

ADOLFO OTTOLENGHI

FOR THE IVTH CENTENNIAL

OF THE

SCUOLA CANTON

HISTORICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE VENETIAN TEMPLES

OF THE TEDESCO RITE AND SOME OF THE PRIVATE TEMPLES,

WITH GLIMPSES OF JEWISH LIFE DURING THE XVIth - XIXth CENTURIES

Commemoration held in the Scuola Canton

On the evening of 6 December 1931 – 26 Chislev 5692

IN HONOR

OF THE MEMORY

OF

ULRICO FANO

OF THE SCUOLA CANTON

FREQUENT PARTICIPANT — DEVOTED SUPPORTER

HIS SON WISHED FOR

THIS HISTORICAL REVIEW

TO BE MADE PUBLIC IN PRINT

זֶה־הַיּוֹם עָשָׂה יְהוָה נִגִּילָה וְנִשְׂמַחָה בּוֹ :

“This is the day the Lord has made,
let us rejoice and be glad in it.”
(Psalm 118, v. 24)

It is not without deep personal emotion that I prepare myself now, Gentlemen, to briefly review the founding and the successive development of our ancient houses of prayer and study of the Tedesco rite. Along with these I will recall dates of historical events that are inexorably connected with these, our sacred institutions, which, taken together, constitute for we Jews of Venice the highest glory achieved in a period of suffering and servitude in body and environment. At the same time this period was also one of great elevation of spirit, and of lively, timeless intellectual production. Four hundred years ago our Venetian ancestors, confined to this Ghetto, built the first two synagogues of the Tedesco rite: the Scuola Grande in 1529, and this Scuola Canton in 1532¹. If we want to be even more precise, following the dates of the Hebrew calendar, the first was founded in 5289 and the second in 5292: this means that the Scuola Grande's date of origin could in fact be 1528, and 1531 for the Canton. For each of these two dates we have one authoritative source; for the Scuola Grande this consists of five letters indicating the Hebrew date on which they were engraved, together with other indecipherable characters, on a small stone found on the outside face of the Temple; for the Scuola Canton the source for the date of origin is given by a short inscription-memorial with the aforementioned date in Hebrew. This inscription can be found on a stone which is mounted in an interior wall of the Temple, down low, to the left as one looks at the pulpit.²

Therefore in 1528 or 29, whichever it was, twelve or thirteen years had passed since our fathers found themselves sealed off in this enclosed space. In fact, as is well known, the decree which sent the Jews to the Ghetto dates from 29 March 1516; here already just a few years after this decree, and notwithstanding prohibitions, we find these two houses of God fully functioning. By this I don't mean the artistic function which we admire today, but rather a real religious and juridical function that was played by the two official synagogues of the oldest of our Venetian Jewish groups, called “the Tedesco nation”. This group occupied the Ghetto Nuovo and was fairly numerous, counting around 700 individuals, including a mixture of families of Italian origin. This settlement would expand over time, adding three private sanctuaries which were founded by families of Tedesco rite or origin: the Scuola Luzzatto, the Mesullamim and the Cohanim. Now, gentlemen, in the short time I have to speak of these things, it is certainly not possible to even briefly discuss some of the most prominent personalities, or some of the institutions of Venetian Jewish life, nor the events prior to the period which we want to commemorate this evening, events which undoubtedly are naturally connected to our subject. That Jews were scattered here or there at Venice since the XIth century and even earlier is without question:

¹ Which perhaps got its name due to its location in a corner (canton) of the Ghetto Nuovo.

² Found also on the arch above the entry door is the date of the founding of the Temple (5292) together with one which recalls a major restoration of the stairs (5619).

it also seems to have been demonstrated that they later became more numerous for reasons of commerce, and that they lived on Giudecca (after 1252) and in other parts of the city, such as S. Aponal, S. Silvestro, Rialto, S. Cassiano. Finally, according to what some claim, it does not seem impossible that two synagogues also existed on the Giudecca.

I don't want to forget, however, to emphasize that it was only after 1366 that regular authorization for temporary residence was granted to the Jews, and that it is probable that synagogues already existed at that time, if not on Giudecca then in other parts of the city. In fact, during the discussion in the Senate regarding the decree of the Ghetto, the sage Ser Zaccaria Dolfin affirmed that such regulation "was desired for the tranquility of the city, awaited by the Priests who 'preached that the ills of the city can be blamed on the excessive liberties conceded to the Jews' and on the synagogues that they keep in spite of the laws". – The decree confining the Jews to the Ghetto would also speak of synagogues, but only to prohibit their construction. If the Jews felt the need for these, they could build them in nearby Mestre.

However, those affected by this prohibition, aware of the good governance of the Serenissima, must have interpreted it with great liberality, since we find our Tedesco Scuole already well organized in the Ghetto itself just a few years after this decree. Not many years passed, then, until the institution of the Ghetto Vecchio in 1541 for first the Levantines, and the Spanish and Portuguese in 1589; there we find the other two synagogues, the Levantine and the Spanish, built by the two new Nations that had been formed and which were called the "Levantine" and the "Ponentine".

Certainly when we speak about temples and synagogues, we shouldn't think of splendid buildings erected as works of art, but of simple rooms dedicated to prayer and study. In fact it is well known that since its institution (in the time of the Babylonian exile) the synagogue was meant to be the house of the people, a place of gathering for the elevation of the mind and the spirit. It is a school as well, taking that word in its broadest possible meaning, where the soul of Israel perpetually educates itself through the sources of the Book of God and its history of the chosen people, the past shaping the creations of new generations.

So it was in Babylon, and so it would continue to be with the return of the exiles to Palestine until the destruction of the second Temple and the fall of the ancient State of Israel. Thus the synagogue, by and large, has been maintained across the centuries, unchanged in its roles and its rules, in the different countries of the diaspora, up to the present time; a magnificent forge where the iron of our souls is tempered, made ready to confront and overcome the most tragic persecutions. Truly, how many untold martyrdoms could be related on the walls of the Temples of Israel! How many times, in the era of the Crusades, or that of the Spanish-Portuguese persecutions, was the synagogue where whole Congregations found their last refuge from the assaults of the fanatical crowds? The answer is that we number in the thousands our martyrs who within these sacred walls preferred death to violating the Law of Sinai. And in these, our Scuole of the Tedesco rite, twice a year, on the Shabbat before Pentecost and on the Shabbat preceding the Fast of Av, we recite special commemorative prayers, recalling the collective martyrdom of all the communities, German, English, Spanish, Portuguese and those in other countries.

As far as the artistic sense of the temples built in exile, the Jews maintained a measured and sober form, in particular those from Italy, where art rose to unattainable heights. Those who lived under Italy's beautiful sky could not remain completely indifferent to this. And our Venetian synagogues are undoubtedly affected by the artistic environment in which they are situated; however it should not be forgotten that the original purpose for which our fathers built them was above all the desire to make these buildings a place of religious sacrament, the centerpiece and focus of the entire moral and intellectual life of the Community.

So now, in order to make our commemorative picture more complete, I'd like to speak briefly regarding the conceptions of art that inspired those who at various times were concerned with the decoration and outfitting of the Tedesco Scuole.³

For the Scuola Canton we cannot know how the interior appeared in its first form, as no visible vestiges remain of the decorative scheme at the time of its original construction as a temple. For this era we can give, with some certainty, the general parameters of its construction⁴ and more particularly the position of the balcony for the women (Matroneo).

The oldest item which to this day adorns this small and sumptuous temple in such a delicate and refined manner is the Aron Hakodesh (the container of the sacred books), with its carved and gold inlaid wood. The character of the architectural composition and the decorative carving clearly reflect the tastes and pomp of the end of the 17th century.

Two sturdy pilasters define the central space, supporting the frame of a voluptuous frieze, culminating in a pediment which is open at the top and crowned by figured carvings; behind the pilasters, standing on their level, are two grooved columns which border the doors of the ark. The sculpted ornamentation, tightly composed and vividly carved, covers the entire Ark.

This is in keeping with that which is prescribed in the Pentateuch for the Holy Ark: "And you shall dress it in pure gold within and without and you shall make a garland of gold to wrap around it" (Exodus 37 v. 2). The shapes and the carvings here are all covered in gold leaf which surrounds the harmonious richness of this most holy case. The two seats for the Parnasim at the sides of the ark, perhaps from a slightly later date, form a worthy completion to the whole of the eastern facing wall.

³ For this very interesting information I am indebted to the expert assistance of Ing. Guido Sullam, about whom we don't know what we should admire him for more; his profound artistic doctrine or his passionate Jewish heart which for many years he put in to the historical identification and systematic conservation of all of the sacred objects of our Community.

⁴ There is information about an initial enlarging of the space of the Scuola Canton included in a Rabbinic decision which appears in Writings and Letters by Leon da Modena, published by Blau (Budapest, 1905) sub. N. 191. The Directors of the Scuola, Biniamin Baldosa, Leo de' Cervi and Mattatia Coen Tamari on one side, and a certain Consiglio Coen Porto on the other, questioned the rabbinic authority regarding the possibility of buying, for the enlargement of the Scuola, a part of a home belonging to Nathan Scaramella and inhabited by the Coen Porto family. Coen Porto wanted to know if this portion of the home was sold, would he and his family still be allowed to live in the apartment once a part of it was in use for the Temple. The Rabbis calmed the parties, affirming that it was guaranteed that nothing would prevent the sale, and so it was also guaranteed that nothing would prevent the part of the home that was not sold to be used for living as before. This decision is from 24 Elul 1639.

The dedicatory inscription which is etched in the steps of the ark in memory of Mordechai Baldosa, who was assassinated in 1672, provides a very approximate date for the time of construction. Perhaps other traces of this era can be found in the wooden part of the lantern over the pulpit and in the wall benches both there and in the larger space of the Scuola.

The remainder of the temple seems to be what was wanted by the proponents of its restoration in 1736, and that is the Parnasim Leo De Cervi, Abraam Izhak Capon, Gherescio Clerle, Abraam Parenzo, and Jeosciuaugh (Yehoshua) Baldosa, as is indicated on the cornerstone of the entryway.

By the beginning of the 18th century the temple assumes all its grace. A high paneling in walnut covers all the walls, adorned with delicate shapes, slender columns and miniature carvings. Over this covering, between each window, there are eight very graceful panels of carved and gold inlaid wood containing within their centers even more carved and painted figures which recall aspects of life for the Jews in the desert. These panels and the windows with perforations which serve as the grilles for viewing from the Matroneo are topped by another gold leaf facing, which runs along the four walls.

In the pulpit, the precious space from which the word of the Law is shared, the decorative aspects continue in an even more refined fashion. It is elevated by five steps, and flanked by twisted columns, the type of which were often placed beside altars at that time, but which here are blank and feature a weave of branches. An arch spreads across the entrance to the pulpit. At the center is the formidable and ornate lectern for conducting the services and oration. Within the space the paneling (offered in 1717 by Benjamin Marina da Conselve) is of rich color, overlaid by gold plated panels which correspond to those in the main space of the temple. These could be seen much more closely than those in the main space, and they accordingly show greater precision of invention and execution, echoing the graceful motifs of the 17th century; a delicate comment to the general golden tone.

The vault of the ceiling (perhaps one day all in gold) embraces this small, precious and marvelous space; the octagonal lantern crowns the dignity of the place. There are pilasters carved with vases full of roses, in the blind side of the drum, where, higher, carved and sculpted decorations descend, enclosing the original multicolor stained glass windows in a golden frame.

The Scuola Grande Tedesca, which underwent restorations in the prior century (1860), must have retained its original decorative scheme, this also dating from a little after the middle of the 17th century. Built on an irregular floor plan, the elliptical form of the balcony for women and the position of the Bimah, originally at the center of the room, had to pleasantly mask the abnormality, thus creating a rare instance of such a temple floor plan.

At the time of the aforementioned restoration, apart from moving the Bimah against the evening facing wall (on which two of the windows were closed), it was also necessary to rework the grilles for the matroneo; today these are of cast iron, and covered by a new painted decoration, the same as the original on the face of the elliptical ring of the ceiling. Perhaps the decoration of the walls over the wood paneling was changed. However, even if we find that in this temple as well the original appearance was changed, notable vestiges still remain, such as the framework of the balcony, the

gracious candelabra centered over the Bimah, and the rich permanent furnishings (the Aron Kodesh⁵, the sculpted and gold plated entryway, and the walnut paneling), as well as the furniture that was added at a later time, such as the benches which add a note of 18th century grace.

Historical documents, official or private in origin, which could include books of deliberations, inventories or the receipts of the Tedesche Scuole, dating either from the time of their construction or that immediately following, are not to be found here in Venice. There is no doubt, however, that they existed, because we have indirect information about some of them, which I will now discuss. I have been able to collect and preserve similar documents from other synagogues, specifically the Spanish and Italian⁶. Having examined these we can infer that each Scuola must have had similar. It is certainly not easy to say where all this historical material, whose loss we greatly lament, ended up; it is certain, however, that public and private archives and libraries to the north glory in the ownership of, and with good reason, rare manuscripts and precious editions from Venetian printers that they were able to take from us, due to our own carelessness and ignorance.

At the Scuola Grande, for example, until about fifty years ago there were two interesting books, handwritten in Hebrew, one dating from 1611, the other from 1649. In the first was recorded the set of rules that was called the “Regulations” for the operations of the temple. The book also contained notes about the offerings and the gifts of members along with the dates of their birth and of death; also noted are the names of the youth celebrating their religious majority, as well as those of the [“Guardians of the Law”, the Hadanim, or Judges], who were nominated each year; in sum there was a great deal of information regarding the religious life that took place at the temple. The second handwritten book contained a regular inventory where all the sacred objects in the temple were listed, along with their provenance and the date of the donation. To recover the Scuola Grande’s books, or those of the Scuola Canton, or books from other synagogues, those still existing or those which are now destroyed, would be to recover an extremely important source for the history of the families and of some of the oldest institutions of our Community. When the history of the Luzzatto family of Venice is reconstructed, it is from these aforementioned books of the Scuola Grande that the oldest names of this family could be obtained. The information which comes to us from the 1882 Autobiography of the immortal Samuel David Luzzatto played a role last year in the memorial for Luigi Luzzatto.

Anyway, from direct and indirect information we can state that the direction of the temple was entrusted to the Parnassim. These were elected by the Assembly, which was composed of temple members who paid a fee for a post in that body. In fact these posts were sold, according to old custom, to the various members of the Scuola, and ownership of one was considered to be an enviable privilege; the post became the property of its occupant, and it was passed from father to son, though at times posts were passed on in a will. The Assembly met in the temple and there each year they would hold the voting for nominations to various posts and offices.

⁵ On the steps of the Aron we read a Hebrew inscription which recalls that this was built and restored in 1662 following a bequest from Menahem Civald Gemelli.

⁶ See Pacifici R. in “La Rassegna Mensile di Israel” 1930 n. 7-8.

If to the three Parnassim was entrusted the general direction of the Scuola, then the distribution of the Mitzvot and other administrative jobs was assigned to the Gabbaim, a type of honorary secretary who had to keep the registries. These varied in number in each of the Scuole. There would have also been, at least based on what is known of other synagogues, the position of Parnas al Shemen Lamaor, who collected donations in the form of money or oil for the illumination of the temple, and the Parnas or Gabbai, for the collection of offerings for the poor in Palestine⁷.

Finally there was the Ghisbar (treasurer), who was in charge of the finances, and was called the “scigno” – the coffer. He was entrusted with not only available cash, but also important sacred objects and the most important documents. In the Venetian dialect, the Parnasim were called Gastaldi, and the administrative office of the temple was called the Gastaldia. Particular provisions are found in the rules relating to the nomination, the offices and the powers of the Hazan and the Shamash. The first, who also had to be a maestro, over time became, at least in some Scuole, the Sofer, a scribe, in the highest sense of the word; what they would have called a chancellor. The Shamash, apart from the generally known responsibilities, had to serve as a public herald; it was his call that turned people’s steps toward the synagogue, he who informed them of news and subjects of public interest. These rules underwent, as is natural over the course of time, notable modifications, such that in the most recently published rules we find different posts and offices; the animating spirit, though, is always the same.

The last Rulebook of the Scuola Canton that I know of dates from 8 September 1847 and is conserved in a manuscript where the rules are written in a beautiful and clear Italian calligraphy. In equally beautiful Hebrew script are written lists of prayers, temple officials, sacred objects, and different religious offices of the Scuola. The book was written by a man who was for more than fifty years an excellent and expert Hazan, and an extremely diligent treasurer (in fact he was the last treasurer for the Scuola), whose name is still wreathed in veneration and respect: Giuseppe Franco. The Regoladori, those who drafted the Rulebook, were Consiglio di Mazzo Ricchetti, Caliman di Abram Grego and Samuel Fano.

The rulebook contains the usual provisions regarding meetings and the legality of the Assembly, about voting procedures and disqualifiers, the obligations of those on salary, the order and discipline required in the sacred space during religious services; basically the same rules that appeared in earlier rulebooks, but updated. They no longer speak of Gastaldi, but rather of Presidents, of whom there were always three, and from among whom one would assume the role of treasurer. The book contains the list of members who were active in the Scuola at the time of the compilation of this rulebook, followed by another list of all new members. Alongside some of these names we find the date of their death or of their relocation to another city. They are all names of families well known to us, many of which have unfortunately have died out, while others have become members in other temples, and still others have left Venice. There are the Angeli, the Clerle, the Dalmedico, and the illustrious medical surgeon, Prof. Michaelangelo Asson. There are the Fano, in their various branches of relatives and kinship, all of whom were, like those alive today, known for their holy zeal and attachment to the temple; and the Franco,

⁷ These offerings were collected in special boxes which were found, and which can still be found at the entrances of the Temples. The money was sent directly to Palestine.

the Ricchetti, the Scaramella, the Olper. Many families of German origin came to live here: Guggenheim, Steinback, Frankel, Weischel, Kirschen, Kaule and many others.

In the book there is a list of Presidents from 1847 to 1881. In 1847 Giuseppe Dalmedico, Consiglio Ricchetti, Giacomo Pase were elected; in 1881 it was Beniamino Fano, Abramo Bassi, Giuseppe Levi Minzi. This is followed by the final list, that of the Hadamim, from '47 to '81. Then everything stops. In 1882 Giuseppe Franco retired from his noble office and his successors no longer take notes of this interesting information; and this, we must recognize, has been a real shame. And as it is for the Scuola Canton, so it is for the Scuola Grande, for which I have not been able to trace the two old manuscript books containing the forms of regular prayers and the names of the dead. Regarding these two books we know that the so-called "Reggimento" of the Parnasim from 1738 was composed by Giacobbe Levi, Yomtov Saraval and Abramo Parenzo.

We have already mentioned that the whole social, religious and cultural life of the Ghetto was contained within our temples⁸. Every morning before dawn, residents were awakened by the "Shomrim la Boker", the Guardians of the Morning, who would bang on doors and shout the names of the sleeping people, inviting them to rise for the morning prayer service. The synagogue would slowly fill with devotees who would recite their own private prayers until it was time to begin the official morning service, Shacharit. No stores would open nor would any work begin until first the store owners and workers had attended prayers. In a packet of documents at the State Archive dating from 1640, there is one dated 6 October 1633, in which the Rabbis at the time, Leon da Modena, Simon Luzzatto and Leon Gaziadio Daraval, affirm that "it is prohibited for any of us Jews to perform any function nor open a store, or see to any art or business if they have not recited the morning service in the synagogues, where we go to pray". Our seniors still recall the holy and pious soul of our Rabbi Abraham Lattes, how 60 or 70 years ago, just after dawn, he would gather around him store owners, small retailers and other businessmen in the Ghetto for morning prayers. And just as there was the Fraternity of the Shomrim la Boker, there was also a "Vespertina", that of the "Hazod Laila". The members of this group would gather in the middle of the night to weep in prayer for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the seat of the Shechinah, of the Divine Presence⁹. So, given that prayers took place at different hours of the day, and that the synagogue served as a place for study meetings, one can say that the Scuole were almost always open.

Nearby these Tedesche Scuole, just as with the other Scuole, would have been the Midrash, a type of academy of religious studies, where a Rabbi, surrounded by an attentive public which wanted to

⁸ Regarding life in the Ghetto, its institutions, the Synagogues, etc., see Cecil Roth: Venice, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia 1930. Prof. Dante Lattes is preparing an Italian translation of this book under the auspices of the Federazione delle Assoc. Cult. Ebraiche d'Italia.

⁹ Until the middle of the last century this Fraternity was fully operational. Then with the death of the most active and affectionate supporters it disappeared from Venetian Jewish life, and their modest capital was focused on that of the Community. But still today in the Budget appear small incomes from the testaments of Fraternity members. On the subject of nocturnal rites and prayers, I like to recall how up to just a few decades ago many of the religious would gather on the night of the 7th day of Passover on the Ponte del Ghetto Vecchio and as a chorus sing Shirat Alam (the Song of the Sea) in memory of the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea.

learn, would comment on and discuss the most interesting pages from the sacred scripture and the Talmud.

These Midrashim, our Circles and Gatherings of study, which to our shame we have closed all too readily, or sold for a little money, are the direct progenitors of what today we call public Universities. Beyond the officially organized Midrashim, there were others which were private, created and organized by patrons of Jewish culture, such as the one founded in 1594 by Caliman Belgrado, at his own expense; this Midrash is where Leon Modena developed his talents for eloquence and ingenuity. This period during which these schools were founded is the period of the Community's greatest prosperity, and it lasted for over a century and half until the end of the 1600s. Venice became a major center of Jewish life: there were many learned Talmudists, profound Cabbalists, doctors of world fame who were sent to the most important European Courts, and able, first class diplomats and financiers, all Venetian. At Venice were born or lived people who produced ageless works, such as Josef Mantino, then doctor to Pope Paul III, who dedicated one of his philosophical works to Doge Andrea Gritti, or Josef Tamary, doctor to the city. There was also David De Pomis, who was author of, among other works, "De Medico hebraeo", "Zemah David", which is a Hebrew-Latin-Italian dictionary, and numerous papers on medicine, one of which is dedicated to Doge Mocenigo and the Senate. There are many others who are well known to us as well, such as Elia Levita, Menachem Azaria Fano, Leon da Modena, Simon Luzzatto, Azzaria Picchio, Simon Calimani, the various Coens, Port and Sarfatti, and the poetess Sara Coppio Sullam. And in particular, our Tedesche Scuole can assuredly count among their attendees Rabbis Avigdor Civald Gemelli, Yehudah Saraval, Samuel Yehudah, Katzenellenbogen, and Jacob Emanuele Cracovica, who was one of the Deputies of the Adriatic to the Grand Sanhedrin of Paris.

Simon Luzzatto was certainly one of the Yahidim and the Rabbis of the Scuola Grande. How much there is to say about this learned philosopher! He was born in 1589 and died in 1663. He is the author of the treatise "State of the Jews", published in 1638, which at the time enjoyed much success. It is a type of apologia regarding the Jews, whose purpose was to demonstrate to Governments and especially to the Venetian Republic how a sense of justice as well as the interests of the State called for favoring tolerance and protection of the Jews. Another of his works, "Socrates" (1651), dedicated to the Doge and to the Senate, is a work of great philosophical erudition, intended to show the inadequacy of human intention and the uncertainty of philosophical opinions. The learned son of the Venetian Ghetto was described, perhaps due to some of his opinions in matters of ritual, as "religious as a writer of philosophy, but philosophical and free of all fanaticism as a Rabbi"¹⁰. He signed, and is perhaps the author of, a prayer drafted in 1605 for the prosperity of the Republic and the Doge, who at that time was Marino Grimani.

It seems certain that Simon Calimani was a Rabbi and member of the Scuola Canton; at least his name appears at the top of the list of the Ascavod (Prayers for the dead) of this Scuola. He is the author of a Hebrew grammar in Italian, with a brief section on poetry, which was printed in 1751; and with his colleague Saraval, he translated the "Sayings of the Fathers" (Pirkei Avot) into Italian. Moisè Soave had a good number of poems by Calimani which had been composed on the occasion of weddings or the

¹⁰ See Autobiography of S. D. Luzzatto, Padova, Tip. Crescini 1882, pg. 16

awarding of Doctoral degrees. Furthermore, the late Doctor Cesare Musatti confirmed that the maestro of Hebrew language for the historic Galliccioli, who is mentioned in Moschini's history of Venetian literature, was in fact our Simon Calimani.

I would be tempted to speak further at length of these maestri and their works, because this is how we commemorate the glories of our temples. Due to the lack of available time, though, I will return to items relating to the general nature of the religious and cultural life of our Synagogues, with particular reference to the Tedesco rite.

One curiosity at the Scuola Grande is its lack of inclusion of the mystical hymn Lecha-dodi in the manual of Prayer. Often it is said that the hymn isn't sung because the foundation of the Scuola predates the composition of the hymn. The author of Lecha-dodi, in fact – Salamone Alkavez – flourished between 1529 and 1575, and his hymn was not accepted outside Andrianopoli until after his death. However, as Soave has correctly observed, given that Lechah-dodi is included here at the Scuola Canton (which is only three years younger than the Scuola Grande), the reason for its lack of acceptance must be something quite different. And this reason can be found in the objection to Cabbalah among the Rabbis of the Scuola Grande.

As much as they were spaces for prayer, our Tedesche Synagogues were also spaces in which one heard the most eloquent oratory. It is well known how the genre of sacred oratory was held in great esteem in Venice, and first among the eminent preachers of the time were Leon da Modena and then Giacobbe Giuseppe Saraval. It was at the Scuola Grande that Leon da Modena made his debut on Shabbat Nahamu in 1593. Sermons were attended by, apart from crowds of the public from the Ghetto, numerous Christians, nobles and priests from every order, demonstrating the great interest aroused by the cultured and ornate words of our Maestri. They sermonized in Italian, naturally, though for reasons of book sales and for easier access to readers these sermons were then translated into Hebrew for printing, as happened with those of Da Modena. However, it is significant and a matter of honor for us Venetian Jews that the first Jewish sermon to be printed in Italian was from our own Scuola Grande, a sermon from the penitential Shabbat of 1714 by Isacco Colli, entitled "The desperate sinner will triumph in penitence".

Every happy or sad event in the Community was recorded in the Temple. It was also in the Temple that the solemn pronouncement of excommunication against violators of the religious laws or of the rules of social and financial life of the Community was performed. The ceremony took place in a truly terrifying setting: with the Holy Ark open, black candles and sounding of the Shofar. Our Scuola Grande was the scene of these painful proceedings, and interesting documents about this have been preserved in print¹¹.

¹¹ On 9 July (21 Messidor) 1797 the Jews of Venice gathered in assembly declared as null and void (except for a very few exceptional cases) all of the excommunications ever pronounced from the most remote past up to that day. (See my study on "Democratic Government of Venice and the abolition of the Ghetto" in "La Rassegna Mensile di Israel", June 1930.

If the Scuola came through some grave danger unharmed, there would be a public celebration ceremony to give thanks to God, where special Hebrew hymns that had been composed for the occasion were sung. It is in recollection of such events that what at the Scuola Grande is called the “Limud of fire” finds its origin. It is dedicated to the memory of two separate fires, one that occurred in 1765, and another in 1817; neither fire, however, damaged the sacred building. To the eternal memory of these two events they composed two poetic hymns. One of these is anonymous, while the second, the one that recalls the fire of 1817, is by Rabbi Elia Aron Lattes. Both were repeated each year on their respective anniversaries (20 Elul and 24 Cheshvan) until a few years before the closure of the Scuola¹².

Cultural activity was not separate from a natural tendency towards entertainment, to music and singing. For example, when the religious-cultural Academies would complete the study of a tract of Talmud, that day would be a day of celebration and singing. We serve God with joy.

So it was that at the Scuola Grande, on a similar occasion in 1622, in addition to the usual very listenable sermons of Leon da Modena, hymns of thanks and exultation were sung. And the Hebrew songs of our Synagogues, both those of the Tedesche and of the Spanish, must have proven to be quite interesting and suggestive even for non-Jews, given that they caught the attention of a great man such as Benedetto Marcello. This illustrious composer, as is well known, set fifty Psalms to music: ten of these were based on themes taken from our Scuole, which were reproduced at the top of the page of each composition in their actual original form, with the verses in Hebrew characters beneath the notation.

Of particular interest, the melody that Marcello used for Psalm 22 is the intonation of Shofet-col-Aretz that our Tedesco Minhag chants for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur¹³.

Each Temple has always had its Gheniza; a closet, that is, or a storage room, where they would place prayer or study books that were no longer serviceable. From these hidden storage rooms many patient scholars have found papers and documents that vividly illuminate people and information from our past. Everything was preserved: pictures with images of the history or customs of Israel, objects in wood or stone with carvings and with inscriptions of Hebrew letters.

Have you ever paid attention to the stone inlaid in the wall close to this Scuola Canton? On it is carved verse 10 of Psalm 32:

רבים מכאובים לרשע והבוטח ביהוה חסד יסובבנו :

“Many pains are reserved for the wicked, but those who trust in God are surrounded by his mercy”. There is, however, a variation; the word Mahovim in Hebrew is altered with a final mem, which one could translate as “my pain”, or as “my pains”. Surrounding the modification of this word is a sort of

¹² The Scuola Grande Tedesca functioned regularly every day until October 1917, after which, due to the war, almost the entire Community had to leave our beloved city. When the refugees returned, due to a variety of circumstances it was not possible to reconstitute the offices of this Temple, nor of the Scuola Italiana. The administration of these was combined with that of the Spanish and Levantine Temples in a single body that took the name of “Templi Israelitici Riuniti”.

¹³ Cfr. Montefiore: “Music in the Jewish Temple” in “La Rassegna Mensile di Israel” 1931 n. 10-11.

legend that has been passed from generation to generation, and which was studied and set on paper by Rabbi Marco Sabbadini. The legend is connected to a very sad episode in 1480 which concerned the small Community of Portobuffolè. The leaders of this Community, Servadio and Mosè son of David, were accused of the ritual homicide of the child of a servant of Servadio's, a certain Donato, who was a convert to Christianity. The terrible accusation involved other Jews and the accused were tried: three of them, the aforementioned Servadio and Mosè, and one Giacobbe da Cologna were all condemned to die by atrocious torture. The other leaders of the little Community appealed to the Avogaria and succeeded in having the execution suspended. The accused were ordered relocated to Venice. Here the trial was started again, but despite the defense of legal counsel Giovanni Minio and other academics from Padova, the sentence was reconfirmed, and these innocents had to die by fire after being hung from a pole in Piazza San Marco. Up to this point is all historical fact: the legend adds that the Hazan of the Portobuffolè Temple, a certain R. Josef, came to Venice to stay with his poor friends for a long time, crying and singing psalms. One of these recognized and pointed out the traitor Donato, who was present at the execution, saying: "Remember my martyrs on the head of this wicked one" and R. Josef answered back: "Even though you are consumed by the flame, the Divine mercy will not abandon you". The Hazan, once returned to his Community, commemorated this last conversation in that rough stone, which, it is not known how, ended up here in Venice, in the wall close by our Scuola. Rabbi Sabbadini was able to decipher this legend from an old manuscript in crude Greek, with interpolations of Hebrew, Caldean and Arabic words, given to him as a gift by a friend from Mantova¹⁴. I wanted to recall the incident to explain in some way the presence of this stone in our Ghetto, and above all to recall for us, we great-grandchildren, a painful episode from the lives of our Veneti forefathers, a life which at times was made even more painful by the perversity of converts.

We also must recall that these Scuole have always been the scenes of demonstrations of loyalty and sincere affection for the city and for their country of adoption, both as institutions and in the sentiments of the individual members. So it was that in March 1797, when the Senate, in light of the war that menaced the city, decreed that even ecclesiastical institutions must bring gold and silver to the public Zecca, our Scuole were second to none. The spontaneous large offering moved the Consiglio dei Pregadi to offer them particular thanks. "The offering of 6214 ounces came from the books of the Scuola Grande, as well as the quota which came from the books of the other Scuole". And since we are speaking of loyalty to Italy, and we are speaking about the Scuola Canton, we must recall the figure of Rabbi Salomone Olper, a close friend of Daniel Manin, who many times entrusted him with the most delicate jobs. Along with him we recall his brother Giovacchino, a maestro of our Talmud Torah; and we recall Leone Pincherle, a minister of the Provisional Government and certainly a Yahid of the Scuola Grande: these are luminous examples who demonstrate yet again how in all the centuries, in all circumstances, in the Ghetto and outside the Ghetto, everywhere there could be dissent concerning religious matter or divisions over ritual or temple, the heart of the Italian Jew has always known sincerely and with sacrifice how to beat in unison with the heart of our great Country.

¹⁴ Corriere Israelitico, Year XLV, No. 6 and 7. Certainly from the historical point of view, as Morpurgo justly points out (Bibliografia della storia degli Ebrei del Veneto in Rivista Israelitica, Firenze 1912, pg. 57), Sabbadini's article contains some inaccuracies because in 1482 the Ghetto did not yet exist in Venice, as also at this time the three nations, levantina, ponentina and tedesca, did not exist.

On this day of commemorating the two principal Scuole of the Ashkenazi rite, our thoughts, grateful and reverent, turn to the other three small private Synagogues we have already mentioned, where for many years the same rite was practiced. The precise date of their foundation is not known for any of these three Scuole: the Luzzatto was instituted in the 17th century by the family of the same name; until 1836 its location was in Ghetto Nuovo, close to the bridge. After that year it was moved to the space of the Midrash of the Scuola Levantina, where, however, the same Minhag continued to be followed.

It is much more sober, but the fixed furnishings of that Scuola are still joined in one decorative unit. The simplicity of its lines reveals how this small room for prayer was also established at about the time of the Scuola Grande and the Canton.

The Scuola Mesullamim was founded around 1600 by one Mosè Mesullam Levi, who is mentioned in the preface to the Tedesco Machzor that was printed in 1600 and which always was and is the liturgical text for these Scuole. This private sanctuary was also situated in the Ghetto Nuovo, and in an annotation found in a book belonging to the Scuola Canton I learned that on 16 February 1840 the Gastaldi of the Scuola Grande granted the right “to the individuals of the Scuola Mesulamim of the Tedesco Liturgy” – these are the annotator’s words – “to gather with them in light of the expenses they must incur due to the state of their space and because it is very small”; then he adds: “they have not been able to get a sense of when it was opened, and by whom, and for what reason; we suppose, though, that it was active in the time that the plague struck Venice in 1680”. And here there is an error in the date, because the plague was in 1630. But this error doesn’t stop us from making a conjecture: Mesullam Levi definitely lived in the first decades of the 1600s and therefore during the epidemic of 1630: why shouldn’t we suppose that the sanctuary was founded by him as an offering to God to ask for an end to the sickness, or as thanks for the ending of it? As across the entire city, the plague left victims in the Ghetto as well, and 300 years ago, Kislev 1631, the plague could finally be considered over. In the various Scuole of all three Communities, tedesca, ponentina and leventina, special religious services were celebrated, preceded by a penitential fast, and accompanied by large donations of money for the acquisition of sacred objects for the Scuole. These events have remained in memory from century to century.

Other than a Torah that was passed to the Tedesco Synagogue of Padova, what remains of the Scuola Mesullamim is a short Hebrew inscription found nearby the entryway of the old building where the Scuola was located, requesting offerings to some indecipherable benevolent organization. A parchment manuscript which is now property of the Scuola Canton also remains¹⁵. This is one of the books used in the Tedesche Scuole for noting the benefactors of the temple who had given donations in cash, objects and in sacred vestments. The book also contains prayers for specific occasions, the different formulations of blessings prepared for the Hazan, and that which is most interesting for us,

¹⁵ The book is made up of twenty one pages of parchment with highly figured borders and large first letters in gold. The frontispiece, within a border the same as on the other pages, has a decorated coat of arms topped with the crown of the Law and with inscriptions bearing the name of the Scuola.

dates and notable events for the Scuola or the Community, as well as copies of the messenger's announcements for Sabbaths and holidays. In this book we find recorded the special blessing for the famous doctor and diplomat Salomone Ashkenazi, who negotiated the peace between the Serenissima and the Sultan after the battle of Lepanto. This renowned figure was in Venice at the time that one of the normal condotte was to expire, and succeeded through his friendship with the most powerful nobles of the city in having the decree to expel the Jews annulled. Also preserved in the book are two other formulations for public announcements: one regarding the penalty for those who broke the rules regarding the Banks, the other against those who by any means or through another person, Jew or no, induced others to take actions that were damaging to the State, the Community, and/or to the relations between individuals and the Authorities. The Codice is from 1710, but naturally includes all the annotations from books of earlier date; it concludes with the names of the Parnassim and of the Gabbai in office at the time, who were Menachem di Aaron Coen, Menachem di langhacov Cracovia (Parnassim) and Mosci Menachem di Simhà Mereri (Gabbai).

The Scuola Coanim is from the 18th Century, and was certainly founded by a Coen family about whom we do not have specific information: it was situated in Ghetto Nuovo, and was closed in 1893 following the demolition of the buildings. Its modest heritage and its objects were added to those of the Scuola Spagnola, and the decorative elements that can be found today in the small sanctuary on the ground floor of the Scuola Spagnola are all from the Coanim.

Gentlemen,

As I approach the end of this historical review, I confess to have noticed, even during its preparation, its various shortcomings and omissions. However, not all of these can be attributed to me, considering the often lamented scarcity of documents and sources. Perhaps in this presentation we should have recalled and discussed other names, those that emerge from the books of the Ascavod, from the inventory books and from the memorial stones that we can read as we climb the stairs of this Temple as well as those of the Scuola Grande, or which can be found within both temples. The Baldosa family, Coppio and the many already named for the Scuola Canton, such as Capriles, Lonigo, Malta, Motta, on to Gentilomo¹⁶, Pincherle, and the Grassini family of our own day for the Scuola Grande; these are names which are frequently encountered in the history of our institutions in all the temples. However, the information and dates available to me regarding these names were so imprecise and uncertain that I feared committing grievous omissions. For all these generous and good souls we have, at the beginning of the ceremony, asked for the blessings of Heaven in the language of our fathers. And so it would not be inopportune to recall the various Hazanim, from the foundation of this Scuola up to our days, such as the already mentioned Giuseppe Franco, his brother Lazzaro, Laudadio Gemelli and Abramo Bassani, and with them all the Hazanim of the Scuola Grande. To them goes the credit for having preserved and passed on, with religious fervor, the traditional melodies which belong to all these temples; it would be very useful if they could be recorded in some way as has been done in other Communities. All of these known and unknown official ministers, with their modest, quiet daily work

¹⁶ See regarding this Family, Edgardo Morpurgo in *Rivista Israelitica*, Firenze 1910, no. 4.

have greatly contributed to the conservation and to the development of these holy places. May their memories be blessed.

In conclusion, and for the learned Maestri of the Community, who are equal to the others in their affection for the same, where for twenty years now my spirit has fed on Jewishness in the memory and the study of its glorious past; finally, amongst all of you, I am proud to affirm that I wanted today's ceremony. And if this sacred environment had offered a greater availability of space, I would have wanted the more solemn rite, more accessible, and more worthy of the historic date. I also wanted the ceremony to be held during this Festival of Lights, because Hannukah recalls another consecration and inauguration of religious life in the Temple: that of 165 BCE, in the Temple of Jerusalem, a consecration which in our millennia of history became a symbol of the purification of spirit, of the rediscovery and the renewal of Jewish knowledge following the hoped for and triumphant victory of the Maccabees against all forms of assimilation and the destruction of Jewish values. We finally recall, oh brothers, that only in the Temple and through the Temple does the soul of Israel come to know the eternal beauty of its own life. We recall that which these Scuole mean to our old ones closed in the Ghetto, compared with the painful indifference that they create in us who live in freedom.

These celebratory rites, for those who properly understand them, have great importance. For many people the memory of the past has always been both a warning and a call to a brighter future. We therefore thank God once again for bringing us to this day.

ברוך אתה ה' א □ לוהינו, מלך העולם, שהחינו וקימנו והגענו
לזמן הזה

God, please allow us to work together as brothers so that our great grandchildren, celebrating the 500th anniversary of this and the other Synagogues, of which few are older than ours, can say that the 400th anniversary in 5692 of the foundation of the Scuole in the Ghetto signaled the beginning of a new period of Jewish light for the Community of Venice.

יברכך יהוה וישמרך : אר יהוה פניו אליך ויחנך :
ישא יהוה פניו אליך וישם לך שלום :

May the Lord bless and keep you.

May the Lord shine his grace upon you.

May God turn to you and may he grant his peace to you. Amen.