote to Jacob Kohen Poppers, who was known as a conservative rabbi from Ashkenaz. From 1718 to 1740 he was the head of the *bet din* in Frankfurt on the Main, which was then the principal centre of Ashkenazi studies. Therefore, it follows that he was almost always involved in these disputes. Moreover, as a consequence of the presence of this central character, Frankfurt became the most natural starting point for the dissemination of the teachings of the messianic movement, as is demonstrated in a letter written by Jacob Kohen Poppers to Isaiah Bassani, where he mentioned some prophetic experiences he had heard of: Joshua Heshel Zoref (Vilna 1633–Cracow 1700), for instance, appeared in Cracow and, without having any real halakhic knowledge of the Torah, declared that he had seen more than one *maggid*, and that he was thus able to reveal divine secrets; a former brandy distiller, called rabbi Zadok, appeared in Grodno (Poland) in 1694–1696 and disclosed some secret names; Daniel Bonafoux appeared in Smyrna and claimed to have the powers of a *medium*, especially in his later years; Judah Leib ben Jacob Holleschau Prossnitz (ca. 1670–1730) was another uneducated man who,

²⁶ Ibid., letter 73, pp. 169–173.

²⁷ Ibid., letter 52, pp. 118–120.

²⁸ Ibid., letter 61, pp. 137–138.

²⁹ Ibid., document 140, pp. 337–340.

in about 1696, underwent a spiritual awakening and founded a kabbalistic circle, where he studied and later taught the *Zohar* and other kabbalistic writings.³⁰

After a brief period, Moses Ḥagiz also wrote to the Italian rabbis who had helped him in the dispute with Nehemiah Ḥiyya Ḥayon: namely Samson Morpurgo from Ancona (Gradisca d'Isonzo 1681 – Ancona 1740), Abraham Segre (Casale Monferrato, d. ca. 1740), and Joseph Ergas (Leghorn 1685–1730). Unfortunately, his letters, addressed to both Abraham Segre and Joseph Ergas, were lost. However, his letters to Samson Morpurgo are still valuable documents today. In fact, the letter written by Moses Ḥagiz to Samson Morpurgo on 14 March 1730 reveals many details about another dispute between the Ashkenazi and Polish rabbinates in which Samson Morpurgo took the side of the Ashkenazi faction.³¹ It is possible that during that period, the memory of this dispute was still alive amongst the Italian rabbinate because, on 24 November 1729, Isaiah Bassani rebuked Luzzatto for having recounted his *maggidic* visions, just as much a Polish pupil as Jekuthiel Gordon. This criticism had been made by a kabbalist rabbi, who was clearly opposed to every type of esoteric teaching of the Kabbalah, as had occurred in Poland³² in the second half of the 17th century. There and then (and in a later period, too), the Shabbatean dissemination created a right field for the divulcation of several messianic utopias, as is revealed in Moses Ḥagiz's account of the matter. In reality, the dispute seems to have concerned the dissemination of the kabbalistic teachings, as Isaiah Bassani says here:

[...] You know that is a bad way, don't you? Actually, the Ashkenazim and the Polish love spreading and upsetting [any kabbalistic teachings]. They are for the world a cause for creating confusion about the Kabbalah. They are chaotic, as appears from *Emeq ha-Melekh* and from other texts similar to this, which altered Ḥayyim Vital's words – blessed be his memory – in a tasteless meal [...]³³

This angry outburst was doubtless influenced by a similar outburst made by Berechiah Berakh ben Isaac Eisik (d. 1663) in his introduction to the *Zera' Berakh*, against the misinterpretation of Luria's Kabbalah, and was also directed against Naftali Bacharach's *Emeq ha-Melekh*:

I have seen a scandalous thing in the matter of kabbalistic studies [...] for the very name Kabbalah [tradition] indicates that it was transmitted individually and it must be revealed [publicly] [...]³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., letter 151, dated 24 February 1736, pp. 373–377.

³¹ Ibid., letter 55, pp. 125–126.

³² On Shabbatean ideas spreading in Poland, see: Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, pp. 74–100.

³³ Ginzburg, *Osef iggerot*, letter 13, pp. 28–30. The translation from Hebrew is mine.

³⁴ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, pp. 86–87.

Berechiah Berakh's protest is an eloquent testimony to the effectiveness of the kabbalistic propaganda during his time and also during the later period; but, eloquent as it was, it seems to have been singularly ineffective – even with regard to himself – as Scholem subsisted and also for the majority of the Polish and Italian rabbinates. As has been said, the rabbis involved in Luzzatto's dispute were also closely connected to the emissaries, who played a decisive role in this affair. Between 1680 and 1740, a considerable number of the emissaries from Erez Israel, especially those from Hebron and Safed, served as links between the various groups of Shabbatean believers in the diaspora. One of these was Jacob Wilna (d. 1732), who, between the years 1702 and 1725, left Jerusalem three times, twice as an emissary of the Ashkenazi community. He visited Turkey, Germany, Holland, and Italy, propagating the Kabbalah wherever he went. Jacob Wilna was a moderate Shabbatean and was considered to be one of the most authoritative kabbalists by his contemporaries in Turkey, Erez Israel, Italy, and Poland. Isaiah Bassani mentions Jacob Wilna in one of his letters to Luzzatto. He says that when Jacob Wilna was in Italy, he studied with him in Verona and notes: "Had [Jacob] Wilna said this to me with his own mouth, I would not have listened to him."³⁵ It is evident that Jacob Wilna was held in high esteem by Isaiah Bassani, but what is equally sure is that he was recognised as an exponent of the Shabbatean movement among his contemporaries. In fact, material about his "beliefs" is included in the Shabbatean manuscripts. Another emissary from Erez Israel also mentioned in Luzzatto's letters as cited above was Raphael Israel ben Joseph Kimḥi, who was a pupil of Jacob Wilna's. Kimḥi had even stayed with Luzzatto in Padua for about fifteen days in 1729. He gave evidence on behalf of Luzzatto in front of the *bet din* in Venice,³⁶ and revealed that he had read some of the kabbalistic works written by Luzzatto, composed both in Hebrew and Aramaic. He wanted to hand these works over to his teacher, Jacob Wilna, but he died before returning to Erez Israel. Samson Morpurgo also mentioned that Raphael Kimḥi was Jacob Wilna's pupil and was one of Luzzatto's supporters.³⁷

It is evident from Luzzatto's correspondence that both the kabbalists who studied Shabbetai Zevi's works and the opponents to every type of Shabbatean idea were very sensitive to the emissaries' anecdotes and also to the emergence of new kabbalistic activities. What was different was the approach to them. In fact, Isaiah Bassani, who was an example of a rabbi with links both to the Kabbalah and to the Halakhah, rebuked Luzzatto for having sent one of his

³⁵ Ginzburg, *Osef iggerot*, letter 47, p. 105. The translation from Hebrew is mine.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, document 8, dated 24 November 1729, pp. 20–23.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, letter 56, dated 9–14 April 1730, pp. 127–130. The translation from Hebrew is mine.

treatises to Hamburg, which gave his Ashkenazi antagonists more information with which to accuse him. The problem did not concern the arguments contained in the treatise but the opportunity to Luzzatto's opponents to read and distort them. Isaiah Bassani also stated that he had studied the Shabbatean works, which he described as "full of Lurianic Kabbalah, particularly in the *Sefer ha-Beri'ah* and in the *Zemir Arizim*".³⁸ This explanation establishes the fact that the influence of the Lurianic Kabbalah was not sufficient to give full authority to a work. In truth, the believers in Shabbetai Zevi and the Italian kabbalists of the 18th century can be considered to be Lurianic mystics. On the contrary, the rabbis who had exposed the secret heretics to the world also disagreed with the speculative nature of the Lurianic Kabbalah.

On 21 March 1730, Moses Ḥagiz wrote once more to the Venetian rabbis. On this occasion, he confirmed his opposition to Luzzatto and analysed the situation more clearly: the evidence used by Isaiah Bassani to defend himself proved to be inadequate and a fresh examination of Luzzatto's activities was initiated. According to Moses Ḥagiz, Luzzatto was similar to Nehemiah Ḥiyya Ḥayon, who had provoked a dispute between the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim in Amsterdam. The Venetian rabbis agreed with Moses Ḥagiz, as Luzzatto's works, like those of Nehemiah Ḥiyya Ḥayon, were full of Shabbatean ideas and were dangerous for the Jewish community. The task of judging Luzzatto's activities was given to the Venetian rabbinate.³⁹ This ruling was respected, as the document signed by Luzzatto on 17 July 1730 demonstrates.⁴⁰ On 29 August 1731 Luzzatto married one of the daughters of David Finzi from Mantua, one of Isaiah Bassani's friends. It is clear that Bassani had advised his pupil to marry someone with links to the kabbalistic authorities in Italy. He thus chose a woman who came from the most influential kabbalistic court in the first half of the 18th century: Mantua. David Finzi had studied in Mantua with Isaiah Bassani in the kabbalistic circle run by Judah Briel. Therefore, it is not surprising that David Finzi always remained one of Luzzatto's supporters. In 1734, when Luzzatto asked Isaiah Bassani for a permission to print his *Hoqer u-Mequbbal*, he was the first rabbi to give his consent.⁴¹

This request for permission to print his work opened the second phase of Luzzatto's dispute, because the Venetian rabbis interpreted it as a public reaffir-

³⁸ Ibid., letter 47, pp. 103–105.

³⁹ Ibid., letter 71, pp. 157–165.

⁴⁰ This account is preserved in two versions: documents 75 and 75.1. The first one is edited in: Ginzburg, *Osef iggerot*, pp. 176–177, the second one was published before in the anti-Shabbatean biography of Shabbetai Zevi ed. by Jacob Emden (Altona 1697–1776): *Torat ha-Qena'ot* ("This is the Torah of jealousies" [Num 5:29]) published in Amsterdam in 1752, p. 102.

⁴¹ Ginzburg, *Osef iggerot*, letter 145, pp. 351–357.

mation of Luzzatto. As a consequence, they issued a new restrictive document and again sent three emissaries to Padua⁴² in order to obtain Luzzatto's acceptance of it. He refused to be governed by this new document and left for Amsterdam in 1735.

During this second phase, the role played by Samson Morpurgo underwent a complete transformation: formerly an accuser, he now became a mediator. Although Samson Morpurgo, Joseph Ergas and Abraham Segre were all inflexible opponents to Nehemiah Ḥiyya Ḥayon, their positions during Luzzatto's dispute were different. In truth, the only one of them who took direct action was Samson Morpurgo. This is evident because, apart from some letters between Isaiah Bassani and Joseph Ergas in which Joseph Ergas claimed that Luzzatto's kabbalistic commentaries lacked originality, we do not know anything else concerning their official positions.⁴³ In contrast, many of the letters written by Samson Morpurgo clearly explain the evolution of his position.⁴⁴ All the above-mentioned did not oppose Luzzatto in the same way as they had opposed Nehemiah Ḥiyya Ḥayon. The reason for this was that Luzzatto, like themselves, was not really a Shabbatean, but had been influenced first by the Lurianic Kabbalah which pervades all of the Shabbatean works, and then by the Shabbatean kabbalistic interpretation. During the first half of the 18th century, all of the rabbis involved in kabbalistic studies had a clear understanding of the Shabbatean works. If they had condemned Luzzatto's kabbalistic interpretation, this would have signified the action of condemning all kabbalists in Italy. The position of the Venetian rabbinate was different, in view of the fact that since they did have an influential rabbi in their community and were struggling with many economic problems, the Venetian community was losing its importance in comparison with the other Italian communities of that epoch, such as Mantua.

The Italian background of the Jewish communities was obviously changing at that time. This alteration was a determining factor concerning Luzzatto's dispute, especially during the second phase. On 3 December 1734, the Venetian rabbis wrote a *herem* account,⁴⁵ which was immediately accepted by different rabbinic authorities.⁴⁶ There were no Sephardic rabbis and, apart from the

⁴² Ibid., letter 96, pp. 248–249, document 100, pp. 257–260.

⁴³ Ibid., letters 45–46, pp. 99–103.

⁴⁴ Samson Morpurgo and Moses Ḥagiz exchanged numerous letters; see *ibid.*, letters 55, 56, 59, 60, 72, 105, 106, 138, 139, 143, 144, 148, 149, 156, 157.

⁴⁵ Ibid., document 104, pp. 271–276.

⁴⁶ Ibid., documents 120–130, pp. 306–320. These documents are endorsements by Ezekiel Katzenellenbogen (document 121), Mordecai ben Zevi Hirsch from Lissa (d. 1753), (document 122), Aryeh Loeb ben Saul Loewenstamm from Lemberg and Glogau [Silesia] (document 123),

Venetian rabbis, there were no Italian rabbis amongst these authorities; on the contrary, there were some Polish rabbis, but other Polish rabbis expressed their support for Luzzatto.

Jacob Emden (document 124); Jacob Hirsch from Pinczow [Poland] (document 125); the rabbi from Krotoschin whose name is unknown (document 126); two emissaries from Safed: Israel ben David from Brody and Moses Samuel (document 127); Eliezer from Cracow (document 128 and 129), and Polish rabbis (document 130).