

Benjamin Ravid

## The Venetian Context of the *Discourse*

I would judge it neither a bold nor a dissonant proposition to say that the Jews have offered some considerable profit to the illustrious city of Venice. Likewise, the proposition that they should be considered part and parcel of the city's common population should not be offensive to the delicate sentiment of even the most scrupulous of souls (*Discourse*, 7r).

I will merely add an exposition concerning some of the profits that the Jewish Nation living in the illustrious city of Venice has brought [to that city]. With this, I do not intend to offer any ambitious estimate of profits and gains; rather I only wish to demonstrate that this Nation is anything but a useless part of the general population of this city. And thus, even those least experienced in worldly affairs will be partially informed about the true motives and impulses that make this extremely prudent and just Republic inclined to yield and provide a protected residence and shelter for the [Jewish] Nation in such a noble and illustrious city of trade. [The Republic] will likewise protect it like a father from the insults of others. With this knowledge, I hope that the above-mentioned [least experienced people in worldly affairs] will become less hostile and even more amicable and peaceable towards the Jewish Nation (*Discourse*, 5v).

### 1 Simone Luzzatto

Time has not been kind to the memory of the Venetian rabbi Simone Luzzatto (ca. 1582–1663). During his life-time he was the most illustrious rabbi and Jewish humanist in Venice along with his slightly older and more prolific contemporary Leone Modena (1571–1648). Yet almost nothing was known about his personal life, his writings were seldom mentioned until the later nineteenth century, and he remained in the shadows until the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

Recent research in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia has established that Simone Luzzatto was a member of a very extensive, prominent, and wealthy family.<sup>2</sup> His father, Isaac Luzzatto (c. 1540–1645) held the propriety right to rental property in

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief biography of Simone Luzzatto, see Veltri, “Individual Responsibility,” below, 278–80, and in more detail, Giuseppe Veltri, “Saggio introduttivo,” in Giuseppe Veltri, ed., *Simone Luzzatto: Scritti politici e filosofici di un ebreo scettico nella Venezia del seicento* (Milan: Bompiani, 2013), XXII–LXXXIX, XX–XXVIII.

<sup>2</sup> See the very important study of Paola Ferruta, “Simone Luzzatto e la sua cerchia familiare: questioni di affari, parentela e vita privata,” in Veltri, *Filosofo e rabbino*, 309–71 with trees of the extended family, 369–71, and also the documents in part III, “Studi storici e documenti inediti dall’Archivio di Stato di Venezia,” by Gianfranco Miletto, Paola Ferruta, and Giuseppe Veltri in cooperation with Carla Boccato, 373–479.

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the ghetto that was owned by Christians,<sup>3</sup> engaged in international maritime trade, was involved in companies that issued maritime insurance,<sup>4</sup> and operated one of the three loan banks that the Venetian government required the Jews to maintain in the ghetto.<sup>5</sup> Isaac was also active in selling *strazzaria*, literally rags but by extension second-hand clothing and a wide range of other pre-owned items, including household furnishings that had to be made by hand prior to the industrial revolution when relatively inexpensive mass-produced items first became available. Jewish activity in the *strazzaria* trade in Venice preceded the establishment of the ghetto in 1516 and was authorised in the charters granted by the Venetian government to the Jews. Its importance can be deduced from the fact that as a rule the Venetian government did not allow Jews to engage in any activity in which a Christian guild existed.<sup>6</sup> *Strazzaria* items were sought out by a large part of the population, as well as visitors to the city, and ultimately by the Venetian government itself. The extent of the resources that Isaac had at his disposal can be seen from the sum that he spent on the wedding of his son Simone and the dowries that he provided for his daughters.<sup>7</sup> Understandably, because of his wealth, activities and family connections, Isaac was a prominent leader in the Jewish community. He was a member of the Small Assembly, the executive committee of the Jewish community and at least once, one of its presidents, and also served on the committee that negotiated the rechartering of the Jewish moneylenders in 1618 and 1629.<sup>8</sup>

Isaac's son Simone clearly benefitted from his father's position, experience and wealth as well as from his family connections. He was involved in the maritime insurance business as well as in the management of rental property in the ghetto. He apparently participated in other of his father's activities, since in 1627 he was granted authorization to serve as his father's legal representative to deposit and withdraw money from the Mint (*Zecca*).<sup>9</sup> In a declaration to the *Dieci savi sopra le*

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**3** Since Jews had been forbidden to own real estate in Venice since 1423, the reference was either to housing units to which Jews held hereditary propriety rights or to units that they had constructed at their own expense on existing buildings.

**4** On real estate, see Veltri, *Filosofo e rabbino*, 434–35, and on maritime insurance, Ferruta, “Simone Luzzatto,” 350–51 and Veltri, *Filosofo e rabbino*, 430–33.

**5** See David J. Malkiel, *A Separate Republic: The Mechanics and Dynamics of Venetian Jewish Self-Government, 1607–1624* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1991), 423–24.

**6** See Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 548–49 and Ferruta, “Simone Luzzatto,” 349. Interestingly, in the *Discourse* Luzzatto did not mention this significant activity, although he alluded to it in the eighth consideration when discussing the obligation of the Jews to furnish palaces (see below).

**7** See Ferruta, “Simone Luzzatto,” 351–63, and the numerous documents in Veltri, *Filosofo e rabbino*.

**8** See Malkiel, *A Separate Republic*, 370, n. 4.

**9** On the *Zecca*, see Ferruta, “Simone Luzzatto,” 351 and Veltri, *Filosofo e rabbino*, 413. Luzzatto must have been a capable administrator, since a Venetian noble-woman to whom he paid his rent authorised him to administer a maximum of 250 ducats from her account in the Banco di Giro; see Ferruta, “Simone Luzzatto,” 351 and “Studi storici,” 425.

*decime*, the magistracy responsible for assessing the real estate tax in Venice, in 1660 he declared a gross income of 151 ducats from rental property, of which 88 were paid to the Christian landlords.<sup>10</sup>

In his youth Simone excelled in rabbinic studies. He was ordained a rabbi in 1606, and in this capacity his name appeared in the approbations (*haskamot*) at the beginning of Hebrew books and on rabbinic responsa.<sup>11</sup> He was a member of the *yeshivah kelalit* (general academy) of the Jewish community of Venice and eventually, apparently in accordance with the Venetian custom of appointing the head (*gaon*) on the principle of seniority, he succeeded Leone Modena as its head around the time of Modena's death in 1648.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, he also signed "attestations drafted by the 'Jewish confraternity for prisons' (*Fraterna delli Hebrei sopra li prigioni*), authorising specific prisoners to receive bread for free, on account of their need, and was active in collecting funds for the Land of Israel."<sup>13</sup>

Simone Luzzatto served for many years as the rabbi of the *Scuola Grande Tedesca*. His sermons were mentioned in the inventory of the estate of his grandson and heir Moisè, but subsequently they dropped out of view.<sup>14</sup> Hopefully, some day they may be serendipitously found in some previously unconsulted location, along with other writings of his. His Hebrew rabbinic writings, however, were apparently never collected and certainly, with a very few exceptions, never published, though they can be found in various published and manuscript collections of others.<sup>15</sup> For example, one controversial ruling of his was referred to in *Paḥad Yiṣṣḥaq*, a posthumous multi-volume Hebrew rabbinic encyclopedia compiled by the 18th century Livornese rabbi, Isaac Lampronti (1679–1756). Lampronti related that

The great rabbi, Simone Luzzatto in Venice, a righteous teacher, made a most learned ruling to prove that it was permissible to cross by boat on the Sabbath from one side to the other, and he presented the ruling to the Small Council [of the Jewish community of Venice] in the presence of all the great Rabbis who were there in those days, and after reflection they voted to forbid it and ordered that the ruling should not be shown to anyone, telling him that even though to permit is more desirable [than to forbid] and the way of wisdom, it is never wise to permit through reason things that seem forbidden to the masses.<sup>16</sup>

**10** "Studi storici," 434–35.

**11** For a list of his approbations, see Malkiel, *A Separate Republic*, 263–64, and 190, n. 118.

**12** The institution of the *yeshivah kelalit* in Venice awaits a comprehensive investigation.

**13** See Makiel, "A Separate Republic," 190 n. 119 and 565 n. 1.

**14** See Veltri, *Filosofo e rabbino*, 406 and 407.

**15** Veltri, "Individual Responsibility," 7–8, and in greater detail, "Saggio introduttivo," XXVIII–XXXVII.

**16** Isaac Lampronti, *Paḥad Yiṣṣḥaq* (Lyck: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1866), 7:58b. See Giuseppe Veltri and Anna Lissa, "Come attraversar il canale restando fermi: un responso famoso di Simone Luzzatto nell'enciclopedia di Isacco Lampronti," in *Nuovi studi su Isacco Lampronti, Storia, poesia, scienza e halakah*, ed. Mauro Perani (Florence: La Giuntina, 2017), 259–68, Italian translation of the text of Lampronti on 264. Apparently Rabbi Isaiah di Trani ben Mali (ca. 1180–1250) used to travel by gondola on the Sabbath, basing the permissibility of his action on the Jewish legal principle of "they are doing it for themselves" (*le-'aşmam hem mitkawenim*), i.e., the non-Jewish gondoliers

This ruling, which Lampronti may not have actually seen but only heard about orally since he did not provide a source for it, is not only very interesting in itself, but also significant as an indication of tensions existing within the leadership of the Jewish community of Venice. Moreover, Lampronti's summary of the ruling was very important because *Paḥad Yiṣḥaq* was a text that was often consulted by rabbis, and thus a Hebrew text by Luzzatto entered into the main-stream of traditional Jewish learning. Like Leone Modena and a few other rabbinic contemporaries, Luzzatto developed a great interest in humanistic studies. In July 1604, he wrote to Rabbi Joshua Jacob ben Elchanan Heilbronn in Padua that "I am now very occupied with other matters. [...] I swear by God that I am so occupied with my other studies that I am unable to move from them even briefly [...] and with the help of God, after sukkot we will exalt in the love of our holy Torah, as my distinguished teacher will testify that now I have no time." This passage has been understood as meaning that Luzzatto was fully engaged in secular studies and did not have time to write on matters of Torah.<sup>17</sup> In 1622, he along with Issac Gherson and Leone Modena were characterised in a community document as being well-versed in the sciences (*versati nelle scienze*).<sup>18</sup> A few years later, in 1629, his contemporary, the astronomer, mathematician, physician, and philosopher Joseph Solomon Delmedigo (1591–1655) singled out Luzzatto as one of the only two or three contemporary Jews who were well-versed in mathematics and the sciences.<sup>19</sup> When complaining about the lack of knowledge of astronomy among the Jews in his day, Delmedigo noted two exceptions, the first of whom was "one in Venice, the great prince, rabbinic authority, and eminent rabbi, may God guard and preserve him." Luzzatto's contemporary, the seventeenth century Hebrew poet Jacob Frances (ca. 1618–after 1703) referred to "the rabbis of illustrious Venice, who are world renowned, and at their head is the greatest among them, the great Rabbi of Venice, our teacher and rabbi, my esteemed rabbi, the prominent Rabbi Simone Luzzatto."<sup>20</sup>

Luzzatto was active in Jewish communal affairs and on occasion represented the community in negotiations with the Venetian government. For example, from

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were undertaking their trips anyways and not specially for Jews, in which case it would be forbidden for the Jews to avail themselves of the service; see his contemporary Rabbi Zedekiah ben Abraham Anav (1210–ca. 1280) in his *Shibbole ha-Leket*, ed. Solomon Buber (Vilna: Rom Bros, 1886), 42. The Jews may have been using the gondolas for ferrying purposes across the Grand Canal rather than for undertaking actual journeys, and presumably any payment for the service was made either before the Sabbath started or after it ended.

<sup>17</sup> Joshua Jacob ben Elchanan Heilbronn, *Naḥalat Ya'aqov* 41b (Padua: 1623–4) 41v–42r, reproduced in Shulvass, "Rabbi Simha Luzzatto," 9–10.

<sup>18</sup> See Malkiel, *A Separate Republic*, 203, 634–35.

<sup>19</sup> Introduction to *Sefer Ma'ayan Ganim* originally published in Amsterdam in 1629, with an approbation by four Venetian rabbis, starting with Leone Modena and Simone Luzzatto; second edition (Odessa: Beilinson, 1865), 131. See also Isaac Barzilay, *Yoseph Shlomo Delmedigo, Yashar of Candia: His Life, Works and Times* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 42 n. 4, 309, 312.

<sup>20</sup> Simon Bernstein, *The Divan of Emanuel ben David Frances* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1932), 144.

1636 to 1641 he played an important role in opposing the attempt of Marco Brolo, the Christian who owned much property in the Ghetto Nuovo, to increase the rent on the grounds that the Jews were treating that rented property in the ghetto as if it were their own, making improvements and enlargements and then profiting by subletting it to other Jews at much higher rental rates than they themselves were paying him.<sup>21</sup> Then in 1639–1641, he served as a member of the committee entrusted with negotiating the renewal of the charter of the Jewish moneylenders, and in that connection he became involved in the issue of the minimum age at which Jewish children could be converted to Christianity against their will or without the knowledge of their parents.<sup>22</sup> After Luzzatto and his fellow negotiators submitted their case in writing to the *Avogadori del Comun* on 7 November 1640, the Venetian noble Carlo Contarini replying on behalf of the House of Catechumens, referred to Luzzatto as the most renowned rabbi of his nation (*il più celebre rabbino della sua nazione*). Subsequently, in 1648, Luzzatto was appointed translator of Hebrew documents for the Venetian magistracy of the *Giudici del Proprio*, a position that he held for fourteen years until 1662 when he retired because of the infirmity of old age in favor of his grandson Moisè a year before his death in 1663.<sup>23</sup> Luzzatto was highly praised and warmly eulogised by Mahalalel Halevi of Ancona in a letter that he wrote to Venice. Mahalalel noted that “his house was open to the rich and poor [...] his feet were as swift as those of a deer to do the will of God, above all ransoming captives.”<sup>24</sup>

However, soon after his death Luzzatto became almost forgotten. To the extent that he was remembered, he was best known for his *Discorso sopra il stato degli Hebrei et in particular dimoranti nel inclita città di Venetia* (*Discourse on the State of the Jews and in Particular those Dwelling in the Illustrious city of Venice*), printed in Venice in 1638. This book had an impact during his lifetime. The prominent rabbi in Amsterdam, Menasseh ben Israel (1604–1657), in his *Humble Addresses Submitted*

<sup>21</sup> Published in “Studi storici,” 459–69; see also 337–38. Interestingly, in 1660, Luzzatto was renting property belonging to Marco Brolo; see Veltri, *Filosofo e rabbino*, 435 and also 423–24.

<sup>22</sup> See Benjamin Ravid, “The Forced Baptism of Jewish Minors in Early Modern Venice,” *Italia* 13–15 (2001): 268–78, photo-reproduced in Ravid, *Studies on the Jews of Venice, 1382–1797* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> For the text of Luzzatto’s will and a sharp family dispute that dated back to 1632 and explains why his will was probated only in 1672, see Ferruta, “Simone Luzzatto,” 352–63, and for the text of his will, “Studi storici,” 376–79. On the position of official translators from Hebrew in Venice, see Benjamin Ravid, “Translators of the Hebrew Language’ for the Venetian Government and the Venetian Government as Preserver of Documents of the Venetian Jewish Community,” in *Tov Elem: Memory, Community and Gender: Essays in Honour of Robert Bonfil*, eds. Elisheva Baumgarten, Roni Weinstein, and Amnon Raz-Karkozkin (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute and the Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2011) 188–224. For Luzzatto’s resignation because of advancing old age, see “Studi storici,” 376–77.

<sup>24</sup> Simon Bernstein, “The Letters of Rabbi Mahalalel Halelujah of Ancona: A Chapter of the Cultural History of Italian Jewry,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 7 (1930): 497–536, 534; see also 504 and 506 n. 20.

to *Oliver Cromwell Seeking to Secure the Readmission of Jews to England* utilised passages from the *Discourse* virtually verbatim.<sup>25</sup> Shortly afterwards, in a speech delivered in the Venetian Senate in a successful attempt to ward off an otherwise unknown expulsion of the Jews around 1659, a Senator with the family name of Loredan, most likely Gian Francesco Loredan, cited the *Discourse* extensively as he strongly opposed the proposed expulsion and especially pointed out the economic benefits of retaining the Jews in Venice.<sup>26</sup>

In greater detail, Samuel Nahmias, better known as Giulio Morosini after his conversion to Christianity in Venice in 1649, in a work published in 1683 twice highly praised Luzzatto, whom he knew from the days before his conversion when both Simone Luzzatto and his father Isaac had been the associates of David and Isaac Nahmias (presumably the father and grandfather of Samuel Nahmias) in issuing maritime insurance.<sup>27</sup> Morosini related that Luzzatto had been “most esteemed for his Jewish erudition and also very well-thought of among Christians for his learning and eloquence” (“*stimatissimo per la lettura ebraica e anche appresso i Christiani grandemente accreditato per le scienze e per l’eloquenza*”). In a similar vein he asserted that Luzzatto “had been famous for his learning, eloquence, and authority” (“*ch’in Venetia era famoso per la dottrina, eloquenza e autorità*”). Nevertheless, that did not prevent him from strongly criticising a few of Luzzatto’s assertions in the *Discourse*.<sup>28</sup> Morosini was not the only Christian contemporary to criticise aspects of the *Discourse*. Melchiorre Palontrotti, in a small pamphlet published in 1649 but to all intents ignored until the later twentieth century, wrote a sharp criticism of certain points in the *Discourse*.<sup>29</sup>

The tract *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland on the same foot with all other nations. Containing also a defense of the Jews against all vulgar prejudices in all countries*, by the eighteenth century deist John Toland (1670–

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25 Benjamin Ravid, “How Profitable the Nation of the Jewes Are: The Humble Addresses of Menasseh ben Israel and the Discorso of Simone Luzzatto,” in *Mystics, Philosophers and Politicians. Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann*, eds. Jehuda Reinharz, Daniel Swetschinski and Kalman P. Bland (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1982): 159–80.

26 Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto, “Difesa inedita del senatore veneziano Loredan in favore degli ebrei nel 1659–60, basata sul Discorso di Simone Luzzatto,” in Veltri, *Filosofo e Rabbino*, 249–74. Some passages have been reproduced in the footnotes to the English translation of the *Discourse* in this volume.

27 See Veltri, *Filosofo e rabbino*, 426–30; also Benjamin Ravid, “Contra Judaeos,” 329–31, photo-reproduced in Ravid, *Studies on the Jews of Venice*, and Malkiel, *A Separate Republic*, 404 n. 4.

28 Giulio Morosini, *Via della fede* (Rome: Sacra congregatio de propaganda fide, 1683), unpaginated introduction to the Jewish reader and 1415. On Morosini, see Benjamin Ravid, “Contra Judaeos,” and Michela Andreatta, “Raccontare per persuadere: conversione e narrazione in *Via della fede* di Giulio Morosini,” in *Contributi di storia religiosa in onore di Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini*. eds. Maddalena del Bianco Cotrozzi, Riccardo Di Segni and Marcello Massenzio. With the collaboration of Maria Amalia D’Aronco (Florence: Olschki, 2014), 85–118.

29 See Ravid, “Contra Judaeos,” 303–28.

1722) marked an important step in the *rezeptionsgeschichte* of the *Discourse*.<sup>30</sup> In chapter 20 of his relatively short work, Toland not only expressed his admiration of Luzzatto and mentioned his intention to translate the *Discourse* from Italian to English, but also gave the reason why Luzzatto had written the *Discourse*:

I cou'd insist on several other as cogent Topics, as any that have been hitherto alledg'd, in behalf of the Jews but left what I have already asserted about both the benefit and safety of naturalizing them [...] and also to supply those other arguments by me purposely omitted, I shall in convenient time publish the translation of a Treatise out of Italian, written above 60 years ago, by the famous Rabbi, SIMON LUZZATTO.<sup>31</sup>

This piece was offer'd with an intention near a kin to mine, to the most serene Republic of Venice, where some hardships were then propos'd to be put upon the Jews, but by this means diverted. LUZZATTO was a man of extraordinary learning and judgment, very acute, and not meanly eloquent: which shows that the Jews want not always for all men tho he gives excellent reasons himself.<sup>32</sup>

However, Toland never published his translation and the world had to wait for the publication of a complete English translation of the *Discourse* for over 300 years until this volume appeared. Yet the *Discourse* was not completely forgotten. It was mentioned in the works of early modern antiquarians and historians, and passages were translated into Latin and French, and later into Hebrew.<sup>33</sup> As the modern scientific study of Judaism, *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, developed during the nineteenth century and new Hebrew documents were discovered, references to Luzzatto occasionally appeared. The popular multi-volume *Geschichte der Juden* (*The History of the Jews*) of Heinrich Graetz – also available in Hebrew, Russian, English, and partially in French and Yiddish – discussed Luzzatto briefly. On the basis of the information then available, an entry devoted to Luzzatto was included in the Jewish Encyclopedia of 1901–1906 that today should be read with caution. Yet no original scholarship was undertaken on him, but one short article by Angelo Sacerdoti, the Chief Rabbi of Rome (1886–1935), the transcript of a lecture delivered in 1925, appeared in a posthumous collection of Sacerdoti's writings published in 1936.<sup>34</sup>

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**30** John Toland, *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland on the same foot with all other nations. Containing also a defense of the Jews against all vulgar prejudices in all countries* (London: J. Roberts, 1714); see Isaac Barzilay, "John Toland's Borrowings from Simone Luzzatto: Luzzatto's *Discourse* on the Jews of Venice (1638) the Major Source of Toland's Writing on the Naturalization of the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland (1714)," *Jewish Social Studies* 31 (1969): 75–81.

**31** By writing "publish the translation of the *Discorso*," did Toland mean that he already had a translation or rather that he was going to undertake or commission such a translation?

**32** Toland, *Reasons*, 59–60.

**33** Veltri, "Individual Responsibility," 302 n. 92, and with slightly more bibliographical detail, Veltri, "Saggio introduttivo," XLIII.

**34** Angelo Sacerdoti, "Simone Luzzatto," in *In memoria di Angelo Sacerdoti* (Rome: Tummenelli, 1936), 99–113.

The modern study of the *Discourse* commenced in 1936 with the publication of the German book *Galut* by the prominent Jewish historian Yitzhak Baer that devoted an entire chapter to Luzzatto.<sup>35</sup> After *Galut* appeared in English translation in 1947, a far greater audience became aware of Luzzatto. In 1950 a complete Hebrew translation of the *Discourse* by Dante Lattes with a biographical introduction by Moses Shulvass and an extensive essay by Riccardo Bachi was published in the “Historical Library” series edited by Yitzhak Baer and his colleague at the Hebrew University, Ben-Zion Dinur.<sup>36</sup> Finally, in the later years of the twentieth century, with the emergence of a new generation of scholars in the United States, the State of Israel, and Italy, serious study commenced not only of Simone Luzzatto and his *Discourse* but also of his *Socrates* (1651), an enigmatic humanistic philosophical work that had been almost completely overlooked for over three hundred years. An annotated edition of *Socrates* was published in 2013 and will shortly appear in a keenly awaited bi-lingual Italian-English annotated volume thanks to the diligent research of Giuseppe Veltri, Michela Torbidoni, and their associates. It will certainly lead to the integration of Luzzatto into discussions of the early modern intellectual world. The current studies of one of the most illustrious inhabitants of the Venetian ghetto, taking into consideration the completely different natures of the *Discourse* and of the *Socrates*, both of which Luzzatto wrote primarily for a Venetian Christian audience, and then integrating them with an assessment of his Hebrew writings for his learned Jewish associates, are of great significance for understanding Luzzatto and for the light shed on the complexity of thought and the impact of the surrounding world within the porous early modern ghetto of Venice.

## 2 The Incident of 1636–37

Presenting a tradition that was still preserved in his day some fifty years after the death of Luzzatto in 1663, Toland, as noted above, wrote that Luzzatto had offered

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<sup>35</sup> For details, see Veltri, “Individual Responsibility,” 304.

<sup>36</sup> If I may be permitted to interject a personal note at this point, while a graduate student interested in finding a topic for a Ph.D. dissertation, preferably in Italian Jewish history, I came across the Hebrew translation of the *Discourse*. An introductory footnote by the editors of the Historiographical Series to the essay of Bachi observing that “this book deserves further investigation” (27) determined the future course of my academic life. I was especially interested in the opening chapters that dealt with the economic activities of the Jews in Venice, and fortunately among the few scholarly articles on Venice then available was one by Cecil Roth that drew my attention to a charter of the Jewish merchants of Venice that he had located in the New York Public Library. Soon afterwards, I discovered the *Archivio di Stato* and devoted my Ph.D. dissertation to studying the history of the Jewish merchants of Venice down to the time of the publication of the *Discourse* in 1638 in order to better understand the background of the *Discourse*. By the time that I finished in 1973, I was so involved with the merchants, moneylenders and institution of the ghetto that I never returned to do any further research on Luzzatto.



a work “with an intention near a kin to mine, to the most serene Republic of Venice, when some hardships were then propos’d to be put upon the Jews, but by this means diverted.” Yet the nature of these hardships remained unknown for almost two hundred years more, until finally on the basis of two Hebrew sources published in the twentieth century and further research in the *Archivio di Stato di Venezia*, the specific events that occurred in Venice shortly before the publication of the *Discourse* in 1638 can be reconstructed.

The first and longest account of these events was recorded in the *Ḥayye Yehudah* (*The Life of Judah*), an autobiography written by Leone Modena for the benefit of his descendants. Although a few nineteenth-century authors had quoted brief excerpts from it, this remarkable work remained unpublished in its entirety until 1911.<sup>37</sup> While *The Life of Judah* provides invaluable information about Jewish life in the ghetto of Venice, Modena did not intend to write a history of his contemporary world; rather, everything focused on himself, his aspirations, his achievements, and his tribulations, and he introduced background details to a very limited extent, only in so far as they were relevant to his personal account.<sup>38</sup> To his great consternation, Modena came to feel threatened by an incident that occurred in 1636–37, shortly before the publication of Luzzatto’s *Discourse* in 1638, and he related it in great detail in *The Life of Judah*.<sup>39</sup>

On Purim of 5396 [21 March 1636], the entire community turned from joy to mourning when trouble began for the community as whole, for some individuals in particular, and for myself.

It was because the crime of Grassin Scaramella and Sabbadin Cattelan was discovered. They had received goods and cash – silk, silk clothing and gold – worth seventy thousand ducats, stolen by some Christians in the Merceria from the merchant Bergonzi, and had put them in a room in one of the houses in the ghetto. A worthless scoundrel named Isaac the son of Jacob Senego, may his name be blotted out, had informed against them and disclosed the affair.

Government agents came and arrested Sabbadin, who showed them where the money was, but Grassin escaped. Menahem d’Angelo and Isaac Scaramella were involved with them through the accusation, even though they were innocent. On Purim, the ghetto compound was closed off in order to conduct a house-to-house search for them in great haste. The outcry

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37 First published in its entirety in 1911, the autobiography was edited by Daniel Carpi on the basis of the original manuscript with introduction and notes under the title *Ḥayye Yehuda: The Autobiography of a Venetian Rabbi* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1985). An English translation by Mark R. Cohen, also on the basis of the original manuscript with introductory essays by Theodore K. Rabb and Mark R. Cohen, Howard E. Adelman, and Natalie Z. Davis, and historical notes by Howard E. Adelman and Benjamin Ravid, appeared under the title *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena’s Life of Judah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). For an Italian translation, see *Vita di Jehudà: Autobiografia di Leon Modena rabbino veneziano del XVII secolo*, translated by Emanuele M. Artom, introduction by Umberto Fortis, notes by Daniel Carpi and edited by Elena Rossi Artom, Umberto Fortis and Ariel Viterbo (Turin: Zamorani, 2000).

38 See Howard Adelman, “Leon Modena: The Autobiography and the Man,” in Cohen, *The Life of Judah*, 19–49.

39 Cohen, *The Life of Judah*, 143–45; see especially the notes by Adelman and Ravid, 249–55.

against and contempt for all Jews on the part of everyone in the city – nobles, citizens and commoners – increased as usual. For when one individual committed a crime, they would grow angry at the entire community, calling us a band of thieves and [saying] that every kind of crime is concealed in the ghetto. Ever since then, they [the Jews] have been the object of scorn and hatred, instead of, as formerly, being loved by all.

Then calamity was added to calamity. On the first day of Passover 5396 [20 April 1636], the Zorzetti brothers, Mordechai who died later as an apostate while in prison and Jacob who is now serving a sentence on a galley, were arrested for giving a bribe to the Quarantia [the chief Venetian Court of Justice] in a case involving two Christians, because the aforementioned Grassin Scaramella informed against them in order to take his revenge. May God refuse to forgive him, for he destroyed and harmed six families of upright men.

[...] The affair lasted about a full year, with constant fear and trembling, which became worse each day. [...] Then, at the beginning of Adar 5397 [began 23 February 1637], my anxiety and fear increased considerably. One of the nobles who had been denounced for accepting a bribe was a dear friend of mine, and I worried that they would say that I had been involved with him in that affair. Even though I was innocent of any transgression, it was nonetheless a time of anger and wrath, with punishments and arrests being made for every light suspicion. So I left for Padua and stayed there for ten days like someone in hiding. I wanted to flee to Ferrara, but God mercifully dissuaded me from becoming a banished person for no fault. I agreed, therefore, to return home a little before Purim.

[...] Afterward, on the seventh of Adar 5397 [3 March 1637], sentence was handed down on all those terrified Jews, and they were ordered to be banished forever, under severe restrictions of banishment. Additionally, and this had never been heard of since the time of our ancestors, they banished from the entire state fathers, sons and brothers of every one of those Jews.

The second account of these events can be found in a Hebrew chronicle from the second half of the seventeenth century published in 1950 under the title of *The Story of the Misfortunes which Afflicted the Jews in Italy*. The eighth episode in *The Story*, named “The Danger of the Expulsion from Venice in the Year 1635–1636,” enhances the account of Modena and sheds further light on the events, especially by providing two very significant additional details.<sup>40</sup> First, it asserted that “the nobles and the Senate and especially the Council of Ten with the Doge Francesco Erizzo at their head, thought of expelling all the Jews from their land.” Second, it describes the significant role of Luzzatto in averting the proposed expulsion:

In the year 5396 [13 September 1635 to 29 September 1636], the holy community of Venice underwent many bad tribulations, and a complete expulsion from all the lands of the government and in particular from Venice and the neighboring cities, was almost enacted against them. The reason for this was that certain base men incited the inhabitants of their city to share in the spoils of a great robbery committed against a certain merchant. At first they banded together, but afterward they had a falling out, and each one decided to inform on his associates in order to clear himself. They secretly revealed to the authorities the circumstances of the robbery and the location of the booty, which was very large. The matter was investigat-

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<sup>40</sup> Moses A. Shulvass, “Sippur ha-šarot she-‘avru be-Italiya” [“A Story of the Misfortunes which Afflicted the Jews in Italy”]. *Hebrew Union College Annual* 22 (1949): 1–21 [in Hebrew], 18–20 (Hebrew pagination).

ed, and that which they had taken was found. Some of those implicated who had taken of the stolen goods fled, while others were caught and placed in jail and this made them very odious indeed in the eyes of the people.

And this was not the end, for matters went from bad to worse, and in order to save themselves from death, they invented accusations to give the government information about some secret matters. Each vied to outdo the other to report about the trial: how the ministers and the judges in whose hands lay the fate of men were bribe-takers who sold a righteous man by means of certain friends of their family and how a man and his brother went to the same woman, the beloved of the judging minister,<sup>41</sup> to pervert justice, to exculpate the guilty and to condemn the innocent. They so slandered them with convincing evidence of these sins, endangering their lives to the extent that they besmirched the honour of the government. Their wickedness became widely known, and to protect their honour the government had to expel from the kingdom some noble families, them, their wives, their children, and their infants to show that they had no sympathy with such activities, and they were angry with the Jews who were the cause of this, revealing things which should not have been made public.

Therefore, some Jewish families, along with their relatives who were not involved in the evil affair, were also expelled. Thus did the ministers do unto them in their anger, to show that there was no favoritism and that the law was the same for all peoples.

Then some heads of families were exiled from the land of their birth; because of the decree of the king [doge] and his counselors, they wandered about, settling where they could, most of them going to Ferrara. [...]

The aforementioned circumstances and their consequences did not change. Therefore the ministers of the Senate and especially the Council of Ten with the Doge Francesco Erizzo at their head, thought of expelling all the Jews from their land. However, God was with them to help and support them and provided them with three faithful shepherds who with their wisdom assuaged the anger of the king and his ministers. One of them was the encyclopedic sage, the great scholar of the Torah, the outstanding physician, Rabbi Samuel Meldola, may God grant him life. The community of Venice requested his own community of Verona to induce him kindly to come and intercede with his Excellency the Doge Erizzo, since Samuel had been his close companion in youth in time of war, so that he could placate him and have him appeal to the ministers concerning the expulsion. The distinguished rabbi apparently did seek the welfare of his people, was successful, and saved them through his intercession.

After him, that great guide, the outstanding rabbinic authority Rabbi Simone Luzzatto, the head of the academy of the holy congregation of Venice, illuminated the path with great wisdom and knowledge. He composed an elegantly written work in the vernacular on the subject of the Jews that he dedicated to the ministers and was well-received by them. They saw and were impressed with his wisdom and fine style and therefore did not reject his plea, and out of pity and graciousness, the nobles had mercy on the people of the Lord, praised be God.

And the third of those who interceded for the community was Rabbi Israel Conegliano, of blessed memory, the most distinguished of the three, the familiar of the minister, Ser Marco Giustiniano, one of the righteous of the nations, who with great exertion interceded with him on behalf of the people of the God of Abraham. And because of these faithful shepherds, those whose hearts God had touched, went to intercede for their people, for it was a time of trouble for the Jews, but they were saved from it, for God moved the government have mercy upon them so that it changed its course and did not speak further of the expulsion, that the edict and the decree was almost, God forbid, decided upon and enacted by the Senate had God not

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41 Presumably Paulina; see Gaetano Cozzi, *Giustizia "contaminata": vicende giudiziarie di nobili ed ebrei nella Venezia del seicento* (Venice: Marsilio, 1996), 99, 100, 106, 108.

been with them and helped them by means of these worthy persons. But before that, many tribulations surrounded them, life hung in the balance before them and they were afraid night and day. Blessed be he who renders good to the guilty, who render good unto them, Amen.

A third account of these events was discovered by late twentieth century investigations in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia. They have shown that the Venetian Council of Ten determinedly occupied itself with the matters related in *The Life of Judah* of Modena and “The Story of the Misfortunes” on numerous occasions between 3 March 1636 and 14 May 1637, and have rendered possible a detailed reconstruction of the course of events.<sup>42</sup> On the night of 1–2 March, 1636 according to the later indictment of the Council of Ten, four Christians had opened the door of the shop of Bartolomeo Bergonzi at the sign of the Madonna in the Merceria with a key that they had forged, and stole gold cloth and silk worth around 60,000 ducats. They took their loot by barge to the ghetto, where it was received by Grassin Scaramella, who was helped by his cousin Isaac Scaramella and Menahem d’Angelo. These Jews hid the goods in the ghetto and at night moved them to different locations so that they would remain undiscovered.

The Council of Ten commenced its investigation of this theft on 3 March 1636. After some preliminary arrests of suspected individuals, on 11 April it ordered the arrest of seven individuals directly involved and eventually on 6 May, all seven were banished forever from the entire Venetian state, all their property was ordered confiscated and applied to reimbursing Bergonzi in full for that portion of his property that had not been recovered. Furthermore, should any of them ever be caught returning to Venice, they were to be hanged between the columns of justice in Piazza San Marco.

On July 11, the Council of Ten turned to the Jewish community of Venice for assistance, as it instructed the *Cattaveri* to order the rabbis and beadles in the ghetto to excommunicate Grassin Scaramella, Menahem d’Angelo and Sabbadin Cattelan because those individuals had not obeyed the order that anyone who knew about the theft at the store of Bergonzi was to inform the authorities. In response three Venetian rabbis, Leone Modena, Graziadio Saravel and Simone Luzzatto came to the *Cattaveri* five days later and respectfully explained that according to their rites and customs, they could not excommunicate anyone unless first they knew the reason, but this was impossible since two of the three were absent and the third was in the prison of the Council of Ten. Thereupon, the *Cattaveri* reiterated their order to excommunicate Grassin Scaramella and Menahem d’Angelo but not Sabbadin Cattelan, since he was already in their hands.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The following brief summary is reconstructed from the details preserved in *Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Council of Ten, Criminale and Civile*, 3 March 1636 to 14 May 1637, partially incorporated into the notes of Adelman and Ravid in Cohen, *Life of Judah*, 249–55. For a more detailed presentation and analysis, see Cozzi, *Giustizia “contaminata.”*

<sup>43</sup> See “Studi storici,” 441–42.

That, however, was not the end of the story. Sabbadin Cattelan, who had been involved in the theft, had, in return for a promise of immunity, informed on others, and this enabled the Council of Ten to make a breakthrough in a major case of bribery that had been under investigation for around three years. It turned out that some Jews had acted as intermediaries on behalf of a Venetian who wanted to “buy votes” in his lawsuit against another Venetian and had disbursed money to certain judges in the *Quarantia Criminale*. Eventually severe punishment was meted out by the Council of Ten: two Venetian noble judges found guilty of accepting bribes were deprived of their nobility, their names were crossed out of the *Libro d’Oro*, the *Golden Book* in which the names of all legitimate nobles were registered, and they were banished forever from the Venetian state subject to beheading between the columns of justice in Piazza San Marco should they ever be caught returning.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, several Jews involved were also banished for life from Venice and others were sentenced to the galleys for life, while some, including one Samuel Luzzatto, were acquitted.

The severity of this affair in the eyes of the Venetian government was reflected in the decision of the Council of Ten on 14 May 1637. After the sentencing was completed, it ordered that the documents involved in the case be placed in the chest of the Inquisitors of State from which they could not be removed for any reason unless proposed by all six Ducal Counselors and the three Heads of the Council of Ten and passed unanimously by all members of the Council of Ten. Finally, to prevent Jews from committing such abuses in the future, the Council of Ten ruled almost unanimously with only one abstention that without exception no Jew was to go to the courts, to any council, college or magistracy, including those at the Rialto either as a petitioner (*sollecitador*) or as a supporter (*interveniente*) nor under any other pretext be involved in the cases of others, under pain of ten years in chains in the galleys, and if unable to do so, to be hanged.

### 3 The Pre-history of the *Discourse*

Any discussion and analysis of Luzzatto’s *Discourse* must address the issue of the pre-history of the *Discourse* prior to its publication in 1638. While the title page of the work bears the date 1638, a reference inside the text refers to “the past year, 1636,” that would point to a composition date of 1637. The simplest explanation would be that the book was written in 1637 but printed a year later, in 1638. Since the matter of the corruption of justice had been settled in May 1637, Luzzatto could have written the *Discourse*, or at least a part of it, while the danger of expulsion still hovered over the Jews. Some further light has been shed on this matter by a

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<sup>44</sup> Cozzi, *Giustizia “contaminata,”* 119.

recently-published article that revealed that an earlier and much shorter version of some of the material in the *Discourse* had existed in manuscript form prior to the publication of the book in 1638.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, it should be pointed out that the *Discourse* of 1638 underwent more than one impression since different orders of the introductory material and errata list are encountered and certain minor corrections were made.<sup>46</sup>

In any case, one date is certain: on 20 October 1637, following the usual procedure, authorization to publish the *Discourse* was issued by the *Cattaveri* on the basis of the report of the Inquisitor, Fulgenzio Micanzio, and the Reformatori of the University of Padua.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps it was not possible to print the book during the time remaining in 1637, and hence the 1638 date of publication.

The involvement of Fulgenzio Micanzio was significant, since only a very few years previously he had shown himself very sympathetic to the Jewish community of Venice. In 1631, the *Avogador del Comun* Zuanne Morosini discovered that the Jewish community possessed a Hebrew book entitled *Il libro dell'università grande* that contained a statute forbidding Jews from having recourse to the Doge, the *Cattaveri* and the magistracies of the Venetian Republic under penalty of excommunication. He ordered that the statute be translated into Italian and given to Gasparo Lonigo, one of the two *consultori in iure* who had succeeded Paolo Sarpi (1552–1623). Lonigo condemned the statute and accused the Jewish community of creating a separate republic of their own and of usurping for themselves absolute jurisdiction over all the Jews in the Venetian state. Presuming that the *Libro grande* contained further material objectionable to God and man, Lonigo recommended that it be burned. Instead, the Senate decided by the vote of 83–6–9 to have the entire book translated into Italian and then passed on to the theologians (*dottori*), who together with the Senate would decide what further action should be taken. Once completed, the translation was given to the other *consultore in iure*, Fulgenzio Micanzio (1570–1654), for his evaluation. Micanzio had been a younger colleague and close friend and associate of Paolo Sarpi and eventually his biographer. Micanzio did not share Lonigo's negative attitude, but rather concluded that the provisions of the *Libro grande* posed no threat to the sovereignty and jurisdiction of the state since for the most part they were needed in order to enable the Jews to maintain their community so that they could meet their responsibilities in accordance with the wishes of the Venetian government, and that their means of enforcement, excommunication, con-

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<sup>45</sup> Giuseppe Veltri, Gianfranco Miletto, and Guido Bartolucci, "The Last Will and the Testament of Simone Luzzatto (1583?–1663) and the Only Known Manuscript of the *Discorso* (1638). Newly Discovered Manuscripts from the State Archive of Venice and the Marciana Library." *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 5, n. 1 (2011): 125–46.

<sup>46</sup> See Veltri "Individual Responsibility," 282–83, and in greater detail, Veltri, "Saggio introduttivo," XLII–XLIII.

<sup>47</sup> See Veltri, *Filosofo e rabbino*, 337. Perhaps it was not possible to print the book in the time remaining in 1637 and hence the 1638 publication date.

stituted only a spiritual penalty. As a result, the Venetian government did not undertake any action and the *status quo* continued.<sup>48</sup>

Although in the end no total expulsion of the Jews took place but rather only the banishment of a few guilty Jews, the possibility that there had been some serious discussion of expelling the Jews from Venice cannot be precluded, and indeed in view of the specific details related in the “Story” that “the ministers of the Senate and especially the Council of Ten with the Doge Francesco Erizzo at their head, thought of expelling all the Jews from their land,” seems quite possible. However, since the Venetians prided themselves on governing in accordance to the law, it is worthwhile considering the laws regarding the residence of the Jews in Venice. The legal basis for their residence was contained in two sets of charters issued by the Senate to two groups of Jews who engaged in two different types of economic activities. The first and longest residing group was the moneylenders, who had been chartered since 1513 while the second, the merchants, had received their first charter in 1589. The five-year charter of the moneylenders in effect in 1636–37 had been renewed on 29 December 1634, and contained no provision for expulsion but only a sixteen-month grace period in case of non-renewal of their charter. On the other hand, the renewal of the charter of the Jewish merchants followed the regular procedure established for all charter renewals. First, the Jews had to submit a petition seeking the renewal of the charter to the Ducal Counselors, who if they approved it, passed it on the *Collegio*. Then the *Collegio* would request written reports from four of the Venetian magistracies involved with the Jews, and on that basis make any changes that thought desirable before passing the legislation on to the Senate for approval or rejection. The Jews petitioned for renewal on or before 4 June 1635 and the charter was approved in the Senate on 10 July 1636. Thus, the renewal of the charter of the Jewish merchants was under consideration during the time of the “incident” of 1636–37. Although the last of the magistracies submitted their favorable reports on 29 January 1636 before the theft at the store of Bergonzi on 1–2 March 1636, nevertheless the possibility that the approval of the charter was delayed from 19 January until 10 July 1636 because of the “incident” cannot be completely precluded. However, since the reports of the magistracies were favorable and clearly the Jews were fulfilling the role in Venetian maritime commerce that the government expected of them, the Senate renewed their charter by the overwhelming vote of 82 in favor, 4 opposed, and 8 abstentions.

Indeed, Gaetano Cozzi asserted that the real problem of the Jews was not that of an expulsion. Rather it was the danger that the welcoming climate that had at-

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**48** See Benjamin Ravid, “‘A Republic Separate From All Other Government’: Jewish Autonomy in Venice in the Seventeenth Century and the Translation of the *Libro Grande*” (Hebrew), in *Thought and Action: Essays in Memory of Simon Rawidowicz on the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of His Death*, eds. Alfred A. Greenbaum and Alfred L. Ivry (Tel Aviv/Haifa: Tcherikover Ltd. and Haifa University Press, 1983), 53–76; Malkiel, *A Separate Republic*, 31–60; and for the text of Micanzio’s memorandum, 239–55, and Veltri, *Filosofo e rabbino*, 337.

tracted Jews to the city and enabled them to integrate to the extent that they could bribe the highest ministers of state was compromised, and that led to the publication of the *Discourse*.<sup>49</sup> Luzzatto had circulated a text in 1636–37 to avert an expulsion being considered in Venice and then had published the *Discourse* in 1638 in order to try to restore the previous relationship. While the details of Cozzi's presentation require further attention, it serves as a reminder of the importance of the events in Venice in shaping the printed version of the *Discourse*, as well as the republication of Modena's *Riti*, and might explain why the *Discourse* was published in 1638 even though the danger of an expulsion had passed.

## 4 The Incident of 1636–37 as Reflected in the *Discourse*

Reading the *Discourse* in the light of the accounts in *The Life of Judah*, “The Story of the Misfortunes,” and the archival documents, it appears that three passages in it allude to the actual danger facing the entire Jewish community of Venice in 1636–37 and constitute an attempt to reduce hostility toward the Jews residing in Venice.

The first such passage is found in the “Preface to the Entire Work” of the *Discourse*.<sup>50</sup> In it, Luzzatto stated that he wished to establish that the Jews were not a useless part of the population of the city but rather brought it benefit, and therefore had been allowed by the government to live in it. This realisation, he hoped, would lead those hostile towards the Jews to become less contumacious towards them. Even if, he continued, in conformity with the weakness of human nature, some rascals and criminals were found among the Jewish people, that should not obscure nor detract from the good will that the Jews as a whole felt toward their most clement rulers, and the Jews should not fear that as a result the public indignation would be provoked against them. Then, in a clear attempt to justify not expelling the whole community because of the crimes of a few individuals, Luzzatto posited the following analogy: the wise farmer, when confronted with useless and harmful grasses growing on well-cultivated land along with the desired harvest, does not abandon his project, but rather extirpates the bad plants and continues his wearisome labor of caring for the good and preserving the useful. Luzzatto further asserted that all who possessed sufficient experience in human affairs knew that evil was much more noticeable than good for it constituted a deviation from the known and accustomed order, while the good was a continuation of the existing and therefore scarcely observed even by the wisest. As examples, he pointed out that good health was only realised when compared with its opposite, and similarly those who travel with

<sup>49</sup> See Cozzi, *Giustizia “Contaminata,”* 122–23.

<sup>50</sup> *Discourse*, 5v–6v.



the stream and move swiftly did not perceive their swift motion until they encounter even a little obstacle. After citing these examples, Luzzatto succinctly concluded his argument by applying them to the situation of the Jews: some people exaggerate the crimes of a few Jews as intolerable evils and unbearable calamities, while ignoring the ordinary advantages and profits that are derived from them.

The second passage in the *Discourse* that reflects the events of 1636–37 is found in the eleventh consideration.<sup>51</sup> After pointing out the difficulties inherent in characterizing an entire people, Luzzatto nevertheless attempted to characterise the Jewish people, enumerating both their weaknesses and strengths. Among their strong points, he included the fact that almost always their faults and delinquencies partook more of the base and the abject than of the heinous and grave. Therefore, he argued, should one of the Jews commit a crime, as often happened among any people, and disobey the laws of the ruler, the remedy was easy and could be handled by the ordinary magistrates with the usual penalties of exile, prison, galleys, mutilation of limbs, and death, since the crimes had as their aim only the personal benefit of their perpetrators who were driven by the greed for goods or similar baseness and did not constitute a major threat to the established political and religious order. After a lengthy digression designed to explain apparent instances of collective punishment in biblical times and in the days of the Roman Empire, Luzzatto asserted the general principle that condemning an entire group because of the crimes of an individual was against both natural and divine law. Nothing in the world, he claimed, was so perfect that it could not be misused. Iron, needed for so many instruments necessary for human life, was also a means of killing, while speech, which ennobled mankind, was also often a cause of misfortune and ruin, yet no legislator ever sought to prohibit the mining of iron or to forbid human speech. Even in the case of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, who had exceeded all boundaries of wickedness, God was willing to avert the punishment deserved by such a great number of people if ten innocent men could be found.<sup>52</sup> Thus, using biblical precedent as a guide for contemporary policy, Luzzatto concluded that it was inappropriate that a few offenders in a people should suffice to provoke the public indignation against all of them.

Finally, in the twelfth consideration of the *Discourse*, Luzzatto returned to contemporary events.<sup>53</sup> There was no doubt, he wrote, that the Jews were more subject to slander than any other people because of the impunity enjoyed by their slanderers. And since often the truth was mixed with the false, the invective made against them became all the more pernicious and much care was needed to distinguish between the true and the false. Those who accused the Jews of very serious crimes

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 35v–40r

<sup>52</sup> The copy of the *Discourse* used for the photo-reproduction (Bologna, 1976) read “innocenza di cinque huomini” (40r). That copy did not have an errata list as did some others.

<sup>53</sup> Luzzatto, *Discourse*, 43v–45v.

not only injured the Jews but also criticised the careful prudence of their ruler, for they claimed to know more than the ruler who never ceased to inquire into and investigate the most hidden deeds of his subjects. And, Luzzatto then asked rhetorically if it could be maintained that those people whose business was not to be acquainted with the crimes of the Jews would be better informed than the authorities whose duty it was to be concerned with these matters? This was especially so since because of the closeness of the Jewish quarter it was impossible that their wicked actions would not be observed and discovered by their neighbors and be easily revealed to the authorities, whether out of desire to obtain a reward or out of feelings of hatred and rivalry that, like other peoples, Jews also harbored. Therefore, those who slandered the Jews should restrain their curiosity, allow the reliable prudence of the authorities to investigate matters, and then consider anything not punished by them to doubtlessly constitute a vain lie or a hasty conclusion. Luzzatto did not go into specific details regarding the charges against the Jews of Venice, other than pointing out the absurdity of the accusation that the Jews were advising the Barbary pirates of the departure of Venetian ships from the city and then sharing in the booty. Luzzatto concluded that the prudent reader should realise the weakness of the many other accusations against the Jews of Venice and that only those who were guilty should be punished.<sup>54</sup>

## 5 The Economic Dimension of the *Discourse*: International Maritime Commerce and Financial Contributions

Since Luzzatto was very well-informed regarding what was transpiring both inside the ghetto and outside of it, was highly respected in both the Jewish and the non-Jewish world, was involved in the crisis facing the Jews of Venice, and was capable of writing in the Italian idiom of his day, he was well-suited to serve as defense attorney of the Jews. Consequently, his discussion of the two main reasons for which Jews had been permitted to reside in Venice, first, to import and export merchandise to Venice and enhance the customs duties by means of their international maritime trade and second, to operate carefully controlled loan banks providing credit to the less well-off inhabitants of the city, bears further analysis.

In a sense, the first seven considerations of the *Discourse* constitute the conceptual and historical background leading up to the eighth consideration in which Luz-

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<sup>54</sup> For the invocation of this argument in connection with the expulsion of the Jews from Venice in 1571, see Benjamin Arbel, *Trading Nations: Jews and Venetians in the Early Modern Eastern Mediterranean* (Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1995), 78–94.

zatto transitioned to a quantitative financial assessment of the benefits that the Jews brought to the Venetian treasury and populace. Luzzatto commenced by affirming the great importance, indeed necessity, of international commerce for maintaining society. He then pointed out that in the past, the Venetians had been pre-eminent in that activity. However, the mercantile profession was always strenuous and quite dangerous, since many times merchants had to risk their lives and possessions when undergoing lengthy voyages, difficult sea crossings, and uncertain commitments. Therefore, Luzzatto continued, after amassing adequate riches, they made every effort to take full advantage of their acquisitions in peace and tranquility by investing them in real estate and urban sources of income. Accordingly, after Venice expanded on the Italian mainland, the merchants aspired to free themselves from the troubles and dangers that arose from long-distance trade and travelling. No longer wishing to expose themselves to the vagaries of fortune, Luzzatto asserted, they turned instead to the acquisition of property, the cultivation of land, and other occupations of civil life.<sup>55</sup> Luzzatto continued by claiming that since Venice had never been invaded or defeated in battle,<sup>56</sup> of necessity the Venetians must have withdrawn from trade voluntarily after the Venetian expansion on the Italian mainland, attracted by the less dangerous and wearisome alternative of investing in real estate and urban sources of income. Although by stressing the voluntary nature of the withdrawal of the Venetian merchants from trade in order to counter the argument that the Jews had usurped that trade from the Venetians, Luzzatto greatly oversimplified the very complex issue of cause and effect of the withdrawal of the Venetians from maritime trade, nevertheless, his argument was essentially valid, for whether the withdrawal of Venetian merchants had been voluntary or involuntary, by 1638 they were no longer the factor that they had been in the past in that sector.

Interestingly, Luzzatto did not identify two of the main reasons for the decline in Venetian commerce with the Levant. The first was the increasing competition, as the sixteenth century progressed, of French and English merchants, followed at the end of the century by the Dutch, in the Levant. Second, these northern European merchants were often able to offer cheaper goods in the Ottoman markets, albeit sometimes of inferior quality as in the case of certain cloth, than could the Venetians. These issues had been mentioned in government documents before the writing of the *Discourse* and in no way do they weaken Luzzatto's arguments in favor

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55 The tendency of Venetian merchants to withdraw from maritime commerce, and especially from the Levant trade, which had been the source of the wealth and greatness of Venice, was a development noted with great concern by Venetian contemporaries from the early sixteenth century on, and has been the subject of much discussion among modern scholars. However, certainly not all Venetian merchants withdrew from maritime commerce.

56 While the city of Venice in the lagoons had never been invaded, the Venetians had certainly lost many battles on both land and sea and in any case, it is not clear how a military defeat or even invasion would necessarily have led the Venetians to withdraw from trade.

of the Jews, but by omitting them he could emphasise the voluntary nature of the Venetian withdrawal from trade.

Furthermore, Luzzatto claimed that the shift on the part of Venetian merchants from international maritime trade to domestic construction and the purchase of land was not beneficial for Venice, for the government gained more from maritime commerce than from real estate.<sup>57</sup> Luzzatto then proceeded to raise and dismiss arguments that could be advanced against his position, and concluded with the additional observation that maritime trade maintained both vessels and the skills of navigators and sailors, an issue of distinction and valour in times of peace and so necessary in times of war.

Luzzatto returned to his main theme as he claimed that since Venetian merchants had withdrawn from international commerce, foreigners had assumed their place in trade. Eventually these foreigners, after becoming wealthy also retired and returned to their homeland, taking with them the profits that they had made in Venice, thereby diminishing the wealth of the city. They in turn were replaced by other foreigners and the cycle repeated itself, draining money from Venice, which as a result did not become enriched from its commerce. Therefore, he concluded, it should not be asked whether it was better that the international maritime commerce of Venice be handled by Venetians or by Jews, but rather whether it was better to have it handled by foreigners or by Jews. Posing the question in this manner, he believed that it was obviously better to have it handled by the Jews.<sup>58</sup> Jews, he claimed, were loyal to governments that accepted them and granted them privileges. This was especially the case in Venice because the Jews had no homeland to which they could return, taking the profits they had made in Venice with them. Since Jews were not allowed to invest their money in real estate and had no occupation other than trade in Venice, they had to keep their assets liquid and employ them in commerce.

In the eighth consideration, Luzzatto embarked upon what was perhaps the most important part of the *Discourse* since it was designed to appeal to the practical side of the Venetian nobility who monopolised the judicial, administrative, and above all, the decision-making legislative councils of the Venetian republic and

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<sup>57</sup> See *Discourse*, 23r–24r. This argument requires careful analysis.

<sup>58</sup> This was basically the policy adopted by the Venetian government and led to the first charter of the Levantine and Pontentine Jews in Venice in 1589 which contained two unique provisions that those merchants were to enjoy until the end of the Venetian republic; for details, see Benjamin Ravid, “An Introduction to the Charters of the Jewish Merchants of Venice,” in *The Mediterranean and the Jews II: Society, Culture and Economy in Early Modern Times*, eds. Elliot Horowitz and Moses Orfali (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press: 2002), 207–11, and in greater detail, Benjamin Ravid, “Venice, Rome, and the Reversion of Conversos to Judaism: A Study in *Ragione di Stato*,” in *L'identità dissimulata: giudaizzanti iberici nell'europa cristiana dell'età moderna*, ed. Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini (Florence: Olschki, 2000), 151–93, both photo-reproduced in Ravid, *Studies on the Jews of Venice*.

were always desirous to increase revenue from all possible sources.<sup>59</sup> He commenced by asserting that he would adopt an approach that would provide a truthful result rather than one with errors and fallacies. However, a close reading of his presentation shows that he weakened the certitude of his calculations by the frequent use of the word *often* and other such qualifying terms, which will be italicised in the following discussion.

However, since errors and fallacies often (*per l'ordinario*) result from general examinations, while the truth always accompanies and follows [the focus on] details and differences, it seems to me appropriate here to turn to the individual case and to approach the calculation of the profits one can probably estimate (*probabilmente si può stimare*) that the government ordinarily receives annually from the [Jewish] Nation living sheltered in the city, leaving aside those dwelling in the other parts of the state.

Luzzatto's following statement that "I estimate (*stimo*) that there are around six thousand Jews [in Venice]" is problematic. Although as a leader involved in community affairs including tax assessment and collection, he should have known how many Jews resided in Venice, nevertheless his figure appears excessively high and should be reduced by at least a quarter or more, probably even halved.<sup>60</sup> Since he utilised the figure of 6,000 Jewish inhabitants as the basis for his following calculations, the results of those calculations should also be reduced.

Luzzatto's subsequent statement that one can judge (*giudicare*) that the tax raised from their purchases of bread, wine, oil, meat, clothing, and other similar items amounted to forty-eight thousand ducats, calculated on the basis of an annual eight ducats per head, also presents a problem. These taxes on the items mentioned by Luzzatto were not direct taxes of a stipulated amount levied on the Jewish community collectively but rather general indirect taxes included in the sales price of commodities purchased for consumption by individuals over the year. While the Venetian government kept track of total tax payments, it could not calculate how much of that revenue came from purchases by individual Jews in stores throughout the city, and any estimate of that amount as eight ducats per head must be very tentative.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, multiplying the uncertain sum of eight ducats annually per head by the presumed 6,000 individuals will lead to further distortions in his calculations.

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<sup>59</sup> *Discourse*, 28r–32r.

<sup>60</sup> The text of a speech delivered in the Venetian Senate in 1659 or shortly afterward stated that there were 4,000 in Venice and referred to a document of 1649 that gave a figure of 2,629; see Veltri and Miletto, "Difesa inedita," 265. This last figure is probably closest to the actual population. For population figures on the Jews of Venice, see Giovanni Favero and Francesca Trivellato, "Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia in età moderna: dati e ipotesi," *Zakhor* 7 (2004): 9–50.

<sup>61</sup> It is instructive to compare Luzzatto's treatment here with the more detailed presentation of the text of the speech of Loredan in defence of the Jews delivered in 1659 or shortly afterward; see the notes to the English translation, above.

Possibly, in order to deflect any criticism of his specific calculations, Luzzatto immediately proposed and rejected a more general and different potential criticism. He asserted that his calculation could not be refuted by arguing that if the Jews did not live in Venice, the same number of Christian inhabitants would arrive and would be more profitable than were the Jews, as happened during the year after the last plague, when, after a very short time, the city was filled again. That argument, he maintained, was not valid, since the Jews were forbidden to engage in all the crafts and prohibited to possess real estate or to serve as lawyers in the courts. Thus, they did not occupy the place of anyone, and if they should leave, no one else would come to the city to live under such restrictions.

Next, Luzzatto claimed that a great number of Venetian Christians maintained themselves by selling food to the Jews. Similarly, Christian artisans were employed by Jews not only for their personal services, but also to produce the goods that the Jews distributed in various parts of the world. Since he did not know the exact number of these artisans, he wanted to suppose (*voglio suporre*) that there were around four thousand of them. Once again, Luzzatto presented a questionable figure that cannot be verified. Since Jews constituted around two percent of the population, presumably very few Christians, if any, could have earned their entire living from Jews. Actually, the Jews increased the earnings of some individual Venetians who supplied their needs rather than generating additional full-time employment, and accordingly Luzzatto might have overestimated the Jewish contribution to the Venetian treasury. Moreover, he continued very questionably, if no Jews remained in the city, then some of these artisans would make so little profit that they would be reduced to very harsh circumstances and consequently the government would not receive its usual revenue.

On the basis of his previous unreliable estimates of eight ducats per head and a population of 6,000 Jews in the ghetto, Luzzatto calculated that the government would receive thirty-two thousand ducats. Moreover, he judged (*giudico*) that the import and export duties that Jews paid amounted to approximately (*in circa*) seventy thousand ducats per year.<sup>62</sup> If they did not reside in Venice, that sum would to a great extent be lost, for they traded with their own capital and also that of their close relatives who always preferred to entrust their money and business to Jews. Furthermore, Luzzatto drew attention to the additional duty payments resulting indirectly from the trade of the Jews that ended up in the hands of the government. When a Jew exported woolen clothes, soap, silk clothing and other merchandise he would pay his export duties, and these exports generated import payments on the materials required to prepare the exports, such as the wool, the oil used in making

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<sup>62</sup> Some round number regarding the import and export duties paid by Jews are preserved in documents written to support the renewal of the charter of the Jewish merchants and this issue deserves further archival investigation; in the interim see Ravid, "The Third Charter of the Jewish Merchants of Venice," 83–134 and Ravid, "An Introduction to the Charters of the Jewish Merchants of Venice," 203–46.

cloth, and likewise the woad, indigo, cochineal, and kermes used for dyeing. Based on the export duties that the Jews paid, one could estimate (*si può giudicare*) the import duties that they paid. This estimation, Luzzatto asserted, amounted to approximately two thirds of the former (70,000), that is, to another forty-seven thousand ducats.

Luzzatto then added the taxes that the Jews paid for the provisioning of the loan banks to meet the needs of the poor<sup>63</sup> and all their related expenses that he claimed amounted to around 8,000 ducats annually.<sup>64</sup> However, it should be noted that this tax was an internal tax collected by the Jewish community to enable it to raise the funds to fulfil the requirement imposed upon it by the Venetian government to operate the loan banks for the urban poor and did not benefit the Venetian treasury.

Following that, Luzzatto addressed another responsibility of the Jews. He asserted that the obligation placed upon them to furnish lodgings for visiting princes and ambassadors (from their *strazzaria* stores) was equally considerable, for when the government itself paid for such a visit, it had to spend up to 800 ducats per month. This obligation, he claimed, was one of the most troublesome burdens imposed upon the Jews because of the frequent changes of the palaces used for accommodations.<sup>65</sup> Luzzatto then stated that one could add more payments, such as the tax on the consumption of salt, which he believed (*credo esser*) was quadruple the amount used by Christians because of the Jewish rite of salting meat to extract blood, which they were not allowed to consume. However, he related that he would not develop this matter further and concluded that the sum of the aforementioned annual revenue amounted to 205,000 ducats. Then, he followed with a surprising disclaimer:

I do not dare to assert that the calculation is above criticism and absolutely trustworthy, or that it does not require revision. Political matters are full of alterations and contingencies, and in this *Discourse*, I intended that I would follow the probable and the plausible, just as a new academician would, and not as a mathematician who follows the absolutely demonstrable and undeniable.<sup>66</sup>

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**63** The Italian name for these establishments was *banco* (plural: *banchi*) *di pegni* (literally bench or board of pawns, *banco-banchi* referring to the benches on which the transactions took place, shortened to *banco-banchi*). Therefore, understandably their owners and managers were often referred to, somewhat misleadingly, as *banchieri* (bankers) rather than *prestatori* or *feneratori* (moneylenders), or more specifically, pawnbrokers. Likewise the designations *banchi di scritti* or *banchi di giro* were shortened to *banchi*, or in the singular, *banco*, and their operators also known as *banchieri*, or bankers, obviously in no way similar to their modern namesakes who engage in far more complex operations.

**64** According to a report of the magistracy of the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, who had jurisdiction over commercial matters, issued on 29 January 1636, the expenses of the loan banks amounted to 7,124 ducats; see Ravid, "Introduction to the Charters," 225.

**65** See Ravid, "Introduction to the Charters," 225 n. 53. I will explain this matter further in my forthcoming book on the Jews of Venice.

**66** *Discourse*, 30r.

Although it would appear that Luzzatto had finished his calculations, nevertheless he continued. The extraordinary tax of the past year 1636, although levied on all the inhabitants of the city and generating eleven thousand ducats which seemed moderate, when applied to the Jews it was extremely burdensome compared to what other inhabitants of the city had to pay. Another tax, he related, was that levied on a quarter of the amount of the rent payments, which was burdensome for the Jews because the houses were assessed according to the closeness of dwellings confined within the narrow enclosure of the ghetto. Indeed, he claimed that without any overestimation one could judge (*si può giudicare*) that this assessment would have amounted to triple of what it would have been had the houses been outside the ghetto inhabited by Christians, and for the Jews it amounted to six thousand ducats. Adding these two taxes to the previous sum produced the sum of 220,000 ducats that, Luzzatto concluded, represented a considerable amount of money, for there were provinces, usually considered as duchies, that never generate such a high revenue.<sup>67</sup>

Luzzatto then added two further items. When the Venetian fleet went to battle, the Jews contributed with the artisans and on past occasions, they had paid 1,500 ducats.<sup>68</sup> Also, those artisans and professionals who remained in the city because of the Jews contributed to the naval campaign either in person or by hiring men to serve in the fleet and this, Luzzatto pointed out, was also profit that resulted from the presence of the Jews.

Additionally, Luzzatto related, one had to take into account the considerable sum of money of the Jews that circulated in the public bank and was available for the service of many, especially for commerce. Moreover, when it was ordered to deposit money in the Mint at the usual interest rate, the Jews were taxed as all others. This, he added, deserved further consideration, since, as he had already said, the Jews had been entrusted with possessions and wealth belonging to their friends and relatives who were subjects of other rulers. Therefore, when depositing money in the Mint, they could trade with a considerable sum of ordinary interest from the money that others had entrusted to them. This would generate greater profits than conducting similar transactions with other foreigners who would send the annual interest to their own countries and thereby deprive the city of it. With the Jews, a different scenario might unfold, for since they did not have their own homeland, they would stay where their money was and derive profit from it.

Having presented the income side of the ledger, Luzzatto turned to the other side. Above everything else, he noted, it was worth observing that in order to assure that income from the Jews, the Venetian government did not need to have any con-

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<sup>67</sup> For a discussion of this claim, see Ravid, *Economics and Toleration*, 85–88.

<sup>68</sup> In 1607 the Jews claimed that they had paid 1,250 ducats in galley-tax; see Malkiel, *A Separate Republic*, 129, 257; also 158–59, 546–48, 562–63, 565–66, 614. For further details, see Ravid, “Introduction to the Charters,” 227 n. 64.



cerns or incur any expenses. In an implicit contrast to Venetian possessions on the mainland and overseas, he pointed out that the enclosure of the ghetto did not need a garrison to guard it, nor a citadel to defend it, nor a naval force to patrol the coast to prevent sudden attacks by corsairs. No foreign rulers wanted to attack it, nor need one fear any internal revolt. There was no danger of flooding by the sea or by an overflowing river. The Jews were submissive, humble, and pliable to the will of the ruler, and wished that they could be as skillful at handling weapons and the spilling of their own blood copiously as they were ready to spend money in the service of Venice.

## 6 The Economic Dimension of the *Discourse*: Moneylending

After having dealt extensively with the role of the Jews in international commerce and their direct and indirect contributions to the Venetian treasury, in the ninth consideration Luzzatto turned his attention to Jewish moneylending in Venice.<sup>69</sup> His presentation was generally descriptive rather than theoretical. Supporting his presentation with quotations from both classical and biblical sources, he first pointed out the necessity for governments to provide for the needs of the poor in order to assure domestic tranquility. Then, moving on to the specific case of Venice, he related that the republic required the Jews to operate three loan banks lending money at the low interest rate of only five percent per annum. This rate, Luzzatto correctly observed, was so low that the expenses exceeded the income. Moreover, the amount that had to be available for borrowers, he continued, was without limitation, although the moneylenders were not obliged to lend more than three ducats per pledge. This low interest rate, he added, was unique to Venice, for elsewhere the Jews lent at rates up to eighteen percent.

Luzzatto then enumerated four specific reasons that moved the Venetian Senate to impose such a task on the Jews. First, the Senate, perceiving the discord and repugnance caused by religious differences and the consequences the Jews might suffer from the common people because they were its weakest part, decided that if the Jews were to supply them with money at such a low interest rate in case of need, a certain friendship, or at least tolerance, would be generated toward the Jews, and, he claimed, as experience showed, in Venice the common people were more peaceful and amenable toward the Jews than in other parts of the world. Second, since

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<sup>69</sup> *Discourse*, 32r–34r. For a somewhat more detailed discussion of Luzzatto's views on moneylending, see Benjamin Ravid, "Moneylending in Seventeenth Century Jewish Vernacular Apologetica," in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Isadore Twersky and Bernard Septimus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 257–75, photo-reproduced in *Studies on the Jews of Venice*.

the Jews were the weakest and least respected subjects of the ruler, the poor might not hesitate to complain about every slight infraction in moneylending and the Jews would receive their due punishment from the magistrates. Third, since usury was so abhorred and detested in Venice, the government did not allow Christians to lend money even at the low rate of five percent. Fourth, although the Venetian republic was so well-established that there was no reason to suppose that it would undergo any change, for the sake of good government and to give an example its government wanted the function of lending money to the poor to be exercised by a subject and submissive group completely without any seditious thoughts, and therefore it selected the Jews. As precedent for such a policy, Luzzatto cited the conduct of the biblical Pharaoh of Egypt who, after having dreamed that a very bad famine would occur in his country, placed a young ex-slave from an alien people and of a different religion, without any popular support, in charge of the distribution of food for the people.

Upon closer examination, Luzzatto's presentation reveals a mosaic of valid description, sound explanation, and apologetic distortion. It is correct that the Venetian government required the Jews to operate three banks to lend money to the Christian poor at the rate of five percent per annum. This rate had been in effect since 1573, and the Jews frequently complained that their expenses exceeded their profits. Also, it appears that the amount to be loaned out was without limit; the charter of the Jews only specified that they had to capitalise their loan banks with a certain amount and that the bankers were not obliged to furnish more than three ducats per pledge. Moreover, the five percent rate was indeed lower than elsewhere, and in their petitions for the renewal of their charter in which they requested a half percent increase to five and a half percent (a twenty percent increase), the Jews had pointed out that on the Venetian mainland, they could lend at rates up to twelve percent; moreover, in Rome, for example, the permitted rate at that time was eighteen percent.

However, when Luzzatto proceeded to explain why the Senate imposed the task of moneylending upon the Jews, he entered into the realm of *apologetica*. His first reason, that the Senate gave the Jews the task of moneylending in order to generate friendship or at least tolerance toward the Jews, reversed the historical course of events. It was not that the Jews of Venice already resided in the city, and the Senate, in order to promote better group relations, decided to give them the task of moneylending; rather, Jews were allowed into the city specifically to fulfill the task of moneylending and owed their residence to the fulfillment of that function. Also, if Luzzatto's claim that the common people were more peaceful and amenable toward the Jews than elsewhere is correct that certainly was not a result of their moneylending activities. If anything, their moneylending activities, while recognised as necessary if not essential, would have aroused resentment rather than gratitude on the part of the borrowers. Rather, the peacefulness was due to the physical layout of Venice and the policy of the Venetian government to maintain law and order as well

as its desire to enable the Jews to live securely in order to fulfill the tasks for which they were allowed to reside in the city.

Luzzatto's second reason, that the Jews as the weakest subjects would receive their due punishment for any infraction, was basically valid. The changes in the terms of their successive charters reveal that while the Venetian government upheld the right of the Jews to practice their religion freely and provided for their fair treatment within the framework of the existing restrictive laws, nevertheless it strove to prevent and punish any abuses that might arise. However, the Venetian government did not single out the Jews for punishment because they were the weakest subjects (a questionable assertion), but rather because they wanted to protect the interests of the Venetian poor and to maintain law and order.

Luzzatto's third reason, that the Jews were tolerated so that Christians would not lend money at interest to fellow Christians against the divine law, was indeed the reason for permitting the residence of the Jews in Venice, as well as in other places on the Italian peninsula and therefore could have received greater stress and attention. Over a hundred years previously, the Venetian diarist Marino Sanuto had pointed out that as long as the Venetian government did not wish to establish a *Monti di Pietà* in Venice such as those existing in many other places on the Italian peninsula and even on the Venetian mainland, the presence of Jewish moneylenders was necessary.<sup>70</sup> Senate legislation of 1553 explicitly asserted that "this Council has permitted the Jews to dwell in our dominions for the sole purpose of preventing Christians from lending upon usury in violation of both the divine and the civil laws"<sup>71</sup> and this view was often repeated.

Luzzatto's fourth reason deserves closer attention. A potential threat to the Jewish community in Venice arose in March 1523 when the Senate approved the idea of establishing a *Monte di Pietà* with the details to be worked out later. Slightly over a year later, in April 1524, the thirteen procurators of the *Ospitali degli Incurabili*, eleven of whom were nobles, presented to the *Collegio* a detailed proposal to establish a *Monte di Pietà*. However, the Council of Ten suddenly intervened and "for the most important and well-considered reasons expressed" ordered those who had submitted the statutes of the *Monte* not to further propose nor speak of the matter and never to reveal that they had been so ordered by the Council of Ten under penalty of death. Furthermore, in the future no one was to propose nor speak about establishing a *Monte di Pietà* unless given permission by the Council and no measures were to be passed unless unanimously approved in the Council. Although one cannot ascertain what the "most important causes and well-considered reasons" were, it has been suggested that this action might have been taken because the government was apprehensive about creating a potentially powerful institution not under its direct control.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Marino Sanuto, *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto* (Venice: F. Visentini, 1879–1903), vol. XXIII, col. 63.

<sup>71</sup> See Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 521.

<sup>72</sup> See *Ibid.*, 499–504.

Four other references to moneylending are contained in the second half of the *Discourse*, in which Luzzatto was concerned primarily with explaining the nature of Judaism and refuting general arguments raised against the Jews, including those involving moneylending. Two of them merit special attention.<sup>73</sup>

In the twelfth consideration, Luzzatto asserted that the Jews were attacked by three groups of people: religious zealots, politicians and statesmen (*politici e statisti*), and the common people, and he detailed the charge of each group.<sup>74</sup> The politicians and statesmen complained about the charging of usury (Luzzatto used the word in the sense of any interest, not only excessive interest), a crime not only condemned by divine law but also universally prohibited by civil law as a destroyer of wealth and the family. Luzzatto responded by claiming that the usury practised by the Jews was only tolerated by their laws, rather than expressly allowed. Moreover, he continued, it could be affirmed with great probability that Jews who maintained themselves by engaging in usury were very rare, for since their household expenses were very great, it was inconceivable that they could sustain themselves by an activity neither authorised nor permitted by the law of the ruler. Actually, of course, the reason that very few individual Jews supported themselves by usury was not because their household expenses were so great but rather because any moneylending outside of the loan banks was forbidden by Venetian law and severely punished. Furthermore, Luzzatto's statement that Jewish moneylending was not authorised or permitted by the law of the ruler was at variance not only with the actual situation in Venice, where the Jews had been allowed to engage in moneylending for over a hundred years and on the mainland possessions for over two hundred and fifty years at higher rates of up to twelve percent, but also appears to contradict his presentation in the ninth consideration, where he discussed at length the reasons that induced the Venetian government to employ the Jews in the role of moneylenders.

Luzzatto continued by pointing out the disadvantages under which the Jewish moneylenders operated. They could not at any time compel Christian borrowers to redeem their pledges and thus once Jews had invested their capital, they could not get it back but had to wait for the Christian borrowers to redeem their pledge. If *Monti di Pietà*, such as those of Padua, Vicenza,<sup>75</sup> and Verona, in which hundreds of thousands of ducats were invested for the sake of the needy, were not allowed to sell their unredeemed pledges after one year, in a short time they would be out of money with all their capital tied up. Therefore, it was inconceivable that the Jews

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<sup>73</sup> For a more complete discussion, see Ravid, "Moneylending," 258–77. The other two passages are to be found in Luzzatto, *Discourse*, consideration XIII, 47r and consideration XIV, 55v–56r.

<sup>74</sup> *Discourse*, 40v–42v.

<sup>75</sup> Incorrectly rendered in the Hebrew translation as Venice (cf. 42r with page 109), probably a slip of the pen or a typographical error. No *Monte di Pietà* was ever established in Venice since *de facto* the Jews were in effect running one, especially after 1573.

of Venice, who possessed much less wealth, could maintain themselves in so disadvantageous an undertaking. And especially since Jews could legally engage in trade, it was unlikely that they would expose their possessions to the restrictions involved in moneylending. In actuality, he concluded, Jewish moneylending was an activity of orphans and widows rather than of traders.

In this presentation, Luzzatto was basically correct. By his time, the income of the Jewish community of Venice was primarily derived from the international trade of the Jewish merchants and from also the profits of the Jews who engaged in selling *strazzaria*, while the loan banks had turned into deficit-incurring institutions that were financed by the Jewish community as a whole.<sup>76</sup> His statement that Jewish moneylending was an activity of orphans and widows rather than of traders may reflect the tendency of Jews to invest money that needed to be preserved safely for dowries and other purposes in the loan banks.

Luzzatto again returned to the subject of Jewish moneylending in Venice in detail in the seventeenth consideration of the *Discourse*.<sup>77</sup> There he dealt not with theoretical matters but rather again with practical reality, which serves as a reminder of the immediate impetus for writing the *Discourse*. It was necessary, he related, for Jews everywhere to support themselves in one of three ways: from usury, as in some cities of Italy and Germany; from engaging in the crafts in the city; or from income from rented real estate, as in the Levant. Each of these sources of livelihood had its drawbacks: usury caused the Jews equally disliked by all orders of the city, the exercise of the crafts by the lower orders and the possession of real estate by the noble and powerful. However, he continued, these reasons were not applicable in Venice, where the usury rate was only five percent and the loan banks were established for the convenience of the poor and not for the profit of the Jews, while both engaging in crafts and possessing real estate were prohibited and overseas wholesale commerce and trade fulfilled their needs in such a manner that no group in the city found the Jews a burden or nuisance.<sup>78</sup> Luzzatto's statements on the actual Jewish moneylending activities in Venice are correct; Jewish moneylending in Venice was at a very low interest rate and existed for the benefit of the urban poor and not for the profit of the moneylenders. However, regarding maritime commerce, some of the Christian Venetian merchants still engaged in maritime trade resented the competition of the Jews and claimed that the Jews were usurping their trade.

In summary, Luzzatto's treatment of moneylending conveyed the impression that basically Jews were not encouraged by their own traditions to lend money at interest to Christians. However, because moneylending was an evil that could not be eradicated from human society and because Jews were restricted by Venetian law from engaging in other forms of economic activity, they were permitted to engage

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<sup>76</sup> On the question of utility as opposed to necessity, see Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 29–44.

<sup>77</sup> *Discourse*, 86v–87r.

<sup>78</sup> See Ravid, *Economics and Toleration*, 38–39.

in moneylending; indeed, their moneylending in Venice at the low controlled rate was beneficial to the state and to society and eliminated the need for Christians to lend to each other at interest and therefore they should not be expelled.

## 7 Luzzatto's Treatment of Jewish Moneylending and International Maritime Commerce Compared

A comparison of Luzzatto's treatment of Jewish moneylending with his discussion of Jewish maritime commerce is illuminating. Moneylending and international maritime commerce (along with the *strazzaria* trade which is nowhere mentioned in the *Discourse*) were the only areas of economic enterprise in which the Jews of Venice were specifically authorised to engage, and Luzzatto, seeking to avert a threatened expulsion, needed to demonstrate the great economic utility of the Jews in order to ward off that expulsion.<sup>79</sup> The Venetians had considered maritime commerce to constitute a noble form of economic enterprise to which Venice owed its greatness, and therefore Luzzatto was able to deal with it openly, systematically, and at great length. His main concern was not to justify international maritime commerce itself, although he did so presumably because of the shift to other forms of economic activities, but rather to demonstrate that the Jews were not usurping the position of the native Venetians. In reality, Jews were moving into a sector increasingly abandoned by the native Christian merchants and competing with foreigners, who were much less desirable than were the Jews because they might leave Venice to return to their places of origin and take with them the wealth that they had accumulated in the city.

In the case of moneylending, a subject of condemnation for centuries, Luzzatto could not employ the same arguments he had used in the case of trade. He could not extol the honorable nature of moneylending as a profession, its intrinsic desirability, nor its role in promoting the greatness of Venice, nor single out the essential Jewish role in that field for praise and justification. Yet the reality of the Venetian situation required small-scale pawnbroking to assure that Christians would not engage in lending money to the poor at higher interest rates and this led him to stress the indispensable role of the Jews in moneylending in an institutionalised manner at fixed low interest rates. Consequently, he dealt with the actual situation in Venice in the ninth consideration as a conclusion to his "economic utility" presentation. He introduced his presentation with the correct observation that governments had to provide for the needs of the poor in order to secure domestic tranquility and accordingly justifying the policy of the Venetian government to require the Jews to lend money to the urban poor at the low rate of five percent. The key reason for this

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<sup>79</sup> On the question of utility as opposed to necessity, see Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 29–44.

policy in the eyes of the Venetian authorities, to prevent Christians from engaging in moneylending, was mentioned, although not given as much emphasis as it could have received. Luzzatto was well-aware of the controversies over Jewish moneylending to elaborate further. His main concern was to show that the Venetian Senate had, for valid reasons, required the Jews to engage in moneylending, and thus he implied that any critique of Jewish moneylending would involve impugning the wisdom of the Venetian Senate.

However, since Luzzatto did not restrict his presentation to the economic situation in Venice but also wanted to refute general charges made against the Jews, he was compelled to deal with the attacks on Jewish moneylending. His most detailed treatment is found in the twelfth consideration. First, he established the general principle that the usury of the Jews was barely tolerated by their own laws, and not expressly allowed. Then, he established that the Jews of Venice were basically not moneylenders and indeed were not making any profits from moneylending. Furthermore, he claimed that usury was one of the basic ineradicable human vices and, should the Jews not be involved in it, the situation might become even worse, since the absence of their participation could cause an increase in the interest rate, a point that had been raised on previous occasions by members of the Venetian government in supporting past renewal of the charter of the Jews.

It seems that Luzzatto could have made his case much stronger by differentiating between Jewish moneylending in the form of officially sanctioned pawnbroking for the urban poor that was closely regulated by the authorities and comparable to the permitted Christian *Monti di Pietà*, on the one hand, and on the other, moneylending on a larger scale and at higher interests on the basis of promissory notes or real-estate rather than on small-scale pledges. Such an approach would have allowed him to defend the Jews of Venice while still developing his views on the reprehensibility of moneylending in general.

## 8 Conclusion

To conclude, Luzzatto did not seek, and indeed could not seek, any amelioration in the condition of the Jews of Venice as Toland was to seek in England some eighty years later. Luzzatto had participated in the charter renewal process and knew that the Jews could only hope to obtain from the Venetian government some relatively minor alleviations of the terms under which they lived, especially if they would be in the interests of the government. While an increased understanding of the nature of the Jews on the part of the Venetian nobility might make a few of them more sympathetic and less hostile toward Jews, it could not change their status. Luzzatto believed that it was possible to avert an expulsion since the usual policy of the government had been to renew the charters of the Jewish merchants and moneylenders because of their utility, notwithstanding an on-going undercurrent of hostil-

ity toward them. However, given the nature of the political and economic system in Venice and its generally conservative nature, neither *apologetica* – nor acculturation, wealth, or interaction between a few Jewish and Christian literati – could lead to any amelioration of the status of the Jews in early-modern Venice. The only thing that could bring the Jews any substantial improvement would be the end of the traditional Venetian ancient regime and the elimination of the charter system that regarded the Jews as a foreign community (or in the contemporaneous terminology, “nation”) not capable of possessing any rights of *sudditanza*. No gradual amelioration was possible, but rather a total regime change was necessary. Only when the centuries-old Venetian government fell in 1797, not as a result of internally-motivated political considerations but rather due to conquest by Napoleon Bonaparte, then the special status of the Jews also ended.<sup>80</sup> Thus Luzzatto can be seen as a defense attorney arguing for the maintenance of the *status quo*: Let my people stay. In the process, he contributed a pioneering work in defense of Jews, Judaism, and Jewish economic activity in the Most Serene Republic of Venice.

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**80** See Benjamin Ravid, “The Sephardi Jewish Merchants of Venice, Port Jews, and the Road to Modernity,” in *From Catalonia to the Caribbean: The Sephardic Orbit from Medieval to Modern Times: Essays in Honor of Jane S. Gerber*, eds. Federica Francesconi, Stanley Mirvis, and Brian Smollett (Boston: Leiden, 2018), 117–35.