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ABRAHAM MELAMED

THE PERCEPTION OF JEWISH HISTORY IN ITALIAN  
JEWISH THOUGHT OF THE SIXTEENTH AND  
SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES. A RE-EXAMINATION \*

1. There is a long standing debate among scholars as to the degree to which Renaissance historiography influenced the perception of Jewish history among Jewish scholars in Italy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This debate is essential to determining the basic question of whether sixteenth century Jewish historiography was still essentially « medieval », or if it broke away, in some significant aspects, from the medieval historical view, and initiated the development of modern Jewish historiography.

The two opposing basic positions were presented in the standard histories of Italian Renaissance Jewry. Shulvass stated, a little uncritically, that « the development of Jewish Renaissance historiography paralleled that of the Italian in scope and depth »<sup>1</sup>. Cecil Roth held the opposing opinion, that « although there was an unquestionable revival of interest in history among Italian Jews in the Renaissance period, this expressed itself through the medium of episodic chronicles, in the medieval style, rather than in comprehensive histories in the modern sense, such as Machiavelli and Guicciardini had by now introduced to European literature »<sup>2</sup>.

Basically following Shulvass, Ben Sasson attributed the flourishing of Jewish historiography during this period to two chronologically parallel developments. The first was internal, the Iberian catastrophe, which served as an impetus to Jewish historiography. It produced the urge to comprehend the causes, meaning and effects of the catastrophe as an integral part of Jewish history.

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\* I deliberately did not use here the problematic term « Renaissance » since I did not want to get involved in the debate about the meaning and chronological limits of this period, especially as far as Jewish culture in Italy is concerned. The neutral terms « 16th and 17th centuries » seem to be more appropriate in this context.

<sup>1</sup> M. A. SHULVASS, *The Jews in the World of the Renaissance*, translated by E. I. Kose, Leiden 1973, p. 296.

<sup>2</sup> C. ROTH, *The Jews in the Renaissance*, Philadelphia 1964, pp. 310-311.

The second development was external: the humanist culture in Italy, and in particular the development of Renaissance historiography, which provided Jewish scholars with a new conceptual framework in which to consider the meaning of Jewish history and its destination. The coincidence of these two developments provided the basis for a new approach to Jewish history. According to this opinion, it was not at all accidental that the Jewish historiography of this period flourished mainly in Italy, where these two developments coincided. Some of the great historians of the period were Jewish exiles from Spain and Portugal and their descendants who settled in Italy. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, some native-born Italian Jewish thinkers joined the debate about the course and meaning of Jewish history<sup>3</sup>.

Following Shulvass' enthusiasm about the extent to which Renaissance culture influenced the various aspects of Jewish life, including the historical outlook, Baer almost obsessively searched for the influence of Renaissance historiography in his studies of the historical viewpoints of Abravanel and Ibn Verga<sup>4</sup>.

However, Netanyahu has already shown that the sources of Abravanel's historical worldview are mainly to be sought in medieval theology rather than in Renaissance historiography<sup>5</sup>. Clearly, Abravanel, who, at the end of the fifteenth century, in old age, settled in Italy, could not be as yet meaningfully influenced by Renaissance historiography as it was still in the early stages of its development. It is possible, however, to detect some influences from the broad spectrum of Renaissance humanist ideas upon his political and historical observations<sup>6</sup>.

As for Ibn Verga, Baer assumed that after the expulsion of the Jews from Portugal he came to Italy where he wrote his *Shebeth Yehudah* under the influence of Renaissance culture, including his contemporaries Machiavelli

<sup>3</sup> H. H. BEN SASSON, *Le 'Megamot ha 'Cronographia ha 'Yehudit shel Yemei ha 'Beinaim u 'Beayoteha*, in *Historionim ve 'Ascolot Historiot*, Jerusalem 1973, pp. 32-33. Also in M. A. MEYER (ed.), *Ideas of Jewish History*, New York 1974, p. 17 [editor's introduction]; A. DAVID, R. Gedalya, *Ibn Yabya's 'Shalshelet ha'Kabbalah*. A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Historiography, in «Immanuel», 12, Spring 1981, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> I. BAER, *He'arot Hadasot le'Sefer Shebeth Yehudah*, in «Tarbiz», 6 (1934-1935), pp. 152-179; ID., *Don Isaac Abravanel ve' Yabaso el Ba'ayot ha' Historia ve'ha' Medina*, *ibid.*, 8 (1937), p. 245; ID., introduction to S. IBN VERGA, *Shebeth Yehudah*, ed. A. SHOHAT, Jerusalem 1947, pp. 11-13. Also in his *Galut*, New York 1947, pp. 77 ff.. The same opinion also in A. A. NEUMAN, *The Shebeth Yehudah and Sixteenth Century Historiography*, Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume, New York 1945, pp. 253-273.

<sup>5</sup> B. NETANYAHU, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman and Philosopher*, II, Philadelphia 1972, esp. pp. 148-149.

<sup>6</sup> I. BAER, *Don Isaac Abravanel ve'Yabaso...* cit.; B. NETANYAHU, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman...* cit., pp. 166-173; A. MELAMED, *The Myth of Venice in Italian Renaissance Jewish Thought*, in *Italia Judaica. Atti del I Convegno internazionale. Bari, 18-22 maggio 1981*, Roma 1983, pp. 401-413, and see below.

and Guicciardini<sup>7</sup>. New research, however, has found that Ibn Verga never came to Italy. After the expulsion he went directly to Flanders where he soon died<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the problem of Ibn Verga's sources is still a puzzle. Reading his *Shebeth Yehudah* it is easy to come to the conclusion that there was a noticeable influence of Renaissance historiography upon his conception of Jewish history, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Baer did so<sup>9</sup>. However, the new findings have reopened the question of Ibn Verga's sources.

On the other hand, Salo Baron, in his studies of Azariah de' Rossi's *Weltanschauung* and historical method, accepted Roth's opposing assessment. In his view, even de' Rossi, who is traditionally viewed as the most advanced Jewish historian of the period, is still essentially « medieval », in comparison with contemporary Italian historians, whose achievements carried Renaissance historiography far beyond the medieval historical viewpoint<sup>10</sup>.

Lately, Yerushalmi has reopened this debate. In his reevaluation of Jewish historiography of the sixteenth century, he came to the conclusion, echoing Roth, that aside from some secondary influences « We do not find that the spirit of Italian humanist historiography was absorbed into sixteenth century Jewish historiography »<sup>11</sup>. Yerushalmi maintains that the reasons for the resurgence of Jewish historical writings in the sixteenth century are to be sought in causes which are imminent in Jewish history<sup>12</sup>.

Yerushalmi's point of view caused him great difficulties when he came to grip with Azariah de' Rossi's *Meor Einaim*. Unlike Baron, he could not

<sup>7</sup> I. BAER, *Don Isaac Abravanel ve'Yabaso...* cit., repeated by A.A. NEUMAN, *The Shebeth Yehudah...* cit., p. 259.

<sup>8</sup> M. BENAYAHU, *Makor al Megorashey Sefarad be'Portugal ve'zetam aharey Gezerat RaSav le'Salonoki*, in « Sefunot », 11 (1971), pp. 233-263. See also Y.H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews: Reflections on Jewish Historiography in the Sixteenth Century*, in « Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research », I, 46-47, part II, p. 622, reprinted in his *Zakhor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Washington 1982, pp. 53-75.

<sup>9</sup> Yerushalmi, however, in the context of his basic position (see nn. 11 e 12) argues that « If there are external influences in his book they should be sought, as I have long supposed, in the Iberian cultural milieu, that was closest to him » (p. 622). The « Iberian cultural milieu », however, was probably already influenced by the culture of the Italian Renaissance; see S.W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method*, in his collected essays *History and Jewish Historians*, Philadelphia 1964, p. 424, n. 9. See also Y.H. YERUSHALMI, *The Lisbon Massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the « Shebeth Yehudah »*, in « Hebrew Union College Annual », Supplement no. 1, Cincinnati 1976.

<sup>10</sup> S.W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Attitude to Life*, in *Jewish Studies in Memory of I. Abrahams*, New York 1927, p. 43, and mainly in his *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit., pp. 205-239, which is a revised translation of his *La Méthode Historique d'Azaria de' Rossi*, in « Revue des Études Juives », 86 (1928), pp. 151-175, 87 (1929), pp. 43-78.

<sup>11</sup> Y.H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., p. 622.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

deny the great influence of Renaissance historiography upon de' Rossi's historical views<sup>13</sup>. Thus, Yerushalmi had to admit that de' Rossi's book « presents special problems »<sup>14</sup>. He solved these problems by presenting de' Rossi as an exception<sup>15</sup>.

In Baron's view, de' Rossi, the leading Jewish historian of the period, remained essentially « medieval », just like his lesser contemporaries. For Yerushalmi, de' Rossi was exceptionally « modern » in comparison with his basically « medieval » contemporaries. I shall argue, however, that de' Rossi, although the most daring Jewish historian of the period, still was only one representative of a new trend in Jewish historical thought, who attempted to reevaluate the meaning of Jewish history as a result of the effects of the Iberian catastrophe and the influences of Renaissance historiography<sup>16</sup>.

It seems that Yerushalmi came to his conclusion, erroneous in my view, since he consulted only sources which are historiographical in the limited sense of the term, and disregarded other contemporary literary Italian Jewish genres containing historical observations. He also limited himself to the sixteenth century, while the contemporary reevaluation of the meaning of Jewish history continued well into the seventeenth century. In addition, Yerushalmi barely related to the conflicting currents in the development of Italian historiography of the sixteenth century, which possibly influenced contemporary Jewish historiography, and as such may shed new light on its development. Yerushalmi's insistence that the flourishing of Jewish historical thought of the period was related only to developments internal to Jewry, can not explain the fact that this phenomenon centred mainly in Italy. Only when we take into consideration the influence of Renaissance historiography can this fact be properly explained.

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Thus, my study will attempt to re-examine the whole issue. It rests upon the methodological assumption that, generally speaking, historical and intellectual developments within Jewry can not be sufficiently explained without relating them to external influences. This is even more the case when dealing with the Renaissance and post-Renaissance Jewish community in Italy, which was more open to influences of the external culture than any other Jewish community before the Enlightenment. Since, in general, Renaissance culture profoundly

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<sup>13</sup> Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., also p. 632.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 620; also p. 632: « Azariah's experiment, however, remained his alone, there were no heirs to his method ».

<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note that Shulvass, who emphasized the influence of Renaissance historiography upon Jewish historians, used the example of de' Rossi, while Roth, arguing that there was no substantial influence of Renaissance historiography does not mention de' Rossi at all in this context; above, nn. 1 e 2.

influenced contemporary Jewish thought and culture, its influence should be noticeable in particular in Jewish scholars' perception of the meaning and direction of Jewish history.

The focus of this study is not Jewish historiography in the limited sense of the term, that is, the attempt to record the events of the human past which are deemed worthy of remembrance, but mainly historiosophy, that is, the idea of history, and in our case, the attempt to understand the meaning and direction of Jewish history. The two should not be confused, although there is an intrinsic connection between them<sup>17</sup>. This study also considers the then new historical and literary sources and methodological tools utilized by contemporary Jewish scholars, in their endeavour to understand the meaning of Jewish history.

Thus, the sources consulted for this study were not limited to Jewish histories written during this period, like those of Joseph ha'Kohen, Azariah de' Rossi, Gedaliah ibn Yahiah of Elijah Capsali, but also to other branches of Jewish literature of the period, like the writings of Don Isaac Abravanel, Abraham Portaleone, Leone da Modena and Simone Luzzatto. All of these sources were considered relevant in attempting to detect the influences of Renaissance historiography upon the Jewish conception of Jewish history.

Now, it would be hazardous to maintain that every Jewish thinker and historian of the period was automatically influenced by the new trends in the historical *Weltanschauung*, and thus to obsessively detecting the latter influence on every text. Baer's and Shulvass' overestimation of the influence of Renaissance historiography upon Jewish historians are cases in point.

However, the fact that there was an ever growing influence of the new Renaissance perception of human history upon Jewish thinkers' assessment of their own history can not be denied. They somehow tried, often in vain, to create a composite picture from the medieval tradition which they inherited and the new Renaissance conception of human history. This was the case with all the cultural fields which occupied Italian Jewish thinkers of the period.

The aim of this study is to show how the methodology, sources and historiosophic conceptions of Renaissance historiography influenced Jewish thinkers and contributed to a new approach towards the study of Jewish history. This will be attempted by exploring the possible influence of three major aspects of Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italian historiography upon the Jewish scholars' conception of Jewish history in its development, from the early sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century.

2. One of the main attributes of Renaissance historiography was the attempt to give natural and rational explanations to historical occurrences in

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<sup>17</sup> Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., pp. 610-613.

place of the theological reasoning which was prevalent in the medieval view of history. This amounts almost to the secularization of history. Medieval God-centred history was gradually replaced by modern man-centred history<sup>18</sup>.

Likewise, some Jewish thinkers of the period, though they never totally gave up the theological explanation of historical occurrences, were clearly influenced by this trend in Renaissance historiography, and applied it to their study of Jewish history.

The fact that they were still heavily dependent on the Divine factor in history, does not necessarily mean that they were still essentially « medieval », as some scholars have concluded<sup>19</sup>. These Jewish thinkers could never give up the belief in the central role Divine Providence has to play in the course of history, not because they were still « medieval », but rather because they were Jewish. Only after the Enlightenment would some Jewish historians totally disregard the Divine factor in history.

Moreover, it would be inaccurate to assume that Italian Renaissance and Counter-Reformation totally gave up the belief in Divine influence. Even historians of the « secular » Florentine school, like Machiavelli, Guicciardini and their followers, at times had to resort to the influence of fortune, the « pagan » equivalent of Divine Providence, whenever natural causality was insufficient in order to explain historical phenomena. Their counterparts in the so-called Roman school of Counter-Reformation historiography, defending the Papal cause, were still heavily dependent on the Divine factor in history. However, it would be misleading to label them « medieval » just because of this.

True, Jewish historians of the period would never go as far as the Italian historian of the late sixteenth century, Paulo Beni, who declared that « Divination and prophecy had nothing to do with history, properly speaking »<sup>20</sup>. However, the very fact that in addition to Divine Providence, some of them gave also natural and rational explanations to historical occurrences marks a new, definitely « non-medieval » step in the development of Jewish historiography.

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<sup>18</sup> B. ULLMAN, *Leonardo Bruni and Humanist Historiography*, in « *Medievalia et Humanistica* », 6 (1946), p. 55; B. NETANYAHU, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman...* cit., p. 148.

<sup>19</sup> Above, nn. 2 and 10.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by G. SPINI, *The Art of History in the Italian Counter-Reformation, in The Late Italian Renaissance*, New York 1970, p. 111. On the whole issue, see also W. J. BOUWSMA, *Three Types of Historiography in Post-Renaissance Italy*, in « *History and Theory* », 4 (1965), pp. 303-314; J. A. MAZZEO, *Renaissance and Revolution. The remaking of European thought*, London 1967, p. 85; P. BURKE, *Tradition and Experience: The Idea of Decline from Bruni to Gibbon*, in « *Dedalus* », 105 (1976), p. 142.

Even Abravanel, despite his still essentially medieval conception of Jewish history, at times utilized the natural laws of history as explanation. In the introduction to his *Commentary on the Books of Kings*, he explained the gradual disintegration of the Kingdoms of Israel and Juda and their subsequent exile, by the organic theory of the state, which was basic to the Renaissance theory of historical decline<sup>21</sup>.

Abravanel described the death of all living organisms as a gradual process which proceeds from the outer and secondary organs to the inner and more important ones, until it reaches the source of life, the heart, at which point death enters. Likewise, the two kingdoms, like any other body-politic, followed the same gradual process. First, the less important parts of the nation, the outermost sections of the Kingdom of Israel east of the river Jordan, were conquered and exiled. Following this, the northern parts of the Kingdom in Galilee, and subsequently the heart of the Israelite kingdom, the region of its capital Samaria, were destroyed. Only then came the turn of the Kingdom of Juda, including the city of Jerusalem and finally the destruction of the First Temple, the equivalent of the heart. Thus, the death of the first Jewish body-politic reached its stage. The last episode of Gedaliah ben Ahikam, after the destruction of the Temple, resembles, for Abravanel, the natural phenomena, in which the dying body keeps some of its warmth until it gradually cools down<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> R. STERN, *Meaning Levels in the Theme of Historical Decline*, in «History and Theory», 14 (1975), pp. 1-31; P. BURKE, *Tradition and Experience...* cited.

<sup>22</sup> Introduction to the *Commentary to the Books of Kings*:

”וראוי שתדע כי כמו שבהפסד הכחות הטבעיות חיוניות ונפשיות יפסדו ראשונה מן האברים היותר רחוקים מן הלב, ואחר כך מהיותר קרובים אליו, והאחרון אשר יפסד הוא הכח אשר בלב, ככה בגליות האלה הוגלו ראשונה מלכי ישראל, ואחר כן מלכות יהודה, וגלו ראשונה ממלכות ישראל אותם השבטים אשר היו מעבר לירדן ראובן וגר וחצי שבט מנשה, שהיו בערך האברים היותר רחוקים מן הלב שהוא בית המקדש, ואחריהם עיון ואבל בית מעכה ושאר הערים וכל ארץ נפתלי שהיו יותר קרובים אליו, ואחריהם שומרון ובנותיה שהיו יותר קרובים ללב הקדושה, ואחריהם גבורי ירושלם היושבים בתוכה, ובסוף הגליות בית קדשנו ותפארתנו שהיה בערך הלב היה לשרפת אש, כי שם היה מקור החיים וההצלה, ואמנם גלות גדליה בן אחיקם היה כדמות החום הנשאר אחר המות באברים זמן מועט שיפסד אחר כך.”

See I. BAER, *Don Isaac Abravanel ve'Yahaso...* cit., p. 248. Compare to Jacob Anatoly's application of the organic theory to the triple organization of the Jewish nation - Priests, Levites and Israelites - (*Malmad ha'Talmidim*, Lyck 1866, pp. 96 a-b) and also to Luzzatto's usage of the same theory for his explanation of the deterioration of the Venetian republic, S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso circa il stato de gl'Hebrei... di Venetia*, Venezia 1638, consideratione VIII. See also A. MELAMED, *The Myth of Venice...* cited. It is typical, though, that Abravanel and Luzzatto both related to the organic theory in a different way than Anatoly, who wrote in the 13th Century. Both used it in connection with the Renaissance theory of historical decline. See nn. 21, 31. Abravanel used it to explain the deterioration of the ancient Jewish states, while Luzzatto used it to explain the deterioration of contemporary Venice.



Another example is to be found in Shlomo Ibn Verga's *Sebeth Yehudah*, written in the first half of the sixteenth century. In his discussion of Jewish history, Ibn Verga used, again and again, the same expression, « סיבה טבעית » i.e. « natural cause »<sup>23</sup>, and attempted to explain thereby Jewish history. Ibn Verga, however, unfortunately falls beyond the scope of this study.

Yet another example is to be found in the writings of Azariah de' Rossi. In his critical reevaluation of the Sages' famous Agaddah about the death of Titus which was caused by the penetration of an insect into his brain, De' Rossi related, first of all, to physical, biological and medical considerations, all of which brought him to the conclusion that this event could not have happened according to the laws of nature, « מלא נמנעות אצל הטבע »<sup>24</sup>. For him, whatever was a natural impossibility was also necessarily an historical impossibility.

It is significant that de' Rossi did raise, in this context, the possibility of a miracle, which in his opinion was not impossible, depending on Divine Will. However, he did not continue to elaborate this possibility, and went on to deal with the historical evidence. The occurrence of a miracle in history is theoretically not impossible, but he does not relate to it further in his discussion of the historical event.

The strongest influence of Renaissance historiography's attempt to give rational and natural explanations to historical occurrences is found in Simone Luzzatto's *Discorso* (1638)<sup>25</sup>. This kind of historical reasoning comes forth in various aspects of the *Discorso*, in which Luzzatto attempts to explain to his Gentile audience the true meaning and uniqueness of Jewish history and religion.

One clear example is the influence of the cyclical theories of history, or what is called, the idea of historical recurrence. An echo to this theory we already found in Abravanel. These theories were adapted by Renaissance historiographers from classical sources, mainly Aristotelian and Polibian. A most illustrative example for the application of the idea of historical recurrence it to be found in Machiavelli's conception of history.

Machiavelli distinguished between two correlated historical cycles. The inner cycle is national: the cycle of governments within a given state, which perpetually revolve, according to the Polibian scheme, from a positive form of

<sup>23</sup> S. IBN VERGA, *Shebeth Yehudah*, ed. A. SHOHAT, Jerusalem 1947, pp. 27, 40, 41; M. A. MEYER, *Ideas of Jewish History...* cit., pp. 110-114; Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., p. 627.

<sup>24</sup> AZARIAH DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim*, Vilno 1863. See S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit., p. 216.

<sup>25</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cited. A limited photoreproduced edition appeared in Bologna, 1976. The Hebrew translation entitled *Ma'amar al Yehudei Venezia* was published in Jerusalem, 1950, edited by A. Z. AESCOLY, with introductory essays by M. Shulvass and R. Backi, and notes by Y. Levy, A. Z. Aescoly and I. Baer.

government (i.e. Monarchy, Aristocracy and Democracy) to a negative form of government (i.e. Tyranny, Oligarchy and Anarchy)<sup>26</sup>.

The outer cycle is international: the perpetual rise and fall of nations throughout history. The two cycles are interrelated. Internal decay which is the result of the general instability caused by the perpetual change in the form of government and the specific negative effects of the evil forms of government, necessarily causes a decline in the international standing of the state.

In his history of Florence Machiavelli relates to the internal cycle, success bringing peace, which is followed by civil tranquillity, necessarily resulting in weakness and disorder. Instability causes the destruction of the state from which a new order develops, ushering in a new period of virtue, fortune and glory, and so forth as the cycle perpetually continues<sup>27</sup>.

In the opening of the second book of the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli relates to the external cycle. The world is always the same, virtues and vices are always the same. They only wander from place to place, from one nation to another. This causes the perpetual rise and fall of the international powers. Machiavelli gives, of course, the example of ancient powers: virtue moves from Assiria to Media, from Media to Persia and finally to Rome<sup>28</sup>.

Basically the same ideas were repeated by Giovanni Botero and other historians and political thinkers of the late Italian Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation<sup>29</sup>. One of them was Simone Luzzatto, the Jew, who was strongly influenced by Machiavellism and the ensuing political theory of the « Ragione di Stato »<sup>30</sup>. The uniqueness of his contribution was in the application of this theory to Jewish history.

<sup>26</sup> N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi*, in *Tutte le Opere*, a cura di M. MARTELLI, Firenze, 1971, pp. 78-81. On the whole issue, see G. W. TROMPF, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought from Antiquity to the Reformation*, University of California press, 1979, ch. 5.

<sup>27</sup> N. MACHIAVELLI, *Istorie fiorentine*, in *Tutte le Opere... cit.*, p. 738 « ...e così sempre da il bene si scende al male, e da il male si sale al bene. Perché la virtù partorisce quiete, la quiete ozio, l'ozio disordine, il disordine rovina; e similmente dalla rovina nasce l'ordine, dall'ordine virtù, da questa gloria e buona fortuna ».

<sup>28</sup> Id., *Discorsi... cit.*, p. 145 « ... il mondo sempre essere stato ad uno medesimo modo, ed in quello essere stato tanto di buono quanto di cattivo; ma variare questo cattivo e questo buono, di provincia in provincia: come si vede per quello si ha notizia di quegli regni antichi, che variavano dall'uno all'altro per variazione de' costumi; ma il mondo restava quel medesimo. Solo vi era questa differenza, che dove quello aveva prima allogata la sua virtù in Assiria, la collocò in Media, dipoi in Persia, tanto che la ne venne in Italia ed a Roma ». See also P. BURKE, *Tradition and Experience... cit.*, pp. 140-144.

<sup>29</sup> P. BURKE, *Tradition and Experience... cited.*

<sup>30</sup> R. BACHI, *La Dottrina sulla Dinamica delle Città secondo Giovanni Botero e secondo Simone Luzzatto*, in « Rendiconti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, classe di

Employing the organic theory of the state, Luzzatto asserts that, like any other living organism, nations and states follow the same cycle of life: birth, youth, maturity and old age. When nations reach the apex of their power and success, they necessarily deteriorate. This is what happened to all the ancient powers, the Chaldeans, the Persians, the Greek, the Romans and all other pagan people, which vanished from the face of the earth and were intermingled with other people until they become unrecognizable<sup>31</sup>.

Up to this point, Luzzatto argues like any good humanist influenced by the Machiavellian conception of history. On this basis he attempted to explain Jewish history. The fact with which Luzzatto had to deal was the uniqueness of the Jewish phenomena in history. The Jewish nation did not abide by the cyclical order of history. It was the one and only ancient nation which continued to exist as a nation through the ages, despite all the trials and tribulations of life in exile. It lost its national homeland, its political independence and was scattered upon the face of the earth. Its basic spiritual and national characteristics, however, continued to exist intact.

The explanation Luzzatto gives to this fact, however, is partially still theological in nature. As indicated above, the common denominator of all the ancient powers which vanished from the face of earth was their Paganism. The Jewish people, as the one and only non-Pagan nation of ancient times, was spared from this fate by Divine Providence<sup>32</sup>.

By using the divine factors as an explanation in history, Luzzatto stays within the medieval conception of history as a manifestation of Divine Will. Luzzatto, however, is not totally satisfied with the theological explanation, and he returns to the Machiavellian theory.

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scienze morali, storiche e filologiche», s. VIII, 1 (1946), pp. 369-378. Photoreproduced in the 1976 edition of the S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* Also A. MELAMED, *Simone Luzzatto on Tacitus: Apologetica and Ragione di Stato*, in I. TWERSKY, *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, II, Harvard 1984, pp. 143-170.

<sup>31</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cit., c. 88v: «Li Popoli, e Nationi hanno prescritti li loro periodi non meno che tutte l'altre cose mondane, prevenuti che sono alla sommità del fausto et applauso, traboccano poi nel abisso dell'oblio... La Caldea, la Persa, la Greca, la Romana, e tutta la Gentilità, affatto si abolirono, e si dileguarono, et in nuova metamorfosi si trasformarono».

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 89r: «La hebrea non li occorse simili mutationi, e cangiamenti, ma bene si spezzò, e fu divisa quasi infinite portioni, distrata, e dispersa per tutto l'universo, restandole in gran parte l'Identità della sua essentialità; e non è dubbio, che per se stessa non haverebbe havuto tanto vigore di oppondersi alla edacità del tempo et esimersi dalli suoi fieri insulti per si lungo tratto... ma ciò dipende dal volere della Divina Maestà...». Compare to I. CARDUSO, *Las Excelencias de los Hebreos*, Amsterdam 1679, pp. 5, 13 ff. Quoted by H. Y. YERUSHALMI, *Divrei Spinoza Al Quiyyim ha'Am ha'Yehudi*, in «Proceedings of the Israeli Academy of Science», 6, 10 (1983), pp. 180-181, n. 18.

Although the loss of national independence, exile and dispersion are among the worst calamities which can befall a nation, the catastrophe itself can have a positive and remedial influence on preserving the people<sup>33</sup>.

We have already seen that Machiavelli, in his cyclical theory, indicated the same: social and political decay is naturally followed by the renewal of the state (« ordini nuovi », « riordinare lo Stato »). As in nature, decay is followed by renewed growth<sup>34</sup>.

Luzzatto deals here with an old problem in Jewish Apologetics: how to resolve the apparent contradiction between the harsh fact of Jewish suffering, on the one hand, and their continuous insistence upon being the chosen people, on the other. If the Jews really are the chosen people, why are they so harshly persecuted? Does not it mean that God deserted them? The traditional explanation was that Jewish suffering was the result of their disobedience to Divine Will (« מפני הטאינו גלינו מארצנו »), and that world history, and in particular Jewish history, are the manifestations of a hidden divine plan which mortals can not comprehend, nor should they question.

Luzzatto does not altogether abandon the old theological argument. The Jews survived their trials and tribulations because of Divine Providence which protected their continuous existence. However, he also adds a new rationalist, Machiavellian solution to the old problem. The history of the Jewish nation follows the same natural processes of growth, climax and decline, which every body-politic in history necessarily follows. Since decline can naturally bring renewal, the Jewish people, whose decline is more extreme than that of any other people, also have a better chance to recover. Paradoxically, since the decline of the Jewish nation is the greatest, such are also their chances of renewal<sup>35</sup>. The Iberian catastrophe — the supreme decline — thus sets the stage for the rise of the Jewish people.

The humanist interpretations of the cyclical theories of history were optimistic in their very essence. They were meant to free man from the pessimistic determinism of theories of providentially ordered decay and to encou-

<sup>33</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cit. c. 89r: « ...e se bene la captività, e dispersione è il maggior flagello che possi occorrere à Popolo e Nazione, rendendola vile, et abietta, scherno, ed irrisione delle genti, nulla di meno e rimedio efficacissimo per la duratione, e perservatione... ». See also H. Y. YERUSHALMI, *Divrei Spinoza...* cit., pp. 178-179. Yerushalmi brings this quotation in order to prove that although Luzzatto already related to the theory that the continuous existence of the Jewish nation is a consequence of the gentiles' hatred and persecution, still his major explanation was the traditional one of Divine Providence. This is in contrast to Spinoza who was the first to explain the continuous existence of the Jews only in secular terms as a result of gentile persecution. Yerushalmi does not relate at all to Luzzatto's Machiavellian connotations.

<sup>34</sup> N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi...* cit., p. 195: « E perché io parlo de' corpi misti, come sono le repubbliche e le sètte, dico che quelle alterazioni sono a salute, che le riducano inverso i principii loro ».

<sup>35</sup> As Machiavelli says in *Istorie fiorentine...* cit. X, p. 738: « ...non avendo più da salire, conviene che scendino ».

rage optimism concerning possibilities of creative action in politics. Humanist historians generally felt themselves to be on the upswing of a new cycle destined to witness great events<sup>36</sup>. Luzzatto's optimistic reevaluation of the future of the Jewish people, amidst the reverberations of the greatest catastrophe which befell the Jewish people since the destruction of the Second Temple, presents the same optimistic interpretation of the cyclical theories in a Jewish context.

This application to the history of the Jewish people of the Machiavellian assertion that decay is naturally followed by renewed growth can be viewed as a rationalistic, even secular interpretation of the Messianic idea which was widespread in Jewish thought after the Iberian catastrophe. These Messianic ideas often appeared in mystical and cabbalistic contexts<sup>37</sup>. In Luzzatto's case, being influenced by the political theory of the « Ragione di Stato », we already find the Messianic idea in a modern, almost secular presentation.

The attempt to prove the superiority and uniqueness of the Jewish people has been a traditional theme in Jewish thought since the Hellenistic period. This attempt was generally related to the Jewish achievements in the fields of theology, science and philosophy<sup>38</sup>. Luzzatto presents a new variation on the old theme, the Jewish nation as unique in human history, being the only ancient people to survive the pressures of time. Despite the fact that the Jews suffered more than any other nation, and — paradoxically — because of this reason, the Jewish nation was seen by Luzzatto as about to rise again. Thus, the Jews are perceived as the only people that could escape the historical cycle and evade the natural processes. This is a Machiavellian interpretation of the Messianic idea.

Machiavelli and his followers based the theory of the cyclical law of history upon a pessimistic approach to human nature and the theory of « necessità ». History repeats itself since human nature always remains the same. Man is lazy and indolent in his very nature. He is active only because of the pressures of existence, which force him to be industrious and virtuous in order to provide for all his needs and ensure his continuous existence. When he reaches material success, however, the pressures of existence abide and man loses the good virtues he acquired. This necessarily causes the loss of his material

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<sup>36</sup> J. A. MAZZEO, *Renaissance and Revolution...* cit., p. 42.

<sup>37</sup> Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., pp. 626-627; A. DAVID, *R. Gedalya ibn Yahia...* cit., pp. 67-68; A. A. NEUMAN, *The Shebeth Yehudah...* cit., p. 259; B. NETANYAHU, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman...* cited.

<sup>38</sup> Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, New York 1971, ch. 6; N. ROTH, *The Theft of Philosophy by the Greeks from the Jews*, in « Classical Folia », 32 (1978), n. 1, pp. 53-67; R. BONFIL, *Bituyym le' Yehud Am Israel be' Italia be' Tekufat ha' Renaissance*, in « Sinai », 76 (1975), pp. 1-11. In Abravanel (see B. NETANYAHU, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman...* cit., p. 304, n. 34); in Ibn Yahia (see A. DAVID, *R. Gedalya Ibn Yahia...* cit., pp. 70-73); in de' Rossi (see S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Attitude...* cit., pp. 29-30, 37); in Luzzatto himself, *Discorso...* cit., ch. 16.

achievements. Then, the law of « necessità » — the renewed pressures of existence — forces man to endeavour again and return to virtuous behaviour. This is the perpetual rise and fall in human nature (« così girano le cose del mondo »). The continual rise and fall of governments, nations and states is a by-product of the basic weakness inherent in human nature<sup>39</sup>.

Luzzatto adheres to the Machiavellian theory and maintains that by the pressures of existence (« bisogno »), man is forced to work, to morally refine himself and develop arts and crafts and the various institutions of human culture<sup>40</sup>. Adapting the theory to Jewish history, he argues that since the pressures of existence are stronger on the Jews than on any other people, they consequently also excel more than any other people<sup>41</sup>. Again, we find how Luzzatto employed a basic Machiavellian concept in order to prove the superiority of the Jewish nation.

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The same tendency to explain Jewish history by rational and natural processes can also be found in Luzzatto's famous refutation of Tacitus' libels against the Jewish nation in the fifteenth chapter of his *Discorso*. When Luzzatto attempted to prove to contemporary Christians — *via* Tacitus — that the libels against the Jews were unfounded and to explain to them the real meaning of Jewish religion and customs, he consciously refrained from theological explanations which he regarded as irrelevant for a Pagan and a political-minded man like Tacitus. Luzzatto employed political and utilitarian reasoning which a man like Tacitus could comprehend<sup>42</sup>.

Tacitus exerted a profound influence upon sixteenth and seventeenth century historiography and political thought. The influence of his ideas is most noticeable upon Machiavellism and the ensuing political theory of the « Ragione di Stato »<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi...* cit., p. 82: « ... gli uomini non operano mai nulla bene, se non per necessità; ma, dove la elezione abonda, e che vi si può usare licenza, si riempie subito ogni cosa di confusione e di disordine ». See also P. BURKE, *Tradition and Experience...* cited.

<sup>40</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cit., c. 18r: « Reclama il comune de gl'huomini che la natura li habbi incaricati, et vessati d'urgentie, e necessita in gran copia più che a gl'altri Animali privi di ragioni, ma contra dovere si lamenta, perche l'indigenza et il bisogno sono li veri stimuli et impulsivi all'inventioni, e ritrovamenti dell'arti più degne, et eccellenti... ».

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 18v: « Nella Scuola del disaggio sotto la rigorosa disciplina di esso bisogno, sono eruditi, et instruiti li Hebrei più che ogn'altra nazione... ».

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 70v: « Disputando con un Gentile non occorre portarli ragioni de quali egli vuole esserne incapace, come de Creatione di mondo, e liberatione miracolosa d'Egitto, ma bene essendo che Politicamente li doveva sovvenire lui sì gran Maestro di ragion di Stato molte Cause di tali institutti ». See A. MELAMED, *Simone Luzzatto on Tacitus...* cited.

<sup>43</sup> P. BURKE, *Tacitism*, in *Tacitus*, ed. T. A. DOREY, New York 1969; G. TOFFANIN, *Machiavelli e il Tacitismo*, Napoli 1972; K. C. SCHELLHASE, *Tacitus in Renaissance Political Thought*, Chicago 1976.

Luzzatto can be regarded as the foremost Jewish Tacitist. Like many of his contemporaries he admired Tacitus, «frà primi Maestri del Governo Civile»<sup>44</sup>. As a Jew, however, Luzzatto had to cope with the Tacitean libels against Judaism. He had to somehow resolve the apparent contradiction between his admiration of Tacitus the historian and political thinker and his rejection of Tacitus the Antisemite. This Luzzatto attempted to do by proving that precisely from a Tacitean point of departure, specifically that of «reason of State», the Roman historian would have come to a phylosemite conclusion had he only understood the real political motives behind the religion and customs of the Jews. This, exactly, is what Luzzatto attempted to achieve in his response to the Tacitean libels against Judaism.

Thus, for instance, in responding to Tacitus' libel that the Jews are sexually promiscuous, Luzzatto brought, among other Biblical incidents, the example of Absalom's fornication with his father's concubines. He intended to prove that Absalom committed the act only for pure political reasons: «Solo per rispetto di stato e desio di regnare»<sup>45</sup>. His interpretation of the Biblical passage is in accordance with the literal meaning of the text, and follows the traditional commentary, as found, for instance, in Kimhi and Abravanel<sup>46</sup>. However, he presents the Biblical story in clear Machiavellian terminology and reasoning, the house of Borgia in the ancient land of Israel.

Another example is Luzzatto's response to the Tacitean libel that the Jews are similar to unclean animals, like the pigs, and therefore must abstain from eating pork in order to avoid being attacked by the same diseases which attack this impure and dirty animal. Again, Luzzatto argues that «a political man like Tacitus» («statista ch'egli era»)<sup>47</sup> should have understood the «reason of State» motives for this religious prohibition, and not to have accepted false arguments. From the political point of view («politicamente»), religious customs and prohibitions, like the prohibition to eat pork, accustom men to be obedient to their superiors, first of all to God, and, consequently, to their political leaders. The obedience of the multitude is a necessary condition for the stable existence of a government and for its preservation. Thus, Luzzatto concludes, particularly from Tacitean point of view, religious prohibitions, of whatever kind, are an extremely valuable mean in political action<sup>48</sup>.

Another example is Luzzatto's refutation of the Tacitean libel that the abstention from work on the Sabbath and the Sabbatical year prove that the Jews are lazy and indolent. Again, Luzzatto refrains from theological explanations and relates only to political and utilitarian ones. The social function

<sup>44</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cit., c. 57v.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 62r.

<sup>46</sup> The commentaries to *Samuel II*, XVI, 20-22. See A. MELAMED, *Simone Luzzatto on Tacitus...* cited.

<sup>47</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cit., c. 65r.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem.*

of the Sabbath is explained as a proper mean to clearly divide between work and leisure<sup>49</sup>. The Sabbatical year is explained as a utilitarian mean to solve agricultural, social, economic and military problems of the ancient Jewish state<sup>50</sup>. In Luzzatto's view, these religious laws prove the supreme social, political and military wisdom of the Mosaic laws, which Tacitus himself should have understood and admired; had he only been informed and unbiased as a historian and political thinker of his stature should have been<sup>51</sup>.

Luzzatto refrains here from theological reasoning, and relates to rational-political explanations only, since in order to convince Tacitus — and his Christian contemporaries — he had to use Tacitean reasoning. However, by the very usage of such reasoning, in the spirit of the political theory of the «Ragione di Stato», he clearly expressed an attempt to explain ancient Jewish history in secular political terms.

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3. It is a historical commonplace that one of the main characteristics of the Renaissance was the attempt to rediscover the treasures of ancient classical culture, mainly Greek and Roman, and to pattern humanist culture upon their example. Likewise Renaissance historians studied and moulded their works on the histories of the great historians of Greece and Rome<sup>52</sup>.

The impact of ancient history and historians is more and more noticeable also upon Jewish scholars and historians in Italy towards the end of the sixteenth century. Jewish historians devoted more and more space to the description of general history. This phenomenon was not unknown in the past. It can be found, for instance, in the *Book of Yosifon* and in Abraham Ibn Daud's *Zikbron Divrei Romi*<sup>53</sup>. However, this trend greatly increased during the sixteenth century. The discussion of non-Jewish history was mainly devoted to nations which greatly influenced Jewish history. In *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* Capsali discussed at length the history of Turkey and of Venice. His work can be regarded as a first attempt to write Jewish history within the framework of general history<sup>54</sup>. In addition, Joseph ha'Kohen devoted a special

<sup>49</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cit., cc. 70v-71r.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 74.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*. A detailed discussions of the whole issue in A. MELAMED, *Simone Luzzatto on Tacitus...* cited.

<sup>52</sup> B. ULLMAN, *Leonardo Bruni...* cit.; P. BURKE, *A Survey of the Popularity of Ancient Historians, 1450-1700*, in «History and Theory», 5 (1960), pp. 135-151; S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit., pp. 207-208.

<sup>53</sup> A. DAVID, *R. Gedalya Ibn Yabia...* cit., p. 64; Y.H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., p. 615.

<sup>54</sup> E. CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta, and the Venetian Chronicles*, ed. A. SHMUELEVITZ, S. SIMONSOHN and M. BENAYAHU, voll. 2, Jerusalem 1976-1977. Also M. BENAYAHU, *R' Eliyahu Capsali Ish Kandia, Rav, Manbig ve'Historion*, Tel Aviv 1983; Y.H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., pp. 624-625; A. DAVID, *R. Gedalya Ibn Yabia...* cit., p. 64.



work to the history of Turkey and France<sup>55</sup>. We can also find scattered information on general history in Don Isaac Abravanel's commentary to the Bible<sup>56</sup>, in Gedalya Ibn Yahia *Shalshelet ha'Kabbala*<sup>57</sup>, in Luzzatto's *Discorso* as well as in other sources. Some of these writers greatly praised the contemporary gentile nations and governments they described, notably Abravanel, Capsali and Luzzatto who praised the Venetian Republic<sup>58</sup>.

Likewise, there was an increased interest in ancient non-Jewish history, mainly Hellenistic and Roman, which is to be found in the works of Abravanel, Azariah de' Rossi, Ibn Yahia, Abraham Portaleone, Luzzatto, Leone da Modena and others<sup>59</sup>. Again, this interest in ancient history always concerned nations which influenced Jewish history.

A correlated phenomenon was renewed interest in the ancient history of the Jewish people itself. While Italian humanists attempted to uncover their presumed ancient historical and cultural roots in the Greek and Roman past, Jewish scholars correspondingly attempted to rediscover their own classical heritage<sup>60</sup>.

One of the novelties of sixteenth century Jewish history was the attempt to create a coherent survey of the whole of Jewish history. It is meaningful in this respect that the interest of Jewish scholars in their ancient history was mainly devoted to the history of the period of the Second Temple. This can

<sup>55</sup> J. HA'COHEN, *Sefer Divrei ha'Yamim le'Malkey Zarfat u'Malkey Bet Ottoman ha'Togar*, Amsterdam 1733; Y.H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., p. 625; A. DAVID, *R. Gedalya Ibn Yahia...* cit., p. 64.

<sup>56</sup> A. NETANYAHU, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman...* cit., II, p. IV. See also SEGAL, *R. Isaac Abravanel betor Parshan ha'Mikra*, in «Tarbitz», 8 (1937), pp. 272-273. In Abravanel's *Ma'yene ha'Yeshuah*, which is a commentary on the *Book of Daniel*, there is a long discussion of Roman, Christian and Muslim history. SEGAL, *R. Isaac Abravanel betor Parshan...* cit., pp. 274-275. More references to Medieval Christian history can be found, for instance, in the commentaries to *Isaiah*, 34, *Jeremiah*, 49, and *Obadiah*, *ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

<sup>57</sup> G. IBN YAHIA, *Shalshelet ha' Kabbalah*, Venice 1587; A. DAVID, *Mifalo ha' Filofofi shel Gedalya ibn Yahia, Ba'al Shalshelet ha'Kabbalah*, unpublished doctoral dissertation at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1976, ch. 4; ID., *R. Gedalya Ibn Yahia...* cit., pp. 63-66; Y.H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., p. 625.

<sup>58</sup> A. MELAMED, *The Myth of Venice...* cited.

<sup>59</sup> For instance: in Abravanel (see I. BAUER, *Don Isaac Abravanel ve' Yabaso...* cit., pp. 245-249; L. RABINOWITZ, *Abravanel as Exegete*, in *Isaac Abravanel, Six Lectures*, eds TREND and LOEWE, Cambridge 1937, p. 79); in Ibn Yahia (see A. DAVID, *Mifalo...* cit., ch. 4; ID., *R. Gedalya Ibn Yahia...* cit., pp. 64-65); in Azariah (see S.W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Attitude...* cit., pp. 36-37); in Ibn Verga (see A. A. NEUMAN, *The Shebeth Yehudah...* cit., p. 272). See also nn. 62, 63.

<sup>60</sup> Baron argues that de' Rossi's concentration on ancient history can not be attributed to Renaissance historiography, since most Renaissance historians dealt with contemporary history, S.W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit., pp. 207-208. However, it is obvious that de' Rossi, like other contemporary Jewish thinkers, was influenced by the general humanist admiration of the classical past and the strong antiquarian interests of late Renaissance thinkers. Even Italian historians who wrote only contemporary history were influenced in their methods, concepts and literary style by classical authors.

be partially explained by the influence of Renaissance historiography. The history of the Second Temple period is the Jewish chronological equivalent of Greek and Roman history which so much fascinated Renaissance scholars.

Another manifestation of the influence of the renewed interest in classical history is the fact that towards the end of the sixteenth century, Jewish scholars became more and more familiar with classical pagan authors and quoted them extensively in their historical and other writings. In his *Meor Einaim*, Azariah de' Rossi quotes, among others, Homer, Plato, Pythagoras, Aristotle, Plutarch, Pliny, Curtius, Cicero, Quintilian, Tacitus, Dio Cassius and Livy<sup>61</sup>.

Extremely important in this respect is the fact that de' Rossi was the first Jewish author to quote extensively from the writings of the two most important Hellenistic Jewish authors, who were hardly known to Medieval Jewry — Philo of Alexandria<sup>62</sup> and Josephus Flavius, whose history was considered to be the Latin version of the Hebrew *Book of Yosifon* and was called in Hebrew « יוסיפון לרומים » i.e. *The Latin Yosifon*<sup>63</sup>.

Abraham Portaleone, in his encyclopaedic and antiquarian *Shiltei ha'Gibborim* (Mantua, 1612), which deals with the structure of the Temple and divine service therein, mentions Aristotle, Livy, Sallust, Vergil, Lucan, Vitruvius, Terence, Plautus, Pliny and others<sup>64</sup>. Luzzatto, in his *Discorso* quotes, among others, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Curtius, Vergil, Thucydides, Vegetius, Strabo, Josephus Flavius, and, as already mentioned, Tacitus<sup>65</sup>.

The Jewish authors even followed Renaissance historiographic fashion. In the beginning of Renaissance historiography, Livy was regarded as the greatest classical historian, the supreme example to be emulated. By the late sixteenth century he was replaced with Tacitus<sup>66</sup>. Likewise, among the Jewish authors, we find Azariah de' Rossi giving the greatest praise to Livy: « הסופר הגדול לרומיים ... אשר לפניו ואחריו עד היום לא קם בא"ה כמוהו » « The greatest Roman writer ... among the Gentiles none greater preceded or followed

<sup>61</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim*... cit., part I, pp. 2, 9, 10, 15, 90, 97, 105, 130, 224, 226, 232, 250, 254; part II, pp. 4, 110, 150, 153, 175, 186, 187, 193; S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method*... cit., pp. 227-229.

<sup>62</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim*... cit., I, pp. 2, 76, 82, 225 e *passim*; S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Attitude*... cit., p. 13, n. 4, p. 15. ID., *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method*... cit., pp. 222-223.

<sup>63</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einam*... cit., I, pp. 2, 14, 17, 76, 97, 112; S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Attitude*... cit., p. 223; in Abravanel (see SEGAL, R. *Isaac Abravanel*... cit., pp. 272-273 and L. RABINOWITZ, *Abravanel as Exegite*... cit., p. 80); in Ibn Yahia (see A. DAVID, *Mifalo*... cit., pp. 66-69). On the popularity of Josephus in Renaissance historiography, see P. BURKE, *A Survey*... cit., pp. 136-137.

<sup>64</sup> A. PORTALEONE, *Shiltei ha'Gibborim*, Mantua 1612, pp. 4a, 36a, 38a, 42a. See also chs. 78, 81.

<sup>65</sup> In numerous places.

<sup>66</sup> P. BURKE, *A Survey*... cit., pp. 137, 146-151; G. SPINI, *The Art of History*... cit., pp. 123-125; S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Attitude*... cit., p. 43.

him... »<sup>67</sup>. Luzzatto, writing later, saved such praise for Tacitus « gran maestro di ragion di stato », « il maestro del governo civile »<sup>68</sup>.

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A difficult problem the Jewish scholars had to deal with, in connection with their admiration for classical history and historians, was the fact that the Greeks and the Romans persecuted the Jewish people, and that some of the worst libels against the Jews can be found in the writings of classical authors. They had somehow to resolve the apparent contradiction between their admiration of classical history and historians, and their rejection of these historians' anti-Jewish attitude.

We already related to the way in which Luzzatto tried to solve the problem in his refutation of Tacitus' libels against the Jews. The Jewish thinkers' basic method was to stress their admiration for the classical heritage, to view ancient Jewish history as an integral part of the same heritage, and to argue that the achievements of classical Jewish culture were at least as great as those of the Greeks and the Romans, or even to prove their priority and superiority. Finally, they attempted to convince the Pagans — and contemporary Christians — that the libels against the Jews were unfounded, and to explain to them the real meaning of Jewish history and religion.

Don Isaac Abravanel, in his commentary on the Biblical story of post-deluvian human history (*Genesis*, 4) identified the Greeks and the Romans, who represent the cultural and political achievements of mankind, with the descendents of Jaffet, who represented the archetype of political man. The Greeks and Romans are compared on the one hand to Ham, the bestial man, and his descendents, the primitive people, and on the other to Shem, the divine man, and his descendents, who are the sons of Israel<sup>69</sup>.

Later Jewish scholars differentiated between the Greeks and Romans, and represented a position which was commonplace in Renaissance historio-

<sup>67</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., p. 254 - "הסופר הגדול לרומיים הוד והדר למפוארה ארץ מולדתו פאר'ובה הוא מיטו ליוי'או אשר לפניו ואחריו עד היום לא קם בא'ה כמוהו. לחשוב מחשבות ולכתוב בעט ברזל ושמיד מאה וארבעים ספרים על אודות העיר הגדולה רומי, ומסדות העולים ויורדים בה מן היום הוסדה עד זמנו משך שבע מאות שנה ויותר. באשר רצה להראות בראשיתם מה יסכון עליהם גבר משכיל ולאיוזה תכלית הוא והקורא יעמול בהמה. כתב את הדברים האלה."

<sup>68</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cit. For the first citation, see above n. 42; for the second citation: « Cornelio Tacito famoso Historico Romano, meritò per la sua Dottrina, et esperienza delle cose Politiche esser annoverato frà primi Maestri del Governo Civile », *ibid.*, c. 57v. See my above mentioned study, cit. n. 30.

<sup>69</sup> I. ABRAVANEL, *Commentary to Genesis*, 4, 5; A. MELAMED, 'Ma'amado Shel ha' Adam be' Seder ha'Yequum. Motar ha'Adam ba' Mahashava ha'Yehudit be' Sefarad ve' Italia be'Yemei ha'Beinaim ha'Meuharim ve'ha'Renaissance, in « Italia », III (1982), 1-2, pp. 61-67; B. NETANYAHU, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman...* cit., pp. 139-141.

graphy: the Greeks represent the cultural achievements of mankind while the Romans represent political and military superiority.

Luzzatto contended that a nation can perpetuate itself in one of two ways, by its superior culture, or by military conquests. The Greeks achieved historical immortality by the former, while the Romans did by the latter<sup>70</sup>. Ibn Yahia took the same position in his discussion of Greek and Roman history, dealing mainly with Greek cultural achievements and with Roman political and military affairs<sup>71</sup>.

Luzzatto pointed out that while both Greece and Rome distinguished themselves only in one of the two possible ways, only the Jewish nation, while it was still enjoying Divine Grace, was superior in both.

To illustrate Jewish military achievements, Luzzatto presents the heroic struggle of the Jews against the Romans, as described Josephus Flavius. Although the Jews lost divine support, and the whole human race was already under Roman yoke, the Jews alone, a small minority, boldly and heroically tried to defend their religious and political liberty, and forced mighty Rome to devote its best legions and its greatest military leaders to the war against them.

To prove Jewish cultural achievements, Luzzatto quoted Eusebius in *Preparatio Evangelica*, who stated that the greatest theological, cultural and scientific achievements of ancient times were initiated by the Jews. After the loss of political independence and exile, there was a great danger that the Jews would also lose their cultural superiority and fall into ignorance. The constant need, however, to interpret the hidden meaning of Biblical teachings and commandments forced the Jews to continue to cultivate the various sciences, mandatory, in Luzzatto's opinion, for the proper understanding of the *Torah*<sup>72</sup>.

Luzzatto argues that of the two ways to achieve immortality, cultural achievements are by far more important than military conquests. Wars and military triumph bring only clamour and cheers. Its glory is shortlived. Cultural achievements, however, are everlasting. A nation can continue to exist even when it loses political independence. However, if it also loses its unique cultural characteristics, its national identity disappears altogether. The Greeks, although they were politically and militarily dominated by the Romans, became their intellectual leaders. This is why, Luzzatto contends, it is not at all clear in the final analysis, who really dominated whom, the Romans who militarily conquered Greece, or the Greeks who moulded their conquerors' intellectual worldview<sup>73</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cit., consideratione XVI, cc. 73-85v.

<sup>71</sup> A. DAVID, *Mifalo...* cit., pp. 25, 47; ID., *R. Gedalya Ibn Yahia...* cit., p. 65.

<sup>70</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cit., consideratione XVI, cc. 73-85v.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*.

The Jewish people, like the Greek, were militarily vanquished by the Romans, but this was precisely what forced them to achieve eternity by cultural attainments. (Here, again, Luzzatto relates to the law of historical « necessità »). Thus, Luzzatto devoted the whole of the sixteenth chapter of his *Discorso* to a detailed description of the cultural achievements of the Jews during the long period of exile<sup>74</sup>.

In Leone da Modena's collection of sermons *Midbar Yehudah*, there is a short sermon dealing with politics, in which he discusses the three conditions necessary to secure the existence and flourishing of a nation. Da Modena compares Roman and Jewish achievements in this respect<sup>75</sup>. The three necessary conditions, according to da Modena, are as follows, the size of the population, its quality in virtues and wisdom, and the geographic and material conditions of the land.

The Roman Empire conquered and successfully ruled all the nations of ancient times, since it fulfilled all three conditions. Rome, thus, was the embodiment of the perfect republic. As for the quantitative condition, da Modena brought historical data about the great number of soldiers the Romans could muster, and mentioned the Roman law that ruled that no man could be elected a senator unless he had children. Relating to the qualitative condition, he pointed out the praise and honour the Roman state bestowed upon worthy people who served the state well. As for the geographical conditions, da Modena related to the saying of the sages: « שאומות העולם לעתיד לבוא אומרות לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: הרבה שווקים תיקננו הרבה גשרים הרבה מרחצאות כסה וזהב הרבינו » (« the Gentile nations will proclaim before God; "We built many markets, bridges and baths, and made much gold and silver" »)<sup>76</sup>.

Now, the people of Israel, as long as they obeyed Divine Commandments, had all these qualities bestowed on them. In number they were many in ancient times. As for the qualitative criterion, the Jews were always superior in their virtues and wisdom. King Solomon, for example, was the wisest of all men. Da Modena relates to the story of the « unlearned » Jerusalemites who visited Athens, then the world centre of human wisdom, and made a great impression there. Alas, the Jews abandoned the *Torah*, so they were punished, and in exile lost the knowledge of the general sciences. (Note the difference between da Modena and Luzzatto on this issue).

<sup>74</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cit., consideratione XVI, cc. 73-85v.

<sup>75</sup> Y. A. ME' MODENA, *Leket Ketavim*, edition, introduction and notes by P. NAVE, Jerusalem 1968, pp. 121-122. On da Modena and his *Midbar Yehudah*, see L. ROSENZWEIG, *Hoge Yehudi Miketz ha'Renaissance*, Tel Aviv 1972. On this sermon, pp. 100-105.

<sup>76</sup> Y. A. ME' MODENA, *Leket Ketavim...* cit., p. 121. Compare to Ibn Verga's description of the Romans: "העם המוצלח מימי קדם. הוא המושל עד אפסי ארץ." S. IBN VERGA, *Shebet Yehudah...* cit., p. 130.

As for the geographic and material conditions, da Modena employed the climatic theory, and related to the old idea about the unique geographic condition of the land of Israel, and quoted the Sages about the material abundance in the period of the Second Temple.

Thus, the ancient Jewish people fulfilled all three necessary conditions for securing the existence and success of any nation. In the two material conditions, the size of the population and the geographic conditions, the ancient Jewish state was no less fortunate than the Romans. In the one qualitative condition — virtues and wisdom — the Jews greatly surpassed all other ancient peoples, being endowed with divine blessing.

The Jews lost both their qualitative priority and their geographic advantage, their historical homeland. Their contemporary quantitative abundance da Modena considered to be only an illusion, created by the Jewish dispersion among the nations.

To these three lost qualities, da Modena concludes, the lamentation referred: «... איכה ישבה בדד העיר...» («How doth the city sit solitary») (*Lamentations*, I, 1). The expression «רבתי עם», «that was full of people», relates to the quantitative condition. «רבתי בנויים», «Great among the nations», refers to the qualitative condition. «שרתי במדינות», «Princes among the provinces», relates to the geographic and material condition<sup>77</sup>.

Like his contemporary Italians, who dreamed about the long lost glory of the Roman empire («il buon tempo antico»)<sup>78</sup>, da Modena laments the loss of the great Jewish state of antiquity.

The same tendency can be found in Portaleone's *Shiltei ha'Gibborim*. All through his encyclopedic and antiquarian study of the architecture of the Temple and divine service therein, Portaleone attempted to prove that the Jewish nation preceded and was superior to all ancient and modern nations in the various branches of science. The discussion of architecture intended to prove that King Solomon and his craftsmen knew the secrets of classical architecture long before the Greeks and Romans discovered them, and that the Solomonic temple was built according to the best principles of Renaissance architecture<sup>79</sup>.

<sup>77</sup> Y. A. ME'MODENA, *Leket Ketavim...* cit., p. 122. Again, compare da Modena's discussion of the three conditions to Ibn Verga's assertion that the Jews were not lacking the four qualities necessary for the victorious life of a nation: clever resourcefulness, heroism in combat, riches and numbers, S. IBN VERGA, *Shebeth Yehudah...* cit., pp. 27-28; A. A. NEUMAN, *The Shebeth Yehudah...* cit., p. 262. Compare to Abravanel's *Nahalat Avot*, ch. 4.

<sup>78</sup> C. T. DAVIS, *Il Buon Tempo Antico*, in *Florentine Studies*, ed. N. RUBINSTEIN, London 1968, pp. 45-69.

<sup>79</sup> A. PORTALEONE, *Shiltei ha'Gibborim...* cit., chs. 2-3. See my forthcoming study *Hebrew Encyclopedias of the Italian Renaissance*, to be published in a volume dealing with Medieval and Renaissance encyclopedias by the department of philosophy of the University of Milan.

In his discussion of music, Portaleone attempted to identify contemporary musical instruments with the instruments mentioned in the Bible, and to prove that the music used by the Levites in the Temple was based upon the same principles as Renaissance musicology<sup>80</sup>.

Similar is his discussion of politics and the art of war, in which Portaleone tried to identify contemporary weapons, including the new firearms, with the weapons mentioned in the Bible. When he discusses the Roman art of war, renewed by the Renaissance, he insists that the ancestors of the Jews, Abraham and Moses, developed these military tactics, ages before the Romans<sup>81</sup>.

As already indicated, this attempt to prove the priority and superiority of the Jews in all branches of human knowledge, is a continuation of an old tradition. Here, however, it was integrated into the new historiographical trends of the Italian Renaissance. The ancient Jewish heritage is viewed as a distinguished part of the classical tradition renewed and imitated by the Renaissance.

It would be appropriate to sum-up this part of our discussion with Luzzatto's appeal to the Gentile reader, in the introduction of his *Discorso*. Using a conventional humanist analogy, Luzzatto compared the Jewish fate to the fate of the relics of classical antiquity. Every relic of a classical statue, disfigured as it may be, is much valued by every antiquarian, since it was created by great artists like Fidiias and Lysippus. Likewise, the Jewish people, although corrupted by the trials and tribulations of exile, should not be despised, since, as everybody knows, in its classical antiquity it had a perfect constitution given by God Almighty<sup>82</sup>. The Jews are presented as a splendid relic of classical antiquity.

Here again, Luzzatto directly echoes Machiavelli, who, in the introduction to his *Discorsi*, appealed to his reader to study and learn the lessons of classical history, in the same way they study and admire every broken relic of an ancient statue<sup>83</sup>.

<sup>80</sup> A. PORTALEONE, *Shiltei ha'Gibborim...* cit., chs. 4-12.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, chs. 40-42. For instance, p. 36a: "וכמו שמשה רבינו נשא נם לשבטים... כן עשו הרומיים נם הם כפי למורו..." "ואברהם אבינו ע"ה היה הממציא הראשון ממשפט המלחמה הזאת."

<sup>82</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cit., c. 6v: «...et se coroso fragmento d'invvecchiata statua, perche da Fidia overò Lisippo fusse stata elaborata appresso il curioso antiquario sarebbe d'alcun prezzo, cosi non dovrebbe affatto essere abborita la reliquia dell'Antico Popolo hebreo, ben che da travagli difformata, et della lunga captività deturpata, poi che per comune consenso de gli huomini già una volta esso Popolo da Sommo Orefice prese forma di Governo, et Institutione di vita».

<sup>83</sup> N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi...* cit., p. 76: «Considerando adunque quanto onore si attribuisca all'antiquità, e come molte volte, lasciando andare infiniti altri esempli, un frammento d'una antiqua statua sia suto comperato gran prezzo, per averlo appresso di sé, onorarne la sua casa e poterlo fare imitare a coloro che di quella arte si dilettono;... e veggendo, da l'altro canto, le virtuosissime operazioni che le storie ci mostrono, che sono state operate

4. Another basic characteristic of Renaissance historiography was the attempt to regard the study of the past as an autonomous science, in which all phenomena are to be understood as a part of the natural order. Consequently, only conclusions derived from adequate evidence could be accepted as legitimate. Classical and medieval sources were approached with a new scientific method. Renaissance historians no longer accepted the historical information and evaluation presented by classical historical and literary sources at face value. The sacred authorities and traditions of the past were no longer considered sufficient to ensure the truth of historical knowledge. New logical, philological and chronological historical methods were devised in order to collect historical data, compare the various available sources and arrive at a more accurate picture of past events. Lorenzo Valla's famous treatment of the donation of Constantine is one of the first and most famous examples of the new way history was being studied, as a rationally explicable process. Early humanist thought stemmed from the concept of the renewal and imitation of ancient culture and consequently revered the classical authorities, while in the late Renaissance the idea of progress took hold, and a more critical approach to classical authorities developed<sup>84</sup>.

The Jewish scholar's revaluation of ancient Jewish history was greatly influenced by these sixteenth century trends. We have already seen how Jewish scholars became familiar with classical non-Jewish historical and literary sources and used them in their writings. Similarly, they increasingly became familiar with, and used, Christian, Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance sources, as in the writings of Abravanel, de' Rossi, Ibn Yahia, Portaleone, Luzzatto and others.

Revolutionary was that some of these Jewish scholars even dared to utilize these non-Jewish sources in their revaluation of Jewish history. They no longer accepted Jewish sources as the only relevant and legitimate ones for the study of Jewish history. Influenced by Renaissance historiographical methods, some of them ceased to accept at face value the veracity of Jewish sources. They critically reevaluated them, compared and contrasted the various Jewish sources, and took into consideration the evidence found in relevant non-Jewish sources, sometimes preferring their data and conclusions to what they found in the equivalent Jewish sources. Consequently, at times they came to conclusions which were strikingly at odds with Rabbinical tradition.

A striking example can already be found in Abravanel's commentary to the Bible, in which he liberally utilized classical and medieval non-Jewish

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da regni e repubbliche antique... anzi, in tanto da ciascuno in ogni minima cosa fuggite, che di quella antiqua virtù non ci è rimasto alcun segno ».

<sup>84</sup> W. VON LEYDEN, *Antiquity and Authority. A Paradox in the Renaissance Theory of History*, in « Journal of the History of Ideas », XIX (1958), pp. 473-492; W. J. BOUWSMA, *Three Types... cit.*, p. 306; G. SPINI, *The Art of History... cit.*, pp. 100-105, 123-125.



sources. His attitude to the Christian sources, like Augustinus, Aquinas, Albertus Magnus and Nicholas de Lyra, among others, is revolutionary. Although some previous Jewish commentators, like Kimḥi, already related also to Christian sources, none had done so as extensively as Abravanel. Moreover, Abravanel was the first one to relate to these sources not only for the sake of religious argumentations and disputations, but also as a relevant and legitimate source for the true understanding of the *Torah* itself. We can hardly find in his commentary the discreditation of Christian authors which was prevalent in medieval and contemporary Jewish writings<sup>85</sup>. Sometimes he even went as far as preferring the commentary of Christian authors to those of Jewish ones « ובאמת רואה אני דבריהם בזה יותר מתישבים מכל דברי שאר החכמים אשר זכרתי מבני עמנו »<sup>86</sup>.

Abravanel had a similarly open attitude to the usage of classical historical sources. In the introduction to his commentary to the *Books of Kings*, Abravanel indicated that the Sages were mistaken in their assertion that Alexander the Great massacred the Jews of Alexandria. He found that the Sages confused the above mentioned Alexander, who lived much before the massacre, with the twenty fourth Roman Emperor Alexander, who committed the second massacre of Alexandrian Jews (the first massacre was committed by Trajan).<sup>87</sup> « ומה שכתוב בנמרית שלנו מוקדון הוא טעות סופר וראוי למוחקו ».

In his opinion, the Sages were confused due to their lack of knowledge of the writings of Roman historians « וקרה להם כל זה לפי שלא ראו ספרי דברי הימים אשר למלכי רומי ».<sup>88</sup>

Another example can be found in Abravanel's *Ma'yene ha'Yeshuah*. In his allegorical interpretation of Daniel's prophecy of the four kingdoms, Abravanel indicated that although the context of the *Book of Daniel* is not of general history, as it may seem to be, but rather of the fate of the Jewish

<sup>85</sup> SEGAL, R. *Isaac Abravanel betor Parshan...* cit., p. 277; S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit., pp. 227-228. While Zacuto, for instance, still added ימח שמו to his mentioning of Augustinus, de' Rossi voiced great admiration.

<sup>86</sup> Commentary to *Kings*, I, 7. On this question, with additional examples, see L. RABINOWITZ, *Abravanel as Exegete...* cit., p. 79; SEGAL, R. *Isaac Abravanel betor Parshan...* cit., pp. 277-279; S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit. For de' Rossi's criticism on Abravanel's attitude, see *ibid.*, p. 433, n. 104. Abravanel's new attitude to the Christian sources should also be related to the increasing influence of the Scholastic philosophy upon late medieval Jewish scholars. As Pines already noted, this influence can already be traced to the 13th century, although only in the late 15th century, Jewish scholars, like Abravanel, started to directly quote and voice admiration to Christian authors, see S. PINES, *Ha'Scolastica sh'Aharei Thomas me'Aquinas u'Mishnat Hasdai Crescas ve'Kodmav*, in his collected essays *Bein Ma'hashevet Israel le'Maha'shevet ha'Amim*, Jerusalem 1977, pp. 221-222, n. 101. See also in J. B. Sermoneta's various studies on this subject.

<sup>87</sup> Introduction to *Kings*.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*.

people, still the knowledge of history is indispensable for the true understanding of the prophecy. He criticized former Jewish commentators for misunderstanding the prophecy, due to their ignorance of general history: **”וכאן נכזבו המפרשים שלא ידעו ספורי המלכים”**<sup>89</sup>.

The most prominent instance of this is, of course, that of Azariah de' Rossi. In the part of *Meor Einaim* entitled *Imrei Binah*, he diligently scrutinized various aspects of ancient Jewish history, mainly that of the Period of the Second Temple. De' Rossi utilized the various Hebrew sources, the Apocrypha, Hellenistic Jewish thought and historiography, Greek and Roman historiography and Christian sources — Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance<sup>90</sup>. The critical approach to the texts, the utilization of the various sources and the comparison between them often brought him into sharp disagreement with Rabbinical tradition. The only text he refrained from criticizing was the Bible. Consequently, de' Rossi, in the spirit of the new methods and goals of Renaissance historiography, boldly and openly criticized the traditional approach to history in the Jewish sources.

De' Rossi pointed out that the Sages hardly distinguished between **”מוקדם ומאוחר”**, that which preceds and that which comes late in the sequence of history, and they uncritically mixed together details of events occurring in totally different periods. He scrutinized the traditional genealogies of human history since the creation, coming to the audacious conclusion of there being no scientific basis for the traditional genealogy, due to the impossibility of correctly calculating the long chronology of mankind since Adam<sup>91</sup>.

De' Rossi's new method of historical investigation is best demonstrated in his refutation of the famous talmudic legend about the insect which entered Titus' brain, tortured and finally killed him as a punishment for the desecration of the Temple.

<sup>89</sup> *Ma'yene ha'Yeshuah*, 11, 4. SEGAL, R. *Isaac Abravanel betor Parshan...* cit., pp. 273-274.

<sup>90</sup> On the Rossi's sources, see above, nn. 61-63; S.W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Attitude...* cit., pp. 13, 36-37; Id., *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit.; Y.H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., pp. 634-635.

<sup>91</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., II, pp. 3-4, *Imrei Binach*, chs. 29-42:

**”החלק מסך השנים ליצירה הנודע על פי התורה אשר שם משה לפנינו וכן המפורש בקבלה מן הנביאים הבאים אחריו שכתבו את ספר דברי הימים זכרון בספר. איננו נוכל תחת שום חקירה ודרישה כי צדיק וישר הוא... אולם החלק אשר לא נוספה בו רוח ה' רק יחידים וחכמי הדורות יגידוה ויערכוה לנו... נודע כי בתהפוכות הזמנים וטרדת הרעות וחלופיה אפשר שיצאה בו איזו שגגה ובלבול סדר...”**  
See also Y.H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., p. 633. On de' Rossi's attitude towards Talmudic literature and the distinction between the Sinaic tradition versus personal opinions, which are open to criticism, see S.W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit., pp. 219-221.

De' Rossi first investigated the various Hebrew sources which related to this incident. He found great differences in the details « כי רבו החלקים שלא הוסכמו »<sup>92</sup>. This caused him to suspect the whole story. Thus, he put it under close scientific and historical scrutiny. Initially, de' Rossi relates to physical, biological and medical considerations, which, as already noted, brought him to the conclusion that this event could not have happened according to the laws of nature.

In addition, de' Rossi investigated the chronology of the story, and, based upon his readings in Roman historical sources and the chronicles of Ibn Daud, he came to the conclusion that Titus must have died much later than the date implied in the Sages' version.

Based upon his readings of Roman historians, like Suetonius, Cassiodorus, Dio Cassius and also upon the evidence amassed by Petrarch, de' Rossi also found that there were additional traditions about the cause of Titus' death. His final conclusion was, thus « כי זה מעשה שיטום שזכרו רבותינו לא היה » (« This tale about Titus mentioned by our Sages, was not altogether like this »)<sup>93</sup>.

De' Rossi, thus rejected the Rabbinical tradition about Titus' death on scientific and historical grounds. In this context, he had to go back to the old, and perpetually relevant issue in Medieval Jewish thought, the debate about the learning of the so-called « external wisdoms ». Here he only mentions that he did it in « קצת מעיתות הפנאי » only in some of his leisure time, when he rested from the study of the *Torah*, and that even the prophet Jeremiah advised « to consult the Gentiles » « שאלו נא בנויים »

Being conscious of hostile public opinion<sup>94</sup>, he devoted another whole chapter to discussing the justification for consulting Gentile authors. Here de' Rossi attempts to prove that the Sages and the Medieval Jewish thinkers all consulted the Gentiles, in attempting to better understand the teachings of the *Torah*<sup>95</sup>. We already noted that Luzzatto later voiced the same opinion when

<sup>92</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., p. 204. See M. A. MEYER, *Ideas of Jewish History...* cit., pp. 115-121.

<sup>93</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., pp. 206. See Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., p. 635; S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit., p. 232. De' Rossi insists that the evidence amassed by the Roman historians is much more persuasive than the Sages' story, since the Romans were more knowledgeable in such « unimportant » matters: « הרי אלה אפוא עשרה מכל לשונות הגוים אשר לתומם יביעו עתק נגד ספורם ו'ל' ולכאורה אצל המודים על האמת להם המשפט לדעת פרטי הספורים של מה בכך כאלה יותר *ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>94</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., p. 209. On the Rossi's source criticism, see also S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit., pp. 209, 217-219.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp. 68-76, *Imrei Binah*. See also *ibid.*, II, p. 2, with regard to the study of history: « אשר ע"כ בהודמן לידנו על ספור איזו מתולדות הימים מתחמת לדרוש הוה עדות של סופרים שונים מחכמי כל עם ועם כלשונו, אשר לעשות להם שם בגדולים חקרו צרפו וחקקו אותם הולכי הלוך ודבר על הדעת שיוכל המשכיל להעביר קול עדותם זו במחנה הספורים וליסוד עליהם מנוח לכף רגלינו. »

discussing the development of Jewish culture. As it turned out, de' Rossi's worries were not unfounded. His book was attacked immediately after it was printed and in various Italian Jewish communities it was placed under Rabbinic ban<sup>96</sup>.

De' Rossi could not ascribe the fact that the Sages were wrong in their historical information to plain ignorance. Nor did he want to escape into the easy sophistic solution ( « והנה כונתי אין להיות כמתחכם » ) that what the Sages really meant was a hidden Midrashic meaning. For him, the texts dealing with the story of Titus and the insect had to be understood in their plain meaning. Thus, his conclusion was that the Sages deliberately chose to use the story for moral and didactic purposes, consciously disregarding its historical accuracy. Their aim was not historical truth, but the education of the common people in true knowledge and in the modes of virtuous behaviour « למען יקבעו בלב ההמון את הטוב והישר שיכספיהו להצטייר בנפש לאיזה תכלית מתייחס למדות או לדעות הנאותות לנו »<sup>97</sup>.

Now, historical tales of this kind can serve as an ideal rethorical mean for the education of the common people. In this respect, their historical accuracy is irrelevant. This particular story was aimed at showing the crowd the greatness and glory of God, who can employ even his smallest creature for the punishment of the wicked<sup>98</sup>.

The usage of quasi-historical tales or *Aggadot* for didactic purposes was usual in Jewish tradition. In his attempt to prove the Sages' intent in relating to the tale of Titus' death, de' Rossi presented quite a few examples of how Biblical and Talmudic stories were used by them for didactic purposes.

This distinction between the two levels of historical knowledge-historical truth, which is the aim of learned men, and the moral lessons of history, which is meant for the crowd, also reminds us of the classic Averroist distinction, common in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish philosophy, between the two levels of human knowledge. De' Rossi accepts the Maimonidean distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric meaning of the *Torah* and the *Agaddah*, the esoteric meaning being of a higher level, and compatible with reason<sup>99</sup>.

However, here again, there seems to be also a direct influence of Renaissance historiography. De' Rossi opened this discussion with the assertion that it was very popular among the Wises of the Gentiles to employ such historical

<sup>96</sup> S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Attitude...* cit., pp. 39-40; Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., p. 634; A. DAVID, *Mifalo...* cit., p. 65.

<sup>97</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., p. 206.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207: « על מעשה שיטוס הנוכח יכל ורשאי אתה לומר כי ספורו איננו רק המצאה ואופן למוד נהוג אצל תמימי הדעת. ליסד בלב ההמון כי גדול אדונינו ורב כח להשיב אל מתקוממיו. ובפרט אל כל זר יהודי נמול ועונש אף על ידי הקטנה שבבריאיותו. »

tales for didactic purposes. Only then did he add that the same method was also employed by the Jewish Sages<sup>100</sup>.

De' Rossi related, in fact, to the great debate of Renaissance historiography which was centred around the essential questions: What is the aim of writing history? What is the demarcation line between rhetoric and poetry, on the one hand, and history on the other? The great debate between the Ciceronians and their opponents, between the camp of Livy and the followers of Tacitus, was centred around this fundamental question: What is the higher aim of writing history, to relate truth or to teach by way of moral lessons and please as literature?

The problem had been summed up by one of the great historians of the early Italian Renaissance, Leonardo Bruni, who, following the Ciceronian dictum, clearly distinguished between the two different aims of historical writing — the scientific and the didactic —: « Aliud est enim historia, aliud laudatio ». « History, he says, should follow the truth, panegyric goes beyond the truth in its praise »<sup>101</sup>.

Within this context, de' Rossi asserted in fact that the writing of history can serve in these two different categories. His criticism of the historical veracity of the story about Titus' death belongs to the first category. His indication that the Sages consciously and legitimately used the story for moral and didactic purposes relates to the second.

De' Rossi related the Sages' disregard for historical truth to their conscious moral and didactic aim of telling historical tales. Thus, in his opinion, the Sages only related to one of the purposes of the study of history, the didactic aim. They totally disregarded the other — and according to de' Rossi — higher aim of the study of history, that is, historical truth.

In another chapter of *Imrei Binah* (ch. 27), he went further and explained the theological reasons for the Sages' refraining from seriously dealing with history, the cause of the many mistakes he found in their references to historical matters.

De' Rossi opened this discussion with his above mentioned admiration of Livy as the archetype of the perfect historian<sup>102</sup>. Livy, considered to be the greatest Roman historian by early Renaissance Humanists, was used by de' Rossi as the model to which the historiographic endeavours in Judaism were compared.

<sup>100</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., p. 209; see S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit., p. 225.

<sup>101</sup> B. ULLMAN, *Leonardo Bruni...* cit., p. 52. On the whole issue W. J. BOUWSMA, *Three Types...* cit., p. 306; P. A. GRENDLER, *Francesco Sansovino and Italian Popular History, 1560-1600*, in « Studies in the Renaissance » 16 (1969), p. 144; G. SPINI, *The Art of History...* cit., pp. 104, 112-113, 122-125; M. PHILIPS, *Machiavelli, Guicciardini and the Tradition of Vernacular Historiography in Florence*, in « American Historical Review », 84 (1979), p. 86.

<sup>102</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., p. 254, see above n. 67.

Alas, when contemplating the development of Jewish culture, de' Rossi had great trouble finding any historical discussion which reached the stature of Livy's. This, despite the fact that the *Torah*, in his opinion, deals not only with laws and commandments but also with the history mankind. « כל הספורים המתייחסים לפעולות האדם וקורותיו »<sup>103</sup>. For him, as for any other advocate of the learning of the so called « external wisdoms », the *Torah* included all branches of human learning. Since the study of history was, in his opinion, an integral part of the *Torah*, it necessarily followed that it was originally meant to be studied not only in leisure time, but constantly, like any other aspect of the *Torah*. An incidental benefit for his justification of the study of history was its usefulness for the correct understanding of present day events and for the better direction of human affairs, themes clearly echoing Machiavelli<sup>104</sup>.

However, the study of history was not emphasized in the course of the development of Jewish thought. Although, de' Rossi indicated, some serious historical discussion could be found in the writings of the lives of Philo, Mai-

<sup>103</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., p. 255. Compare to Ibn Ezra's attitude, see Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., p. 614.

<sup>104</sup> A. DE ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., p. 254: « הנה ידיעת מה שהיה לעולמים על פי ספרי הזכרונות תתן לנו פריה זה אשר עד מאד יועילנו. כי ממנה נקח הלמודים הטמונים בכל מיני הדוגמות. ובהם נכיר את הטוב בעדנו ובעד עמנו להרחיק המניק ולקרר התועלת ע"כ. » Baron correctly pointed out that this is a free translation from Livy (*Ab urbe Condita*, preface). However, I do not know how he came to the conclusion that de' Rossi « expressly rejected Livy's adage, which saw the function of history as teaching how to search for the useful and to avoid the harmful », S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit. pp. 206-207 and p. 423, n. 3. A plain reading of the text does not justify his interpretation. De' Rossi paraphrased Livy's adage because he accepted his opinion and considered it relevant also for the study of Jewish history. Moreover, expressions like « להרחיק המניק ולקרר התועלת » frequently appear in Medieval Jewish thought, mainly concerning the ethical aim of human laws. For instance, Albo, *Iqquarim*, I, 7: « להרחיק המניק » The expression « בעדנו ובעד עמנו » is a paraphrase on *Samuel II*, 10, 12. Compare to Abravanel, *Nahalat Avot*, 4 and A. PORTALEONE, *Shiltei ha'Gibborim...* cit., p. 35a. De' Rossi repeated this opinion several times, for instance: « ... להתבונן וללמוד מתוכם בהלכה למעשה מה שיוכל הזמן להזמין לנו ואיך נתנהג בתולדותינו עם אלהים ואנשים... הנה שכרנו אתנו ופעולתנו לפני האלהים כאשר משפטי הספורים והקורות הנשמעים בה נקח עצה ומוסר על כל הנדרש אלינו... » A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., p. 255, and see n. 97. Baron, however, erroneously concluded that: « Azariah yet declares the study of history to possess this didactic value for the gentile world but not for the Jews », S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Attitude...* cit., p. 43. Also, ID., *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit., p. 214: « his particular non-activist conception of the aim of history ». Compare de' Rossi's attitude to Machiavelli's as expressed in the preface to the first book of the *Discorsi*: « ...coloro che leggeranno queste mie dichiarazioni, possino più facilmente trarne quella utilità per la quale si debba cercare la cognizione delle istorie », N. MACHIAVELLI, *Discorsi...* cit., p. 76.

monides and Gersonides, the Jewish Sages, as a whole, generally refrained from the serious study of history. This was the result of an extreme interpretation of the commandment: *והגית בו יומם ולילה* the duty to devote one's entire time to the study of the *Torah*. Some of them even came to the conclusion that one should not overly prolong one's prayer, since this might lead to losing time and distracting one's mind. This was even truer for the study of history, which they considered to be part of the external wisdoms whose study should be strictly limited. — «מחוסם על זמנם שלא יכלוהו בדיעת תולדות הזמן שלא תועילם»<sup>105</sup>.

De' Rossi could not, of course, accept this opinion. As a Renaissance man, he considered all human studies to be an integral part of the *Torah*. This included of course the study of history, which he emphasized for its usefulness in understanding human affairs.

The Sages, in his opinion, were wrong in their assumption that history is one of the external wisdoms, which should not be studied for their own sake. Thus, they refrained from the serious study of history, a fact which gave rise to the many errors he found in their references to historical events<sup>106</sup>.

Like some of his Italian contemporaries, who did not hesitate to criticize traditional authorities — classical and ecclesiastical — in their search for the historical truth, de' Rossi also ended up in sharp disagreement with traditional Jewish authorities, in his endeavour to understand the true course of Jewish history. The fierce attacks inflicted, as a result, upon his *Meor Einaim*, is a cultural phenomenon which, though imbedded in the Jewish tradition, is equivalent, in many respects, to the sharp criticism in which Catholic Counter-Reformation circles viewed the «profane» history written by the followers of Machiavelli and Tacitus. For them, like some of de' Rossi's Jewish critics, the only merit of writing history (that is, if it has any merit at all!) is to teach moral lessons and defend religious dogma<sup>107</sup>.

<sup>105</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., pp. 255-256.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256: «ובגלל הדברים האלה אשר יקר אצלנו להאריך בכאור אמיתתם. אין לנו להתפלא אם להיותם ו'ל שוקדים וטרודים בעסק התורה לבר ובלתי פונים אל רהבי שיחות חולין וקריאת זכרונות על מה שארע לעולמים מקדם. תצא מלפניהם איוו שגגה או קצור בספור». Compare also to Ibn Zacuto's apology for writing history, in the preface of his *Sefer Yuhaisn*, A. A. NEUMAN, *The Shebeth Yehudah...* cit. 257 and to Ibn Verga's praise to the Christians for their historical writing. S. IBN VERGA, *Shebeth Yehudah...* cit., p. 11, A. A. NEUMAN, *The Shebeth Yehudah...* cit., p. 258, n. 7. See also the contemporary approach of Jewish society to the writing of history, Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., p. 631.

<sup>107</sup> A. DE' ROSSI, *Meor Einaim...* cit., ch. 28. S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Attitude...* cit., p. 21. On this issue in Italian historiography of the period, and especially the examples of Patrizzi and Sarpi, see G. SPINI, *The Art of History...* cit., pp. 100-105; W. J. BOUWSMA, *Tree Types...* cit., pp. 306-312. Baron, although he tends to deemphasize the influence of Renaissance historiography upon de' Rossi, still admits that it influenced

De' Rossi's attempt to write Jewish history aimed at the knowledge of historical truth was a new phenomenon in the development of Jewish historiography. The awareness of the novelty of this attitude in the writing of Jewish history was common among his contemporaries. They not only has a new approach to Jewish history, but were also clearly conscious of it. This is vividly expressed in Joseph ha'Kohen's preface to his History of the Kings of France and the Ottoman Empire. Echoing the Biblical Song of Deborah, ha'Kohen presents himself as the first Jewish historian since Yosippon, who for him, it should be remembered, was Josephus Flavius of the First Century: «The chroniclers ceased in Israel, they ceased, until I, Joseph, did arise, until I did arise, a chronicler in Israel!»<sup>108</sup>. From Josephus (Flavius) to Joseph (ha'Kohen) there was no true historian in Israel!

Gedalya Ibn Yahia never went as far as de' Rossi in his utilization of the new methodology of Renaissance historiography. Nor did he dare to so boldly criticize Rabbinical authorities. He also refrained from mentioning de' Rossi by name, presumably out of fear of being ostracized by de' Rossi's many critics. Basically he continued to write within the familiar and accepted mould of the «chain of tradition»<sup>109</sup>. However, Ibn Yahia based many of his historical observations on de' Rossi's findings, and sometimes copied him *verbatim*. He did this to such an extent that Zunz accused him of literary plagiarism. Ibn Yahia clearly imitated de' Rossi's methods of historical research. Like him, when dealing with a particular subject, he collected all available sources, and compared them including non-Jewish sources, in order to better understand the historical past. Although the value of his historical inquiry is much inferior to that of de' Rossi's, it still reflects in many respects the influence of Renaissance historiography<sup>110</sup>.

Until now, we have considered the new critical approach to Jewish historical sources. In Luzzatto's refutation of Tacitus' libels against the ancient Jewish people, we find the new critical approach to classical texts applied to a non-Jewish historian's observations on Jewish history.

In the concluding remarks of his discussion on Tacitus, Luzzatto asserted that the least benefit the reader could gain from reading his criticism of Tacitus was the understanding that no authority — great and ancient though it might be — was solely sufficient to prove the truth of the matter, «il vero cimento

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him in various aspects, like in developing source criticism, mentioned above (S.W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit., p. 209, 217-219), and the method of writing disconnected historical essays adopted by his Italian contemporaries from classical models (*ibid.*, pp. 210-211), an issue which is not dealt with in my study.

<sup>108</sup> J. HA'COHEN, *Sefer Dibrei ha'Yamim...* cit., the preface. Quoted by Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., pp. 622-633. See also A. DAVID, *Mifalo...* cit., pp. 65-67; *Id.*, *R. Gedalya Ibn Yahia...* cit., p. 63.

<sup>109</sup> Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *Clio and the Jews...* cit., p. 628.

<sup>110</sup> A. DAVID, *R. Gedalya Ibn Yahia...* cited.



della verità ». Every authority should be open to critical evaluation « sine ira et studio ». Refuting Tacitus' polemics against the Jews by means of employing his own political precepts, is the best example.

To Luzzatto, particularly because he admired Tacitus as a fine historian and acute political observer, the master's false accusations and grave errors in dealing with Jewish religion and history was inexplicable. Tacitus, who did not let any bias distract him from telling the truth about his own Roman people, was so influenced by emotions and prejudice when discussing the Jewish nation that he was distracted from the true course of historical writing. Luzzatto indicated that Tacitus did not lack authentic historical sources, since the Vulgate and the writings of Philo and Josephus Flavius were readily available to him. Neither was he a plain Roman senator, whose misinformation could be excused by lack of interest in external events. As a historian of stature, who intended to relate the history of nations, Tacitus should have overcome his emotions and prejudices and presented a more accurate description of Jewish history and religion. He should have done likewise as a political thinker. As a political man (« statista ch'egli era ») who understood so keenly the matters of political life, he also should have better understood the true political applications of Jewish religion and customs <sup>111</sup>.

Thus, Luzzatto attempted to explain to Tacitus — and to contemporary Christian Antisemites likewise — the true meaning of Jewish history. The new methodology of Renaissance historiography, and its definition of the ultimate goal of the study of history, that is the better understanding of the human past, served as a starting point of modern Jewish Apologetics.

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<sup>111</sup> S. LUZZATTO, *Discorso...* cit., c. 65r; A. MELAMED, *Simone Luzzatto on Tacitus...* cited. On de' Rossi's criticism of classical authorities, S. W. BARON, *Azariah de' Rossi's Historical Method...* cit., pp. 209, 217-219.