

DAVID SCLAR

THE RISE OF THE “RAMḤAL”: PRINTING AND TRADITIONAL JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE ‘AFTER-LIFE’ OF MOŠEH ḤAYYIM LUZZATTO\*

Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto (1707-1746) has become an extraordinarily popular figure<sup>1</sup>. He has been posthumously hailed as the founder of Modern Hebrew literature, a precursor to Hasidism, and a pillar of the ethical Mussar movement that originated in nineteenth-century Lithuania. Scholars from Leopold Zunz to Simon Dubnow to Simon Ginzburg identified Luzzatto as the cultural bridge between the Medieval and Modern eras. The great Hebrew poet Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik published a glorifying poem about Luzzatto entitled *Ha-boḥer me-Paduvah*<sup>2</sup>.

Although scholars of several and quite diverse fields study Luzzatto’s influence and analyze his texts, he is (and always has been) most revered and widely studied in traditional Jewish circles. Kabbalists delve deeply into his kabbalistic works, yeshiva students attempt to refine their lives by studying his most well-known book *Mesillat yešarim*, and newly religious Jews are often introduced to the fundamentals of Judaism with his systematic study of the tradition, *Derek ha-šem*<sup>3</sup>. He is reverentially referred to as “the RaMḤaL” (an acronym for Rabbi Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto), and is generally regarded as a ṣaddik and one of the greatest purveyor’s of Judaism in the last several centuries. It is commonly held in orthodox communities that the great hasidic leader Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezhirech (1710-1772), stated that Luzzatto’s death at a young age indicated a heavenly decree that the world was not yet worthy to receive his teachings; it is also said that Elijah Gaon of Vilna (1720-1797), a staunch opponent of

\* Dedicated to the memory of my paternal grandfather, Hayyim ben Avraham ha-Levi, רוח ה' תניחנו בגן עדן.

<sup>1</sup> On the three-hundredth anniversary of Luzzatto’s birth, several conferences were held internationally examining the man and his work, and Jewish newspapers throughout the world published articles celebrating this prolific and once-controversial scholar. In addition, biographical entries on Luzzatto are found in several languages on Wikipedia and a Google search of several permutations of his name yields tens of thousands of hits.

<sup>2</sup> H.N. BIALIK, *Ha-boḥer me-Paduvah*, in «Ha-po‘el ha-ša‘ir» 21, nos. 23-24 [1928] (Tel Aviv: *Hoša‘at ha-po‘el ha-ša‘ir*).

<sup>3</sup> This last element is relatively recent. *Derek ha-šem* was published for the first time in 1896 in Amsterdam, and its popularity today, particularly in the United States, is probably linked to the “*baal teshuva*” movement of the last few decades.

Hasidism, insisted that had he been alive during Luzzatto's lifetime, he would have traveled to Italy on foot from Lithuania in order to learn from him<sup>4</sup>. These and similar statements are often found in the introductions to modern printed editions of Luzzatto's works. A recent hagiography of Luzzatto went even further by asserting that Luzzatto influenced the American way of life! The author of this book indicated his belief that Luzzatto personified traditional Judaism, remarking polemically that *Mesillat yešarim* is «studied in every place where true Jewish ideas are handed on» (emphasis mine)<sup>5</sup>.

The phenomenon that is “Ramḥal” is even more astonishing when one considers that Luzzatto was, during his lifetime, the center of a scandal that labeled him a heretical and deviant threat to the Jewish people. The rabbinic establishment, in Italy and elsewhere, feared Luzzatto's mystical speculation was connected to the followers of Shabbetai Zevi. Rabbis throughout Europe sought to quell what they regarded as Luzzatto's misguided youthful ventures, and, over several years, Luzzatto was the subject of a heresy hunt. His works were condemned, confiscated, and burned, and he eventually fled Italy for a more peaceful life in Amsterdam. His controversial standing seems to have remained with him to varying degrees (depending on the community) for the rest of his short life<sup>6</sup>.

More than a mere monograph is necessary to reconcile Luzzatto's contentious status during his life with the posthumous adoration and reverence we witness and participate in today. How did the “Ramḥal” attain his present status if he was condemned by some of his generation's most important and influential rabbis? How did this controversial figure come to impress and influence the precursors of diametrically opposed modern Jewish movements? This paper is a preliminary investigation into Luzzatto's reception history (*rezeptionsgeschichte*). I wish to elucidate how Luzzatto was able, in a practical historical sense, to influence others, when it appears that he could have been marginalized by the controversy and forgotten except as a relic of the Sabbatian era. While

<sup>4</sup> M.H. LUZZATTO, *Derekh Hashem (The Way of God)*, S. Silberstein - A. Kaplan (trad.), Feldheim Publishers Ltd., Jerusalem 1977, pp. 15-18; <<http://www.ramhal.com/en/Biographie.htm>>. See note 33 below.

<sup>5</sup> Y. BINDMAN, *Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto: His Life and Works*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham MD 2004, pp. 95, 110-111, 123-125. The short biography on the website of the Ramhal Institute exhibits similar sentiments: «Today, we can only pray for forgiveness upon the Rabbis of his generation, who mistook him for an impostor and prevented him from learning, teaching, writing and leaving to the nation of Israel other magnificent works. We should also pray for our own generation that we will merit of the revelation of all his writings in our day, particularly the *Zohar Tinyana* that was amongst those buried by the Rabbis of Frankfurt»; <<http://www.ramhal.com/en/Biographie.htm>>.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed treatment of the controversy, see E. CARLEBACH, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies*, Columbia University Press, New York 1990, pp. 195-255.

Luzzatto's very different disciples Jekuthiel Gordon and David Franco Mendes disseminated their master's influence, in *Qabbalah* and poetry, respectively, their activities were not nearly grand and influential enough to facilitate and propagate the extraordinary image of the "Ramḥal." Similarly, Luzzatto's apparent contentment in the Land of Israel, his burial next to the great Talmudic sage Akiva, and the eulogy composed in his honor by the rabbis of Tiberias are not enough to explain the extent and nature of the "Ramḥal" phenomenon. Moreover, Luzzatto's most widespread reception began approximately a century after his death among Lithuanian Jewry, newly established as Judaism's cultural center and without direct connection to Luzzatto's life and worldview.

The most concrete evidence of Luzzatto's extraordinary legacy – and the place from which to begin analyzing the rise of the "Ramḥal" – rests in the printing of his writings<sup>7</sup>. The sheer number of Luzzatto imprints demonstrates his posthumous popularity. For example, in just twelve years, between 1857 and 1869, approximately ten printers published more than twenty editions of Luzzatto's works in six different cities<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, each edition is replete with intellectual, social, religious, and cultural complexity. In addition to the importance of who printed what and where, the printed books themselves contain valuable information in printers' *haqdamot* (introductions) and rabbinic *haskamot* (approbations). The introductions contain bibliographic, biographic, and geographic information, as well as the sentiments of the printers, editors, and patrons of the imprints.

<sup>7</sup> For this study, I have relied upon two bibliographies: N. BEN-MENACHEM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Hayyim Luzzatto: rešimah bibliografit sel Sifrei defus u-kitvei yad*, Mossad Harav Kook, Jerusalem 1951; Y. VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus of the Hebrew Book*, 2 vols., The Institute for Computerized Bibliography, Jerusalem 1995. In general, I have analyzed imprints printed before the 1860s, by which time "Ramḥal" was firmly established as a *Torah* giant in the eastern European Jewish psyche. See note 36 below for two imprints of the 1850s (a commentary and a translation) that signify mainstream acceptance of Luzzatto's work.

<sup>8</sup> None of the imprints surveyed in this study revealed the number of copies printed. Abraham Habermann estimates that during the incunabula period (books printed before 1501) some 300-400 copies were produced in a print-run (A. HABERMANN, *Toledot sefer ha-'ivri*, Jerusalem 1945, pp. 39-40). Given the nature of studying print culture (lack of printers' testimony leaves us with little knowledge of the inner workings of the profession) and the history of the Hebrew book (few copies remain due to heavy use) we can measure literary popularity primarily by the number of editions printed. In his dissertation on the reception history of the *Kuzari*, Adam Shear rightly estimates that the printing of that monumental medieval work three times during the sixteenth century signifies a high rate of demand (A. SHEAR, *The Later History of a Medieval Hebrew Book: Studies in the Reception of Judah Halevi's, Sefer Ha-Kuzari*, dissertation, University of Pennsylvania 2003, p. 190). Although the imprints discussed in this study appear more than two centuries later, when the printing trade was far more advanced and established, twenty editions of a single author's works in a dozen years is by any measure astounding.

The books' *haskamot*, meanwhile, elucidate the nature of Luzzatto's posthumous acceptance<sup>9</sup>. Although *haskamot* formally protected printers' rights, they unofficially safeguarded against the printing of heretical ideas. In addition, the reputation of the men granting *haskamot*, and the intensity of their admiration, demonstrated the value of the author and influenced printers and readers. Authors required approval to print a work, so the signature of a member of the rabbinic establishment assured an author's legitimacy as a link in the chain of tradition that began with Moses at Mount Sinai. Luzzatto's legacy developed through a complex interaction between Luzzatto's brilliant writings, the influence of the printing trade, and traditional Jewish historiography. The uniqueness of his legacy clearly indicates that Luzzatto was a genius, unparalleled in intellectual and literary talent in recent centuries. But his diverse, even contradictory, legacy also demonstrates that developing modern Jewish identities divorced the man's ideas (i.e. his books) from his life (which had been largely defined by his controversial activities). Luzzatto came to be seen as the father of various modern Jewish movements through the selective appropriation of his personality; the apparently distinct elements of this 'personality' were merely his diverse intellectual contributions that survived in print. While it may be appealing to label Luzzatto's posthumous ascendancy the 'rehabilitation' of a misunderstood and condemned man, I intend to demonstrate that this phenomenon is more accurately described as the rise of an ahistorical, multi-faceted, and ill-defined figure called "Ramḥal." In addition, a perusal of the printing of the "Ramḥal" indicates that the study of Luzzatto's 'after-life' can provide significant insight into modern Jewry, from the restructuring of Jewish society to the development of new worldviews.

The beginning of Luzzatto's posthumous rise to fame and honor began at the nadir of his life. Having experienced hardship in Italy, and again in Frankfurt, Amsterdam proved to be a place of rejuvenation for Luzzatto<sup>10</sup>. Although he faced opposition from the Ashkenazic chief rabbinate, Luzzatto earned the respect and acceptance of the Sephardic community. He gained a great reputation as a scholar and teacher, and he continued to write books and poetry, although nothing explicitly kabbalistic<sup>11</sup>. Three works were printed during his

<sup>9</sup> See M. BENAYAHU, *Haskamah we-rehšut be-defusei Venitziyah*, Mechon Ben-Tzvi, Jerusalem 1971. For a masterful index of approbations, listing rabbis who granted *haskamot*, book titles, and publication information, see Leopold Löwenstein, *Mafteah ha-haskamot Index Approbationum*, new edition compiled and edited by Shlomo Eidelberg (Lakewood: I.C.C., 2008),

<sup>10</sup> For documentary evidence of Luzzatto's residence in Amsterdam, see J. MEYER, *The Stay of Mozes Haim Luzzatto at Amsterdam, 1736-1743*, Amsterdam 1947.

<sup>11</sup> Luzzatto signed oaths that included the provision that he would refrain from producing kabbalistic tracts without permission. See S. GINZBURG, *RaMḥal u-benei dorו: osef iggerot u-te'udot*,

stay, including, in 1740, *Mesillat yešarim*<sup>12</sup>. Printed dozens of times over the next century, it became Luzzatto's most significant contribution to Jewish thought, and the book for which he is most widely known and respected<sup>13</sup>. The work instructs readers in moral behavior, systematically detailing the steps from forsaking sin to maintaining contact with the divine spirit<sup>14</sup>.

The first edition of *Mesillat yešarim* included *haskamot* from prominent members of the Amsterdam rabbinate and elsewhere<sup>15</sup>. Luzzatto was praised for his wisdom and the book was lauded as essential to living a pious life. David ben Raphael Meldola of Amsterdam gave Luzzatto the supreme compliment by comparing him to the Biblical Moses. The name "Moses" was enlarged in a reference to the God-given *Torah*, and Meldola stated that "none has arisen like Moses," a declaration commonly made about the great medieval thinker Maimonides<sup>16</sup>.

Tel Aviv 1937, vol. 1, #176; J. EMDEN, *Torat ha-qena'ot*, Amsterdam 1752, fols. 51r-52r; and CARLEBACH, *The Pursuit of Heresy*, cit., pp. 225-226.

<sup>12</sup> BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabi Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto* cit., no. 127; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 64 (Amsterdam #1521).

<sup>13</sup> *Mesillat yešarim* was sufficiently in demand to warrant the printing of seven editions in Vilna between 1844 and 1875, and approximately twenty-five editions in Warsaw between 1841 and 1895. At least five editions of *Mesillat yešarim* appeared in Königsburg in 1858 and 1859 alone (BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabi Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto*, cit., nos. 155, 158-162; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 626 [Königsburg #198-201]). *Mesillat yešarim* was the fifth Hebrew book printed in Vilna (BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabi Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 145; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 194 [Vilna #4]) and the third Hebrew book printed in Lyck (BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabi Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 163; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 411 [Lyck #1]). The Vilna imprint was just the second book printed by the Romm press, which later produced the renowned Vilna Shas.

<sup>14</sup> The book is an exposition of the 143 'ladder of saintliness' described by the Talmudic sage Phinehas ben Jair (Mishnah Sotah 9:15). For modern hagiography of 'Ramḥal' in action see translator's preface in *Mesillat yešarim (The Path of the Just)*, S. Silberstein (trad.), Feldheim Publishers Ltd., Jerusalem 1987: neither "book" nor "exposition" appropriately describe Luzzatto's work, for he did not merely elucidate and describe the Talmudic dictum, he provided a manual for living (p. xi). To be sure, Luzzatto's analytical powers, extensive knowledge, and expansive worldview were so outstanding (despite the controversy he did not recede into the background!), and his contribution was so extraordinary, that this particular point of view may in fact be fitting.

<sup>15</sup> The first edition of *Mesillat yešarim* included a joint *haskamah* from David Israel Athias and Isaac Hayyim d'Brito Abendana, *hakam* of the Portuguese community in Amsterdam and head of the Talmudic academy *Eš Ḥayyim*. The imprint also included a *haskamah* from Raphael ben Eliezer Meldola, rabbi of France, as well as an introduction from Jacob ben Abraham Bassan, rabbi of Hamburg. About *Mesillat yešarim*, Bassan remarked: «מצאתי בו את שאהבה נפשי».

<sup>16</sup> «... ושוממה ועד משה לא קם חכם כמשה המאיר...». This glorifying statement also appeared in the eulogy composed by the rabbis of Tiberias (see ALMANZI, pp. 61-62; S. GINZBURG, *RaMḤal u-benei doru*, vol. 2, # 167; and M. CHRQUI, *Igrot Ramhal u-benei doru*, Mekhon Ramhal, Jerusalem 2001, pp. 442-443). David Meldola, the son of Raphael Meldola, published several works, including

Much of this was echoed two years later when Luzzatto published a treatise on the study of the *Talmud* entitled *Derek tevunot*<sup>17</sup>. The approbations showered Luzzatto with honorary titles, elucidated the benefits of studying this work, and encouraged scholars to approach the *Talmud* using Luzzatto's method.

Luzzatto's third and final work printed in Amsterdam was the poem *La-yešarim tehillah*<sup>18</sup>. Composed in 1743 in honor of a wedding, it was printed without *haskamot* at the famous and leading Jewish printing house of Solomon Proops. The clear and precise language of *La-yešarim tehillah* led early historians to deem Luzzatto the first Modern Hebrew author. More than twenty editions of the poem appeared over the next several decades, an exceptionally large number for any publication let alone a wedding poem<sup>19</sup>.

These imprints are obviously important for what they contain. The high praise is indicative of a uniquely talented man earning his due. After a prolonged struggle in Italy, Luzzatto had found relative peace and prosperity in Amsterdam. Wealthy and powerful community members welcomed him and commissioned his poetry, prestigious printing houses published his writings, and the most important and influential rabbis of the city sanctioned his books and urged their dissemination. [Hence, one may, in fact, question the power and effect of Luzzatto's opposition.] Nevertheless, these imprints are also signi-

responsa entitled *Divrei David*, Amsterdam 1753, which included rulings from Luzzatto (see, for example, no. 48), thus making Meldola's introduction all the more personal and relevant to the study of Luzzatto's acceptance in Amsterdam (MEYER, *The Stay*, cit., p. 22). It is significant that Luzzatto actively participated in legal decisions in Amsterdam. Despite his Italian origin, controversial status, and relatively short stay in Amsterdam, Luzzatto was clearly regarded as part of (or, judging by the *haskamot*, superior to!) the city's intellectual elite.

<sup>17</sup> BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Hayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 40; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 65 (Amsterdam #1552). Like *Mesillat yešarim*, this imprint included a joint *haskamah* from rabbis David Israel Athias and Isaac Hayyim d'Brita Abendana, and an introduction by David Meldola.

<sup>18</sup> BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Hayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 69; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 65 (Amsterdam #1570); I. LANDMAN, *Moses Hayyim Luzzatto (1707-1747), In Honor of His Bicentenary*, in T. SCHANFARBER - S. HIRSHBERG - J. STOLZ (eds.), «Year Book of the Central Conference of American Rabbis» XVII, Frankfort - Michigan 1907, p. 194. Wedding poems were not rare compositions in eighteenth-century Holland or Italy. In his tome on the history of the Jews of Amsterdam, M. H. Gans wryly concluded: «people doubtless talked more about that marriage and about the rich Portuguese families involved than they did about the poet, not suspecting that it was the latter who would cause bride and bridegroom to enter the pages of Jewish history» (M.H. GANS, *Memorbook: History of Dutch Jewry from the Renaissance to 1940*, A.J. Pomerans (trad.), Bosch & Keuning, Baarn 1977, p. 155).

<sup>19</sup> *La-yešarim tehillah* inaugurated Hebrew printing in both Lissa and Jozefow, when, between 1823 and 1826, at least five editions of the poem appeared in four different cities (BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Hayyim Luzzatto*, cit., nos. 76-80; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, pp. 86, 348, 407, 422 [Lemberg #420, #432; Lissa #1; Amsterdam #2519; Jozefow #5]).

ficant for what they lack: any mention of the Luzzatto controversy. None of the *haqdamot* or *haskamot* to *Mesillat yešarim* and *Derek tevunot*, printed within seven years of his emigration from Italy, alludes to the difficulties Luzzatto faced. His rabbinic supporters neither expressed empathy for his suffering, nor joy over his arrival in Amsterdam. In fact, no implicitly historical, time-bound element is evident in any of the writings. A first-time reader who had never heard of Luzzatto would have no knowledge of Luzzatto's life and times, and certainly would have no reason to assume that there was anything unusual about the author. The printing of these books had given official sanction to Luzzatto's work, and retroactively, Luzzatto the man. The Luzzatto controversy had simply ceased to exist in the collective consciousness of European Jewry. Thus, the refuge that was Amsterdam would prove to be the cradle of his birth as the "Ramḥal".

By the 1880s, editions of *Mesillat yešarim* were accompanied by the short, but prominent, ethical treatises of Naḥmanides (1194-1270), Elijah Gaon of Vilna (1720-1797), and Israel Salanter (1810-1883). These editions demonstrated the enormity of Luzzatto's reputation at the time, for they associated Luzzatto with three of the most outstanding and influential figures then-prevalent in the minds of eastern European Jewry. Linking Luzzatto with these rabbis indicated the nature of traditional Jewish study. The name of a given work was often synonymous with its author; the most respected and influential rabbis are referred to by either the name of their most famous work or by an acronym. The lack of an historical dimension is most obvious in the study of the Talmud, where conversations take place in the present between people of distinct cultures who lived centuries apart. Luzzatto's reception as the "Ramḥal" came from this ahistorical approach to learning *Torah*. The events of his life and the nature of his personality were irrelevant to a society more interested in moral instruction than history.

Scholars of both the Jewish religion and of Jewish history have generally classified *Mesillat yešarim* as a purely ethical work, but the origins of this supposition most likely stem from these late nineteenth-century publications and the rise of the Mussar movement. Although *musar* (ethics) is integral to Judaism and ethical works were composed as early as the medieval era, *musar* did not dominate Jewish intellectual culture until Salanter influenced Lithuanian Jewry in the mid-nineteenth century. Salanter partly modeled his self-critical philosophy on *Mesillat yešarim*, but he did so by separating the moral instruction of the work from its mystical intent. As Lithuanian Jewry rose to prominence in Europe, the image of the "Ramḥal" as an ethicist became firmly established in modern Jewish minds. Desiring to simplify the book's message, Salanter and his followers ignored the fact that Luzzatto had been first and foremost a kabbalist, and that previous generations had clearly identified mystical elements in the work. The second edition of *Mesillat yešarim* (Zolkiew, 1766), for instance, was accompanied by the introduction to Luzzatto's then-unpublished kabbalistic

work *Qalah pithei hokmah*<sup>20</sup>. *Derek 'eš hayyim*, as the introduction was called, was printed nearly two dozen times with *Mesillat yešarim* over the next century. To be sure, *Derek 'eš hayyim* appeared with Salanter's epistle, beginning in Königsburg in 1858, until the 1880s, but ultimately the Lithuanian image of the "Ramḥal" permanently removed his mystical nature from his ethical teaching.

The printing of *Mesillat yešarim* a second time, and the fact that it was supplemented with *Derek 'eš hayyim*, indicates that the anti-Luzzatto hunt succeeded in one respect but failed in another. Memory of the man was successfully suppressed, but the spread of his ideas was not. The first printing of *Mesillat yešarim*, accompanied by praiseworthy *haskamot* that did not mention the controversy, enabled future printings and the subsequent spread of Luzzatto's ideas. Once published, Luzzatto's 'spirit' was released into the world. His ideas were free to be studied and disseminated. His legacy could potentially grow, and this once-contentious man could, in theory, service the religious development of mainstream Jewish communities; hence, Salanter's appropriation of *Mesillat yešarim* and the prevalent conception of Luzzatto as an ethicist.

In 1781, Eliezer Solomon d'Italia published *Mesillat yešarim* in Mantua<sup>21</sup>. D'Italia's father, Raphael, had published Luzzatto's first book, *Lešon limmudim*, just prior to the outbreak of the controversy<sup>22</sup>. The printing of a Luzzatto treatise in Italy less than forty years after his death seems astounding. Had the Luzzatto controversy been forgotten in Italy? Surely, d'Italia and the Mantuan rabbinate knew of the trouble that had surrounded Luzzatto. Perhaps d'Italia ignored Luzzatto's controversial past, thereby disregarding the previous generation of Venetian rabbis, because he trusted his father's prior association with

<sup>20</sup> BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Hayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 128; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 313 (Zolkiew #292). Although Zolkiew had served as the center of the Sabbatian movement in Poland between 1680 and 1730, this imprint probably had little to no effect on Sabbatianists in the area. Despite his once-contentious status, Luzzatto seems to have never appealed to Sabbatianists or other deviant groups. The followers of Jacob Frank, for instance, expressed no particular affinity for Luzzatto; the only Luzzatto imprint to appear in Offenbach during the Frankists' influence in the city was *Derek tevunot* (1788), probably Luzzatto's least visibly mystical work (BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Hayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 41; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 12 [Offenbach #117]). The rabbinic desire to sustain a normative Judaism necessitated labeling all non-conformist groups as universally deviant despite their differences; it would be a historiographical error to maintain this line of thought by assuming that one form of deviance influenced or appealed to another.

<sup>21</sup> BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Hayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 129; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 473 (Mantua #516).

<sup>22</sup> BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Hayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 102; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 469 (Mantua #340). Raphael printed for about fifty years, and Eliezer continued until the beginning of the nineteenth century. The press' most important contribution was the first edition of *Minḥat šai*, printed in Mantua, 1742-1744.



him. He may have also chosen to rely on the precedence set by previous printers and the sanction of the early *haskamot*.

By the 1780s, nearly forty years after Luzzatto died, the Ramḥal – not the historical Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto, who had been hounded during his life, but the Ramḥal, the author of *Mesillat yešarim* – was firmly entrenched in the mainstream study of *Torah*. *Haskamot* for Luzzatto imprints showered him with honorary titles; he was even praised as a great kabbalist<sup>23</sup>. In 1783, four Luzzatto treatises were published together in Amsterdam<sup>24</sup>. David Hacoheh d’Azevedo, *av bet din* of the Sephardic community in Amsterdam and scion of a well-known and powerful family that stretched from London to Amsterdam to Algiers, demonstrated a sense of privilege to provide a *haskamah* for this imprint. He used Luzzatto’s full name in a flowery allusion to wisdom, paralleled Luzzatto with the Biblical Moses, and considered his writings capable of brightening the wisdom-starved world<sup>25</sup>. D’Azevedo apparently believed that the spread of Luzzatto’s writings could combat evil. European Jewry was clearly undergoing philosophic and social change, for the spread of ideas, as a challenge to rabbinic authority, had been an integral element of the Luzzatto controversy. D’Azevedo considered Luzzatto’s ideas to be in line with, if not the embodiment of, rabbinic Judaism; the Ramḥal had replaced the historical Luzzatto in the minds of the establishment.

This 1783 Amsterdam imprint also received a *haskamah* from Saul ben Aryeh

<sup>23</sup> See M.H. LUZZATO, *Ma’amar ha-ḥokmah*, Amsterdam 1783 (see note 24 below); Id., *Qalah pithei ḥokmah*, Koretz 1785 (see note 31 below) for expressions such as «מקובל» and «איש האלוהים». By the 1880s, Luzzatto’s name was often preceded by ten or more introductory titles. Praise was standard in introducing an author of words of *Torah*, let alone in introducing a revered and established rabbi. This stemmed from the custom of showing respect for one’s teacher. For an extreme array of honorifics, see the Genizah fragment addressed to Maimonides (T-S 12.822), in which the name משה בן מימון appears amid more than one-hundred twenty words and acrostics of praise. [For a transcription of the fragment, see: *Herman Cohen Jubilee Volume*, Berlin 1912, pp. 261-262. I am grateful to Dr. Ben M. Outhwaite, Head of the Genizah Research Unit at Cambridge University, for providing me with a copy of the transcription.]

<sup>24</sup> BEN-MENAHEM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 13 VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 78 (Amsterdam #2129). The four works were: *Derek ḥokmah*, *Ma’amar ‘al ha-haggadot*, *Ma’amar ha-‘iqarim*, and *Ma’amar ha-ḥokmah*. The book included a poem by the great Hebrew poet, and former Luzzatto pupil, David Franco Mendes (1713-1792).

<sup>25</sup> «פני משה כפני חמה. שואף זורת על פני האדמה. הן בעודנו חי כל מוצאו מצא חיים תורה חתומה. נחל נובע מקור חכמה. נהר אשר לא יכבזו מימיו דרך גבר בעלמיה. כען שתול אשר בצלו שטו העם ולקטו חכמה מפוארה ולנער דעת ומזימה. והכל עונים אחריו משה שפיר קא אמרת אשרי אדם מצא חכמה: אף הוא ראה אדם להבל דמה. ואלו הן הנקברין נגד שמא. ויעש לו שם כשם הגבורים אשר בארץ חמה. עד אשר לא תחשך השמש והאור ויאסף אל עמה. ולא יזכר שמו בישראל מימים ימימה. ויבא משה וישם לפניהם ארבעה חמה. אמרות טהורות מאמר דרך חכמה. מאמר על ההגדות. מאמר העיקרים. מאמר החכמה ואור הגנוז:

מעשה ידיו להתפאר תורת ה' תימיה והאריש כי נעמה...»

Leib Polonus Löwenstamm (1717-1790), the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam<sup>26</sup>. According to the approbation, Saul had heard about the controversy from the previous generation of rabbis. They had informed him of Luzzatto's troubles, but had also praised Luzzatto's knowledge, sharpness of mind, and analytical powers. This was apparently the first and only time the controversy was mentioned in a Luzzatto imprint until recent decades. It's uniqueness in that sense does not overshadow the fact that Luzzatto's historicity had been replaced by an amorphous spirit. Equating him with the Talmudic sage Akiva, Saul wrote that Luzzatto was saintly enough to enter the spiritual Paradise, exit in peace, and flood the world with blessings<sup>27</sup>. Like Eliezer Solomon d'Italia of Mantua, Saul freely disassociated Luzzatto's writings from his controversial life in order to reap the benefit of his writings. The study of modern Jewry, seen through the lens of the Ramhal, is never more interesting and necessary than in the moments of the blatant breakdown of rabbinic authority and culture. In order to disregard the author's once-contentious status, Eliezer and Saul were required to ignore those who had been opposed to Luzzatto. In Saul's case, this included his own father, Aryeh Leib, who had issued a ban against Luzzatto in Poland in 1735<sup>28</sup>.

Divorcing Luzzatto's writings from his life helped make him one of the most important contributors to Jewish thought and religious life. His books were printed throughout Europe, often among the first books printed by a new print shop or in a new city<sup>29</sup>. In 1784 and 1785, respectively, *Mesillat yešarim* and *Hoqer u-mequbbal* were printed in Shklow. Hebrew printing was introduced in that

<sup>26</sup> GANS, *Memorbook*, cit., pp. 196, 215.

<sup>27</sup> See Babylonian Talmud, *Ḥagigah* 14b:

«...משה חיים לוצאטו ז"ל. הופיע בארצו במדינת איטליא ונשמע גם בארצנו כי האיש משה גדול מאוד ומאן גבר גבר בכולא. ואחרי כן בבואי לכאן שמעתי מפי בעלי תריסין וחכמים גדולים שהכירוהו את מעשה תקופות כמה נפיש חילי לאורייתא לבו כלב הארי בגמרא וסברא פלפלא חריפא וצנא מלא ספרי ועוד לו עשר ידות בכל חכמה ומדע ועל כולנה בהדי כבשי דרחמנא בין מחזדי חקלא נכנס לפרדס ויצא בשלום. והנה גם הוא הניח ברכה אחריו...»

<sup>28</sup> L. RABINOWITZ, *Loewenstamm*, in M. BERENBAUM - F. SKOLNIK (eds.), «Encyclopaedia Judaica» XIII, Macmillan Reference, Detroit 2007, pp. 167-168. Aryeh Leib had also sided with his brother-in-law, Jacob Emden, in vehemently condemning Jonathan Eybeschuetz as a Sabbatianist.

<sup>29</sup> For example, the famous Shapira press of Zhitomir printed four Luzzatto titles (*Mesillat yešarim*, *Derek ḥokmah*, *Ma'amar ha-'iqqarim*, and *Ma'amar ha-ḥokmah*) in 1847 and 1848, among the town's and press' first forty-five imprints (BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto*, cit., nos. 148, 17, 61, 85; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 331 [Zhitomir #20, #33, #43, #44, #152, #239]). Also noteworthy is the printing of Luzzatto's kabbalistic treatises *Hoqer u-mequbbal* and *Qalah pithei ḥokmah* in Czernowitz in 1849; these imprints were two of the city's first eighty printed Hebrew books, sixty-one of which were *Talmud* tractates and the remainder of which were primarily Bible, liturgy, and *halakah* (BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto*, cit., nos. 61, 225; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 342 [Czernowitz #73, #79]).

city in 1780; the printing of two Luzzatto treatises there in less than five years reflected the high regard in which the author was held<sup>30</sup>. Likewise, the printing of *Hoqer u-mequbbal*, which had never before been published and had been a leading cause in Luzzatto's banishment by the Italian rabbinate, indicated the Ramḥal's supercession of the historical Luzzatto.

Also in 1785, *Qalah pithei ḥokmah*, the kabbalistic tract from which *Derek 'eš hayyim* was taken and so often printed with *Mesillat yešarim*, was printed in Koretz<sup>31</sup>. The imprint included a *haskamah* from Jacob Joseph of Ostrog (1738-1791), a preacher of piety and an early admirer of the Ba'al Shem Tov. Echoing David Meldola's *haskamah* to the first edition of *Mesillat yešarim*, Jacob Joseph compared Luzzatto to the Biblical Moses and declared this book to be «the Torah that Moses placed before the people of Israel»<sup>32</sup>. In addition, Jacob Joseph praised *Mesillat yešarim*, most likely in order to convey the importance of the present work for which he was providing a *haskamah*. The mention of *Mesillat yešarim* reveals that the book and its author were by now recognizable, if not renowned. That the first edition of *Qalah pithei ḥokmah* received a glorifying *haskamah* from this particular rabbi demonstrates that Luzzatto's legacy was on a meteoric rise even, and quite differently than mithnagdim, among mystically-inclined hasidim. His reputation may even be said to have been supreme among early-modern rabbinic figures. After all, Jacob Joseph lauded *Mesillat yešarim* as a guide for everyone, including *šaddiqim*. If *šaddiqim* – divinely-inspired men who uplifted the world – could gain spiritual insight from *Mesillat yešarim*, then Luzzatto was a *šaddiq* among *šaddiqim*!

Luzzatto's posthumous persona seems to have reached almost mythical proportions within one hundred years after his death. The printer of the first edition of *Qalah pithei ḥokmah* echoed Jacob Joseph's sentiments, saying «from Moses to Moses, none had arisen like Moses»<sup>33</sup>. Comparisons with the Biblical

<sup>30</sup> Shklow was a growing center of Jewish culture, and a community influenced by the students of the Vilna Gaon. Perhaps Luzzatto's glorified status among Lithuanian Jewry began at this point. Luzzatto's disciple Jekuthiel Gordon also took up residence in Shklow; see I. TISHBY, *Darkei ha-ḥašatam šel kitvei qabbalah la-Ramḥal be-Polin u-ve-Lita*, in «Kiryat Sefer» 45 (1970), pp. 127-154.

<sup>31</sup> BEN-MENAHM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Hayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 224; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 600 (Koretz #59). Approximately two-thirds of the one hundred books printed in Koretz between 1766 and 1819 were kabbalistic or hasidic in nature, which contributed considerably to the spread of Hasidism in Poland and the surrounding countries.

<sup>32</sup> «...וזאת התורה אשר שם משה לפני ישראל...»

<sup>33</sup> «...שמימות משה ועד משה לא קם כמשה...». In addition, the printer's introduction to *Qalah pithei ḥokmah* is the printed source for the famous statement by Dov Baer ("the Maggid") of Mezhibrech that Luzzatto died young because his generation was not worthy to receive his teachings (see note 4 above). The introduction states that the printer heard it from Jacob Joseph of Ostrog who

Moses, which had started in the first edition of *Mesillat yešarim*, continued to be made over the next several decades. A printer in Minsk epitomized adoration for Luzzatto by asking, «Who does not know of the greatness of this man of God, Moses?»<sup>34</sup>. It is unlikely that these associations with Moses were mere rhetoric. The fact that distinguished rabbis and printers living in distinct communities and conditions independently assessed Luzzatto's greatness in this manner clearly demonstrates the influence and importance of his work. The praise heaped upon Luzzatto and the rumors about his greatness were sincere reflections about his genius.

The rabbis and printers who promoted his work attached themselves spiritually to the Ramhal. The printer of an 1834 edition of *Mesillat yešarim* informed readers that Luzzatto had received revelations from the prophet Elijah. Luzzatto, the printer continued, had also been the next link in the kabbalistic chain of redeemers, a successor to Isaac Luria<sup>35</sup>. Although early-eighteenth-century rabbis had regarded these statements, which Luzzatto himself had made, as cause to silence Luzzatto, nineteenth-century rabbinic authorities apparently accepted their validity as they came into greater contact with Luzzatto's writings. Respect and appreciation for the texts themselves seems to have instigated an intense love and reverence for the author. Expressions of that love and esteem from influential religious and cultural authorities led to increased readership and printing, and broadened Luzzatto's influence<sup>36</sup>.

heard it from the *Maggid* himself. Incidentally, I have not discovered any early (near contemporary) printed source quoting the Vilna Gaon's high praise of Luzzatto.

<sup>34</sup> BEN-MENAHAM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 42; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 457 (Minsk #27). The printer's words were:

«מי לא ידע תוקף ועוז גדולת האיש משה איש האלקים? זה האיש משה חיים לוצאטו! כשמש בעוז הלו, כן תהילתו...». This imprint, which was accompanied by David Meldola's introduction to the first edition, was one of only thirty-four Hebrew books printed in Minsk between the relatively short years of activity, 1808-1837.

<sup>35</sup> BEN-MENAHAM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 139; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 694 (Shklow #224). Printed by Isaac ben Joseph Me'enyah.

<sup>36</sup> Two imprints from the 1850s demonstrate the widespread and diverse dissemination of Luzzatto's writings: *Mesillat yešarim* (Vilna, 1854) was translated into Yiddish for people unable to study it in the original (BEN-MENAHAM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 152; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 212 [Vilna #855]) and a commentary on *Hoqer u-mequbbal*, entitled *Nišmat šlomo mordekai* (Johannesburg, 1853), was published in aid of elucidating the difficult text (BEN-MENAHAM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Ḥayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 65; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 346 [Johannesburg #8, #9]). *Nišmat šlomo mordekai* was authored by Aaron Moses ben Mordekai ben Jacob, a member of a well-established rabbinic family and, according to the title page, a distant relative of the great sixteenth-century rabbi Judah Loew of Prague (*Maharal*). This imprint may have been the first book printed in Johannesburg. The commentary was successful enough to warrant a second edition within a year. It is ironic that the work that had helped fuel Luzzatto's troubles in Italy (for its attack on the venerated Venetian rabbi Leone Modena) was the first to

Ironically, the cultural aspects that permitted Luzzatto's 'rehabilitation' were the same as those that had led to his ban. Anti-Luzzatto sentiments were initiated and perpetuated by an established rabbinic order. That same order, some decades later, came to venerate Luzzatto because of the nature of the rabbinic establishment and the influence of printing. In an introduction to his publication of *Mesillat yešarim*, one printer questioned himself rhetorically about the moral implications of revealing (that is, disseminating through print) the deep and heavenly secrets contained within Luzzatto's writings<sup>37</sup>. This apprehensive sentiment was similar to that displayed by the very rabbis who had hounded Luzzatto. They had feared that unbridled mysticism was dangerous to both the student and to the community. The rabbis were motivated to suppress any deviant elements evident in the Jewish community, whereas this particular printer simply feared exposing the uninitiated to the mysteries of *Qabbalah*. Nevertheless, Jewish communal leaders both during and after Luzzatto's life wanted the same thing: to flood the world with wisdom and morality and to quell the spread of movements they deemed dangerous to the tradition. Ironically, the nature of Jewish historical memory and edification allowed the writings of a once-hounded man to help maintain the status quo of mainstream rabbinic Judaism.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the memory of the controversy had long been erased by the predominant ahistorical approach to religious texts. The Amsterdam publications had provided the space in which to view the texts as religiously viable, and the *haskamot* and *haqdamot* of subsequent imprints reveal that rabbis, printers, and readers were continuously impressed and even awed by Luzzatto's writings. The rise of the ahistorical Ramhal coincided with the development of distinct modern Jewish identities. Luzzatto had been diverse and prolific; his legacy began to reflect that in specific and not always compatible ways as separate Jewish communities formed. Jacob Landau (1745 or 1750-1822), son of the famed rabbi Ezekiel Landau, remarked in an 1810 introduction to *Lešon limmudim* that: moralists praised *Mesillat yešarim*; kabbalists delved into *Qalah pithei ḥokmah* and *Hoqer u-mequbbal*; talmudists navigated the sea of the *Talmud* with *Derek tevunot*; and Hebrew writers emulated *La-yešarim tehillah*<sup>38</sup>.

inspire a commentary.

<sup>37</sup> See note 34 above.

<sup>38</sup> BEN-MENAHAM, *Kitvei rabbi Mošeh Hayyim Luzzatto*, cit., no. 104; VINOGRAD, *Thesaurus*, cit., vol. 2, p. 420 (Lemberg #320). Landau further proclaimed that *Lešon limmudim* was composed as though it came directly from God. Jacob's father, Ezekiel Landau (1713-1793; better known by his ahistorical cognomen "Noda' be-yehudah"), is also relevant to the study of Luzzatto's *rezeptionsgeschichte*. He had waged his own campaign against 'deviance', but apparently made no mention of the Luzzatto controversy, either to condemn or to redeem the controversial genius. Of course,

Although Landau himself celebrated Luzzatto for his range of talents, the fact that he cited the specific praises of distinct groups indicates that a selective memory of Luzzatto was already in development. Luzzatto, the man, was lost to history as Ramḥal, the intellectual contributor, found reception in the ever-expanding psyches of modern Jewry.

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Landau had little reason to consider the controversy, for it had ceased with Luzzatto's death, if not during his stay in Amsterdam. Even if Landau had been aware of Luzzatto, to mention the controversy would have been to awaken a successfully suppressed 'danger', and acknowledging the ills of the rabbinate would have undermined his own efforts to establish normative Judaism.

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