

# The Controversy between I.S. Reggio and S.D. Luzzatto on the Date of the Writing of the Pentateuch

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S.D. Luzzatto's controversy with I.S. Reggio concerning the origins of the Hebrew alphabet is discussed. Reggio argued that Hebrew script was unknown in Moses' time; a single person could not possibly have invented it; therefore, Moses had received the Hebrew script together with the Torah at Sinai and taught Israel both the Torah itself and the art of writing.

Luzzatto feared that these ideas might be exploited by critical scholars to bolster their argument that Moses did not write the Pentateuch. First denying the veracity of Reggio's thesis, on the basis of supposed evidence that Hebrew script predated Moses, Luzzatto later attacked Reggio's logic, arguing that lack of proof for knowledge of the script before the Exodus did not imply its nonexistence. Moreover, there was no indication in the Written or Oral Law that Hebrew script was invented by Moses under divine inspiration.

This argument typifies Luzzatto's conviction, also reflected in his writings, that it was his bounden duty to combat any ideas that he thought might undermine the Jewish faith. In the present case, though Reggio's thesis might be legitimate in itself, it might be misused by critical scholars to deny the divine origins of the Torah.

Samuel David Luzzatto, one of the pioneering Jewish Bible commentators in the period of the *Haskalah* in the nineteenth century (northern Italy; 1800–65), is considered to be the first modern Jewish commentator. His commentary is based on Jewish tradition and on the belief in the sanctity of the Bible, and constitutes a sort of transition from the medieval Jewish commentary, through non-Jewish critical commentary, to modern Hebrew Biblical interpretation. He was quite familiar with the ramified Jewish commentary that preceded him, such as that by Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Nahmanides, Abrabanel, and Moses Mendelssohn, whom he frequently mentions in his commentaries, as well as the critical Christian commentary, that he greatly esteemed and from which he extensively quoted, but of whose excessive critical nature he disapproved.<sup>1</sup> One of the questions that was

<sup>1</sup> For Luzzatto's interpretive method, see the monograph: B. M. Margolis, *Samuel David Luzzatto: Traditionalist Scholar* (New York: Ktav, 1979).

raised by Biblical criticism in the time of Luzzatto was: when did people begin to write in alphabetic script?<sup>2</sup>

All of the discussions that were conducted in the nineteenth century regarding the source and the time of the formation of alphabetic script are of only historical interest today, as part of the history of scholarly research. In classical scholarship, scholars drew their knowledge regarding the history of the script from the Bible and from other ancient books that were preserved and copied over the course of generations, such as the writings of Herodotus. Modern scholarly inquiry into this issue began only in the twentieth century, upon the discovery of about a dozen inscriptions of a special type known as proto-Sinaitic, that were uncovered in 1905 by Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie (1853–1942), a leading Egyptologist, in the excavations of the temple of Hathor and in the turquoise mines in Sarabit el-Khadm in the Sinai peninsula.<sup>3</sup> From that time on, this subject would be examined on the basis of finds that were unearthed.<sup>4</sup>

One of the central issues raised at the beginning of Biblical criticism was that of the authorship of the Torah. Baruch Spinoza (1632–77)<sup>5</sup> was the first intellectual from among the Jewish people to openly rebel against the tradition, and discard it in favor of a critical approach. He pioneered “Biblical criticism,” which he developed into a methodical discipline.<sup>6</sup> In his essay *Tractus Theologico-*

- 2 According to new studies, the alphabetic script, in which each symbol represents only a single consonant, had its beginnings in the middle of the second millennium B.C.E., in the vicinity of the Land of Israel-Syria. Luzzatto wrote that he devoted to this topic a chapter in his book *Torah Nidreshet* chapter 17: “The Book of the Torah of Moses — When Was It Written.” See *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2 (Warsaw: Ha-Tzeferah, 1913) 96; *Peninei Shadal* (Przemysl: Zupnick, Kneller & Hammerschmid, 1888) 413. The first twelve chapters and parts of chapters 22 and 24 were published in different forums. A posthumous translation into Italian of these chapters was published as *Torah Nidrescet, volgarizzato dal Rabb. M. Coen Porto* (Padua: Tip. Crescini, 1879). This chapter, like others, was not published, and remained in manuscript form, apparently in the possession of Luzzatto’s sons.
- 3 These are texts engraved in stone in a pictographic script, in which each picture represents the first sound of the object depicted by it. These inscriptions are dated approximately to the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. See W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Researches in Sinai* (London: J. Murray, 1906) 129–32; W. F. Albright, *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions and Their Decipherment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1966).
- 4 See J. Naveh, *Origins of the Alphabet* (Heb.) (Jerusalem: Keter, 1979) 14–18; J. Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1989) 13–42; P. T. Daniels and W. Bright, *The World’s Writing Systems* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996).
- 5 Spinoza was born into a Marrano family that had emigrated from Portugal to Holland, and that was highly respected among the Jewish Spanish-Portuguese community in Amsterdam. The leaders of the community placed him under a ban and “cut [him] off from the Nation of Israel” in 1656 because of his views.
- 6 For a general discussion of Spinoza’s standing in critical biblical research, see P. Slymowics, “Spinoza and Biblical Criticism,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2, 2 (1982/3) 232–54 (Heb.). The beginning of biblical criticism is commonly accredited to Spinoza in the midseventeenth century. See, e.g., R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper, 1948) 46; O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966) 160.

Politicus<sup>7</sup> he denies the traditional belief that Moses wrote the Torah in its entirety: “the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, but by someone who lived long after Moses,”<sup>8</sup> and since Spinoza, critical literary scholarship has focused on the question of the formulation of the Pentateuch. Many scholars accepted the view that rejects attribution of the authorship of the Pentateuch as a whole to Moses.<sup>9</sup>

Luzzatto sought to contend on contentual grounds with the critical arguments raised by the scholars who preceded him. He attacked the critical approach disseminated by the rationalist Protestant clergymen in Germany,<sup>10</sup> and totally refuted all of the arguments that originated, so he believed, in this school. He zealously defended the early authorship, unity, and perfection of the Torah. Like other Maskilim before him,<sup>11</sup> Luzzatto proclaimed his belief in “Torah from Heaven,” and bluntly denounced those who repudiated this conviction, thus revealing his total opposition to the school of higher criticism of the Torah.<sup>12</sup>

In 1818 R. Isacco Samuel Reggio (known as *Yashar*; 1784–1855), a Jewish *maskil* and Bible commentator from Gorizia (in northeast Italy) who founded the Collegio Rabbिनico Italiano in Padua, Italy,<sup>13</sup> published his commentary on

7 B. de Spinoza, *The Chief Works (A Theologico-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise)*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951) 120–28. The book was originally written in Latin (*Tractus Theologico-Politicus*) in 1670.

8 Spinoza, *The Chief Works*, 124.

9 See, e.g., P. Sandler, *Mendelssohn's Edition of the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1940) 34 (Heb.).

10 For the history of scholarly research on the Pentateuch until the time of Luzzatto, see A. T. Chapman, *An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1911), and the concise summary by M. Soloweitschik and S. Rubascheff (Shazar), *The History of the Bible Criticism* (Berlin: Devir-Mikra, 1925) 66–92 (Heb.); M. Weinfeld, “Torah, Study of the Torah in the Modern Period,” *Enziklopedyah Mikra'it (Encyclopaedia Biblica)* (Heb.) (9 vols.; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1982), 8:cols. 490–507.

11 See Moses Mendelssohn, *Sefer Netivot ha-Shalom, Bereschith (Genesis)* (Vienna: F. von Schmid and I. I. Busch, 1837), “Introduction,” pp. 1, 5 (pagination added. S.V.); Judah Leib ben Ze'ev, *Mavo el Mikra'ei Kodesh (Introduction to the Holy Scriptures)* (Vienna: F. von Schmid, 1810), new edition: G. Kessel, ed. (Bat Yam: Devarim Nedarim, 1967) p. 7; R. Nachman Krochmal (known as Renak), “*More Nevukhei ha-Zeman*,” in: S. Rawidowicz, ed. *The Writings of Nachman Krochmal* (Heb.) (2d enlarged ed.; London–Waltham, Mass.: Ararat, 1961) 9, 157, 199; Isacco Samuel Reggio, *Sefer Torat ha-E-lohim Meturgemet Italkit . . . Hakdamah . . . Torah min ha-Shamayim — le-Hokhi'ah Amitato be-Rayot Ne'emanot al-pi Moftei ha-Sekhel (The Book Torat ha-E-lohim Translated into Italian . . . Introduction . . . Torah from Heaven — to Prove Its Veracity with Sure Proofs in Accordance with the Wonders of the Intellect)* (Vienna: Georg Holzinger, 1818) 9b, 11a.

12 For Luzzatto's stance toward higher criticism, see S. Vargon, “Luzzatto's Attitude toward Higher Criticism of the Torah” (Heb.), *Shnaton — An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 13 (2002) 271–304.

13 Reggio was cognizant of the Bible research that had developed during the time of the Enlightenment, and he even cites the views of such scholars on occasion. Thus, for example, he writes: “And now, as I pass over the works of [Ferdinand] Hitzig, I see in them fine things and hypotheses that are close to the truth” (*Kerem Hemed* 4 [1838] 15). For his critical approach in biblical research, see H. Shelly, *Biblical Research in the Literature of the Haskalah* (Heb.) (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1942) 54–59. Reggio

the Torah. In his introduction he devoted a special chapter to the subject of “The Time in Which the Torah Was Given.”<sup>14</sup> In this chapter Reggio argued that before the Revelation, “humans had not yet invented the letters of script,”<sup>15</sup> and after a discussion of this issue he concludes: “The sum of the matter, we have no proof of the existence of the letters of script earlier than the Torah scroll that we possess. . . . Consequently, the evident truth is that this person, Moses, who brought the Israelites up from the land of Egypt, was the first to invent and make known to the world the art of writing with letters.”<sup>16</sup> Since the Hebrew script was not known in the time of Moses, and he was not capable of inventing it, Reggio deduces that “clearly, the Creator, may He be blessed, bestowed some of His holy spirit upon Moses, and taught him the skill of writing, with all its conditions and manners, and the wisdom of the grammar of the language, with all its rules, so that he would write in a scroll all the words of the Torah and establish it as the heritage of the congregation of Jacob.”<sup>17</sup>

Luzzatto attacked this view in a letter to Reggio from Trieste, dated May 24, 1819.<sup>18</sup> He argued in this letter that the publication of this view was inappropriate,

generally supported Luzzatto and conducted intensive and lengthy correspondence with him on philological and interpretive topics. His correspondence with Luzzatto was collected by Isacco Hayyim Castiglioni (Cracow: J. Fischer, 1902). Also see *Iggerot Yashar* (Vienna, 1834), that consists of historical and philosophical comments in the form of letters to friends; and his book: *Ha-Torah veha-Philosophiya (The Torah and Philosophy)* (Vienna: Schmid, 1827). The rabbinical seminary founded by Reggio in Padua was the first of its kind in Europe.

- 14 Isacco Samuel Reggio, “The Time When the Torah Was Given,” in *Sefer Torat ha-E-lohim*, 11–14.
- 15 Reggio, “The Time When the Torah Was Given,” 11b.
- 16 *Torat ha-E-lohim*, “Introduction,” 12–13 (*Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 8–9).
- 17 *Torat ha-E-lohim*, 12b. Reggio writes further on: “If so, we have attained the awareness that our Torah is divine, since our teacher Moses received the technique of writing as well from Sinai” (*Torat Ha-E-lohim*, 13b). Cf. *m.Avot* 5:6: “Ten things were created on Sabbath eve at twilight, and they are: . . . the letters; the writing; and the tablets”; this is also cited in *Mekhilta, Be-Shalah* 16:32; *Sifrei*, Deut 359; *Midrash Tannaim* 33:21; *Zohar* 2 (Exodus), *Mishpatim* 113b: “We learned: Ten things were created on Sabbath eve . . . the letters; the writing; and the tablets, as it is written: “The tablets were God’s work, and the writing was God’s writing, incised upon the tablets” (Exod 32:16). According to one of the methods of interpreting these rabbinic sources, God taught the manner of writing and reading to Adam (for a discussion of the understanding of these rabbinic dicta, see M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah* [in Heb.] [43 vols.; Jerusalem: Bet Torah Shelemah, 1992] 29:28–31 [chap. 7]).
- 18 S. A. Graeber, ed., *Iggerot Shadal ha-Tvriyot* (Przemysl: Druck, Zupnick & Kneller, 1882) 31–35, esp. 32–34; also printed in *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 5–8. The ties between Luzzatto and Reggio began in 1817, when Luzzatto wrote “*Ma’amar ha-Nikud* [On Vocalization],” in which he collected the proofs against the belief in the antiquity of the vocalization and cantillation marks, proofs that also refuted the antiquity of the kabbalistic works. Reggio sought to contradict his arguments, but Luzzatto did not accept the reasons he advanced. By the time Luzzatto was eighteen years old, he had a reputation as a poet and scholar, and then he met Reggio, the well-known scholar from Gorizia, with whom he had already previously corresponded concerning the time of the establishment of vocalization and cantillation. Their acquaintanceship soon developed into friendship and esteem by Reggio for Luzzatto, and he would eventually recommend the appointment of the

because those denying the Torah of Moses would make use of the proofs advanced by Reggio, according to which script had not yet been invented in the time of Moses, in order to provide a basis for their claim that Moses did not write the Torah. Although Reggio sought to discover the historical truth, and he revealed that there was no script, he nonetheless truly *believed that Moses was the founder of script, that came to him by Divine inspiration*. The heretics, Luzzatto argued, would, however, use only part of what he said, for their own purposes. So as not to give them a weapon with which to deny the belief that Moses wrote the Torah, Reggio should not have published his opinion in public, “for although as for you, my friend, your intent is laudable, nonetheless, *the greedy dogs* (see Isaiah 56:11) will derive from your words results that are of unparalleled evil,”<sup>19</sup> “and if you were to say to any of them that script was not known in the time of Moses, then he will sing out joyously, and derive satisfaction from having his claim to the truth strengthened.”<sup>20</sup>

Even regarding the basic issue itself, however, Luzzatto was of the opinion from the outset that Reggio erred in his conclusions, because Luzzatto believed that there were sufficient “proofs demonstrating the antiquity of script.”<sup>21</sup> Luzzatto conducts a survey of “ancient books” that discuss the origin of the alphabetic script, and brings from them proofs of the great antiquity of this script, that was known before Moses. It is noteworthy that Reggio saw some of these sources, and related to them in his book, but rejected their validity. The following are several arguments that were raised in the context of this controversy.

1. One of Reggio’s proofs for the lack of knowledge of alphabetic script in the pre-Mosaic period consists of the Egyptian hieroglyphic signs “that allude to things, and not to words.”<sup>22</sup> Against this, Luzzatto cites Clement of

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latter as a teacher-professor in the rabbinical seminary in Padua, where he could devote most of his time to the teaching of Judaism and research.

19 *Iggerot Shadal*, 33; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 7.

20 *Iggerot Shadal*, 34; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 6.

21 *Iggerot Shadal*, 32; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 7.

22 *Iggerot Shadal*, 32; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 6. As Reggio puts it: “They are not letters, but known forms, each one representing a single concept” (n.14 above, 11b). In this passage Reggio discussed the principle of the Egyptian writings, that were constructed of logograms, written signs that constituted ideas and words. “Hieroglyph” is a Greek word meaning “holy carving,” and expresses the idea that the Egyptian inscriptions are a carving of sacred texts. When the Greeks conquered Egypt, they were impressed by the monumental inscriptions engraved in the walls of the Egyptian temples. The hieroglyphic characters, however, were not exclusively for the inscribing of hallowed texts, but were used mainly for secular compositions. This script is pictographic, like the Sumerian cuneiform script; initially, each picture represented a word, while over the course of time a system developed in which the characters represented syllables (see Naveh, *Early History*, 14–16; I. J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing* [rev. ed.; Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963] 1–20, 72–81; G. R. Driver, *Semitic Writing from Pictograph to Alphabet* [London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976] [1948]). It should be

Alexandria,<sup>23</sup> “that these signs [the hieroglyphs] were used only on tombstones and buildings (possibly for the comprehension of the uneducated who were illiterate), but they possessed another script (that he calls Epistolare) composed of letters, as is our practice at the very present, which they ascribe to Tut [Thoth, the god of wisdom, to whom the Egyptians attributed the imparting of the skill of writing], that they say was during the time of Abraham and Isaac.”<sup>24</sup>

2. Luzzatto reminds Reggio that Herodotus, the father of history (484–25 B.C.E.), relates that the Phoenicians — the Canaanites, and with them a legendary character named Cadmus, brought writing (the letters of the alphabet, that are known as “Phoenician letters” or “Cadmian letters”) to Greece.<sup>25</sup> This

recalled that during the time of this dispute no deciphering of the Egyptian script had yet been published. It was only in 1822 that Jean-Francois Champollion informed the French Academy of his success in deciphering the hieroglyphic script by means of the Rosetta Stone, a stele with a bilingual (Egyptian and Greek) inscription in three scripts that had been discovered 23 years previously in Rashid (Rosetta) in the Nile Delta region. In a letter to his friend Jacob Goldenthal (October 4, 1850), Luzzatto relates that he had a year previously read “Champollion’s books, and then I found, or it seemed to me that I had found, most of the forms of the characters in the hiératique writing of the Egyptians.” The letter was published in *Ha-Shahar*, year 2, issue 8 (Vienna, 1871) 335–39, and reprinted in *Peninei Shadal*, 367–71, esp. 367. The question of the origin of the alphabet therefore troubled Luzzatto many years later.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in the words of *La Harpe la Chine* and also in the book *Enciclopedia art écriture* (*Iggerot Shadal*, 32). Clement of Alexandria, a Christian theologian, one of the Fathers of the Greek church (ca. 150–215 C.E.), was born to pagan parents, most probably in Athens, and traveled in his youth in search of a teacher who would instruct him in Christianity. He found a teacher named Pantaenus, who headed a school for Christians in Alexandria. When his teacher died, he was succeeded by Clement. He is considered to be the first Christian who approved of Greek education, upon which he based his teachings. See H. Chadwick, *The Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966); E. A. Clark, “Clement of Alexandria,” in M. Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (16 vols.; New York-London: Macmillan, 1987) 3:533–34.

<sup>24</sup> *Iggerot Shadal*, 32–33; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 6. It is known now that the Egyptians preserved the tradition of their script, and therefore used the script with hundreds of characters, and not alphabetic writing, until the end of the first millennium B.C.E.

<sup>25</sup> See A. D. Godley, trans., *Herodotus* (4 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.–London: Loeb Classical Library) 3:58–59). Cadmus is also known as Cadmus of Tyre (*Herodotus*, 2:49 [English trans., 1:337]). The ancient historians generally agreed that the Greeks learned writing from the Phoenicians, but they disagreed on the question of the source of the Phoenician script itself. Didorus Siculus (a first century B.C.E. Greek historian, who wrote the forty volume world history *Bibliotheca historica*) and Gaius Plinius Secundus (a Roman author, 23–79 C.E., author of *Naturalis Historia*, the most extensive encyclopedia in antiquity) conjectured that the Assyrians invented writing, and the Assyrians learned from them. Plato (one of the greatest Greek philosophers, 428/7–347/6 B.C.E.), Cornelius Tacitus (Roman historian, 50–120? C.E.) and others ascribe the invention of the art of writing to Egypt. The ancient Chinese attribute writing to the dragon-faced Tsang-Chieh; the ancient Greeks credited the invention of writing to the god Hermes, or other mythological figures, especially to the mythological character Cadmus. The Romans attributed writing to the god Mercurius. See D. Diringer, *Encyclopedia Americana* (30 vols.; New York: Americana, 1969) 29:559, col. 1, lines 2–6. Modern scholars hardly engage in the question of how the ancients related to script, but rather

occurred at the end of the time of Moses, “although the script was known among the Canaanites before Moses, for in his time it cannot be said that they learned this from Israel, who were dwelling apart in the wilderness.”<sup>26</sup>

3. Luzzatto brings another proof for the knowledge of alphabetic script from the writings of the sixth-century historian Procopius (Procopio, Pluche tomo, 13), who attests “that in the vicinity of the city of Tangier, at the end of the land of Mauritania [the historical name of a region in northwestern Africa, in the area that today comprises northern Morocco and most of Algeria], two pages were found, on which was written in Canaanite script: ‘We are among the people who fled for fear of Joshua ben Nuh’ [copyist’s error]. From this also is a proof . . . of the existence of letters in the time of Moses, for the Canaanites who fled from Joshua undoubtedly did not learn script from him, but rather knew it beforehand.”<sup>27</sup>
4. Luzzatto brings an additional proof from the writings of Herodotus, who relates that the Egyptian king Sesostriis,<sup>28</sup> who conquered many lands and made them a slave force, would erect in them victory columns, “on which were written in letters his name and the name of his land, and how he prevailed over them.”<sup>29</sup> Luzzatto maintains that, according to Herodotus himself, Sesostriis reigned “before Ferone, who preceded Proteo,<sup>30</sup> who was during the time of the Trojan War, that preceded Herodotus by more than 800 years.” Luzzatto therefore tends to accept the words of those who state that the king Sesostriis is the monarch who is called in the Bible “Pharaoh,” who lived in the

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describe the development of script in accordance with the actual finds that were uncovered. For detailed discussions, see D. Diringer, *The Story of the Aleph Beth* (New York: Lincolns-Prager, 1958); Daniels and Bright, *The World’s Writing Systems*; A. Gardiner, “The Egyptian Opinion of the Sinaitic Alephbeth,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 3 (1916) 1–16.

26 *Iggerot Shadal*, 33; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 6.

27 *Iggerot Shadal*, 33; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 6; in the standard English translation of Procopius: “They also built a fortress in Numidia, where now is the city called Tigisis. In that place are two columns made of white stone near by the great spring, having Phoenician letters cut in them which say in the Phoenician tongue: ‘We are they who fled before the face of Joshua, the robber, the son of Nun’ (H. B. Dewing, trans., *Procopius* 4:10:22 [London–Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1958] 2:289). Procopius was born in Caesarea ca. 500, and died in Constantinople after 563. He was a Byzantine historian and statesman who acquired his education in rhetoric and law. In Constantinople he was close to the court of the emperor Belisarius and participated in the latter’s military campaigns (Diringer, *Encyclopedia Americana*, 22:630–31).

28 According to Josephus (H. St. J. Thackeray and R. Marcus, trans., *Ant.* 8:253 [20 vols.; London–Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1950] 5:709, Sesostriis is Shishak king of Egypt (1 Kings 14:25), but according to current historical thought, he is the son of Amenemhet I, the founder of the XII Dynasty, who lived centuries before Shishak. This king ruled for 46 years (see von Beckerath, *Chronologie*, n. 37, below).

29 Herodotus 1:2:102–111, 137.

30 Herodotus 1:2:112–116, 118, 121.

- time of Moses, or shortly after him. "And he would write in letters, as is our practice today, and he did not learn the act of writing from Israel, for in his time they were dwelling apart, and had no dealings with anyone; consequently, he knew this previously; and accordingly, script was known before Moses."<sup>31</sup>
5. Luzzatto attempts to prove the antiquity of script also from the writings of the medieval commentators. He indicates the statement by Maimonides in the *Guide for the Perplexed*, who "mentions books from the very ancient Sabian books, that also mention the annals of the Patriarch Abraham."<sup>32</sup> And in 1:71, that discusses the question of the eternity or the creation in time of the world, Maimonides writes: "At present it will be enough for you to know with regard to this question that the philosophers of the various epochs have been disagreeing with respect to it for the last three thousand years up to this our time, as we can find in their works and the reports concerning them."<sup>33</sup> Luzzatto deduces from this that books had already been written 3,600 years before Maimonides, that is, more than 400 years before Moses.
  6. Luzzatto also brings what he considers to be a proof from the commentary of Nahmanides on the verse: "*He sent word* [*va-yomar*, literally, he said] to Moses, 'I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you'" (Exodus 18:6). In Nahmanides' words: "He sent him the message in a letter [following the opinion of R. Joshua in *Mekhilta*] in which it was so written. A messenger could not have said: 'I, your father-in-law.' He rather would have said: 'Behold, your father-in-law Jethro is coming to you.' It is likewise not possible that Jethro told him so mouth to mouth, for then he would have said: 'Behold, I have come to you.' Moreover, it is not customary for [the speaker] to mention his name: 'I, so-and-so,' for upon seeing him, he would recognize him. A similar case is: 'Hiram, king of Tyre, *said in writing* and sent to Solomon" [2 Chronicles 2:10]. Luzzatto comments on this: "Now, even though this is the opinion of an individual, it is to be relied upon as the words of the Torah themselves, since this is the only possible interpretation of the text according to its simple meaning. For how could the emissary say, 'I, your father-in-law

<sup>31</sup> *Iggerot Shadal*, 33; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 6.

<sup>32</sup> For the Sabian book, that describes the pagan forms of worship of the peoples of the Ancient Near East, see S. Pines, "*Studies in the History of Jewish Philosophy: The Transmission of Texts and Ideas* (Heb.) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1977) 103–74, esp. 163–64. In Arabic, the term "*tzaba*" is used to denote all idolatry. Maimonides refers to "The Nabatean Agriculture" to describe the "Sabian" belief (*Guide for the Perplexed* 3:29). He asserted the antiquity of the book, but it is currently known that it was composed by Ibn Wahshiyah in the tenth century. This book presumed to describe the religious and traditional practices of ancient Babylonia, against which Abraham rebelled, and with this revolt laid the foundations for the Israelite faith.

<sup>33</sup> M. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964) 180.



Jethro, am coming to you?<sup>34</sup> and if Jethro himself said this to Moses, how could it then say: 'Moses went out to meet his father-in-law' [Exod 18:7]? For he had already seen him and spoken with him. Hence, the simple meaning of Scripture is only as Nahmanides writes, and *if so, Moses was not the first writer*.<sup>35</sup>

7. Luzzatto mentions to Reggio that most scholars in their time concurred "that the Book of Job was written before the wilderness generation, and their view is well-based."<sup>36</sup> Consequently, use was made of alphabetic script prior to the time of Moses.

On June 11, 1819, Reggio sent from his city of Gorizia a letter in response to Luzzatto, in which he reiterated his view "that script was not known in the time of our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace." He argued that Luzzatto's proofs were not conclusive.<sup>37</sup> Thus, for example, he writes that the author Clement of Alexandria himself maintains in another place that Moses was the first to invent

34 R. Eleazar ha-Moda'i (*Mekhilta*) learns from the wording "*va-yomar*" that the reference is to an emissary, who was sent to deliver this statement to Moses; this understanding was opposed by Luzzatto.

35 *Iggerot Shadal*, 33; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 7.

36 *Iggerot Shadal*, 33; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 7. For those who assign an early date to the composition of the book, see, e.g., the book by the theologian and Bible scholar, Bishop Robert Lowth of London, who wrote in Latin in 1773 one of the most famous works in the history of literary Bible scholarship. The book appeared in English in two volumes and won much renown: R. Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (London: J. Johnson, 1787; Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1969). Regarding the antiquity of the book of Job, Lowth writes: "for that it is the most ancient of the sacred books, is, I think, manifest, from the subject, the language, the general character, and even from the obscurity of the work" (354). Johann Gottfried Eichhorn also writes that the book of Job is "the most ancient poetical work in antiquity": J.G. Eichhorn, *Einleitung ins Alte Testament* (3 vols.; Reutlingen: J. Grozinger, 1790) 3:472 par. 633; 3:476–86 par. 637; and Judah Leib ben Ze'ev also maintains "that the body of the book was written in the Arabic language or in some Aramaic close to it, and Moses skillfully copied this book into the Hebrew language, only he and no other was capable of training his hands, to render the polished lyrics from one language to another, without its taste growing faint or its fragrance being spoiled; and possibly it is purer and more sublime than the body of the book" (*Mavo el Mikra'ei Kodesh*, 65b). See also idem, *Kitvei Kodesh, Nidpasim Mehadash u-Mehudarim be-Tosefot Rabbot, Sefer Iyov im Targum Ashkenazi u-Biur, ve-Nilveh eilav gam ha-Mavo me-et ha-Hakham R. Yehudah Leib ben Ze'ev z"l* (The Holy Scriptures, reprinted and adorned with many additions, the Book of Job with a German translation and commentary, also accompanied by the Introduction by the sage R. Judah Leib ben Ze'ev, of blessed memory) (Vienna: A. von Schmid, 1839), the first eight pages (no pagination). In this introduction Judah Leib ben Ze'ev maintains once again, in language similar to the wording used by Eichhorn, that "this ancient book [Job] is earlier than all the Hebrew books" (first page). For Luzzatto's position concerning the time of the composition of the book of Job, see S. Vargon, "The Date of Composition of the Book of Job in the Context of S.D. Luzzatto's Attitude to Biblical Criticism," *JQR* 91:3–4 (January–April, 2001) 377–394.

37 *Katuv Yosher*, 15–18.

the art of writing.<sup>38</sup> This view is also held by Cornelio Agrippa,<sup>39</sup> as is cited in the book by Nonnote. Eusebius of Caesaria (260–340 c.e.) in his book *Preparazione Evangelica (Praeparatio evangelica)*,<sup>40</sup> chapter 8, writes in the name of the ancient philosopher Eupolemo (Eupolemos)<sup>41</sup> that the invention of alphabetic script is to be attributed to Moses (the Canaanites took this from him, and from them this script passed to the Greeks). Reggio notes that there are different opinions even regarding the time of Tut: some assign to him an early time, that of the Exodus from Egypt, while others place him in a later period; and even regarding those who date him earlier, it is not clear on what basis they make this determination: whether they follow the count of years from the Creation, or from the beginning of the monarchy in Egypt. “And in the final analysis, the individual Tut did not leave behind any book or writing from which we may judge regarding his existence, so how can we bring a proof from him?”<sup>42</sup>

As regards Luzzatto’s argument concerning the Canaanite script discovered on columns close to the city of Tangier, Reggio responds with a question: “Who knows whether this was in an alphabet, or by means of hieroglyphs? And who knows if this was written by the Canaanites themselves who fled from Joshua, or whether their sons wrote this as a memorial for their parents, and used the language, as if it were their parents who were speaking?”<sup>43</sup>

Against the statement by Luzzatto that, according to Herodotus, writing was already known in the time of the king Sesostrius, Reggio maintains that we do not

38 According to Reggio, this is so stated by Nonnote in his book “*Dizionario Biblico*.” The intent is apparently to the book *Dictionnaire philosophique de la religion, ou l’on établit tous les points de la religion, attaques par les incrédules, & ou l’on répond a toutes leurs objections* (Avignon, 1772; published in many editions, in various European languages; the Italian edition: *Dizionario filosofico della religion . . .* [Venice: Zerletti, 1779]), a response to the objections raised against religion, and directed primarily against the *Dictionnaire philosophique* by Voltaire, by Claude-Francois (Adrien) Nonnote (1711–93), a French Jesuit. See: A. Degert, “Claude-Adrien Nonnote,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* (16 vols.; New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1913) 11:99–100.

39 The intent is probably to Agrippa von Nettesheim, Heinrich Cornelius, a German author, physician, and philosopher (1486–35), whose worldview was based on a complete belief in Scripture. He is known for his *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (1651), in which he discusses the three worlds that God created *ex nihilo*.

40 In this book Eusebius demonstrates that it was only Judaism that changed the correct foundation upon which Christianity is based.

41 Eupolemos, who lived in the second century B.C.E., is considered to be the first Jewish Hellenistic historian. He wrote a book in Greek on the kings of the Jews entitled *On the Kings of Judah*, portions of which were preserved in *On the Jews* by Alexander Polyhistor. The Church Fathers Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius of Caesarea quoted Eupolemos, as preserved in the latter, in their writings. According to *Maccabees*, Eupolemos was a member of the delegation of Judah Maccabee to Rome that forged friendly relations and an alliance between the two peoples (1 *Macc* 8:17–32). See *Encyclopedia Judaica* (16 vols.; Jerusalem: Keter, 1972) vol. 6 cols. 964–66.

42 *Katuv Yosher*, 17.

43 *Katuv Yosher*, 17.

know when this king lived, and the determination of his time prior to the Trojan War is not sufficient, because this war — if it actually was a historical event — occurred, at the earliest, in the time of Gideon son of Joash, in the period of the Judges, according to “the wisest of all in the calculations of the years Petavio,” and this therefore does not constitute a proof for writing predating Moses.<sup>44</sup>

The proof from the writings of Maimonides also is not substantial, according to Reggio, because Maimonides “did not state that those compositions were written three thousand years before today, he said only that from the compositions of the philosophers of the generations (whenever they were written) we know that the ancient philosophers disagreed on this issue for three thousand years, and who would not understand that these philosophers were debating this issue orally, with their opinions being written in a book several generations later?”<sup>45</sup>

Reggio also refutes the proof that Luzzatto brings from what is written in the Torah portion of *Yitro*, and he defines it “a tenuous and weak allusion, for even if I admit to you that Jethro sent him a letter, who will tell you if that writing was in actual letters, or by means of forms and signs, in the manner of hieroglyphics?”<sup>46</sup>

Regarding the argument that the Book of Job was written before the wilderness generation, Reggio says: “All the scholars did not concur with this view, and at any rate, here, our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace, committed it to writing.”<sup>47</sup> Reggio concludes his letter with the following:

The sum of the matter, we have no clear proof of the existence of writing earlier than our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace. All the support that you seek from the sages of the generations is merely a doubtful argument, as I have shown you. Since, however, the writing of our Torah by our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace, is agreed upon and [accepted as] true by any intelligent person, as was proved at length by great sages from the non-Jewish peoples, especially the latest of them all Jahn<sup>48</sup> in his book *Introductio in libros sacros*, who collected strong proofs from all who preceded him,

44 The Egyptian monarch Sesostri is currently acknowledged to be a king of the XII Dynasty. Von Beckerath recently published the Egyptian royal chronicles, including the kings of the XII Dynasty (1976–1794 B.C.E.). The listing indicates that three kings of this dynasty bore the name Sesostri: the first reigned during the years 1956–10, the second, from 1882 to 1872, and the third, 1872–53. J. von Beckerath, *Chronologie des Pharaonischen Ägypten* (Mainz: P. von Zabern, 1997) 187.

45 *Katuv Yosher*, 17.

46 *Katuv Yosher*, 18.

47 *Katuv Yosher*, 18.

48 The intent is to the Austrian Johann Jahn, an important Catholic theologian and Hebraist (1750–1816), who wrote six books and was a professor of Oriental Languages and Biblical Archaeology at the University of Vienna, 1789–1806. The book mentioned by Reggio was first written in German: *Einleitung in des AT* (1793–1802), and was later published in a Latin edition (1804; 1815). See *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (10 vols.; Berlin: Eschkol, 1928) 8:779.

and who established this cornerstone as an immovable peg, so that anyone who casts doubt on this will be considered simple and a fool. Accordingly, the truth of this is a certain argument, and as you already know, in a case of certain and doubtful, the certain is preferable. Accordingly, my decision that our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace, invented the art of writing is correct, and we are not to fear that the deniers [i.e., the critical scholars, who deny that Moses wrote the Torah] will take from this an argument for their denial, for you have received irrefutable proofs such as I have revealed to you. Consequently, I did not trouble myself to bring proofs for this in my introduction [to the Torah]; nor are we to think that this view contradicts the teachings of the Rabbis, of blessed memory.<sup>49</sup>

On June 21, 1819, Luzzatto sent a letter to Reggio in which he admits that “among all my proofs there is not a single one that necessitates the existence of writing prior to the Exodus from Egypt.” Accordingly, he states, he decided to reject the futile proofs that he cited, “because I do not desire to rely upon proofs that contain a fallacy from any aspect.”<sup>50</sup> When Luzzatto realized that there were no true proofs for the existence of writing before the time of Moses, he adopted a new approach to reject the view of his friend. He would now attack the starting point of Reggio’s hypothesis. The assumption upon which Reggio bases his thesis is, according to Luzzatto, “anything for which we have no proof — never existed.”<sup>51</sup> This is indicated by the formulation of Reggio’s conclusion in his letter: “The sum of the matter, we have no clear proof of the existence of writing earlier than our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace. . . . Accordingly, my decision that our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace, invented the art of writing is correct.” Luzzatto also cites Reggio’s statement from his book (end of 12 a): “The sum of the matter, we have no proof of the existence of written letters before our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace, and certainly there was no book in existence in the world that predated the Torah scroll that we possess. . . . Accordingly, it is the clear truth that this man Moses . . . was the first to invent and to disclose to the world the art of writing with letters.”<sup>52</sup> Luzzatto argues in response that the lack of proofs for the existence of something is not sufficient to rule out its existence. Due to the paucity of the information we possess concerning events from the dawn of history, it is possible that things happened for whose occurrence we have no proofs. One of those things could be the knowledge of script before the Exodus from Egypt. Later in his letter he adds, in a different context: “For our witnesses the written books did not come [down

49 *Katuv Yosher*, 18.

50 *Iggerot Shadal*, 36; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 8.

51 *Iggerot Shadal*, 36; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 9.

52 *Torat ha-E-lohim*, “Introduction,” 12–13 (*Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 8–9).

to us] from that time and from that land, and if they were with us today, we might perhaps find the desired testimony.”<sup>53</sup> An additional argument advanced by Luzzatto is that there is no allusion in the Torah or in the Oral Law for the innovation of the act of writing by Moses acting with Divine inspiration. If the art of writing had been transmitted to Moses in miraculous fashion, as is indicated by Reggio’s arguments, the Holy One, blessed be He, would have written this in the Torah, so that people would know what was the source of writing. Since nothing is either written or alluded regarding such a miracle, he maintains, “we cannot fabricate miracles that are not mentioned in the Torah.”<sup>54</sup> Acting in such a manner would “detract from the power of the Torah” to such an extent that it would draw its authority from miracles that are not written in it. It is inconceivable, he adds, that the Holy One, blessed be He, would desire to lead people astray by concealing information concerning such a great miraculous event.<sup>55</sup>

He therefore rejects the view put forth by Reggio that writing was revealed to Moses in miraculous fashion, thereby innovating the art of writing by Divine inspiration. Although there are no explicit proofs, it is to be assumed that the art of writing the Hebrew letters in which the Torah was written was already known in the time of Moses.

In light of this exchange of views, the question arises, what led Luzzatto to take such a resolute stance and to dispute with his learned friend, when they actually possessed a common intellectual platform, with both believing in the revealed Torah, in all the narratives of the Torah and the miracles portrayed in it, and both held the belief that Moses son of Amram wrote the entire Torah and transmitted it to Israel. Both also were of the opinion that Judaism could not exist “without the belief in Torah from Heaven.”<sup>56</sup> Luzzatto apparently reasoned that Reggio in all innocence believed that if he were to publish his philosophical conclusion regarding the miraculous revelation of the secret of writing to Moses, he would impart this belief in the miraculous nature of this event to his readers as well. Luzzatto, on the other hand, considered that such a declaration by Reggio would provide a “pretext to the heretics to state that it was impossible for the Torah to have been written more than three thousand, one hundred years ago, since writing was not known at that time.”<sup>57</sup> Luzzatto feared lest the view of the late invention of writing would serve as a basis for the claims of the Bible critics, who deny the belief that Moses wrote the Torah, and maintain instead that it was written later, since the alphabetic script, in which the Torah was written, was

53 *Iggerot Shadal*, 39; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 12.

54 *Iggerot Shadal*, 36; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 9.

55 *Iggerot Shadal*, 36; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 9.

56 *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 29; Reggio, “*Torah min ha-Shamayim*,” in the introduction to his commentary on the Torah (n. 11, above) 9b–11b.

57 *Iggerot Shadal*, 32; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 5.

not yet known in the time of Moses. The weighty opinion of an important rabbi such as Reggio, that in the time of Moses the art of writing was as yet unknown, was liable to provide support for those engaged in literary criticism of the Bible. Luzzatto therefore saw fit to pen criticism and even a reproach to his friend, the renowned sage, who was his senior by sixteen years. Luzzatto writes:

“Do you not know? Have you not heard?” [Isa 40:28], you my brother, that this is one of the places the heretics have raised sacrilegious claims, and they maintain this with all their strength? The greatest sages therefore sought to uproot this “stock sprouting poison weed and wormwood” [Deuteronomy 29:17], and they bring all the proofs in the world . . . to demonstrate that writing was known in the time of Moses, and now you will do the opposite? . . . And how can you be so arrogant as to hope that the heretics will heed you, and that those people who deny all the wonders of our teacher Moses that are explicit in the Torah will believe the sign that you fabricated, and thereby believe the entire Torah? Do you think that the heretic will incline his ears to you when you speak such things to him: writing was not known in the time of Moses, and he was not capable of inventing it, rather, Divine inspiration taught him, and if so, then our Torah is divine, since Moses also received the method of its writing at Sinai? Know before whom you stand [usually used in reference to God], before a person who denies the entire Torah, who heaps calumny upon the prophets, and obviously derides the Torah and Divine service. If so, what will be his answer to you? It will be along the following lines: You say that writing was not known in the time of your teacher Moses, and I know that he did not learn it by Divine inspiration, because I know that prophecy is something impossible; at the very least, I have not seen until now any proof of the possibility of its existence, nor have you told me. Accordingly, it cannot be said that Moses wrote the Torah. Because of this “my heart quakes, and leaps from its place” [Job 37:1]. But you respond: No matter what, it is the truth that I seek, and fools who do damage will be held accountable for this.<sup>58</sup>

In a second letter, the young Luzzatto advises his older friend: “Heed me, and take my counsel, and may God be with you” (Exod 18:19). Abandon your view forever, write it a writ of divorce, and relief and deliverance will come to the Torah from another quarter, for there are many wonders (attesting) to its divine nature, for if you turn to them, they will respond to you (based on 2 Chr 15:2).<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Iggerot Shadal*, 32; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 5–6.

<sup>59</sup> *Iggerot Shadal*, 37; *Mehkerei ha-Yahadut* 2, 9.

In other words, Luzzatto tells Reggio that what he wrote on this issue will not be to his honor, because there are sufficient wonders that are capable of attesting to the divine nature of the Torah, and there is no reason to add a miracle that is connected with the giving over of writing from God to Moses, so that the latter would write the Torah in a new and special script.

The above dispute to which Samuel David Luzzatto and Isacco Samuel Reggio were party regarding the time of the writing of the Torah is a characteristic example of Luzzatto's debates with his colleagues, that find expression in his commentaries and in his other writings.<sup>60</sup> Luzzatto regarded himself duty-bound to battle against arguments that, in his opinion, were liable to undermine the Israelite faith. In the case under discussion, he was apprehensive of the publication of a position that, while possibly legitimate in terms of Israelite belief, was liable to be misused by the critical scholars who refuted the principle of "Torah from Heaven" by the hand of Moses. Luzzatto felt responsible to refute the critics of the Torah who assign a late date for its composition and who expropriate it from Moses, seeking to defend his faith in a logical-scientific manner. This characteristic line of thought, that was expressed in his later writings, was a renowned scholar, already manifested itself at the beginning of his career, when he was only nineteen years old.

60 See S. Vargon, "The Dispute between Shadal and his Colleagues over their Attitude to Ibn Ezra, against the Background of the Haskala Movement, Italy" (Heb., at press); S. Vargon, "Luzzatto's Attitude towards Higher Criticism."