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THE REGGIOS OF GORIZIA:  
MODERNIZATION IN MICRO

I

Isach Samuel Reggio, an affluent Italian-Jewish intellectual, was a devoted follower of Moses Mendelssohn and the Haskalah. Born in 1784, his early achievements were well received. In 1820 Reggio proposed the establishment of a rabbinical seminary that would train students in the humanities, as well as according to the traditional curriculum.<sup>1</sup> The following year he published an Italian translation of the Bible, with a commentary, modeled after the German *Bi'ur*. His *Ha-Torah veba-Philosophia* appeared in 1827, proclaiming the compatibility of rationalism and religion. Reggio was now 43 years old and a respected Maskil.<sup>2</sup>

During the remaining years of his life, Isach fell out of favor in intellectual circles because his name became increasingly linked with Reform. Criticism reached a crescendo after 1852, when, in *Behinat ha-Kabbalah*, Isach attributed the heretical *Kol Saḳal* to Leone Modena, Venice's colorful

\* To my mother, Ann Kupfermann, on her seventieth birthday.

1 The proposal was published in Vienna in 1820, in Venice in 1822, and in *Corriere Israelitico* 21 (1882-83): 130-33, 151-53, 175-77, 189-202, 224-26.

2 Though there have been several sketches of Isach's career, his full biography has yet to be written. Systematic analysis of his views has never been undertaken, to say nothing of his social environment. See Moisè Ehrenreich, "Isaaco S. Reggio," *L'Educatore Israelita* 3 (1855): 293-97; Vittorio Castiglione, "Toledot KMHR Isach Samuel Reggio," *Ozār ha-Sifrut* 4 (1892): 82-90; Joseph Klausner, *Historia shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Hadashah* (Jerusalem, 1963), vol. 4, pp. 10-37; Guido Hugues, "Di alcuni illustri semitisti e orientalisti della Venezia Giulia," *Studi Goriziani* 24 (1958): 43-51; Giuliano Tamani, "I.S. Reggio e l'illuminismo ebraico," in *Gli Ebrei a Gorizia e a Trieste tra Ancien Regime ed Emancipazione*, ed. P. C. Iolly Zorattini (Udine, 1984), pp. 29-40.

17th century rabbi.<sup>3</sup> Solomon Judah Leib Rapoport (SHIR), leader of the Galician Haskalah, concluded that Isach had finally shown his true heretical colors: "Towards the end of his life, he [Isach] was revealed to be a Sadducee. He wrote *Behinat ha-Kabbalah*, replete with arguments against those of the Talmud, revealing the villainy that had always been concealed within him. There has never been a denier of the Oral Law like him.... He is a hater of Israel."<sup>4</sup>

Isach's father, Abram Vita, was one of Italy's leading rabbinic authorities. The relationship between these two thinkers, father and son, affords a rare opportunity to probe the genesis of modern Jewish thought, and to watch the torch pass from the traditional to the modern intellectual leader. Upon examination, the distinction between tradition and modernity is not clear-cut. This point will be elaborated at length, but can be briefly illustrated here: Isach attended a Catholic grammar school, which was obviously Abram Vita's decision.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, in 1818, Abram Vita appended a letter of praise to Isach's first works, *Torah min-Shamayim* and *Torat Elohim*.

This essay will compare the thought of these two thinkers by focusing on their attitudes towards Kabbalah and Reform, considered by both to be key issues in determining the nature of modern Judaism. It will show that father and son disagreed, but not absolutely — and not at all times. Moreover,

3 *Behinat ha-Kabbalah* (Gorizia, 1852), pp. 73-86. This work begins with *Kol Saḥal*, a lengthy polemic against rabbinic tradition. Allegedly composed in 1500, it is attributed to one Amitai Ibn Raz of Spain. A very brief rebuttal follows, entitled *Sha'agat Aryeh*, attributed to Leone Modena. These two works are followed by an extensive series of comments by Isach. See Talya Fishman, "*Kol Saḥal's*" *Critique of Rabbinic Tradition* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1986); *idem*, "New Light on the Dating and Provenance of 'Kol Saḥal' and its Timeless Critique of Rabbinic Culture," (Hebrew) *Tarbiz* 59 (1990): 171-90; *idem*, *Shaking the Pillars of Exile* (Stanford, 1997).

4 *Ha-Shahar* 1 no. 2 (1869): 12-14. In a footnote to Rapoport's letter, Peretz Smolenskin, the editor of *Ha-Shahar*, alludes to Rapoport's personal resentment of Isach. For Isach's reactions, see *Algemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 18 (1854): 120-21; *Ozar Nehmad* 1 (1856): 127.

SHIR was not the first to accuse Isach of penning a pseudepigraphic medieval attack on traditional Judaism. Moritz Steinschneider attributed the heterodoxical *Alilot Devarim* to Isach. See *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1931), vol. 2, cols. 2135-36. Isach did copy *Alilot Devarim*, in 1831, hoping to publish it: see Oxford-Bodleian MS. 2222/4. However, he only published selections, in Letter 19 of *Igros Joschor*, vol. 1 (Vienna, 1834), pp. 122-32.

5 Isach's name appears in a government memorandum on the subject of

Abram and Isach did not differ on the basic question of the place of Halakhah in modern life.

## II

Our story begins with Abram Vita Reggio's biography, recorded by Mordecai Samuel Ghironi, his disciple and friend from Padua.<sup>6</sup> Born in Ferrara in 1755, Abram Vita studied with R. Isach Lampronti, author of the monumental *Paḥad Yizḥak*. Beginning in 1773, aged 18, Reggio spent eight years as a children's tutor in the Friuli district, first in Cormons and later in Chiavris. During these years he traveled frequently to Gradisca to study Kabbalah with Abram Morpurgo, whose daughter he later married.

In 1781 Abram Vita was hired by the officials of the Jewish community of Gorizia, near Gradisca, to serve as the teacher of their newly-opened school. He taught Hebrew and grammar, rhetoric and poetics, Bible and Bible commentary, homiletical literature, and the first book of Maimonides' Code.

Up to this point in his career, Abram Vita had acquired and exercised the full gamut of Hebrew disciplines. He had acquired training in Bible and grammar at Lampronti's yeshiva. In 1786 he wrote *Mashal u-Melizah*, a collection of occasional verse and didactic riddles,<sup>7</sup> which display his wit, as well as his erudition and linguistic skills.

Abram Vita's training and activities justify labeling him a Maskil. This classification is supported by the fact that *Mashal u-Melizah* contains a poem Abram Vita wrote in 1790, on the occasion of the marriage of Herz Homberg,

Jewish education, dated November 19, 1800. See Chiara Lesizza, "Scuola e cultura ebraica a Gorizia nel XVIII secolo: istanze tradizionali e fermenti di rinnovamento," *Studi Goriziani* 68 (1988): 64-65. Isach also appears in the Piarist school's published list of students: in September 1797 he was in the highest class of the lowest level in grammar. In April and September of 1800 Isach was in the top class in Rhetoric and Greek. He is not listed among the students of poetry. See *Quod felix faustumque Sit. nomina inventum in Caes. Reg. Goritienis scholarum piarum gymnasio humanioribus litteris studentium ex ordine classium in quas finito ... cursu referri meruerunt* (Gorizia, 1797, 1800 [April and September]).

6 Ghironi wrote the first biographical sketch of Abram Vita in a letter to David Zacut Modena, dated 1836. This document belongs to Professor Meir Benayahu, who kindly brought it to my attention. In 1844, after Abram's death, Ghironi published another biography in the first issue of *Yerushalayim ha-Benuyah*, pp. 74-83.

7 JTS Mic. 8627/2.



Rabbi Abram Vita Reggio  
(1755-1842)



Isach Samuel Reggio  
(1784-1885)

whom he calls a dear friend (ff. 42r-43r). Homberg stood at the forefront of the Berlin Haskalah, serving as tutor to Mendelssohn's son and later writing the Deuteronomy section of the *Bi'ur*. He and Abram Vita must have met and become closely acquainted in 1783-84, when Homberg taught at the Jewish school in Trieste.<sup>8</sup>

The year Abram Vita wrote his poem for Homberg was also the year he enrolled little Isach at the local Catholic school. Abram Vita's concern for Isach's general education fits in well with this stage of his career: it was the apogee and twilight of his early Maskilic phase, when he was still teaching Hebrew and Bible, writing prose and poetry.

In 1798 Abram Vita was offered the post of Rabbi of Gorizia, following the death of Moses Hefez Gentili. He held the position until his death in 1842. During these years Abram Vita composed his masterpiece, *Eshel Avraham*, an encyclopedic guide to Jewish culture, spanning Bible, grammar, Talmud, Midrash, homily, and Kabbalah. The disciplines are graded according to age groups, following the structure set down in Avot (5:21): "At five — Bible, at ten — Mishnah, and so on."

This structure, and particularly the space devoted to each field, reflects the relative importance of the various disciplines in Abram Vita's eyes at this later stage of his life. Bible and Hebrew are included — as they were in Lampronti's yeshiva — but are dispensed with in the first of the book's 13 parts. The rest of the disciplines are treated in parts 2-7, except for Kabbalah. Parts 8-12 deal with Kabbalah, while the final part deals with prayer, specifically kabbalistic prayer. Abram Vita had clearly moved out of his early Maskilic stage into his mature identity as a kabbalist. Henceforth, he bore the standard of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto alongside that of Isach Lampronti.<sup>9</sup>

Abram Vita produced a small number of other works, including an autobiography, a volume of responsa, and another of sermons.<sup>10</sup> None of these writings was published, and none has survived. Discussion will, therefore,

<sup>8</sup> Homberg went on to champion the cause of Haskalah in Galicia, where he adopted extremely untraditional views — with which Abram Vita would certainly not have agreed. See Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity* (New York, 1988), p. 152.

<sup>9</sup> See Meir Benayahu, *Kabbalistic Writings of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 92-94 and *passim*. *Eshel Avraham* does not purport to present a new interpretation of any field, and if in fact it does contain innovative contributions, these will be uncovered only through careful and minute analysis of the entire work.

<sup>10</sup> Ghirondi, letter to David Zacut Modena, op. cit., verso.

focus on his correspondence with Mordecai Samuel Ghironi of Padua, his student and friend. This material has survived in Ghironi's manuscript collection of his own responsa, *Kevuzat Kesef*.<sup>11</sup> Ghironi is a particularly valuable source because he straddled both Abram Vita and Isach's generations, and corresponded with both.

### III

One of Abram Vita's letters to Ghironi is about the significance of Kabbalah. Ghironi had asked Abram Vita whether a God-fearing and observant Jew, who studies Torah on the literal level but does not believe in the science of Kabbalah — or perhaps believes in it but does not want to study it — would be considered to have sinned.<sup>12</sup>

Abram Vita answered that study of Kabbalah is incumbent upon everyone, claiming that there is no other path to eternal bliss, which he states as the human goal. At the heart of Abram Vita's presentation is the argument that the Torah makes no sense on the literal level. What is the point, he asks, of recounting stories from the past, such as that of Laban's livestock, or that of Judah and Tamar, which "adds no honor to us?"<sup>13</sup>

Abram Vita makes the same argument for the commandments. He repeatedly points out that some of them are intended simply to commemorate past events, a purpose which ostensibly could be accomplished by means

<sup>11</sup> Ghironi separated the substantive, main body of his letters (as well as those of his correspondents) from the opening and closing pleasantries and personal remarks. The latter are collected in manuscripts entitled *Dover Shalom*, also in the Montefiore collection.

<sup>12</sup> Montefiore MS. 162, #289, ff. 45r ff. Though Ghironi may have asked the question theoretically, he wrote a number of letters that express the difficulties he was having with his own study of Kabbalah. In one letter, Ghironi is perplexed by disagreements between kabbalists, especially the discrediting of pre-Lurianic Kabbalah by Hayyim Vital (Montefiore MS. 161, #63-4, ff. 47v-49v). Abram Vita replied to the letter without answering the question. Elsewhere, Ghironi asked Reggio which kabbalistic authorities he himself followed, especially with regard to the choice between Cordovero and Luria; again Abram Vita evaded the question (Montefiore MS. 163, #488, ff. 108v-109r.). Ghironi received no reply at all to a series of specific questions on matters of kabbalistic doctrine, which he raised after reading Abram Vita's *Eshel Avraham* (Montefiore MS. 162, #392). Therefore, it may be that Ghironi's question about Kabbalah's indispensability expressed his own ambivalence towards the discipline.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Megillah 3:10.

of a mental act. In Abram Vita's view, the literal understanding of these commandments leaves them "lacking taste and salt." Abram Vita concludes that the Torah and commandments must have an internal quality which grants them meaning and value, by which he means Kabbalah.

These arguments are not new; Yair Hayyim Bacharach made a similar case in the 17th century, citing even earlier sources.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, discussion of the apparent meaninglessness of commandments dates back to medieval arguments over the authenticity of rabbinic tradition. Still, Abram Vita penned these lines against the backdrop of his own historical context: he was a child of the Enlightenment, when formalized religion was on the decline among Jews and Christians. Viewed in the context of the prevalent apathy and skepticism, the problems Abram Vita raised take on a contemporary air alongside their medieval roots.

Abram Vita attacks the enemy camp, defined as literalists and sympathizers of philosophy, which, despite the destruction of Aristotelianism, is still identified as Greek. Abram Vita has this group claim that knowledge of Bible, Talmud and halakhic literature is sufficient for proper observation of the commandments. The enemy and its arguments are familiar from medieval sources. Similarly, Abram Vita's principal claim — that because philosophy undergoes constant change, it is without foundation — resonates back to the Karaite-rabbinic polemics of an earlier age. But Abram Vita adds a contemporary touch:

The great scholar Kant, who was an extremely wise man, wrote at the beginning of his book that he read the works of all ages — Plato, Aristotle and all the earlier philosophers — and prepared proofs to overturn all their words, and to prove that all their proofs are erroneous. And so he did. And then came a great philosopher, author of *Giv'at ha-Moreh*, and attempted to defend the early philosophers and save them from Kant's approach (f. 49r).

Abram Vita is referring to Solomon Maimon's *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, a critique of Kant published in 1790. But Abram

<sup>14</sup> See Isadore Twersky, "Law and Spirituality in the Seventeenth Century: A Case Study in R. Yair Hayyim Bacharach," in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. I. Twersky and B. Septimus (Cambridge MA, 1987), pp. 447-67. For earlier sources, see *idem*, "Talmudists, Philosophers, Kabbalists: The Quest for Spirituality in the Sixteenth Century," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Cambridge MA, 1983), pp. 431-59.

Vita's picture of Maimon as a throwback to Aristotelianism is inaccurate; Maimon attempted to modify Kant's philosophy, but he did not reject it *in toto*.<sup>15</sup> Abram Vita's error indicates that he had not read Maimon — and possibly not Kant — but was simply using common knowledge for the sake of argument. This suggestion fits the fact that neither science nor philosophy were part of Abram Vita's formal education. If his intellectual horizons were really that narrow, his embrace of Kabbalah was probably not motivated by modern intellectual currents, such as the downfall of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics, or of the perceived equation between the truth of revelation and of reason. Rather, he would appear to have preferred Kabbalah to philosophy for the same reasons expressed by his medieval predecessors.

#### IV

On the question of the Kabbalah's validity — and certainly its indispensability — father and son are almost — but not completely — opposed. A letter from Ghironi to Isach reveals that Isach underwent a gradual disenchantment with Kabbalah.

Late in 1834 Isach asked Ghironi for his opinion of *Igeros Joschor*, a collection of Isach's letters. In his reply, Ghironi castigated Isach for criticizing Kabbalah in his 13th letter. He urged Isach to refrain from publicizing criticism of Kabbalah, for various reasons, and then added<sup>16</sup>:

I am surprised at you, wise scholar that you are, that you seek to make this holy science distasteful to scholars after treating it kindly in your sermon, *Torah min ha-Shamayim*. Moreover, you yourself proved, in Part one Chapter five of your book *Ha-Torah veba-Philosophia*, that

the Torah has an inner stratum (*penimiyyut*) which is known to the pious of each generation. How, I wonder, did you transform yourself all at once into a different person?<sup>17</sup>

Actually, *Torah min ha-Shamayim* does not talk about Kabbalah at all, but makes the central point that there is a divine lesson in every letter of the Torah, indeed, in every written character. In this sense, the sermon can be interpreted as sympathetic to the kabbalist's sensibilities.

Part one, Chapter five of *Ha-Torah veba-Philosophia* is also not about Kabbalah. However, elsewhere in this book Isach does speak favorably of Kabbalah; he notes that even famous kabbalists saw merit in the study of philosophy, citing first Abraham Kohen Herrera and then Abraham b. Isaac of Granada, the alleged author of *Berit Menuhah* (p. 49). Isach does seem to view this kind of philosophical Kabbalah as a respectable discipline.<sup>18</sup> Later in the work Isach cites the Zohar in support of remarks on the eschatological legend of the leviathan, and he cites it before Sa'adia Gaon, implying the antiquity of the Zohar.<sup>19</sup> Finally, Isach waxes eloquent on the subject of the esoteric meaning of *aggadah*, and even uses the term *penimiyyut*, providing yet another intellectual contact point between Isach and Kabbalah sympathizers.<sup>20</sup>

Letter 13, the stimulus for Ghironi's rebuke, is a refutation of the claim that, before dying, Leone Modena abandoned his rejection of metempsychosis. Isach finds it inconceivable that Modena would "suddenly turn into another person" (p. 84), the phrase Ghironi later turned against him. But Isach's main point is that the story does not vitiate the intellectual force of *Ari*

17 Montefiore MS. 164, #439, f. 78r.

18 In Part two, Chapter five, Isach lashes out at popular customs and superstitions that he considers ridiculous. It is apparent that he is criticizing popular kabbalistic lore, but he veils his target, so that this section would not have upset Ghironi (pp. 80-83).

19 P. 76. Isaac Baer Levinsohn contrasted this with Isach's later view of the Zohar's authenticity. See his *Yehoshafat* (Warsaw, 1883), pp. 46-47.

20 Pp. 126-27. Moshe Idel has argued that Solomon Maimon, and to a certain extent Moses Mendelssohn, felt that Kabbalah was a body of truth (particularly its psychology), however misunderstood by latter-day kabbalists. See his "Perceptions of Kabbalah in the Second Half of the 18th Century," *The Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy* 1 (1991): 62-68. In this context, note Isach's respectful and academic discussion of magic, particularly the writings of Yohanan Alemanno, in *Kerem Hemed* 2 (1836): 39-53.

15 Maimon does reject some of Kant's ideas and integrate elements of Maimonidean thought, but he could not seriously be considered a champion of classical philosophy. See Samuel Atlas, "Solomon Maimon's Treatment of the Problem of Antinomies and its Relation to Maimonides," *HUCA* 21 (1948): 105-52, esp. 120 ff.; Samuel Hugo Berman, *The Philosophy of Solomon Maimon*, trans. Noah J. Jacobs (Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 210-15.

16 Ghironi's first point is that a critique of Kabbalah would be misused by those who seek to destroy Judaism and "invent a new Torah." Second, Ghironi writes that Kabbalah is a neglected discipline, implying that it does not threaten to conquer the hearts and minds of Italian Jewry. Third, Ghironi maintains that the few people engaged in the study of Kabbalah are not likely to be swayed by Isach's critical remarks.

*Nohem*, Modena's anti-kabbalistic treatise. Once again, Kabbalah *per se* is not Isach's target.<sup>21</sup>

*Ari Nohem* seems to have affected Isach profoundly, causing him to abandon his earlier attitude, which combined respect for Kabbalah *per se* with a restrained criticism of what he perceived as latter-day distortions and perversions. This is the shift to which Ghironi referred in his letter, and Ghironi appears to have bottled up his resentment of Isach's critical remarks until he was invited to comment on *Igros Joschor*.

Isach's writings on *Ari Nohem* reveal the gradual shift in his attitude and tone. In 1816 he presented Moses Kunitz of Budapest with a series of questions on the authenticity of the Zohar, following the appearance of the latter's *Ben Yohai*. Isach tells Kunitz that he has acquired a manuscript of *Ari Nohem*, and that it contains falsehoods about Kabbalah in general, and the Zohar in particular. Isach quotes a few acerbic sentences, and, after expressing shame at having repeated Modena's calumnies, humbly asks Kunitz to decide whether or not they merit a reply.

Given the care Isach takes to present himself as a believer, as well as his obsequious tone, it is hardly surprising that Isach signs the letter as the son of his father. But, significantly, Abram Vita subscribed to the letter, indicating

21 In addition to these references, there is a chapter from *Ha-Torah ve-ha-Philosophia* on Kabbalah that was stricken by the censor, and appeared anonymously in 1840. There Isach argues at length that Kabbalah should not be studied. He notes that though the kabbalists stress that the terminology used to refer to the Godhead is figurative, the actual, spiritual truth to which the terms allude is generally too nebulous to be grasped and, indeed, the distinction between expression and reality is often lost on Kabbalah's adherents. This pitfall is tantamount to heresy, because of the principles of God's unity and incorporeality.

To discourage the study of Kabbalah, Isach lists the many medieval scholars who discouraged pursuit of Kabbalah because of its inherent danger. Then he argues that the multiplicity of doctrines makes it impossible to know what the true Kabbalah is. Finally, Isach attributes the Sabbatian debacle to Kabbalah: "all this came about because of the love of wonders and mysteries, and the search for wonder and mystery."

The view that Kabbalah is dangerous was hardly in dispute, even among kabbalists. Neither this argument nor the preceding ones could be called an attack on the legitimacy of Kabbalah *per se*. At no point does Isach state or imply that Kabbalah is fundamentally false, and thus Ghironi might have taken Isach for a closet sympathizer. See Leone Modena, *Ari Nohem*, ed. Julius Fuerst (Leipzig, 1840), pp. 91-97. The attribution to Reggio is mentioned by Isaac Baer Levinsohn (*Yehoshafat*, p. 46). See *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Reggio, Isaac Samuel," p. 361.

that he stood behind his son's enquiry, even if had not read *Ari Nohem* or doubted the Zohar's authenticity. Father and son stood together, and *Ari Nohem*, which Isach had only just acquired, had yet to undermine his faith in the legitimacy of Kabbalah.<sup>22</sup>

The change in Isach's views and tone is evident in his edition of Delmedigo's *Behinat ha-Dat*, published in 1833. Delmedigo's text is followed by a series of lengthy notes by Reggio, and note 10 includes a full chapter from *Ari Nohem*, attacking the kabbalistic view of prayer (pp. 103-107). Note 12 is an attack on the attribution of the Zohar to Bar Yohai, and note 13 is a response to Kunitz's defense of the attribution. Modena had clearly persuaded Isach, and Isach's sympathy for the work is also evident from the fact that he prepared *Ari Nohem* for publication. It is this change of heart to which Ghironi refers in his letter of 1834, one year later.<sup>23</sup>

From the subject of Isach's change of heart, Ghironi shifts to a personal tack:

Bear in mind, my beloved friend, that you have an elderly father, elderly in the wisdom of the divine Kabbalah, who is an absolute master of the revealed and the mysterious, who has a firm grasp of the Torah's secrets, and who has written numerous and weighty books on the subject. You cannot suspect him — as the sect of the BESH'Tians was suspected — of anything ignoble. For you and I know him to be Godfearing, privately as well as publicly ... and God forbid that "the seed of Abraham," his son, would rise up and dispute his words, denouncing the science of truth!<sup>24</sup>

22 M. Kunitz, *Ha-Mezaref*, pt. 1 (Vienna, 1820), pp. 41-47.

23 Samuele David Luzzatto (Shadal), Isach's colleague and friend from Padua, was also interested in the question of the authenticity of the Zohar. In 1836 Luzzatto published an anonymous letter on the matter in *Kerem Hemed*. His lengthy treatment of the subject, *Vikkuaḥ al ḥokmat ha-Kabbalah ve-al kadmut ha-Zohar*, was published in Gorizia in 1852 by Graziadio Isaia Ascoli. Isach's role in the composition and publication of this work is unclear.

24 Montefiore MS. 163, #439, ff. 78r-v. The personal-pleasantry segment of this letter dates it to the eve of *Rosh Ḥodesh Kislev* 5595, i.e. 1834: see Montefiore MS. 176, #1075, f. 38r. The reference to the "BESH'Tians" alludes to the charges of heresy made by Hasidism's opponents. In addition to the well-known critique of Zaddikism in Solomon Maimon's autobiography, see Mordecai L. Wilensky, "Hasidic-Mitnaggedic Polemics in the Jewish Communities of Eastern Europe: The Hostile Phase," in *Essential Papers on Hasidism*, ed. Gershon D. Hundert (New York, 1991), pp. 244-71; Allan Nadler, "Meir b. Elijah of Vilna's *Milhamoth*

Ghirondi's reference to Abram Vita suggests that he saw a connection between blood and belief, between Isach's convictions and his relationship with his father. Ghirondi's letter highlights the rebellious aspect of Isach's agitation against Kabbalah. He saw Isach's letter as signaling a downturn in the relationship between father and son.

## V

Isach's switch from an early traditionalism to a more radical stance, and the change in his relationship with his father, are reflected in sources on the issues of *tefillin* and shaving on *ḥol ha-mo'ed* (the intermediate days of festivals). In the spring of 1825 Isach petitioned the communal leaders (*Capi*) of Gorizia to allow into the synagogue those Jews choosing not to put on *tefillin* during *ḥol ha-mo'ed*.<sup>25</sup>

*Tefillin* on *ḥol ha-mo'ed* was not a new issue. Ashkenazic tradition required that they be worn, but a Zoharic prohibition dictated Sephardic practice, and ultimately determined the position of R. Joseph Karo (*Shulḥan Arukh*, pt. I, sec. 31). BESHtian Hasidism aligned itself with the Zoharic dictate, and the Gaon R. Elijah of Vilna agreed. Around the turn of the 19th century, R. Jacob b. Aaron of Karlin issued a last-ditch defense of the inviolability of Ashkenazic tradition.<sup>26</sup>

*Adonai: A Late Anti-Hasidic Polemic.* *The Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (1992): 260-74.

<sup>25</sup> Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), IT-GO, AII-22, 1.IV.1825.

<sup>26</sup> On this controversy, see Jacob Katz, "Tefillin on *Ḥol ha-Mo'ed*: Differences of Opinion and Public Controversies of Kabbalistic Origin" (Hebrew), in *Halakhah ve-Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 102-24. The Jews of Gorizia had confronted this issue on a previous occasion. In 1716 Raphael Emanuel Hai Ricchi, a kabbalist who settled in Gorizia and supported himself by teaching the local Jewish children, exhorted the community's members to abandon their tradition of wearing *tefillin* on *ḥol ha-mo'ed*. Gorizia, unlike Ferrara for example, was such a small community that sustaining more than one synagogue was not an option. The result was a new situation, in which members of a single synagogue split into two camps with different practices. To this there arose fierce opposition. Various rabbinic responsa affirmed the continued legitimacy of the traditional practice, and demanded that Ricchi's campaign for change be stopped. See Isach Lampronti, *Pahad Yizhak*, s.v. *Tefillin*, f. 99v, ff.

Isach's exchange with the *Capi* suggests that some members of the Gorizia community adhered strictly to their Ashkenazic legacy, while others followed the kabbalists' practice. Isach's petition implies that he himself refrained from donning the *tefillin*, though he may have acted out of concern for the religious freedom of others. Isach's own policy is clarified by a separate document from the archive of Gorizia's Jewish community, which was attached to Isach's petition. It tells the following story, providing neither the name of the protagonist nor the date of the incident.<sup>27</sup>

At one time everyone was allowed into the synagogue on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, even those worshipers who did not put on *tefillin* during *ḥol ha-mo'ed*. Apart from the narrator of the incident, this last group included such distinguished congregants as Abram Vita Reggio and Ventura (b. R. Menasheh Hefez) Gentili. No objection was made by the communal Rabbi, R. Moses Hefez Gentili, but the *Capi* eventually prevailed upon him to issue a declaration against the practice.<sup>28</sup>

This year, on the morning of *Hoshanah Rabbah*, the narrator responded promptly to the sexton's call to prayer, and was soon followed by Isach Reggio. Within a few minutes, Abram Vita Morpurgo approached the narrator, and began abusing him and loudly ordering both men out of the synagogue. The narrator and others tried to calm Morpurgo, but he continued to shout, while kicking and banging on the narrator's bench. Another congregant shouted in support of Morpurgo's outburst, and prayer could not proceed until the two complied with Morpurgo's demand.<sup>29</sup>

It is clear from this story that Isach's 1825 appeal to the *Capi* stemmed

<sup>27</sup> The juxtaposition in the Gorizian community archive of Isach's appeal and the narrative suggests that they were chronologically proximate, though April 1st and *Hoshanah Rabbah* are separated by half a year. However, this remains uncertain, as the narrative is undated.

<sup>28</sup> Hefez died in 1798, so the following incident took place some time thereafter. See Mordecai Samuel Ghirondi, "Toledot Avraham," *Yerushalayim ha-Benuyah* (1844), p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> The question of entering the synagogue came up during the controversy with Ricchi. At that time a number of possibilities were suggested that would have defused the tension created by the proposed change, but Ricchi rejected them all. One of the compromises, also rejected, was that community members abstaining from *tefillin* not enter the synagogue until the recitation of *Hallel*, when everyone removes their *tefillin* in any case. This compromise may have been the measure that Abram Vita Morpurgo sought to implement in the latest Gorizian struggle. See Katz, "Tefillin," pp. 114-20, 123.

from religious conviction rather than from an ideal of religious toleration or pluralism. Thus it appears that in 1825 Isach adhered to his father's custom, and practiced — as well as preaching — respect for Kabbalah.<sup>30</sup> Ten years later, in 1835, the year of Ghironi's letter, Isach's attitude towards tradition seems to have changed. The issue is Reform, not Kabbalah, but by coincidence *hol ha-mo'ed* is again the focus of debate.

That year, 1835, Isach published *Ma'amur ha-Tiglahat*, calling for abrogation of the halakhic taboo on shaving during *hol ha-mo'ed*. This was a classic issue in the struggle over Reform, and Isach's main arguments had already been aired by other scholars.<sup>31</sup> The heart of the matter, to which Isach devotes half of the book, is the right to institute halakhic reform. Isach writes: "Everything depends on temporal and geographical change, on changes in people's needs and customs, on the obsolescence of the old rationales, and on fear of the greater ills that would stem from the custom's perpetuation" (p. 48).

Abram Vita objected to the treatise, and his critical notes were published after his death, under the title *Tiglahat ha-Ma'amar*.<sup>32</sup> He, too, addressed broad considerations, as well as the legal particulars of the issue at hand. Abram Vita characterized those favoring the change as "pampered handsome young fellows (Ezek. 23:6), whose only aim is to appear nice and handsome for the prostitutes" (6r). His practical suggestion was that these "fellows" grow their beard throughout the year, and he cited other "handsome young fellows" who do so, "and say that this is their beauty" (4v, 7r).

Abram Vita explains that ceding on the matter of *hol ha-mo'ed* would open the door to shaving on festival days, or even on the Sabbath (5v). He shows no willingness to compromise with those who refuse to obey rabbinic law. This is characteristic of the general attitude Abram Vita expresses towards Reform in *Tiglahat ha-Ma'amar*: "It is true that the fences of Judaism are breached in many places, and we are unable to repair them, but we shall

not, on that account, lend the sinners our support, adding satiety to thirst and causing them to transgress further, for the troubles of the present are of sufficient difficulty" (5r).

*Tiglahat ha-Ma'amar* reveals how wide a breach had opened between Abram Vita and his son by 1835. Abram Vita assumed the same militant stance in 1837, in letters he exchanged with Ghironi concerning the Reformist publications of Aaron Chorin of Arad.<sup>33</sup> Ghironi accompanies every mention of Chorin's name with strings of curses, but he wrote to Abram Vita because some of Chorin's arguments appeared to make sense, a realization he found quite unsettling.

One of these letters concerns the question of whether a Jew may sell medicine to a non-Jew on the Sabbath. Ghironi uses the issue to ask Abram Vita to look for ways to remove halakhic restrictions that do not endanger the basic Written and Oral Law. He cites Chorin's point that many Jews will turn their backs on Judaism, leave the fold, and even become enemies of the Jewish people. Deploring Chorin's point of view, Ghironi asks Abram Vita whether, nevertheless, the problem is real. He has imaginary supplicants complain that the distinctive lifestyle enjoined by Halakhah makes them the subject of ridicule among non-Jews, and causes government officials to deny positions to Jews.<sup>34</sup>

Abram Vita could not be budged: "Times may have changed, but our Torah has not changed, God forbid!" Abram Vita refers to the Reformers as "the new philosophers, who lead people astray through scientific investigation, an alien wisdom ... which seeks to destroy the roots of the holy Torah and its basic contents." He continues: "One should not be surprised at those that are drawn after her — namely science — because 'they abound in customs of the aliens' (Isa. 2:6) that did not know God's mystery, and refused to walk in the way of his Torah, and thus they threw truth away."<sup>35</sup>

This is Abram Vita's most extreme rejection of modern thought, which he equates with the abandonment of "truth" — perhaps Kabbalah — and religious observance. Abram Vita's language seems less severe when placed in its specific setting, as a reaction to the writings of Aaron Chorin, a particularly radical Reformer. Abram Vita devoted a separate letter, written

30 The *tefillin* story also shows that the pressures of modernization failed to temper the passionate commitment of Gorizia's synagogue regulars to meticulous ritual observance, a point that merits further examination.

31 See Moshe Samet, *Halakah ve-Reforma* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1967), pp. 25-29, 35-36, 42-55; Meir Benayahu, *The Second Day of the Festival* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 31-34; Jacob Katz, "The Orthodox Defense of the Second Day of the Festivals" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 57 (1987-88): 413; *idem*, *Halacha in Straits* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1992), p. 101.

32 Livorno, 1844. See also Jacob Ezekiel Halevi, *Tisoret Lulianit* (Berlin, 1839).

33 Both Ghironi and Abram Vita cite Chorin's *Igeret El'asaf* (1826), *Avak Sofer* (1828), and *Zir Ne'eman* (1831).

34 Montefiore MS. 176, #1063, f. 32r-v.

35 Montefiore MS. 164, #458, f. 91v.



in 1837, to refuting Chorin's heretical views.<sup>36</sup> The letter addresses specific points, leaving no doubt that Abram Vita had read Chorin's works. In fact, Abram Vita says so explicitly: "I did not wish to read them, but [people] implored me and I read, until I was disgusted, and I threw them to the ground" (f. 165v). It is unclear who implored Abram Vita to read Chorin: could it have been Isach?

## VI

The image of Abram Vita and Isach as holding polarized views on Reform is not entirely accurate for either. Abram Vita's responsum on music in the synagogue expresses a large measure of flexibility.

Ghirondi asked Abram Vita whether it was permissible to have non-Jews play musical instruments on the final day of Sukkot, "to honor God and the Torah — the Torah having been completed on that holy day — on the grounds that this performance evokes *Simhat Beit ha-Sho'evah*." Abram Vita permitted the practice, on condition that the congregants accompanied the music with songs honoring God, stating that this would truly evoke the holiday.<sup>37</sup>

The issue of music in the synagogue first appeared in Italy in the early 17th-century. With the introduction of the organ into the Hamburg Temple in 1819 the issue became a bone of contention between traditional and Reform rabbis. Italian rabbis could be found in both camps, and the fact that Abram Vita ruled leniently is only remarkable because Abraham Eliezer Halevi, the rabbi of neighboring Trieste, sided with the traditionalists, citing a recent attempt to introduce the organ into the local *Tempio*.<sup>38</sup>

Isach's position on halakhic reform is also more complex than one might suppose; he opposed radical reform as vehemently as he opposed rigid orthodoxy. Among the listed advantages of the rabbinical college he proposed in 1820 was the rabbi's ability to combat unrestrained attacks on tradition.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, #544, ff. 164r-166v.

<sup>37</sup> Montefiore MS. 161, #203, f. 95r.

<sup>38</sup> On the debate over music in the synagogue, see Shlomo Simonsohn, "Some Disputes on Music in the Synagogue in Pre-Reform Days," *PAAJR* 34 (1966): 99-110; Meir Benayahu, "The Views of Italian Scholars on the Playing of Music during Prayer" (Hebrew), *Asufot* 1 (1987): 265-318. Additional material is discussed in my "Themes and Texts in the Halakhic Literature of Italy in the Modern Period" (Hebrew), in *Pe'amim* 86-87 (forthcoming).

In a number of writings, including *Behinat ha-Kabbalah*, Isach excoriated those who rejected the concept of mandatory precepts in favor of a purely spiritual approach to Judaism. Like his father, he singled out Aaron Chorin for particular censure.<sup>39</sup> Isach only advocated changing rabbinic prescriptions that he felt contravened the biblical commandments upon which they were based. Isach sanctioned deviation from the *Shulhan Arukh*, but decried the threat to Judaism posed by the extremist camps of both orthodoxy and Reform.

Abram Vita's and Isach's views show that they differed, especially from the mid-1830s, but that their differences were more textured than their rhetoric suggests. Their social relationship gives no indication of any tensions their "generation gap" may have caused. Abram Vita's death certificate discloses the fact that Isach, who was well provided for, supported his father in his advanced age, and that the two lived under one roof.<sup>40</sup>

## VII

For most of his life Isach was merely a taxpaying member of the Gorizia community. In 1842, at the age of 58, following his father's death, he assumed the position of acting rabbi. However, in 1850 he was dismissed from the position. This incident is of particular significance because it was motivated by a struggle over Reform. Isach was ousted for blocking a program of halakhic reforms initiated by the *Capi*.<sup>41</sup> Outmaneuvered in the field of communal politics, Reggio did manage to have the last word on Reform. In 1852 he published *Behinat ha-Kabbalah*, which contains the following indictment of

<sup>39</sup> *Ozar Nehmad* 1 (1856): 48; *Behinat ha-Kabbalah*, p. 86; "Etrog" in *Yalkut Josçhor* (Gorizia, 1854), pp. 49-50; *Behinat ha-Dat* (Vienna, 1833), pp. 98-103, 118-23. While I believe these sources are representative of Reggio's attitude towards Reform, a detailed study remains a desideratum.

<sup>40</sup> The death certificate states that Abram Vita left no property at all, because he had none. See Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, Tribunale Civico Provinciale, busta 190, fasc. 273/A. As for Isach's wealth, the community's 1829 tax lists place Isach in second place among the community's 23 taxpayers. See CAHJP, IT-GO, A XIII.

<sup>41</sup> This episode is documented in a dossier in the Archivio di Stato di Gorizia, Capitanato Circolare di Gorizia, b. 16, fasc. 173. Vittorio Castiglione passed over the story of Isach's dismissal in 1850, noting only that in 1851 Isach "stripped off the rabbinic mantle" (op. cit., p. 89). The incident was noted by Klausner (op. cit., p. 15) and Ehrenreich (op. cit., p. 296). See my "New Light on the Career of Isaac Samuel Reggio," *History and Memory: The Jews of Italy*, ed. Bernard D. Cooperman (forthcoming).

the proponents of Reform: "... not only do they oppose this commandment [*tefillin*], they rebel against all the others, with malice and contempt. The spirit of the times ... seduces them to destroy every commandment that distinguishes the Israelite from his fellow man, as if our only purpose were to resemble others, even in their follies."<sup>42</sup>

SHIR's stigmatization of Reggio as a heretic might have been based entirely on his attribution of *Kol Sakal* to Leone Modena; it hardly emerges from his ringing condemnation of Reform.<sup>43</sup>

42. *Behinat ha-Kabbalah*, p. 153. Cf. the views of Joshua Heschel Schorr in Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, pp. 196-97.

43. Long before he published *Behinat ha-Kabbalah*, Isach expressed frustration over his impression that Italian Jewish scholars were likely to mistake his scholarship for heresy. See *Ozar Nehmad 1* (1856): 14.