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THE ACTIVITY OF THE 'ITALIAN CONGREGATION' OF VENICE ON BEHALF OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF ERETZ ISRAEL DURING THE YEARS 1576-1733

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The 'Italian Congregation' of Venice, or – as it was called – Kahal ha-Le'azim (the Foreigners Congregation), was the smallest and the poorest of the ghetto congregations. It was founded at the onset of the sixteenth century, during the Cambrai alliance war period, when the Jews of the unwalled towns of the republic fled before the onslaught of the Imperial armies and sought refuge in the capital. These Jews were mainly of Ashkenazi extraction, first or second generation immigrants from lands which lay beyond the Alps; the rest were Italian, scions of families originating in the towns of middle and south Italy. The Venetian authorities, however, and the common folk as well, were not overly concerned with these differences in origin. They considered these Jews to be of a single kind, especially since they all came to the city at the same time and under the same circumstances. They granted them a uniform legal status and, in accordance with the majority of them, called them 'La Nazione Tedesca' (the Ashkenazi nation). Two Jewish groups remained separate from them: those from Eastern lands, merchants of Ottoman citizenship, who reached Venice within the framework of their business and some of them settled there permanently, and those from Western lands, Converso from Spain and Portugal, who fled their countries of origin and came to the city to rebuild their lives as Jews, under the auspices of the laws of the Republic. Over the years both groups were awarded privileges and a special legal status, the authorities conceiving of them as separate 'nations': 'La Nazione Levantina' (the Levantine Nation) and 'La Nazione Ponentina' (the Occidental Nation). The process whereby Jews were absorbed into the city, after a period of over a hundred years when their dwelling in it was prohibited, was not overly easy. At the beginning the refugees from the unwalled towns were received unwillingly by most of the inhabitants, and their future became a subject of tiresome debate in the courts of the state. The authorities finally decided, in 1516, that while they would be allowed to remain, this would be conditional upon their taking up residence, all together, in a small, isolated neighborhood on the outskirts of the city, a place known generally
as the ‘Ghetto Nuovo’ (the New Ghetto). Years later, when the number of Jews in the city had grown, the neighborhood was expanded: in 1541 the authorities set aside a few streets for the dwellings of the Levantine Jews, nearby the first ghetto, a place called the ‘Ghetto Vecchio’ (the Old Ghetto), and in 1633 they assigned an additional group of buildings, this time to house the ‘Ponentini Jews’, i.e., the Sephardim. This neighborhood, the smallest of all, was termed ‘Ghetto Nuovissimo’ (the Newest Ghetto). In this way the Jewish community of Venice developed over the years into one based on three ‘nations’ recognized by the authorities, each of them living in their own ghetto and having their own special legal status. On the other hand, the Jews themselves organized their lives within the framework of four Kehalim (congregations) – the Ashkenazi, the Italian, the Sephardi and the Levantine – each having its own independent leadership, its own lay leaders and rabbis, its own synagogue, study and charitable societies, while together they shared common institutions for purposes of representation and leadership – ha-VE‘ad ha-Katon (the Small Committee), ha-Kehal ha-Gadoa (the Great Assembly) – as well as a rabbinical council (ha-Yeshiva ha-Kedalah), a cemetery, a rabbinical court, and several small institutions for educational and cultural purposes. The special links between the Ashkenazi and La-Tzim congregations created quite a complex situation, with cooperative and isolationist trends simultaneously discernible. Various factors, both internal and external, exerted influence in either directions as time passed. The most prominent feature, however, was that in periods of prosperity and development, when the number of Jews in the city – including both Torah scholars and laymen – was growing, the desire and ability to act independently increased in both communities simultaneously; on the other hand, when the overall Jewish community decreased in numbers and in prosperity, these tendencies grew weaker, and the need to perform together those modest activities they were still capable of doing became dominant. This phenomenon was expressed in the fund-raising for the poor of Eretz Israel, as well. In the second half of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, the activities of the Jews of the Italian congregation for Eretz Israel were separate from those of the Ashkenazi congregation. They collected funds, particularly for the members of the Italian community in Safed, and their contributions were generally transferred by means of special emissaries from that community, who would visit Venice for this purpose. On the other hand, the Jews of the Ashkenazi congregation acted for the benefit of the entire Ashkenazi community in Eretz Israel, and transferred their contributions by means of ha-Gishar ha-Kedalah (the General Treasurer), a Jew of their congregation who was put in charge of collecting the donations and transferring them en bloc to

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1 Literally ‘new foundry’. In Venetian dialect the verb to found is ‘gera’ and the foundry is called geru or gera; indeed the place in which the Jews were relegated was near a foundry. The word was afterwards turned into gheta or ghetto. On the ghettos of Venice, see the recent and exhaustive study by B. Ravid, ‘Cautfow Time in the Ghetto of Venice’, in Medieval and Renaissance Venice, Urbana and Chicago 1999, pp. 217-275.
type of information which can be gleaned from them. The earliest of these is a registry of payments relating to the years 1575-1733, in which the lay leaders or the treasurer jotted down, briefly and untidily, the amounts of money they spent from time to time for the purpose of the congregation, such as the salaries of the cantor, the scribe and the teacher and the rent paid for the synagogue. According to the scholar, J. Sonne, this record book was kept in the library of the Talmud Torah of Venice, where he perused it before the Second World War and published a section from it regarding the emissary, Menahem Azariah of Melli (mi-Melli). Since then the registry changed location, at present to be found in the library of The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York (Ms 8593). The record book mentions eleven contributions made over a period of somewhat more than sixty years, from 1576 to 1639; most are explicitly said to have been carried out by means of emissaries, the money being intended for the poor of ‘the Italian community’ in Safed. Two other contributions listed in this registry, from the years 1731-1733, were given to an emissary from Jerusalem. The chronologically second source is the minutes book of the Va’ad K.K. Italiot (the Committee of the Italian congregation), where copies of resolutions (parn) and appointments decided upon by the committee, and the by-laws of the congregation adopted in 1644, 1654, 1663 and 1684 appear. Each of these lists of by-laws includes a special paragraph relating to ‘the person in charge of monies for Eretz Israel’, his obligations and his authority. Similarly, a number of resolutions from the years 1648 to 1652, concerning the fundraising for Eretz Israel and the transfer of funds to Eretz Israel, were written down in this minutes book. This manuscript, the first part of which was written toward the end of the lifetime of R. Yehudah Aryeh (Leon) Modena — probably by his grandson R. Yitzhak min-Hallevievym — is also kept in the library of Theological Seminary in New York (Ms 8594). Some scholars have been aware of its existence, but it does not seem to have served them to learn about the activity of the congregation on behalf of Eretz Israel. The third source is an account book where the community scribe copied, year by year, the incoming and outgoing sums of money relating to the term of office of the congregation leaders then concluding theirs. Each set of leaders had its own annual accounting, concerning funds for ‘charity’ for ‘oil for light’ and for ‘Eretz Israel’. The account book, which includes the accounts from the years 1664-1731, is at present to be found in The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem (IT 1098). To the best of my knowledge, it has never been utilized for scholarly research. The last of these sources is a small booklet in which the lay leaders of 1663-4 jotted down the contributions made for Eretz Israel by ‘members of the congregation’ during that year — each person with the list of his vows and a detailed report of his payments and obligations. These particulars were recorded in accordance with the by-laws of 1663. Booklets of this kind seem to have been written every year, but for some reason or other this is the only one to have survived; it, too, can be found in the ‘Central Archives’ in Jerusalem (IT 1105).

These manuscripts make available to us a rare combination of two kinds of sources, differing from one another yet supplementing each other: on the one hand, resolutions adopted by the congregation committee and its by-laws, which sometimes reflect general aspirations which were never actually realized or only partly so; and on the other hand, a detailed accounting of the collecting of the contributions and their transfer to Eretz Israel, which reflects the daily execution of the practice resolutions adopted by the congregation. These sources, taken together, reveal various aspects of the activity carried on in Venice on behalf of the poor of Eretz Israel and the changes which took place in this activity, in its trends and the manner of its administration, at various times during a considerable period — over one hundred and fifty years.

A. 1576-1639 - The Years of the Special Contribution on Behalf of ‘the Italian Community’ in Safed

The first item referring to a contribution for Eretz-Israel preserved in the payment records of the congregation dates from 5336 (1576). Two ‘lay synagogues’ leaders of the Lo’azim of Venice, R. Mordechai son of R. Shelomo Ashkenazi and R. Ishmael Hayyim of Pesaro, handed over to R. Menahem Azariah of Melli, ‘authorized emissary of two Italian communities of Safed, may it speedily be rebuilt’, thirty ducats, one litron (libra) and 13 soldi in Venetian coin, i.e., 187 litron and 13 soldi, ‘to be distributed among the aforementioned two communities, half to each’. The matter of the ‘two Italian communities’ of Safed is difficult to comprehend, especially since it is not hinted at in any other contemporary Hebrew source. J. Sonne, who published this section referring to the receipt of the money by the emissary, thought that the phrase was referring to ‘two congregations of one community’, the one being ‘the congregation of Ashkenazim from Italy’, and the other ‘the congregation of Italian Jews’ (Lo’azim). This assumption, however, is not supported by the sources. On the contrary, to whatever extent the Jews of Eretz Israel found it necessary to relate to the question concerning which congregation an immigrant from Italy, whose origin was from another country, would belong to, they ruled explicitly ‘that everyone goes to the congregation of those of his language’, i.e., of his ethnic grouping, ‘and not to any other congregation’, even

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4. Ms 8593, f. 1b (24 Tammuz 5336 [1576]).

if he was born in Italy and even if he was the son of Jews born in Italy. Moreover, it may be deduced from Ottoman documents that in the year 963 (of the hejira era, i.e. 1555-6) there were in Safed, besides the 'Italian community' which numbered 29 taxpaying families, two other communities of Jews from the south of Italy – one of Jews from Puglia (21 taxpaying families and 1 bachelor), and one of Jews from Calabria (24 taxpaying families). Most probably the leaders of the Italian congregation of Venice were referring to one of these two communities, or perhaps to both of them together, as the recipients of their contribution. The emissary, R. Menahem Azaria of Melli, is not known from other sources. His name bears witness to his being of an Italian Jewish family, and he was the first emissary from 'the Italian community' of Safed to visit Venice on his mission, whose name has reached us. Of the two lay leaders mentioned in the document, it was perhaps R. Mordechai son of Shelomo Ashkenazi who was an ancestor of R. Shelomo son of Mordechai Ashkenazi, to whom R. Yehudah Arayh Modena left, in the year 1648, part of his writings in the Christian tongue, 9 that is, in Italian or in Latin. The second contribution was made in 5339 (1579). 10 An anonymous emissary confirmed having received from the scribe of the Italian congregation of Venice, R. Shemuel Spira, 11 at the behest of the lay leader R. Jacob Corcos, 12 'sixteen ducati correnti and a quarter', i.e. 100 litnus and 15 soldi, all 'from the money of the aforementioned synagogue'. The entry does not mention for whom the money was intended.

The third contribution is undated, but it appears among the items from the year 5349 (1588/9), 13 and was certainly entered during that same year. R. Israel of Camerino, emissary of the holy community from Safed, may it speedily be rebuilt, 14 confirmed having received from R. Jacob son of Meir, 15 'at present lay leader of the Italian congregation here, Venice, the sum of 22 ducati correnti, i.e., 136 litnus 8 soldi'. Neither was it mentioned this time to whom the money was intended, but from the details of the contribution added hereunder – also given to R. Israel of Camerino – it is clear that this one, too, was earmarked 'for the poor of the Italian community' in Safed.

On the first intermediate day of the Feast of Tabernacles 5536 (19 September 1595), R. Israel of Camerino, 'emissary of the Italian community in Safed, may it speedily be rebuilt', signed a receipt, confirming that he had received from R. Shemuel Spira 36 and a half ducats in Venetian coin from the funds of the synagogue of the Italian congregation in Venice, for 'the poor of the Italian community in Safed'. 15 This is the fourth contribution listed in the recordbook.

Over ten years passed before the next contribution was registered. These were very difficult years for the Jewish community in Safed, which suffered time and again from natural catastrophes as well as those of human origin. Its situation became especially strained after the town was taken by the Druze Emir Fakher ad-Din II, in 1602; the number of Jews in the town decreased and their economic situation weakened. The Jews of Venice, who during those years enjoyed a period of calm in their relations with the authorities, as well as impressive economic prosperity, came to the aid of their brethren, and for a while even took the initiative and executed the fundraising operations on behalf Eretz Israel throughout Jewish communities in various countries.

Between 30 Tishri and 5 Marcheshvan 5536 (8 and 13 October 1600) R. Yehudah Arayh Modena wrote to 'the holy communities in the lands of Ashkenaz, Poland and Russia', asking them to make contributions for 'our brethren in distress in the land of Israel and in the town of Safed, may it speedily be rebuilt', even advising them as follows: 'Whatever is collected for this contribution it may be good in your eyes to send it via Venice, which lies on the coast and ships sail from here. 16 A few months later, on 5 March 1601, the entire Jewish community of Venice – Ashkenazim, Loezim, Levantins and Posenzim – adopted a parte (resolution), 'obliging everyone known to be Jewish, of twenty years of age or more and a payer of taxes of 3 ducats or more, to pay half a shekel, which is a quarter of ducat, every year'. Three of the most celebrated rabbis of the town – the geonim R. Avigdor Cividal, R. Ben Zion Zarfati, and R. Leib Saraval – were appointed in order to give the resolution additional authority, and to emphasize the special importance of the tax, which was earmarked in its entirety for distribution among the Jewish community in Eretz Israel, 'taking into account the number of persons of each tongue, Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Portuguese, Italian, and others'. 17 This resolution was announced by R. Yehudah Arayh Modena as well, in a letter he sent 'to all communities concerning the half shekel for Eretz Israel', to encourage them

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6 Moshe ben Joseph mi-Tozai (Malbสถ), Responsa, Venetia 1629, Part I, n. 307 (Hebrew).
7 B. Lewis, Notes and Documents from the Turkish Archives, Jerusalem 1952, p. 6.
8 On the mission of R. Menahem Azaria, see also A. David, 'Two 16th Century Emissaries' Letters', pp. 331-332.
9 Chayye Yehuda, D. Carpi (ed.), Tel Aviv 1985, p. 112.
10 Mi 8593, f. 2b (10 Year 5339 [1579]).
13 Mi 8593, f. 4b.
15 Mi 8593, f. 6b.
17 The resolution was printed at the end of the introduction of R. Baruch Calimani to the R. Moshe Alsheich commentary to the Pentateuch (Torot Moshe, Venetia 1601, f. 6b).
to adopt a similar resolution. And, true enough, in one place at least this effort had results. The synagogue of the La'azim in Venice, of which R. Yehudah Aryeh Modena was a leading rabbi, certainly shared in this widespread activity, though no hint of this was preserved in the record book in question. It is likely that since, during these years, the fundraising was carried out by the entire Venetian community, by means of 'the three gevurim' and for the benefit of all the Jews of Eretz Israel, the special activity carried out by 'the Italian congregation' for their brethren in Safed was suspended for a while, so as to interfere with the general activity. Such a development took place from time to time during this period, as testified to explicitly in various sources. At any rate, between Tishri 5536 (September 1595) and Iyar 5536 (May 1606) no entry was made in the record book that would indicate any La'azim congregation activity for Eretz Israel.

On 22 Iyar 5536 (29 May 1606), the emissary, R. Yedidiah Galante, confirmed having received from R. Shmu'el Spira the sum of 23 livron and 14 soldi as a contribution made by the synagogue of 'the Italian congregation' in Venice for the Yeshiva of the Italian community in Safed, may it speedily be rebuilt.

R. Yedidiah, the son of R. Moshe Galante, one of the greatest rabbis of Safed, is known from various sources, from which we learn of a number of his deeds during the period of his mission to Italy. In 5537 (1606/7), he issued a lengthy ruling concerning the inheritance of orphans and the status of the woman appointed as trustee for their property, which he signed: 'Here, in Cuneo... the twenty-fifth of Shevat [February 22] ... the guest for a night, Yedidiah Galante.' R. Yedidiah is mentioned in this context not in his role as emissary from Eretz Israel, but rather as a rabbi and halakhic judge, who may have been invited to that community in order to rule in a dispute. If so, this is an indication of the respect he enjoyed during the first years of his stay in Italy. At that time, R. Yedidiah was involved in a dispute which divided contemporary rabbinic authorities, concerning the fitness of the ritual bath of Rovigo; he himself supported those who had ruled against it. In 5538 (1607/8) he published in Venice a book of his father's responsa, ending with 'A Few Rulings on a Number of Tractates,' of his own. Still in 5538, we know of R. Yedidiah's activity in raising funds among the Jews of Padua for the redemption of captives. A year later, while he was still in Venice, he was suspected of having embezzled funds donated for Eretz Israel. In order to demonstrate his innocence publicly, R. Yedidiah came to the synagogue of the Levantine congregation in the town, and on the Sabbath of the reading of Parashat Shofrim (Torah section, Judges), the 6 Elul 5709 (5 September 1609), 'he delivered a public sermon before a very large number of people' and, with the Torah scroll in his arms, swore a solemn oath... that he had not taken, nor received of his own accord or by means of others, any sum of money at all from the Eretz Israel account, in general or in particular, other than what was written in the books.' And since specially empowered officials appointed by the congregation examined these books and confirmed the truth of his statement, the lay leaders of the Venetian community decided to clear him of all suspicion and to make their decision public, so that there remain no one to object'. An announcement to this effect appeared in the fall of 1609, signed by nine of the leaders of the Venetian community supported by nine rabbis. A few years later, R. Yedidiah was involved in a strange affair when he came to visit the renowned doctor, R. Elihu Montalto, who was on his deathbed. While there he related 'miraculous stories ascribed to the Ary (R. Yitzhak Luria) of blessed memory'. His stories were apparently not well received by the sick man, for with his remaining strength he said: 'I can no longer keep silent and suffer; in truth, it is all a pack of lies.' R. Yehudah Aryeh Modena, who witnessed this incident, describes it somewhat scornfully, not concealing his distaste for the opinions and study methods of that scholar who had come to Venice as 'an emissary from Eretz Israel.' True enough, an ambivalent attitude towards the emissary, as well as signs of approval and admiration, on the one hand, and of distrust and scorn, on the other, was not uncommon in the history of the emissaries from Eretz Israel and, apparently, was not absent among the Jews of Venice, and particularly in the case of R. Yedidiah Galante.

Between 1614-1617 the record book contains four notations of contributions written in the Italian language – in a very peculiar form of Italian – which is unusual in this record book. On 5 August 1614, Yitzhak Mas'ud (in the original text: 'Isaiah Mazav') confirmed, in the name of his father, Moshe, having received from R. Yehudah Volterra, as gabbai of the Italian congregation, the sum of 294 'small livron' and sent it on to Safed 'that same year' by a boat named Barcan Sansen.

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18 Letters of Rabbi Leo Modena, pp. 215-216.
21 Ms 8593, f.9. On R. Yedidiah Galante, see also Ya'ari, Emissaries from Eretz Israel, p. 247.
23 The ruling was printed at the end of his father's book, Moshe Galante, Responsa, Venetia 1608, ff. 67-69 (Hebrew).
24 Yehudah Salter, Mekkeh Israel, Venetia 1607, ff. 84b, 85a. See above, note 23.
25 See above, note 23.
year later, on 4 September 1615, Yitzhak Mas’ud once again confirmed, in his father’s name, the receipt of 346 ‘small litrin’ and 10 soldi, and sent that amount to Safed, again ‘that same year’, by means of the boat Barca Longa. The money was given to him by a person the scribe does not mention by name, perhaps R. Yehuda Volterra himself, ‘in the name of the Italian congregation as gebbor’.30 R. Yitzhak son of Moshe Mas’ud was a scion of one of the better known and more veteran families of the Levantine congregation in Venice. His father, R. Moshe, is mentioned as ‘gebbor’ for Eretz Israel of Venice in sources of the Jewish community of Pisa, from where he received, in April and September of 1610, sums of money for the poor of Jerusalem and of Safed. Concerning Safed, the money was declared intended for the nactus portugese (Portuguese nation) of the town. Another scion of the same family, R. Shemu’el Mas’ud, was a rabbi in Venice during this period and he, too, was active in transferring contributions to Eretz Israel, as mentioned below. R. Yehuda Volterra is not mentioned in other sources; he certainly belonged to the Venetian branch of this family, from which several generations of ‘general treasurers for Eretz Israel’ developed during the seventeenth century.

About two years later, on 3 October 1617, a third contribution was listed in the record book in the Italian language: Shemu’el Mas’ud (in the original: Samuel Mazav) confirmed having received from the Parnasi (leaders) of the Italian congregation – Emilio Melli, Yitzhak de Elia, and Gabriel Perosino – 260 and a half ‘small litrin’, to be sent off ‘to the poor of the Italian congregation in Eretz Israel, may it speedily be rebuilt in our day’.31

The main innovation in this extract is the note that the money was to be dispatched to the poor of the Italian community in Eretz Israel, rather than to the Italian community in Safed, as was written with regard to all the contributions previously listed in the record book. Though there need be no contradiction between these two wordings, for a person accustomed to the existence of a single Italian community in Eretz Israel, the community in Safed, could quite possibly write ‘the Italian community in Eretz Israel’ while referring to the community in Safed, it is nevertheless possible that this was not the case. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the decline of the Jewish community in Safed continued, while the situation of Jerusalem community was improving.32 The number of Jews coming to Eretz Israel was increasing, with most of these new immigrants settling in Jerusalem. In addition, reports have been preserved about the arrival of immigrants from Italy, including a group that travelled to Eretz Israel via Venice, these also settling in Jerusalem.33 It is logical for the changes which took place in the Jewish community in Eretz Israel to have affected, to some extent or other, the arrangements for the distribution of the funds contributed for Eretz Israel, and even more so the distribution of a contribution intended for a particular ethnic grouping. As long as the majority of immigrants from Italy lived in Safed, the funds contributed were sent there; with the increase in the number of these immigrants residing in Jerusalem, including poor people in need of funds, it may be assumed that the contributions were divided up between the two towns, some being sent to the one and the rest to the other. In this regard it is appropriate to mention a resolution on this topic adopted a few months earlier by the Va’ard (committee) of the Jewish community of Rome, which was worded as follows: ‘On the eighth day of Sivan 5577, the 11th of the month of June 1617, the honorable committee agreed to collect funds every year, on the Sabbath of the Zakhor reading, for the Italian poor of Safed and Jerusalem, may they be speedily rebuilt in our day, this being in force for seven years’.34 Here it was specifically stated where the funds raised ‘for the Italian poor’ in Eretz Israel were to be sent.

The inscription of the fourth and final contribution in the Italian language dates from 8 September 1617: Shemu’el Mas’ud confirmed having received from the honorable Emilio Melli 216 ‘small litrin’ and 2 soldi, in order to send the sum ‘to the Italian poor of Eretz Israel’. Melli handed the money over to R. Shemu’el in the name of the ‘Italian congregation of here’, i.e., of Venice, ‘as the appointed official in charge of Eretz Israel cashbox’.35 This is the only item in the record book concerning money from ‘the Eretz Israel cashbox’, which was set up in the Italian synagogues; it was apparently mentioned erroneously, for the scribe drew two ink lines through it to erase it. Perhaps the cashbox accounts were kept in a separate record book administered by the ‘appointed official’, a book which has not been preserved.

Very little information has come down to us concerning R. Shemu’el Mas’ud himself. He was a Venetian rabbi during the first half of the seventeenth century,36 and his name was included in the list of rabbis compiled by R. Yitzhak Hayyim Cohen me-ha-Hazananim (Cantini).37 His signature appears on the rolls of approval granted to three Venetian presses dating from 5381 (1620/1), 5385 (1624/5), and 5387 (1626/7).38 He was one of the rabbis who affixed their signatures to Harov Yerushalayim,39 and he was one of the ‘rabbis of the provinces of It-

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31 See the original: ‘per nome del giu rendez di italiano come gubor’.
34 Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, Ms 4026, f. 5b.
39 Biblioteca Angelica, Roma, Ms 12, f. 5b.
40 M. S. Cherri, Toledot Gedolot ha-Yisra’el, Tel-Aviv 1933, p. 476 (Hebrew).
41 S. Puchas, Judaism in the 17th Century, Jerusalem 1976, p. 323.
ly’ who signed a ruling regarding ‘the prohibition of processing phylacteries already processed for ulterior motives’. With regard to his activity on behalf of the poor of Erez Israel, he is known from the aforesaid two inscriptions dating from September and October 1617, as well as from a letter sent by R. Yehudah Aryeh Modena on the first day of Elul 5399 (31 August 1639) ‘to our close brethren, the Italian community – may God preserve it – in Safed, to inform them of a contribution handed over to the great and wise, honorable man, R. S. Mas’ud’, for him to send off to its destination. ‘We know – adds R. Yehudah Aryeh Modena – as his way is the blessed way of a righteous man, that the money will certainly reach you.’ R. Shmuel Mas’ud passed away on the 23 Heshvan 5408 (8 November 1648), and was lamented by the poet Jacob Francis.40

The next contribution, the tenth, is recorded once again in Hebrew, just like the first contributions. This time R. Menahem de Lonzano confirms that he received ‘from R. Yitzkhok of Oimo, may God preserve him, gabba’i of the Italian congregation’, one zecchino, i.e., 12 litrin and 8 soldi, ‘for the pledge of that congregation for the year 5379’ (1618/9).41 This inscription is one of the shortest in the record book. Although it has no date, it was clearly written at the end of 5379 or the beginning of 5380 (possibly in the autumn of 1619). Neither does it say that R. Menahem was an emissary from any specific place, nor in whose name he received the pledge. Ya’ari lists Lonzano as a ‘freelance emissary’.42 and this inscription provides this assumption of his with real support. In 5378 (1617/8) R. Menahem Lonzano had his book, Shem Yado, printed in Venice, and for this purpose had need of financial assistance from individuals. It is possible that the aforementioned pledge was intended to cover some of these expenses, particularly as the sum given this time was far smaller than those of the other contributions.

The final contribution, the eleventh, was given about twenty years after the previous one. Judging by its date and place in the record book, where it is inscribed on one of the last pages, it was not one of the previous contributions considered above, though it is not very different from them in its content. Two emissaries from Safed, R. Jehoseph of Leiria and R. Joseph ibn Aroyo, confirm that on the 8 Shevat 5399 (1 February 1639) they received from the lay leaders of ‘the Italian congregation of Venice’, R. Moshe Luzatto and R. Jacob Sullam, ten and a half ducati in Venetian coin, i.e., 65 litrin and 2 soldi.43 In this inscription no mention is made of the Italian community of Safed, and it is possible that the two rabbis were on a mission on behalf of the entire Jewish community of the town.

From the same year, 5399, when the contribution was given to the two emissaries from the community of Safed, the aforementioned letter written by R. Yehudah Aryeh Modena to ‘exemplary people’ of Safed has also been preserved. In it he informed them of a further contribution of 40 ducati, that is, 248 litrin, which had been dispatched ‘to the Italian community, may God preserve it, of Safed’. The amount of this contribution was handed over to the aforementioned R. Shmuel Mas’ud, who was in charge of transferring it to Erez Israel.

Thus, in the record book before us there are references to eleven contributions made over a period of sixty-three years, between 1576 and 1639. Most of them were intended for the Italian community of Safed, and a few were designated for this community ‘in Erez Israel’, i.e., Safed and Jerusalem. One contribution was apparently sent to the entire Jewish community in Safed, and one was given to R. Menahem de Lonzano, perhaps for his own use. The firm link between the Jews of the Italian congregation in Venice and those of the same origin in Erez Israel is easily perceived and requires no explanation; it was important and even necessary to both parties and both of them encouraged it throughout all this period. The special attitude towards the entire Jewish community of Safed – the Italian com-

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40. S. Abbaa, Deo Shmuel, Venezia 1702, p. 8b.
41. Letters of R. Levi Modena, p. 221.
42. Berenstain, Uber Abenaim, p. 543, n. 128.
43. Mo 8593, f. 15b.
45. Possibly the husband of the poetess Sarah Coppo Sullam.
46. Mo 8593, f. 157b.
munity and Jews of other communities, as well — is also clear; perhaps it stems from the special aura that enveloped this community in the past and had not yet been forgotten by the Jews of that generation. Most of the contributions listed in the record book, seven out of eleven, were made by means of emissaries from Eretz Israel. Only between 1614 and 1618 do we find that money was transferred to Eretz Israel through the efforts of a local person, who performed this charitable deed at the behest of the congregation. The reason for this exception is not explained in the record book. It may have been the war between Venice and the Uscocchi, which reached its peak between 1613 and 1617; it disrupted the sea lanes, especially in the Adriatic Sea, and may have caused a delay in the departure of a number of emissaries. It must, however, be noted that, even without connection with the wartime events, several communities tried to make their activities on behalf of the poor of Eretz Israel a permanent practice, so that they would not depend upon the initiative of the emissaries or those who sent them. A step of this kind was taken in 1561 (1600/1), when the Jewish community of Venice decided to impose a tax of ‘half a shekel’, and again in 1577 (1616/7), when the Va’ad (committee) of the Jewish community of Rome adopted a resolution concerning the collecting of an annual tax for a period of seven years, on behalf of the poor of Safed and Jerusalem. A resolution in the same spirit may have been adopted at the same time in Venice as well, though for some reason no mention of this has been found until now. Of the six emissaries whose names are mentioned in the record book, some were known previously — Yedidah Galante, Menahem de Leonato, and Jechoseph de Leria — while others are names of people not known from other sources — Menahem Azaria of Melli, Israel of Camerino and Joseph ben Aroyo. None of these names appear in the lists of emissaries who visited Padua or Mantua at the same time — two towns from whose archives lists of emissaries having visited them in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been published — except for the pair Jechoseph de Leria and Joseph ben Aroyo, whose name is mentioned in a document preserved in the archives of the Mantua community. This fact is in itself quite surprising, for considering the geographical proximity of these towns, especially that of Venice and Padua, one would suppose that most of the emissaries who went to one town would visit the others as well; yet the available sources do not indicate that this was the case. It seems that during this period a number of activities on behalf of the poor of Eretz Israel took place in Venice and its environs at one and the same time — on behalf of the entire Jewish community in Eretz Israel and on behalf of the Jews belonging to certain groupings as well. The Italian congregation of Venice raised funds for the Jews of its own community in Safed, and perhaps also in Jerusalem, in independent campaigns assisted, at least partially, by special emissaries sent to Venice from Eretz Israel for this purpose. This activity may have been in addition to the part played by the congregation in fundraising campaigns carried out by the general community of Venice on behalf of the entire Jewish community in Eretz Israel, and may have been coordinated, to some extent, with the activities of the other La’atim congregations in neighboring towns; but no information in this regard has come down to us.

The particular character of the activity of the Italian congregation in Venice during this period is also expressed in the fact that it was not assisted by the Gebar Kelali (General Treasurers), the Venetian Jew in charge of the activity on behalf Eretz Israel. The three ‘General Treasurers’ appointed during this period whose names have been preserved — R. Shemuel Yehudah Katznelbenben, R. Yehudah Leib Seraval, and R. Simha (Simone) Luzatto — all belonged to the Ashkenazi congregation in town, and it seems that the funds of the specific contributions made by the Italian congregation to Jews of their own community in Eretz Israel were not channelled via them.

From the entries in the record book we learn that between 1576 and 1639 of the funds contributed by the Italian congregation a total of 740:8 litrin was transferred to Eretz Israel via emissaries, and a total of 1117:2 small litrin in other ways; 216:2 ‘small litrin’ of which came from the funds of the ‘Eretz Israel cashbox’. These are probably not the only sums transferred to Eretz Israel during this period. An indication of this is the transfer of funds carried out in 1639, which is mentioned in the letter of Elul 5399 sent by R. Yehudah Areyh Modena to the sages of Safed. At approximately the same time, between 5344 and 5380 (1583/4-1619/20), the contribution made by the community of Padua came to 975:14 litrin, a quarter shaker and 6 ‘small litrin’. A comparison of these figures — the only data relating to the Jewish communities of Italy during this period to have been published to date — indicates that the contribution made by the Italian congregation of Venice, the poorest community of the town, was a generous one. Moreover, if this was in addition to its portion in other contributions raised in Venice for the entire community in Eretz Israel, then it was very generous indeed. Concerning the Jewish communities in Eretz Israel, very little can be learned from our record book, just as from other internal community sources. Nevertheless, it seems that, judging from the distribution of the funds dispatched from time to time to the Italian community in Eretz Israel, we may deduce that, until the beginning of the seventeenth century, most of this community resided in Safed. During 5377-5378 (16167-1617/8) the funds were distributed partly in Safed and partly in Jerusalem. Thus, it is possible that during the 1630's the 'Italian community' of Safed dwindled numerically, while not yet disappearing com-

53 See above, note 34.
55 Carpi, 'The Activity of the Community of Padua', pp. 31-33.
56 Letters of R. Levi Modena, p. 221.
pledly. Such a picture fits well with the available information concerning the changes which took place during these years throughout the Jewish communities of Safed and Jerusalem.

Finally, a comment regarding the interval between 1616 and 1638, concerning which no information has been preserved in the record book of the transfer of contributions to Eretz Israel. This lack of information may be attributed to several causes, and there is no point in theorizing. One fact, however, cannot be overlooked: the years 1630-1631 were the years when the great plague raged; in Venice alone tens of thousands of people died over a sixteen month period. This plague was preceded by a period of famine, which sorely afflicted the entire region. These years were certainly not good years for fundraising on behalf of the poor of other communities. There were also tremendous practical difficulties in maintaining contact with towns overseas at a time when travel was difficult and passage was blocked because of fear of the spreading plague. While the Jewish casualties in Venice were few in comparison with those in Padua and Mantua, and even more so in comparison with the casualties of their Christian neighbors, nevertheless the suffering of the Jews was very considerable and their property losses enormous. Even after the plague was over, years went by until the survivors recovered and returned to normal economic activity, and even renewed their activities on behalf of the poor of Eretz Israel.

B. 1644-1663 - The Rules Governing the Activity on Behalf of the 'Italian Community' in Safed

In the year 5404 (1644) the committee of the Loʾitzim Synagogue in Venice adopted a new list of regulations known as Torah ha-regulation (ihne) K.K. Italiani, to be in force for ten years from 1 Elul 5404 (2 September 1644). This list of regulations, which takes up the first eighteen pages of the record book of the Vaʾad ha-K.K. (Congregation Committee), encompasses every area of the congregation’s social and organizational life, especially the system of electing the congregation functionaries and a detailed description of their tasks: three parnasim, two gabba'im, ha-memuneh ’al shemen la-maʾor (the official in charge of oil for light), ha-memuneh ’al maʾaṭeh Eretz Israel (the official in charge of Eretz Israel funds), ha-gishar neʾeman ha-scriino (the treasurer responsible for the casket).

'The official in charge of Eretz Israel funds' – or, as he was occasionally called, 'the memuneh and gabba'im of Eretz Israel funds' – was a member of the committee

and was elected by it each and every year in the middle of the month of Av, at the same time as the other lay leaders, for a period of one year starting from 1 Elul. It was his job to 'try his very best' to maintain the fixed contribution made in the synagogue three times a year, on the eighth day of Passover, on the first day of Pentecost and on the Day of Atonement. It was also his responsibility to collect – personally, not by means of others – the money donated for the poor of Eretz Israel: the 'three time contribution' made in the synagogue, occasional contributions made by individuals, and the money from the two collection-boxes for Eretz Israel belonging to the congregation – the one of which was affixed at the entrance to the synagogue and the other passed around among the worshippers. The official was obliged 'to send all this money once a year to Safed, may it be speedily rebuilt, to be distributed among the Italian poor there in Safed and to no one else'. He was not the only person responsible for this last operation: he and the lay leaders were in charge of handling the money over 'to one of the hachamim (scholars) or whoever is ha-measef (the collector) in charge of sending the money to Eretz Israel' so that they could transfer it to its destination.

The list of regulations does not specify who these officials were; the assumption evidently was that they were well known to the Jews of the time and that there was no need to add explanations about them. Today these hints are not self-explanatory. 'Ha-measef in charge of sending the money to Eretz Israel' was almost definitely the 'General Treasurer', who was located in Venice and was responsible for collecting all the money for Eretz Israel and for transferring it there. The term hachamim, however, is unclear, and it is difficult to fathom who was referred to in this context – whether to rabbis or to certain officials concerned with the transfer of funds, as yet unknown from other sources. Thus, in the same year that this regulation was adopted in Venice, the committee of the Padua community decided to make a special contribution to the poor of Safed; and though at the time an emissary from Safed was actually in Padua and possessed reliable credentials signed by the sages of Constantinople, Safed, and Venice, the committee members decided that the money they were contributing would be sent to Venice by means of the illustrious gabba'im of the community of Safed, the elderly R. Joseph Abba and the scholar R. Abraham ibn Yakar. The significance of this is that in that year there were special gabba'im (officials) in Venice who made sure the funds contributed for the community of Safed were transferred, and they may have been the hachamim mentioned in the regulations. At the end of his term of office, the memuneh was obliged to make a report of all the funds with which he had dealt, how much he collected and how much he sent to Eretz Israel. In case some of the funds contributed were left over, he was obliged to hand over within one month of the end of his term of office any money he had not managed to transfer to the treasurer of the congregation ('the treasurer responsible of the scriino'). The latter

58 See the description of R. Yehudah Aryeh Mi-Modena, who resided in Venice at the time of the plague (Chayye Yehuda, p. 84).
59 Ms. 8594, ff. 1-18. Four reguladores wrote the new regulations: Shlomai Sezer, Abraham Medli, Meirchechi son of R. Simha [Luzzato], Yizhaq son of Yehudah Voletra.
60 Ibid., f. 8.
61 Scriino.
had to keep these funds in the community treasury, separate from all other sums of money, and no community official was entitled to remove them and use them for any reason whatever. The money had to be kept constantly available, so that the memuneh and the lay leaders could receive it without delay, if a convenient opportunity for transferring the money to its destination presented itself. If, on the other hand, it turned out that individuals belonging to the congregation owed money they had pledged but not yet paid, the memuneh was authorized to deal with them `very strictly and with fines'; all in accordance with the authority enjoyed by the lay leaders to collect the debts owed by individuals to the congregation.

How exactly these regulations were executed in practice we do not know, for—as we have already noted—the accounts kept by the lay leaders of the congregation have reached us only as of the year 5424 (1663/4). However, some of the resolutions adopted by the committee between 1650 and 1652 illustrate the actual situation to some extent, with regard to actions taken and, even more so, actions which were not taken. As early as 5408 (1648), the committee complained that the account book kept by the lay leaders and gabbai'im of the congregation `in days past' was lost, and decided to open a new account book in which all transactions, revenues, and expenditures `from the year 5404 (1643/4) until today', both by the lay leaders and by the `gabbai of the oil for light and the memuneh for Eretz Israel' would be recorded.63 In 5410 (1650) the committee of the congregation heard a complaint `that many reggimenti'64 have passed without the memunim for Eretz Israel making their accounting of the funds they received, and of those still to be collected from members of our holy congregation and without them sending any money to Eretz Israel'. This time the inaction thus revealed concerned the very existence of the operation for the poor of Eretz Israel, and it was necessary to take drastic measures to correct the situation. Accordingly, the committee decided to appoint one of its members, R. Yitzhak Volterra,65 to check the accounts `of all those memunim who did not send funds to Eretz-Israel and of whoever is in possession of funds of Eretz Israel, and to collect from whoever owes [money] to Eretz Israel, whether `in love and affection' or `by force of law' of the state courts — all this so as to ensure `that everyone pays whatever he owes' and that the congregation would be able to send to their destination all the funds contributed for the benefit of the poor of Eretz Israel'.66 R. Yitzhak Volterra seems to have performed this task faithfully and speedily, for only two weeks after his appointment he had already managed to report to the committee that the debtor who owed a large sum to the collection box of the poor of Eretz Israel had been located, and that he was none other than ... the congregation itself. It seems that the lay leaders of the congregation had borrowed the sum of 345 litin and 9 soldi seven years before, in Elul 5403 (August 1643) from the memuneh for Eretz Israel, R. Abraham Perugino, in order to pay the rent for the synagogue. Since that time no one had bothered to repay the loan, and no memuneh had bothered to collect it, despite the fact that the debt was recorded in the annual accounting made to the treasurer of the congregation by R. Yitzhak Volterra himself, in the month of Iyar 5404 (April 1644).67 Since the loan had been taken a year before the adoption of the regulations of 1644, it is possible that the lay leaders had not actually transgressed any explicit prohibition made by the congregation. Furthermore, perhaps this prohibition was adopted and included in the list of regulations because of the act perpetrated a year before, and so as to prevent its repetition. Nonetheless the fact in itself was probably quite embarrassing, especially since for years lay leaders and memunim had ignored their simple, basic obligation to ensure that the money was returned. Now that a widespread operation was being undertaken to collect all outstanding debts owed to the Eretz Israel collection box, the committee members recalled that `by right these funds should be sent off to the poor of Safed as is customary, and paying a debt is a mitzva (commandment from the Torah) especially to the poor of the Holy Land, for they are constantly in expectation of receiving the charity of Jews'. Accordingly they resolved that everyone who had rented his place in the synagogue for the sum of one litin or more would now be obligated to pay an additional fifty percent `until the entire debt to Eretz Israel, may it speedily be rebuilt, is paid'.

On that same occasion the names of those obliged to pay the additional fee were listed in the record book; there were twenty-one such people, and the annual sum they undertook to pay came to 144 litin and 6 soldi. Thus, it would take two more years to repay the debt which was already outstanding for seven years. Furthermore, there is room for doubt as to whether the congregation ever lived up to these easy conditions which it fixed for itself. In the month of Adar 5411 (February-March 1651), the lay leaders handed R. Yitzhak Volterra the sum of 37 litin and 12 soldi, the amount they had collected with regard to the additional levy for the repayment of the debt to the `Eretz Israel funds',68 and in Adar 5412 (February-March 1652) R. Moshe Levi Monteira, `gabbai and memuneh of Eretz Israel' for 5411, confirmed that he had received from R. Abraham Perugino, outgoing lay leader for 5411, the sum of `ten gold coins [i.e., 62 litin] to send to Eretz Israel as part of the aforesaid debt'.69 From that time on nothing was written in the account book concerning additional payments toward the settlement of this debt, and it is doubtful if anything further was ever done in this regard. In the

64. Terms of office.
65. Probably son of Yehudah Volterra (see above, note 60).
66. Ms 8594, f. 44 (12 Shevat 5410).
67. Ibid., f. 43 (29 Shevat 5410).
68. Ibid., f. 49 (26 Adar 5411).
69. Ibid., f. 51 (25 Adar 5412).
middle of 1654, the ten years period during which the 1644 list of regulations was to be in effect were drawing to their close. On 4 lyar 5414 (22 April 1654), the congregation committee appointed four reguladori (regulation formulators) whose task it was to propose a new list of regulations or any amendments to the previous regulations, as they should see fit. Indeed, they did propose a series of amendments and additions, as the experience gained over the previous years made obligatory, in their opinion. Several amendments were also proposed regarding the paragraph dealing with the memuneh for Eretz Israel.71

One amendment dealt with the way the debts were collected. The memuneh was obligated to hand over to the lay leaders the list of individuals who still owed money to the Eretz Israel collection box within two weeks of the conclusion of his term of office, i.e., by 15 Elul, and the lay leaders were obligated to transfer the entire sum contributed, but as yet unpaid, within another two weeks from the congregation collection box to the memuneh, so that the latter could send on all the money donated for Eretz Israel without delay. It was similarly determined that, at the same time, all the individuals owing money to the collection for Eretz Israel would be written down on the list of people in debt to the congregation treasury, apparently on the basis of the assumption that the lay leaders would have sufficiently efficient and forceful methods to compel them to pay their debts. If one amendment lightened the burden borne by the memuneh – he would no longer be the only one responsible for collecting outstanding debts – another one weighted his burden even more: the 1644 regulations declared the memuneh ineligible for one year after the conclusion of his term, while a 1654 amendment abrogated this limitation or, as the record book puts it, 'the official of Eretz Israel would not have contumacia'.72

The third amendment rendered the regular contribution – 'the three time contribution', which up until then had been made on the eighth day of Passover, the first day of Pentecost and the Day of Atonement – 'the shalosh regalim (three festival) contribution', to be made on Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles; to these, there was added a 'Day of Atonement contribution', which the wives would pledge in the synagogue, their husbands assuming the responsibility of paying their pledges for them.

Nearly ten years passed since the congregation adopted its new list of regulations, a period during which nothing was written down in the record book concerning the fundraising for Eretz Israel. During this time the persecutions of the Jews of Safed by the Druze rulers, members of the family of Emir Fakhir ed-Din, reached its peak: the Jews in distress were obliged to abandon their town, and the community was desolate for years, 1655-1658. When the town was restored to the rule of the Turkish pasha, a small Jewish community was renewed there, and from 1660 onward, various sources provide information concerning the departure of emissaries from Safed for the communities of the Diaspora. Two of them spent time in Venice between 1662 and 1665: R. Joseph Mataron and R. Yehudah Leib Ashkenazi. They presented a recommendation from the rabbis of Safed, which stated explicitly that whatever is donated and pledged should be sent to our teacher, Rabbi Shelomo Hai Seraval, the Gerbar Kelali (General Treasurer) in charge of transferring funds contributed to Eretz Israel.73 A similar statement appearing in the recommendation the rabbis of Venice gave to R. Joseph Mataron, in order to assist him in the rest of his mission 'in the towns of Italy, France and Amsterdam'.74 This was a mission on behalf of all the Jews of Safed, and like others of its kind no mention is made of it in the record books of the Italian congregation in Venice.

At the end of 5423 (1663), the validity of the regulations expired. Once again three reguladori were appointed, and this time they compiled a new list which altered many of the arrangements that had previously been in force in the congregation, including several of the rules concerning the fundraising for Eretz Israel.75 The main innovation was that the number of permanent positions in the congregation was fixed by the new regulations at a total of two: the parnasim and the ‘gabbai responsible for the scribe'. Whereas the positions of the gabbai im and of the two other officials – that 'in charge of oil for light' and that 'in charge of Eretz Israel funds' – ceased to exist. According to the new regulations the lay leaders were obligated to assume these functions from then on, during the turns of four months in which each leader served, in addition to their regular duties as lay leaders.76

On the other hand, there were no substantial changes in the new regulations regarding details of the fundraising and its goals. The main sources of the contribution were, as before, 'those volunteering for a Torah scroll for Eretz Israel', 'the three festival contribution', the pledges made by the women in the synagogue on the Day of Atonement, the permanently affixed collection box 'at the entrance to the synagogue' and the collection box which was passed around among the worshippers 'every day the Torah was read, except for Sabbaths and Festive Days'. The funds accruing from these contributions were supposed to be dispatched each and

70 They were: Abraham Perugino, Hidkiah Levi, Shelomo Dorno, Yitzhak Volterra.
71 Ms 8594, f. 58.
72 Period in which an official was ineligible for reelection after the conclusion of his term.
73 Ms 8994, ff. 79-101. The new list of regulations was to be in force from 1 Elul 5425 (3 September 1663); the reguladori were: Abraham Melli, Ya'acob son of Raphael of Ancona, Ya'acob son of Moshe Volterra.
74 Ibid., f. 81-82.
every year 'to the Italian poor there in Safed, may it speedily be rebuilt, and to no one else'. For this purpose the lay leaders were enjoined to hand the money over 'to one of the scholars or to whoever was serving as fund collector for Eretz Israel', i.e., apparently, either to the 'gabbai' from the community of Safed' or to the Gi- 
bar Keteli, who was located in Venice. Similarly, the lay leaders were required to make an effort to ensure that reliable proof of the receipt of the funds be sent to them from Safed, for otherwise they were not permitted to send additional sums there. Detailed accounts were to be kept in special record books for each of the fundraising collections — 'charity', 'oil for light', 'Eretz Israel' — and the scribe was ordered to copy their annual totals into another record book, each and every year.

As already mentioned, as of 5424 (1663/4), the annual total accounts of the lay leaders, including the total income and payments of the fundraising for Eretz Is- 
rael, were preserved; they can be used to study, from this point on, how the res- 
lutions of the congregation were executed in practice, both with respect to details and general trends.

C. 1664-1707 - Regular Fundraising for the Poor of Eretz Israel by means of the 'General Treasurer' 77

For over forty years, between 1664 and 1707, money was collected in a perma-

nent fashion in the Italian congregation of Venice on behalf of Eretz Israel. This fundraising had three main sources: donations made by *izhidim* (individuals), regular worshippers in the synagogue; money amassed in the *bouoli*, the two col- 
lection boxes for Eretz Israel; and contributions made by *hizanim*, occasional wor-

shippers, women and guests from out of town. Those in charge of the fundraising

were now the *parnas memaneh* (lay leader in charge of Eretz Israel). Every year, how-

ever, there were *izhidim* who pledged a contribution, yet 'remained in debt'. These
debts, which over the period under consideration came to a sum totalling over 717.7 litrin, were collected over the years, to some extent or other; there is explicit testimony in the record book in this regard, 80 though there is no complete listing of these sums, and it is difficult to determine just how much was involved. 81 At any rate it is clear that the total amount of money contributed for Eretz Israel over this period was greater than the total of the amounts entered in the record book. It may

be assumed that the overall total came to about 5,000 litrin or perhaps even a little more. The total amount contributed did not divide up equally over the entire pe-

riod under consideration. Especially prominent is the decline in the contributions collected during the final ten years of the period, 1698-1707, when a total of 745.4 litrin were collected. A similar, though more moderate, decline took place during the same period in the other two collections made in the congregation, as well, 'charity' and 'oil for light'; in earlier years they had come to between 1100-1200 litrin per annum together, whereas towards the end of the period they dropped to about 900-1000 litrin. It is evident, that the economic crisis which affected the Jews of Venice during the eighteenth century, was already beginning to be felt; one of its signs was a drop in the amounts collected for the synagogue in general and for Eretz Israel in particular.

The recording of the transfer of funds to Eretz Israel is very fragmentary, and apparently appears in this record book merely as an indication of the more detailed listing carried out in another record book which has not been found. Nevertheless, the general picture which is reflected in these entries is quite broad and from a number of standpoints is decidedly clear and unambiguous.

The outstanding fact is that all the transfers entered in the record book during this period, up to 1708 inclusive, were carried out via the 'General Treasurer', here

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77 This chapter is based on Ms IT 1098, except for cases specified in the footnotes.
78 Ms 8594 f. 120a. The new list of regulations was adopted on 22 Heshvan 5444 (11 November 1683). The regolatori were: Simea son of Moshechei (Luzzatto), Yithak Roques, Ya'acob son of Moshe Volterra.
79 For example, in the years 5433 (1672/3), 5459 (1698/9), 5463 (1702/3).
80 El 11a.b.
81 There is no mention in the record book of the debts collected in the years 5435-5436, 5455, 5457, 5459, 5462 (1674/5-1675/6, 1694/5, 1696/7, 1698/9, 1701/2).
termed the 'Treasure of Eretz Israel' (Gishar me-Eretz Israel). Two transfers were exceptions to this rule, one of 105 litrin and the other of 74½, and were made via 'our teacher rabbi Moshe Cohen, emissary from Eretz Israel.' The two sums came from funds contributed in 5434 (1673/4) and 5438 (1677/8), but the date on which they were given to the emissary is not noted explicitly. The R. Moshe Cohen mentioned here is very probably R. Moshe son of Jacob ha-Cohen, emissary of Jerusalem, who visited a few European countries in the 1680s and 1690s, even staying in Venice for a while, where he saw to the printing of the collection of 'responsa' Durche 'Nim' by R. Mordechai ha-Levi. Thus, a drastic change took place in the system employed to transfer funds in comparison with what was customary between 1576 and 1639, when most of these transfers were carried out by means of emissaries from Eretz Israel.

Among the 'treasurers of Eretz Israel' who operated in Venice during this period and who are mentioned in the record book, the central figure is that of R. Moshe Aharon Volterra, who served in this post in 5430, 5434, 5440, 5445, 5448, 5450 and 5452 (1670/7, 1673/4, 1679/80, 1684/5, 1687/8, 1689/90, 1691/2). In 5448 (1687/8), three transfers of money to Eretz Israel were made, and with regard to two of them it is written that the money was handed over to 'the honored treasurer of Eretz Israel, R. David Levi and R. Moshe Aharon Volterra.' Of the activity of R. David Levi in 5448 (1687/8) as 'faithful treasurer of the poor of Eretz Israel' we also learn from the records of the 'Scola Grande Tedesca', the synagogue of the ashkenazi Jews of Venice, to which R. David belonged and in which he served many times as a lay leader and a 'gabbai of Eretz Israel.' The other 'treasurers' to whom the funds contributed by the Italian congregation were handed over were R. Moshe Hai Volterra in 5464 (1703/4) (and perhaps also in the years 5454 [1693/4] and 5457 [1696/7]), R. Menahem of Cracovia in 5466 and 5467 (1705/6, 1706/7), and R. Jacob son of Eliezer of Cracovia in 5468 (1707/8). Concerning the money contributed in 5459 and 5461 (1698/9 and 1700/1) we learn that the 'Volterra sons received it', without explaining when and to whom they were handed over.

In general it may be said that, in the second half of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, the central role in the various stages of the

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82 Printed in Venice 5457 (1696/7). See also Y. Eliahi, Emmissaries from Eretz Israel, p. 313.
84 The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, Ms 3594, f. 42b; Capdi, The Activity of the "Scola Grande Tedesca" (above note 83).
85 Capdi, The Activity of the "Scola Grande Tedesca" (above note 83); Benayahu, Copyright, p. 152. R. Jacob of Cracovia died in Chilier de 5479 (November-December 1718), see R. Paciotti, Le invasione dell'antica cristiana ebrea a Venezia, Alessandria d'Egito 1956, p. 124.
86 Archives of the Jewish Community of Padua, Ms 6, f. 58v: Minutes Book of the Community activity carried out in Venice on behalf Eretz Israel was played by members of the Volterra family; whereas the members of the Cracovia family were destined to conclude the period of the 'General Treasurers' in Venice, for these entries from 5466-5468 (1705/6-1707/8), and their parallels from 5466 (1705/6) in the record book of the 'Scola Grande Tedesca', are the last ones known to us concerning the activities of the 'treasurers' in Venice and concerning this position in the town in general. This too, is indicative of the changing times: as they declined economically, the Jews of Venice lost the initiative in the operation on behalf of Eretz Israel, which was taken up by other communities such as Livorno and Amsterdam that were prospering at that period of time.

Another somewhat surprising fact reflected in the entries in the record book, is the large gap in time between the collection of the contributions and their transfer to the 'treasurer'. The first transfer mentioned in the record book is dated 3 September 1670, when the 'treasurer' received funds contributed in 5424 (1663/4). In the months of Elul 5430 (September 1670) and Adar Sheni 5434 (March 1674), funds collected in 5425 (1663/4) were handed over, and in Sivan 5445 (June 1685), funds collected in 5429 (1668/9), and so on all along the line, with the exception of only a couple of instances. This is also true when the funds were deposited in the synagogue treasury, from which the 'treasurer' received the money at a later date. In the month of Sivan 5445 (June 1685) R. Mordechai of Osimo deposited in the synagogue treasury whatever funds he had in his possession – 136½ litrin contributed during the year 5429 (1668/9), and 137½ litrin contributed during 5441 (1680/1). In this case, and in two other cases in which he handed the money directly to the 'treasurer', the same R. Mordechai of Osimo did add, from his own pocket, considerable sums of money 'as a gift, for the period in which he had held the money in his possession'. But he is the only person who did so, or at least, he is the only one whose 'gifts' were mentioned in writing.

These delays were in clear contradiction to the regulations of the congregation, both those of 1644 and those of 1663, according to which the lay leaders were obligated to make sure that the money was transferred to its destination 'each and every year', and that whatever sum was left over in their possession was deposited in the congregation treasury within a month of the conclusion of their terms of office, that is, by the end of the month of Elul (late September). In reality, things were handled differently.

Some of the delays in transferring the funds may have resulted from contemporary and unavoidable circumstances, such as unsafe roads and the need to wait for a suitable opportunity to transfer the money, while other delays may have stemmed from an attitude of neglect in executing the operation. As for the profits which accrued due to these delays, it is not known what happened with them, except for

the aforesaid three entries referring to the payments made by R. Mordechai of Osimo. Perhaps the congregation saw to their transfer, sooner or later, together with the other contributions for Eretz Israel, and perhaps there were cases where the congregation used the money to cover its expenses. At any rate it is clear that the problem disturbed the congregation committee, which tried time and again to enforce the rule whereby the funds were to be dispatched regularly ‘each and every year’ despite the practical difficulties. In the 5444 (1683/4) list of regulations, unprecedentedly severe punitive measures were stipulated: a fine of fifty ducats and expulsion from the committee for anyone who failed to fulfill his obligation to make an accounting and to deposit any balance in the synagogue treasury during the period allotted to him, until the end of the month of Tishri (late October). In fact, for a few years – especially between 5445 and 5449 (1684/5-1688/9) – lay leaders whose terms had expired were careful to hand the funds over to the ‘treasurers for Eretz Israel’ within a short time of the conclusion of their terms of office. This punctuality was not, however, longlasting, and towards the end of the century the situation was as it had been before.

Far-reaching changes took place in the destination of the contributions during this period, i.e., with regard to the communities and congregations in Eretz Israel to which the funds were sent. As noted above, between 5336 and 5339 (1577/6-1638/9) the money was sent regularly to the ‘Italian community’ in Safed, and on rare occasions to the same community in Jerusalem, as well. The congregation regulations adopted in 5404 (1643/4) reiterated this destination, stating explicitly that the funds from Eretz Israel contributions were to be sent to Safed, may it speedily be rebuilt, to be distributed among the Italian poor there in Safed, may it speedily be rebuilt, and to no one else. The regulations adopted in 5423 (1662/3) repeated this instruction in the very same words. We do not know how matters were administered between 1644 and 1663. However, as of 5424 (1663/4), i.e., when the accounts were written down, reality seems to have been very different from the rule in the congregation’s regulations. Nearly thirty short notes were written down in the record book relating to the transfer of funds carried out between 5424 and 5467 (1663/4-1706/7), and the ‘Italian community’ in Eretz Israel was not mentioned even once. Only three times do we find that the money was to be sent ‘to Safed, may it speedily be rebuilt’. In all other cases the writing is extremely noncommittal, such as ‘to send to Eretz Israel’ or ‘handed them over to the treasurers of Eretz Israel’. Evidently, significant changes took place in this regard over the years, due to the actual developments in general, and especially to the situation which came about in Eretz Israel itself. Interesting details regarding this situation may be gleaned from a letter sent by the lay leaders of the Italian congregation of Venice on 2 Tishre 5432 (6 November 1671) to two rabbis of Jerusalem, the ‘Nasi ve-eto beit ha-din’ (Court President) R. Or Shraga named Weibish, and his assistant of true value be-hacham ha-shalem R. Jehosua son of R. Samuel Nantua, to inform them of a contribution of forty Spanish reals, which was sent to them at that time via R. Aaron Voltterra.

You should know – the lay leaders of Venice write – that the resolution of our community was to send them and to distribute them in the Italian poor of Safed, may it speedily be rebuilt; but, as we have heard, there are no Italian poor in our days except for a few in Jerusalem. Thus we have chosen well to send the aforementioned funds to your Torah Excellency, so that you will distribute them to the Italian poor who are there, as you see fit in your wisdom; in particular if there are any poor descendants of the sage Daniel and Uzziya Finzi, and of R. Tuv El Cohen, and of R. Menahem Camerino, distribute to them according to their eminence as you see fit.

Thus, the ‘Italian community’ in Eretz Israel dwindled over the seventeenth century, and in Tishre 5432 (November 1671) only a few remained in Jerusalem alone. The bonds linking this community with the Italian congregation in Venice became severely weak, and even those items of information that reached Venice concerning the families which remained in Eretz Israel were few in number and vague in character. The lay leaders of the congregation were, therefore, left with no choice but to deviate from their own resolution and to acquiesce in the distribution of the funds collected among whatever Italian poor there remained in Eretz Israel. A few years later this limitation, too, was removed, and in the 5444 regulations it was determined for the first time that funds collected were to be distributed among the Italian and Ashkenazi poor. Perhaps this resolution, too, was adopted merely to confirm, a posteriori, an already existing situation. The new resolution sounds as follows:

and since at the present time we unfortunately do not know clearly where there exists a particularly Italian community, and it is not fitting that for this reason the fundraising for Eretz Israel be delayed, it is thus made clear that the aforesaid six are authorized, upon the agreement of four of them, if no specifically Italian community is located, as already stated, to send the funds from our synagogue by means of anyone they find fit to be distributed among the Italian and Ashkenazi poor, as R. Aaron Voltterra, may God preserve him, has done up until now with funds he has received for Eretz Israel, with the clarification that as long as there is a particularly Italian community anywhere at all and at any time, the money be sent to them and not to others.

The nature of the fundraising operation carried out by the Italian congregation in Venice thus changed gradually over the period under consideration, and at the beginning of the 1680s, at the very latest, this operation was integrated, in the

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88 Ms 8594, f. 120a.
89 Twice in 5434 (1673/4) and once in 5445 (1684/5).
90 See Y. Y. Emissaries from Eretz Israel, pp. 285, 846.
91 See Benayahu, Letters of R. Shmuel Abba, p. 11.
92 Ms 8594, f. 144a.
93 Three parnasim at the end of their term and three newly elected parnasim.
94 Ms 8594, f. 120a.
main, into the general fundraising carried out in Venice, both by transferring the funds to Eretz Israel via the ‘General Treasurers’ in Venice and the Jewish bankers in Egypt, and by its destinations in Eretz Israel, where the money was distributed to ‘any Italian and Ashkenazi’ poor. Emissaries from Eretz Israel are no longer mentioned in the record book, though quite a few of them did arrive in Italy during those years, as we learn from a number of sources, and some of them also visited Venice. Apparently they did not receive direct assistance from the Italian congregation, and for this reason no mention of their activity appears in the congregation’s record book.

In the 5444 regulations the Jewish community in Hebron is mentioned as one of three communities, ‘Jerusalem, Safed, and Hebron’, to which funds contributed to Eretz Israel might be sent. This is the only time Hebron is mentioned in the available documentation of the Italian congregation of Venice. A few months earlier, in the month of Teveth 5443 (January 1683), Hebron is mentioned in the record book of the community of Padua, which was visited by ‘an emissary from the town of Hebron to collect from all our holy congregations assistance for the needs of the poor and the needy there in Hebron’. The Jews of the Padua community, after seeing the collections already made by the emissary, and also hearing ‘that all the communities in our environs’ had already contributed on behalf of these poor, resolved to act in this regard as well, and contributed ‘twenty ducati correnti’. They wrote of this pledge in the emissary’s record book, and instructed him to send the money as soon as possible ‘to the town of Livorno, to R. Ephraim Cassuto’. This is the first item of information preserved in the Padua record book concerning the transfer of funds to Eretz Israel via Livorno, and indicates the turning point which was about to take place in the administration of the fundraising operation for Eretz Israel.

D. 1708-1733 - Winding Up the Fundraising for the Poor of Eretz Israel

During the period between 1708 and 1733 the fundraising carried out by the Italian congregation in Venice for the poor of Eretz Israel gradually wound down. No congregational regulations have been preserved from this period, and all our knowledge is drawn from the summing up of the annual fundraising, which was copied over into the account books of the congregation’s lay leaders.

The collection of the money pledged for Eretz Israel was carried out as before by one of the lay leaders, who was ‘memuneth (in charge) for the poor of Eretz Israel’ during his term of office. Upon concluding his term, he handed over the money, generally without delay, to the lay leader who had served as gabbai ha-
tzedakah (charity collector), and he would enter these sums into the account of the other charity funds (hekdekot). It may be assumed that sooner or later the lay leaders of the congregation found ways to transfer these funds to their destination, but no information in this regard has been preserved in the record book. The ‘General Treasurers’ are not mentioned even once, this post seeming to have vanished completely in Venice. There is as yet no information about emissaries from Eretz Israel visiting the town, initiating the fundraising operation and receiving the funds collected. The total amassed over the twenty-five years under discussion is 1135 livri – a very small sum in comparison with the amounts donated in earlier years, and even in comparison with the last ten years of the previous period, which themselves were years of depression. During those ten years, 5458-5467 (1697-8-1706/7), 745:4 livri were collected, as already noted, whereas now only 552:16 livri were collected during the first decade, 5468-5477 (1707-8-1716/7), and 450:3 livri in the second decade, 5478-5487 (1717-8-1726/7).

The same situation can be seen in these years in the fundraising for Eretz Israel of the Ashkenazi congregation in Venice, as well. In its sources, the ‘General Treasurer’ is mentioned for the last time in 5466 (1705/6); from this year until the beginning of the 1730s a modest fundraising operation was administered, but we have no information as to how the money was transferred to Eretz Israel. Finally, in 1731, we find in the record book of the Italian congregation of Venice the first item, after about a hundred years, of the arrival of an emissary: Samuel Vita Rosanes, emissary of Jerusalem, who received from Rabbi Isaac Pasecino the sum of 67 livri, as first payment of the sum of 100 livri the Italian congregation undertook to contribute every year. The money was collected in the congregation by the ‘gabbai im of Eretz Israel’. A similar entry was written down on 10 January 1733, when the same emissary, Samuel Vita Rosanes, received the sum of 45 livri as an advance payment for the 100 livri contribution of that year. In 1733, we also find, for the first time in the account book of the Ashkenazi congregation in Venice, mention of a contribution given ‘to the emissaries of Eretz Israel, may it speedily be rebuilt’.

The era when Venice was the center of independent, organized fundraising for the poor of Eretz Israel was over. The initiative for such an operation was taken up

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96 Archives of the Jewish Community of Padua, Ms 4, f. 242b: Minutes Book of the Community Council, 19 Tevet 5443 (10 January 1643).
97 Ms IT 9798.
99 in the original: ‘come depurato per Jerusalem’.
100 Pacilico, Rabbi and Court President of the Community of Venice. See also Chirotti, Todesh Gedolot, pp. 147-149; S. Feinstein, The Life and Works of Moses Hayyim Luzzato, Philadelphia 1931, p. 172.
101 According to the original: ‘che andaruino in conto delle L. 100 obbliga detta Scuola Intaliana per Jerusalem’.
102 Ms 8593, f. 131a. This entry and the next one are in Italian.
103 Ibid.
once again by the Jewish leadership in Eretz Israel – either alone or in cooperation with the leadership of other communities, such as Livorno and Amsterdam – and the Jews of Venice no longer played a central and active role in it.

Summary

La "Congregazione italiana" (Qahal ha-Lo'atkin) del ghetto di Venezia fu fondata all'inizio del XVI secolo e comprendeva ebrei abitanti e dell'Italia centro-meridionale. Pur essendo la più piccola e povera tra le quattro congregazioni del ghetto, svolse un'importante attività di raccolta di fondi per le comunità italiane di Erev Yisrael, che per il periodo 1576-1733 è ricostruibile grazie alle quattro fonti documentarie qui preso in esame: i ms. 8593 e 8594 del Jewish Theological Seminary of New York e IT 1098 e IT 1105 degli Archivi Centrali per la Storia del Popolo Ebraico di Gerusalemme. Negli anni 1576-1639 le somme raccolte furono abbonandosi grazie alla prosperità economica della repubblica veneziana: i fondi furono destinati dapprima alla comunità italiana di Safed e a partire dal 1617, con il declinare di quella, genericamente ai poveri delle comunità italiane di tutta Erev Yisrael, cioè in primo luogo per quella di Gerusalemme. Per questo periodo i documenti hanno rivelato nomi precedentemente ignoti di emissari delle comunità palestinesi; è inoltre risultato che nella raccolta dei fondi la Congregazione Italiana agiva autonomamente rispetto all'incarico del sostituto generale (gubbas keliq) che le altre congregazioni veneziane nominavano a questo scopo (e che in questo periodo veniva sempre scelto in seno alla congregazione abitante Venezia). Nel periodo 1644-1663 la congregazione adottò un regolamento che venne istituito la carica di mensahen al maz'et Erev Yisrael (incaricato per i fondi di Erev Yisrael), allo scadere del regolamento l'incarico venne affidato a tre regolatori. Tra il 1664 e il 1707 la raccolta venne gestita dapprima da tre pantasini e poi di nuovo da incaricati singoli (e ciò ufficialmente a partire dal 1683); rispetto ai periodi precedenti i fondi raccolti andarono diminuendo a causa della crisi economica che incominciò a affliggere gli ebrei veneziani. I fondi erano destinati alle comunità di Safed, Gerusalemme e Hebron, ma quest'ultima è menzionata solo nel 1683 e quella di Safed risulta estinta in un documento del 1671. Nel periodo 1708-1733 la raccolta dei fondi continuò a essere condotta da incaricati singoli (a spessione), ma le somme raccolte andarono diminuendo sempre più: alla metà del secolo la raccolta era ormai gestita della leadership ebraica di Erev Yisrael, da sola o in collaborazione con comunità quali Livorno e Amsterdam.

ERRATA CORRIGE

Nell’articolo di O. Andoni, La cronografia dei 70 anni dell’esilio budilense nell’egeesi giudea e cristiana, fasc. 1-2, 1999, pag. 71, tito 9, il riassunto risulta impreciso. La redazione si scusa con l’autrice e con i lettori. Per chiarezza si ristampa di seguito l’intero riassunto dell’articolo.

Summary

This study focuses on the chronographic interpretation of the 70 years of the Babylonian Exile (according to Jct. 25,8-12 and Lach. 1,12-17) in the Jewish and Christian sources. Special attention is paid to the transformation processes of this chronological datum from global (marked only by beginning and ending dates but no internal dates) to addition datum (i.e. broken down into addenda that indicate the flow of time). As the basis of this is the assumption that chronography – specifically because it is a "writing (or re-writing) of the time" – is not a chronology (which implies generally the attempt to work out a scientific dating of historical events), but an "exegetis". As a matter of fact chronography and exegetis share the techniques and the non neutral approach to the text and their data.

As for Jewish literature, we take into consideration Flavio Josephus and the Seder Olam Rabbah. As for Christian literature, we examine Clement of Alexandria, Theophilus of Antioch, Hippolytus (the author of the Commentary on Daniel) and Eusebius; their contributions are analyzed within their respective philological and ideological contexts and evaluated also as expressions of medium to long term interpretative tendencies.

Besides, particular attention is paid to the historical and cultural context in which a midrashic exegetis of the Bible is re-proposed in Tannaitic Judaism as well as in the so called Christian apologetics.