

Bridwell Interlibrary Loan (ISB)
(214) 768-3984 bridill@smu.edu

BRI #: 186193


Borrower: WLU

Lending String: *ISB,VUT,IXA,IXA,XII

Patron: Teter R.A., Halim Rizk

Journal Title: **Henoch.**

Volume: 21 **Issue:** 3

Month/Year: 1999**Pages:** 331-360

Article Author:

Article Title: Daniel Carpi; The activity of the Italian Congregation of Venice on behalf of the Jewish communities of Eretz Israel during the years 1576-1733

Imprint: [Torino]; Marietti Editori, [c1979-

ILL Number: 23544021



Call #: PERIODICAL - -

Location: BRIDWELL LIBRARY

Charge

Maxcost: 35IFM

Shipping Address:

ILL

Wesleyan Univ. Library

252 Church St.

Middletown CT 06459

Fax:

ARIEL: 129.133.36.10

32177015438904

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

Daniel Carpi, *Tel Aviv*

The 'Italian Congregation' of Venice, or – as it was called – *Kahal ha-Lo'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, *Conversos* 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).¹ 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 'Pontentini 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-Va'ad ha-Katon* (the Small Committee), *ha-Kahal ha-Gadol* (the Great Assembly) – as well as a rabbinical council (*ha-Yeshiva ha-Kelalit*), a cemetery, a rabbinical court, and several small institutions for educational and cultural purposes. The special links between the Ashkenazi and *Lo'azim* 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 fundraising 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-Gisbar ha-Kelali* (the General Treasurer), a Jew of their congregation who was put in charge of collecting the donations and transferring them *en bloc* to

¹ Literally 'new foundry'. In Venetian dialect the verb *to found* is 'getar' and the foundry is called *geto* or *getto*; indeed the place in which the Jews were relegated was near a foundry. The word was afterwards turned into *gheto* or *ghetto*. On the ghetto of Venice, see the recent and exhaustive study by B. Ravid, 'Curfew Time in the Ghetto of Venice', in *Medieval and Renaissance Venice*, Urbana and Chicago 1999, pp. 217-275.

Eretz Israel.

Circumstances changed in the second half of the seventeenth century. In Eretz Israel the number of Jews of the Italian community decreased, and they lived mainly in Jerusalem. The two congregations in Venice, the Ashkenazi and the Italian, continued to raise funds separately, but all the money they raised was now handed over to the 'General Treasurer', who was responsible for transferring it to the various communities in Eretz Israel, the Italian and the Ashkenazi communities. From time to time a General Treasurer was also elected from the *Kahal ha-Lo'azim*, during this period, especially from the Volterra family.

Towards the close of the seventeenth century there was a steep decline in the amount of money collected for Eretz Israel, both among the Italians and among the Ashkenazim. The prosperous period of the Jewish community of Venice was drawing to its close, and the economic depression which began to develop in the city during these years was noticeable in the activities for Eretz Israel as well. The General Treasurer continued functioning for a few more years at the behest of both communities, but after the year 1708 he no longer appeared in the written sources, his position having, apparently, been done away with completely. Some time later, no later than the beginning of the 1730s, the initiative was once more in the hands of emissaries from Eretz Israel, from various congregations and communities, who once again visited Venice from time to time to collect from all the city's Jews their portion in assuring the livelihood of the community in Eretz Israel.

Until now, the sources that have been used by scholars studying the activity of the Diaspora in support of the Jewish community in Eretz Israel have mainly been linked to the activities of the emissaries, such as letters of recommendation they secured prior to their departure from the Holy Land or lists and letters they composed while *en route*. These are important sources, mainly for the understanding of the conditions prevalent at the time in Eretz Israel. However, the full significance of the overall activity engaged in over generations in various countries and in many isolated communities – activity which is in itself an evident expression of the connection between the Jewish diaspora communities and between them and Eretz Israel – will not be understood unless it is also studied on the basis of the internal sources of the communities themselves. Only from them is it possible to appreciate the internal logic of this activity and of the ways it was carried out.

A number of papers have already been written in this field, and my intention is merely to add a single chapter concerning the activity of the *Kahal ha-Lo'azim* of Venice for the poor of Eretz Israel. This chapter is almost entirely based upon a few record books from the congregation – accounting books and resolution registries – which were once part of the synagogue archives and are now kept in various manuscript collections in the United States and in Israel. These manuscripts, altogether covering a period of over one hundred and fifty years, between 5335 and 5493 (1574/5 and 1732/3), differ from one another in their quality and in the

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 purposes 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 recordbook 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 Azaria of Melli (mi-Melli).² 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. Italiani* (the Committee of the Italian congregation), where copies of resolutions (*parti*) 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 towards the end of the lifetime of R. Yehudah Aryeh (Leon) Modena – probably by his grandson R. Yitzhak min-Halleviyyim – is also kept in the library of the Theological Seminary in New York (Ms 8594). Some scholars have been aware of its existence,³ 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 accountbook 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 re-

² 'Documents of some Emissaries in Italy at the Beginning of 17th Century', *Kobez al Jad*, vol. 5 (15), Jerusalem 1950, p. 218 (Hebrew).

³ R. Pacifici, 'I regolamenti della Scuola italiana a Venezia nel secolo XVII', *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 5 (1930), pp. 392-402.

port 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 synagogue 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 Azaria of Melli, 'authorized emissary of two Italian communities of Safed, may it speedily be rebuilt', thirty ducats, one *litrin* (libra) and 13 soldi in Venetian coin, i.e., 187 *litrin* and 13 soldi, 'to be distributed among the aforementioned two communities, half to each'.⁴ 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*).⁵ 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

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

⁵ J. Sonne, 'Documents', p. 218. See also A. Ya'ari, *Emissaries from Eretz-Israel*, Jerusalem 1951, p. 384 (Hebrew); A. David, 'Two 16th Century Emissaries' Letters from Jerusalem', *Shalem*, 3 (1981), pp. 331-332 (Hebrew).

if he was born in Italy and even if he was the son of Jews born in Italy.⁶ 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).⁷ 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 half 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.⁸ 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 Aryeh 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 litrin 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', confirmed having received from R. Jacob son of Meir,¹⁴ 'at present lay leader of the Italian congregation here, Venice, the sum of 22 ducati correnti, i.e., 136 litrin 8 soldi'. Neither was it mentioned this time to whom the money was intended, but from the details of the contribution adduced hereunder – also given to R. Israel of Camerino – it is clear that this one, too, was earmarked 'for the poor

⁶ Moshe ben Joseph mi-Trani (Mabith), *Responsa*, Venezia 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. Menachem 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 Ms 8593, f. 2b (10 Yiar 5339 [1579]).

¹¹ Scribe of the congregation. Died 24 Nisan 5381 [1621]. See S. Bernstein, 'Luhot Abanim, Part II', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 10 (1935), p. 505, n. 40.

¹² Probably R. Jacob Corcos mentioned in the *Minutes Book of the Council of the Jewish Community of Padua, 1577-1603*, D. Carpi (ed.), Jerusalem 1973, resolutions nn. 167, 170, 290 for the years 1584-1588 (Hebrew).

¹³ Ms 8593, f. 4b.

¹⁴ Died 12 Tammuz 5378 [1618]. See A. Berliner, *Hebraische Grabschriften in Italien*, Frankfurt a.M. 1881, p. 38, n. 38.

of the Italian community' in Safed.

On the first intermediate day of the Feast of Tabernacles 5356 (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 Tishre' and 5 Marcheshwan 5361 (8 and 13 October 1600) R. Yehudah Aryeh 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, Lo'azim, Levantini and Ponentini – 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 Civald, 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 Aryeh Modena as well, in a letter he sent 'to all communities concerning the halfshekel for Eretz Israel', to encourage them

¹⁵ Ms 8593, f. 6b.

¹⁶ *Letters of Rabbi Leon Modena*, Y. Boksenboim (ed.), Tel Aviv 1984, pp. 209-210 (Hebrew). See also D. Tamari, 'Two New Letters from Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh of Modena Concerning Safed', *Y. F. Baer Jubilee Volume*, Jerusalem 1960, pp. 300-302 (Hebrew).

¹⁷ The resolution was printed at the end of the introduction of R. Baruch Calimani to the R. Moshe Alsheich commentary to the Pentateuch (*Torat Moshe*, Venezia 1601, f. 6b).

to adopt a similar resolution.¹⁸ And, true enough, in one place at least this effort had results.¹⁹ The synagogue of the *Lo'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 *geonim*' 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 not 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.²⁰ At any rate, between Tishre' 5356 (September 1595) and Iyar 5366 (May 1606) no entry was made in the record book that would indicate any *Lo'azim* congregation activity for Eretz Israel.

On 22 Iyar 5366 (29 May 1606), the emissary, R. Yedidia Galante, confirmed having received from R. Shemuel Spira the sum of 23 litrin 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'.²¹

R. Yedidia, 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 5367 (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,²² the twenty-fifth of Shevat [February 22] ... the guest for a night, Yedidia Galante'.²³ R. Yedidia 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. Yedidia 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.²⁴ In 5368 (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.²⁵ Still in 5368, we know of

¹⁸ *Letters of Rabbi Leon Modena*, pp. 215-216.

¹⁹ *Minutes Book of Padua, 1577-1603*, p. 416, resolution n. 746 (25 Tamuz 1602).

²⁰ E. Kupfer, 'The Jewish Community of Safed and the Activity of R. Menahem Azariah of Fano on behalf of the Yishuv in Eretz Israel', *Shalem*, 2 (1976), p. 364 (Hebrew).

²¹ Ms 8593, f.9a. On R. Yedidia Galante, see also Ya'ari, *Emissaries from Eretz Israel*, p. 247.

²² On the activity of the Jewish community of Cuneo on behalf of Eretz Israel, see N. Allony and E. Kupfer, 'Additional Hebrew MSS in the "Ambrosiana"', *Arestet. An Annual of Hebrew Booklore*, 4 (1966), pp. 263-270 (Hebrew); A. David, 'The Assistance of the Community of Cuneo to the Yeshiva of the Provençal Community in Safed', *Shalem*, 4 (1984), pp. 429-444 (Hebrew).

²³ The ruling was printed at the end of his father's book, Moshe Galante, *Responsa*, Venezia 1608, ff. 67-69 (Hebrew).

²⁴ Yehudah Saltaro, *Mikveh Israel*, Venezia 1607, ff. 84b, 85a. 25. See above, note 23.

²⁵ See above, note 23.

R. Yedidia's activity in raising funds among the Jews of Padua for the redemption of captives.²⁶ 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. Yedidia came to the synagogue of the Levantine congregation in the town, and on the Sabbath of the reading of *Parashat Shoftim* (Torah section, 'Judges'), the 6 Elul 5769 (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.²⁷ A few years later, R. Yedidia was involved in a strange affair when he came to visit the renowned doctor, R. Eliahu 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 sat up in bed and began to scream loudly ... in the Spanish tongue: "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'.²⁸ 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. Yedidia 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: 'Isach Mazavd') 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 litrin' and sent it on to Safed 'that same year' by a boat named Barcon Sansen.²⁹ A

²⁶ *Minutes Book of the Council of the Jewish Community of Padua, 1603-1630*, D. Carpi (ed.), Jerusalem 1979, p. 96, resolution n. 177 (3 Sivan 1608) (Hebrew).

²⁷ The announcement was published by Sonne, 'Documents', pp. 209-212. See also M. Benayahu, *Copyright, Authorization and Imprimatur for Hebrew Books Printed in Venice*, Jerusalem 1971, pp. 35-38 (Hebrew).

²⁸ *Ari Nohem*, N.S. Libowitz (ed.), Jerusalem 1929, p. 80.

²⁹ Ms 8593, f. 13b.

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. Yehudah Volterra himself, 'in the name of the Italian congregation as *gabbai*'.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 '*gabbai* 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 *nacao portuguesa* (Portuguese nation) of the town. Another scion of the same family, R. Shemuel 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. Yehudah 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: Shemuel Mas'ud (in the original: Samuel Mazavd) confirmed having received from the *Parnasim* (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'ad* (committee) of the Jewish community of Rome, which was worded as follows: 'On the eighth day of Sivan 5377, 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: Shemuel 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. Shemuel 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 synagogue; 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. Shemuel 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-Hazzanim (Cantarini).³⁷ His signature appears on the writs 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 *Horvot Yerushalayim*,³⁹ and he was one of the 'rabbis of the provinces of It-

³³ See D. Koifmann, 'A Letter sent from the Holy City to Carpi the Year 385' (1624/5), *Jerusalem, Me'asef Sifrut le-Hakirat Eretz ha-Kodesh*, 5 (1928), pp. 74-88 (Hebrew).

³⁴ Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, Ms 4026, f. 5b.

³⁵ Ms 8593, f. 14b. In the original: 'come *מזבונת* di la Caseta de *מא* de deto cahal'.

³⁶ M.S. Ghironi, *Toledot Gedole' Israel*, Trieste 1853, p. 323, n.12. 37.

³⁷ *Pachad Yitzhak*, Amsterdam 1685, p. 10.

³⁸ Benayahu, *Copyright*, pp. 268, 274, 278.

³⁹ [Anonymous author], Venezia 1631, f. 12a. A new, critical edition of the book has been pub-

³⁰ Ms 8593, f. 13b. In the original: 'per nome del ק"ק di taliani come gaba'.

³¹ Ms 8593, f. 15a. In the original: 'alli poveri dil *ארץ ישראל* חוביב *ק"ק* אישליני אשר בארץ *ארץ ישראל* חוביב'.

³² See M. Rozen, 'On the Relation between the Jewish Communities of Jerusalem and Safed in the Seventeenth Century', *Jerusalem in the Early Ottoman Period*, Jerusalem 1979, pp. 152-195 (Hebrew).

aly' who signed a ruling regarding 'the prohibition of processing phylactery straps already processed for ulterior motives'.⁴⁰ With regard to his activity on behalf of the poor of Eretz 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'.⁴¹ R. Shmuel Mas'ud passed away on the 23 Heshvan 5409 (8 November 1648), and was lamented by the poet Jacob Francis.⁴²

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. Yitzhak of Osimo, may God preserve him, *gabbai* 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).⁴³ 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",⁴⁴ and this inscription provides this assumption of his with real support. In 5378 (1617/8) R. Menahem Lonzano had his book, *Shre' Yadot*, printed in Venice, and for this purpose had need of financial assistance from individuals. It is possible that the aforesaid 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 Leria 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,⁴⁵ ten and a half ducati in Venetian coin, i.e., 65 litrin and 2 soldi.⁴⁶ 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. No other mention of their joint activity in Italy has been found. R. Jehoseph of Leria and R. Joseph ibn Aroyo set out with a letter of recommendation dated 17 Av 5397 (7 August 1637) and signed by nine rabbis of Safed. Since a copy of this letter has been preserved in the archives of the community of Mantua, it may be assumed that they visited that town as well.⁴⁷ R. Jehoseph of Leria is mentioned by R. Hayyim Joseph David Azulai, who bears witness to having seen 'in the book *Shlom ha-Bayit* by the late Maharam Cases,⁴⁸ in manuscript form, that the aforementioned rabbi [R. Jehoseph of Leria] approved of it when he was on a mission on behalf of the holy town of Safed, in the year 5399 (1638/9)'.⁴⁹ Similarly, R. Jehoseph argued halakhic affairs with R. Shmuel Aboab, who published a number of his *responsa* (responses) to him.⁵⁰ He stayed in Italy on his mission up until the middle of 5402 (1642).⁵¹ He died in Safed in 5414 (1653/4), and one of the sons of R. Joseph of Trani eulogized him in Constantinople upon hearing of his demise.⁵²

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 Eretz 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 Eretz 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 Eretz 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-

lished by M. Rozen (Tel Aviv 1981).

⁴⁰ S. Aboab, *Devar Shmuel*, Venezia 1702, f. 8b.

⁴¹ *Letters of R. Leon Modena*, p. 221.

⁴² Bernstein, *Lubot Abanim*, p. 543, n. 128.

⁴³ Ms 8593, f. 15b.

⁴⁴ Ya'ari, *Emissaries from Eretz-Israel*, p. 232. On R. Menahem Lonzano, see also Sonne, 'Documents', pp. 197-204.

⁴⁵ Possibly the husband of the poetess Sarah Coppio Sullam.

⁴⁶ Ms 8593, f. 157b.

⁴⁷ S. Simonsohn, 'Emissaries from Safed to Mantua in the 17th and 18th Centuries', *Sefunot*, 6 (1962), p. 330 (Hebrew).

⁴⁸ Morenu ha-Rav Menahem Cases.

⁴⁹ *Shem ha-Gedolim*, Vilna 1853, f. 41a, n. 149.

⁵⁰ *Devar Shmuel*, nn. 24-26, 29-31, 34-35, 37-38, 68.

⁵¹ M. Benayahu, *Letters of R. Shmuel Aboab and R. Moshe Zacut and their followers about Eretz-Israel*, Jerusalem 1955, p. 32 (first published in *Yerushalayim*, 8 [1955], n. 2-5 [Hebrew]).

⁵² H. Bentov, 'Autobiographical and Historical Register of Rabbi Josef Trani', *Shalem*, 1 (1974), p. 198 (Hebrew).

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 Usocchi, 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 5361 (1600/1), when the Jewish community of Venice decided to impose a tax of 'half a shekel', and again in 5377 (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.⁵³ 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 – Yedidia Galante, Menahem de Lonzano, and Jehoseph of Leria – while others are names of people not known from other sources – Menahem Azaria of Melli, Israel of Camerino and Joseph ibn 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 published⁵⁴ – except for the pair Jehoseph of Leria and Joseph ibn 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

⁵³ See above, note 34.

⁵⁴ Simonsohn, 'Emissaries from Safed', pp. 229-354; D. Carpi, 'The Activity of the Jewish Community of Padua on Behalf of the Poor of Eretz Israel (1584-1620)', *Raphael Mahler Jubilee Volume*, Merhaviva 1974, pp. 24-46 (Hebrew).

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 *Lo'azim* 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 *Gisbar Kelali* (General Treasurer), the Venetian Jew in charge of the activity on behalf of Eretz Israel. The three 'General Treasurers' appointed during this period whose names have been preserved – R. Shemuel Yehudah Katznelbogen, R. Yehudah Leib Seraval, and R. Simha (Simone) Luzatto⁵⁵ – 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 cash-box'. 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 Aryeh Modena to the sages of Safed.⁵⁶ 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 thaler and 6 'small litrin'.⁵⁷ 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 (1616/7-1617/8) 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-

⁵⁵ Carpi, 'The Activity of the Community of Padua', pp. 31-33.

⁵⁶ *Letters of R. Leon Modena*, p. 221.

⁵⁷ Carpi, 'The Activity of the Community of Padua', pp. 33-36.

pletely. 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.⁵⁸ 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 *Lo'azim* Synagogue in Venice adopted a new list of regulations known as *Torath ha-regolation libne' K.K. Italiani*, to be in force for ten years from 1 Elul 5404 (2 September 1644).⁵⁹ This list of regulations, which takes up the first eighteen pages of the record book of the *Va'ad 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 *gab-baim*, *ha-memuneh 'al shemen la-ma'or* (the official in charge of oil for light), *ha-memuneh 'al ma'oth Eretz Israel* (the official in charge of Eretz Israel funds),⁶⁰ *hagisbar ne'eman ha-scrinio*⁶¹ (the treasurer responsible for the casket).

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

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 *regoladori* wrote the new regulations: Shabtai Sezze, Abraham Melli, Mordechai son of R. Simha [Luzzatto], Yitzhak son of Yehudah Volterra.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 8.

⁶¹ Scrigno.

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 *gabbai'im* of the community of Safed, the elderly R. Joseph Aboab and the scholarly R. Abraham ibn Yakar'.⁶² The significance of this is that in that year there were special *gabbai'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 *scrigno*'). The latter

⁶² Archives of the Jewish Community of Padua, Ms 2b: Minutes Book of the Community Council, 6 Kislev 5404 (16 November 1643).

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 passed' 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 *reggimentii*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

⁶³ Ms 8594, f. 33 (eve of Purim 5408).

⁶⁴ Terms of office.

⁶⁵ Probably son of Yehudah Volterra (see above, note 60).

⁶⁶ Ms 8594, f. 44 (12 Shevat 5410).

none other than ... the congregation itself. It seems that the lay leaders of the congregation had borrowed the sum of 343 litrin 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 litrin 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 litrin 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 litrin 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 Morteira, '*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 litrin] 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

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 45 (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 Iyar 5414 (22 April 1654), the congregation committee appointed four *regoladori* (regulation formulators)⁷⁰ 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 their peak: the Jews in distress were obliged to abandon their town, and the community was desolate for four years, 1655-1658. When the town was re-

⁷⁰ They were: Abraham Perugino, Hizkyiah Levi, Shelomo Porto, Yitzhak Volterra.

⁷¹ Ms 8594, f. 58.

⁷² Period in which an official was ineligible for reelection after the conclusion of his term.

stored 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 rabbi of Safed, which stated explicitly that 'whatever is donated and pledged should be sent to our teacher, Rabbi Shelomo Hai Seraval', the *Gisbar Kelali* (General Treasurer) in charge of transferring funds contributed to Eretz Israel.⁷³ A similar statement appearing in the recommendation the rabbi 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 *regoladori* 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 *scrigno*'. 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

⁷³ M. Benayahu, 'News about Safed from the Time of the Repopulation, 1658-1678', *Sinai*, 43 (1958), pp. 111-112 (Hebrew).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113. The Venetian rabbis who signed the recommendation were: R. Ya'acov son of Moshe ha-Levi, R. Shelomo Hai son of Nehemiah Seraval, R. Moshe son of Ya'acov Treves, R. Moshe son of Mordechai Zacut. On the Joseph Mataron mission, see also Simonsohn, 'Emissaries from Safed', p. 331.

⁷⁵ Ms 8594, ff. 79-101. The new list of regulations was to be in force from 1 Elul 5423 (3 September 1663); the *regoladori* were: Abraham Melli, Ya'acov son of Raphael of Ancona, Ya'acov son of Moshe Volterra.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 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 *Gisbar Kelali*, 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 Israel, were preserved; they can be used to study, from this point on, how the resolutions 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 permanent fashion in the Italian congregation of Venice on behalf of Eretz Israel. This fundraising had three main sources: donations made by *iehidim* (individuals), regular worshippers in the synagogue; money amassed in the *bossoli*, the two collection boxes for Eretz Israel; and contributions made by *hizonim*, occasional worshippers, women and guests from out of town. Those in charge of the fundraising were now the three *parnasim* of the congregation who, at the onset of the period under discussion, filled this position on a rotating basis, in accordance with the regulations in force from the beginning of Elul 5423 (September 1663). This system, however, did not work in practice and so did not last long. The frequent interchanging of functions made it difficult for the lay leaders to perform their duty and, apparently, did nothing to enhance the administration of the fundraising operations. A few years later, the fundraising on behalf of Eretz Israel was, to all intents and purposes, concentrated in the hands of a single lay leader for an entire year, and this change was officially sanctioned in the regulations adopted in the year 5444 (1683), which ruled that 'the third elected lay leader will also be in charge of Eretz Israel', i.e., one lay leader for his entire term of office.⁷⁸

The total amount of contribution money collected during the fortyfour years under discussion came to 4149:17 litrin, according to the entries in the record

book, i.e., less than one hundred litrin per annum on the average, but this sum alone does not reflect the entire contribution made during this period for a number of reasons. First, for two years, 5435 and 5436 (1674/5-1675/6), the sums contributed were not copied into the record book. The aforementioned sum is thus the amount contributed over a period of forty-two, and not fortyfour, years. Second, it is not certain that the sums entered into the record book each year reflected all the various kinds of contributions made for Eretz Israel - *iehidim*, *bossoli* and *hizonim*. On the contrary, there are clear indications that here and there, though infrequently, one of these contributions was for some reason or other not entered into the record book.⁷⁹ Third, and mainly, the aforesaid sum is the total amount of contributions both pledged and collected during the annual term of office of the *parnas memuneh* (lay leader in charge of Eretz Israel). Every year, however, there were *iehidim* 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 period 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

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 Heshwan 5444 (11 November 1683). The *regoladori* were: Simha son of Mordechai (Luzzatto), Yizhak Roques, Ya'acob son of Moshe Volterra.

⁷⁹ For example, in the years 5433 (1672/3), 5459 (1698/9), 5463 (1702/3).

⁸⁰ Ff. 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 'Treasurer of Eretz Israel' (*Gisbar me-Eretz Israel*). Two transfers were exceptions to this rule, one of 105 litrin and the other of 74:4, 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' *Darcho' No'am*, by R. Mordechai ha-Levi.⁸² 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,⁸³ who served in this post in 5430, 5434, 5440, 5445, 5448, 5450 and 5452 (1669/70, 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 treasurers 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'.⁸⁴ 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).⁸⁵ 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,⁸⁶ the central role in the various stages of the

⁸² Printed in Venice 5457 (1696/7). See also Ya'ari, *Emissaries from Eretz Israel*, p. 313.

⁸³ On the activity of R. Moshe Aharon Volterra on behalf of the poor of Eretz Israel, see also D. Carpi, 'The Activity of the "Scola Grande Tedesca" of Venice on Behalf of the Jewish Communities of Eretz Israel (1642-1788)', in the Proceedings of the Conference "The Jews of Italy: Memory and Identity", London 1995 (in press); Ya'ari, *Emissaries from Eretz Israel*, pp. 313-314, 318, 320.

⁸⁴ The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, Ms 3594, f. 42b; Carpi, 'The Activity of the "Scola Grande Tedesca"' (above note 83).

⁸⁵ Carpi, 'The Activity of the "Scola Grande Tedesca"' (above note 83); Benayahu, *Copyright*, p. 132. R. Jacob of Cracovia died in Chislev 5479 (November-December 1718), see R. Pacifici, *Le iscrizioni dell'antico cimitero ebraico a Venezia*, Alessandria d'Egitto 1936, p. 124.

⁸⁶ Archives of the Jewish Community of Padua, Ms 6, f. 3b: 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',⁸⁷ 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 (1664/5) 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 - 136:4 litrin contributed during the year 5429 (1668/9), and 137:12 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

Council, 18 Teveth 5465 (14 January 1705); Simonsohn, 'Emissaries from Safed', p. 332; Benayahu, *Letters of R. Shmuel Aboab*, p. 21.

⁸⁷ Carpi, 'The Activity of the "Scola Grande Tedesca"', above note 83.

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 fulfil 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).⁸⁸ 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 5399 (1575/6-1638/9) the money was sent regularly to 'the Italian community' in Safed, and on rare occasions to this 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 times⁸⁹ 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,

⁸⁸ Ms 8594, f. 120a.

⁸⁹ Twice in 5434 (1673/4) and once in 5445 (1684/5).

the '*Nassi ve-av beit ha-din* (Court President) R. Or Shraga named Weibish,⁹⁰ and his assistant of true value *be-hacham ha-shalem* R. Jehoshua son of R. Samuel Nantua',⁹¹ to inform them of a contribution of forty Spanish reals, which was sent to them at that time via R. Aaron Volterra.

You should know – the lay leaders of Venice write – that the resolution of our community was to send them and to distribute them to 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 Uzzia Finzi, and of R. Tuv El Cohen, and of R. Menahem Camerino, distribute to them according to their eminence as you see fit.⁹²

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 six⁹³ 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 Volterra, 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.⁹⁴

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

⁹⁰ See Ya'ari, *Emisaries from Eretz Israel*, pp. 285, 846.

⁹¹ See Benayahu, *Letters of R. Shmuel Aboab*, 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.⁹⁵ 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 Casiuto'.⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷

The collection of the money pledged for Eretz Israel was carried out as before by one of the lay leaders, who was 'memuneh (in charge) for the poor of Eretz Israel' during his term of office. Upon concluding his term, he handed over the

⁹⁵ Benayahu, *Letters of R. Shmuel Aboab*, pp. 9-57; Simonsohn, 'Emissaries from Safed', pp. 330-332.

⁹⁶ Archives of the Jewish Community of Padua, Ms 4, f. 242b: Minutes Book of the Community Council, 19 Teveth 5443 (10 January 1643).

⁹⁷ Ms IT 9798.

money, generally without delay, to the lay leader who had served as *gabbai ba-tzedakah* (charity collector), and he would enter these sums into the account of the other charity funds (*hekdesb*). 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 litrin – 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 litrin were collected, as already noted; whereas now only 552:16 litrin were collected during the first decade, 5468-5477 (1707/8-1716/7), and 450:3 litrin 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.⁹⁸ 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,⁹⁹ who received from Rabbi Isacco Pasefico¹⁰⁰ the sum of 67 litrin, as first payment of the sum of 100 litrin the Italian congregation undertook to contribute every year.¹⁰¹ The money was collected in the congregation by 'the *gabbai'im* of Eretz Israel'.¹⁰² A similar entry was written down on 10 January 1733, when the same emissary, Samuel Vita Rosanes, received the sum of 45 litrin as an advance payment for the 100 litrin contribution of that year.¹⁰³ 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

⁹⁸ Carpi, 'The Activity of the "Scola Grande Tedesca"', above note 83.

⁹⁹ In the original: 'come deputado por Jerusalem'.

¹⁰⁰ Pasefico, Rabbi and Court President of the Community of Venice. See also Ghironi, *Toledot Gedole' Israel*, pp. 147-149; S. Ginzburg, *The Life and Works of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto*, Philadelphia 1931, p. 172.

¹⁰¹ According to the original: 'che andarano in conto delle L. 100 obligata detta Scola Italiana 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'azim) del ghetto di Venezia fu fondata all'inizio del XVI secolo e comprendeva ebrei ashkenaziti e dell'Italia centro-meridionale. Pur essendo la più piccola e povera tra le quattro congregazioni del ghetto, svolse un'attività di raccolta di fondi per le comunità italiane di Eretz Yisrael, che per il periodo 1576-1733 è ricostruibile grazie alle quattro fonti documentarie qui prese in esame: i mss. 8593 e 8594 del Jewish Theological Seminary di New York e IT 1098 e 1105 degli Archivi Centrali per la Storia del Popolo Ebraico di Gerusalemme. Negli anni 1576-1639 le somme raccolte furono abbondanti grazie alla prosperità economica della repubblica veneta: 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 Eretz 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 tesoriere generale (gisbar kelali) che le altre congregazioni veneziane nominavano a questo scopo (e che in questo periodo veniva sempre scelto in seno alla congregazione ashkenazita). Nel periodo 1644-1663 la congregazione adottò un regolamento in cui veniva istituita la carica di memuneh 'al ma'ot Eretz Yisrael (incaricato per i fondi di Eretz Yisrael); allo scadere del regolamento l'incarico venne affidato a tre regoladori. Tra il 1664 e il 1707 la raccolta venne gestita dapprima da tre parnasim 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 cominciava ad 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 (memunim), ma le somme raccolte andarono diminuendo sempre più: alla metà del secolo la raccolta era ormai gestita dalla leadership ebraica di Eretz Yisrael, da sola o in collaborazione con comunità quali Livorno e Amsterdam.

ERRATA CORRIGE

Nell'articolo di O. Andrei, *La cronografia dei 70 anni dell'esilio babilonese nell'esegesi giudaica e cristiana*, fasc. 1-2, 1999, pag. 71, riga 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 Jer. 25,8-12 and Zach. 1,12-17) in the Jewish and Christian sources. Special attention is paid to the transformation processes of this chronological datum from global (marked off 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). At 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 "exegesis". As a matter of fact chronography and exegesis share the techniques and the non neutral approach to the texts and their data.

As for Jewish literature, we take into consideration Flavius 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 analysed 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 exegesis of the Bible is re-proposed in Tannaitic Judaism as well as in the so called Christian apologetics.