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# The Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau and the Rabbinical College of Padua: A Comparison

## Abstract

The article deals with three points that refer to two important Jewish institutions of the age of emancipation, that is, the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau and the Rabbinical College of Padua: (1) how these Rabbinical schools were founded, (2) their courses and programs, and (3) the inspiration behind them. A comparison is outlined on the ground of these three points. The conclusion reminds the closing of these two schools, in 1938 the first and in 1871 the second, because of external events: the uprising of German antisemitism and the constitution of Italian State; and how the interesting figure of Sabato Morais, the founder in 1887 and first president of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, which prepares Conservative Rabbis, could in a sense be considered the heir of both these schools.

## Keywords

Jewish emancipation, Rabbinical schools, Jewish tradition, Modernity

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The *Breslauer Seminar* and the *Collegio Rabbinico* of Padua were founded in the nineteenth century, when the process of emancipation and auto-emancipation of the Jews from their feudal restraints was developing apace. They were the first institutes whose function was to train rabbis to teach Jewish subjects with modern methods that took into account the results of historical, philological, and philosophical research. While in the traditional schools, the *Yeshivot*, the sources of Judaism were studied by reading and commenting without considering their historical-cultural context, linguistic analysis, and the critical use of reason, that is, a use completely independent from revelation, these institutes sought to combine interest, love, and attention for Judaism's past with an openness to modern culture: a culture which from Descartes and Spinoza onwards, unlike that of the mediaeval period, was no longer linked to any article of faith or religious authority.

The two schools had deep affinities. There were, however, as I shall try to show in this contribution, differences regarding (1) the circumstances leading to their founding and the nature of the Jewish contexts of which they were a part, (2) their courses and programmes, and (3) the fundamental inspiration behind them.

Both schools closed prematurely, but for different reasons. And both enjoyed a new life in North America, exercising a joint influence on a figure who, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, was one of the promoters of the conservative movement within Judaism. I am referring to Sabato Morais, who, though from Livorno, had ties with the Jewish community of Padua and was familiar with Central-European Jewry: he was the founder and first president of the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York, whose perspective was to offer a balance between tradition and modernity in a conservative approach. In conclusion, I shall deal with these two last points: the end of the two schools and their influence on American Judaism.

## The founding of the institutes: the Jewish and non-Jewish context

The Breslau Seminary—as the historians of German Judaism of the nineteenth century tell us<sup>1</sup>—was founded in 1854, thanks to a legacy from Jonas Fränkel for the creation of a Jewish rabbinical school that was to be more innovative than those already in existence. It was the first genuinely modern institute for training rabbis in those parts of Europe mainly inhabited by Ashkenazi Jews. A college had been founded in Metz in 1825, but it took off after transferring to Paris in 1859; and other colleges were to be founded only in 1872 in Berlin, in 1877 in Budapest, and in 1893 in Vienna. Fränkel had supported Abraham Geiger in his battle in Breslau against the orthodox wing of the community since he had arrived as a rabbi in the city in 1840, invited by the liberal wing. But it was the Prague-born Zacharias Frankel, then a rabbi in Dresden, who was chosen to direct the Seminary, because of his more orthodox position regarding observance of the *Mitzvot* compared with Geiger's, although they shared the same historical and scientific approach to the sources of Judaism. Frankel invited Heinrich Graetz, Jacob Bernays, Manuel Joël, and Benedict Zuckermann to teach at the Seminary, men with a historical, scientific, philosophical, and literary background as well as one in Judaism. They were scholars trained in general culture as well as in Jewish culture and religion.

The Seminary originated, then, as an initiative within the Jewish community of Breslau. From the start, it was part of the bitter discussion that, since the early nineteenth century, had been taking place in German Jewry between the followers of a reform that was to have significantly modified the liturgy of the synagogue and the forms of worship—on the basis of a new way of looking at the tradition—and the followers of Judaism in the form it had taken on since the Talmudic period and had maintained into the Middle Ages. The impulse behind the Rabbinical College of Padua, by contrast, came from outside, and its origins combined both the traditionalist and the reforming wings of Italian-speaking Jewry, which was in the main disposed toward dialogue with the non-Jewish world and modern culture.

The Italian researcher Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi, who has reconstructed the history of the College of Padua with many details and documents,<sup>2</sup> has recalled in a contribution where she synthetically gives the results of her investigation,<sup>3</sup> how, after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the tolerance the Hapsburgs had shown since the end of the eighteenth century for the various religions to be found in the Empire, which were, in principle, on the same level as Catholic Christianity, began to be accompanied by a desire for greater control, with the aim of preventing dissidence and rebellion:

In the climate of the Restoration the Hapsburgs had extended [...] to the Jews of Veneto the legislation already in force in Lombardy and the other provinces of the Empire, the result of their Jewish policy from Charles VI onwards, particularly that of Joseph II. Now they also tried to intervene in the cultural situation of the Jews, whom they wanted to integrate and make good, faithful subjects, but also subject to careful control. The resolution of Francis I of 29 January 1820, as well as making secular education obligatory for Jews too, required rabbis to have “fundamental knowledge in the philosophical sciences and Jewish religious instruction”. For the first time, then, the problem of the training of rabbis was being faced, particularly that of the chief rabbi, who was seen as a sort of functionary and guide of Jewish congregations. From an institutional point of view, the Padua College originated in two regulations: the sovereign resolution of January 1820 and the sovereign resolution setting up the school of 8 November 1825.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Among the last fruits of the investigation on the Breslau Seminary I remind: Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1995; Andreas Brämer, *Rabbiner Zacharias Frankel. Wissenschaft des Judentums und konservative Reform im 19. Jahrhundert*, Hildesheim: Olms, 2000; Esther Seidel, *Zacharias Frankel und das Jüdisch-Theologische Seminar*, Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> See Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi's book, *Il Collegio Rabbinico di Padova. Un'istituzione religiosa dell'ebraismo sulla via dell'emancipazione*, Firenze: Olschki, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi, *Samuel David Luzzatto al Collegio Rabbinico di Padova*, in *Samuel David Luzzatto. The Bi-Centennial of His Birth*, ed. Robert Bonfil, Isaac Gottlieb, and Hannah Kasher, Jerusalem: The Hebrew University-Magnes Press, 2004, pp. 9-34.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Work on the project of setting up the new rabbinical school went on between 1820 and 1825. It was carried out by representatives of the Jewish communities of Hapsburg-dominated Lombardy and Veneto and promoted by the imperial authority: these were, mainly, the communities of Venice, Mantua (which was also responsible for the Jewish community of Milan, consisting of just a few families at that time), Padua, Verona, and Rovigo and also the small communities of some small towns in the vicinity of Mantua: Ostiano, Bozzolo, Rivarolo, Sabbioneta, Viadana, Pomponesco, Revere, and Sermide. The assembly of the representatives took the name of *Conferenza Israelita del Regno Lombardo-Veneto* [Israelite Conference of the Kingdom of Lombardy and Veneto] and conveyed its decisions to the Governments of Milan and Venice, which passed them on to Vienna. However, the Conference did not break up after the school was founded in Padua in 1829, as it went on supporting it until 1836. There were various reasons for the choice of Padua as the location for the College: it was a city with an ancient community, it had been a centre of Jewish culture since the Middle Ages, and the Faculty of Medicine at the University had welcomed Jewish students from every part of Europe for several centuries, giving rise to a lively, cosmopolitan, intellectual environment.

In its work, the Conference welcomed the suggestions that reached it not only from the rabbis of the various communities who were most closely tied to traditional studies but also from those—living in the geographical area involved—who expressed the need for a profound renewal of Judaism in the spirit of the Enlightenment, partly drawing on the rationalist tendencies already flourishing in the Italian communities, particularly during the Renaissance, and partly drawing on the critical tendencies to be found in the German-speaking Jewish world. One example of this second group of rabbis was Isaac Samuel Reggio from Gorizia, the author of a text entitled *Riflessioni d'un Israelita del Regno Illirico sopra un Articolo del Decreto di S.M.I.R.A. in data 4 febbraio 1820, riguardante la nomina de' futuri rabbini in tutti gli Stati ereditari della Monarchia Austriaca* [Reflections of a Jew about an Article of the Imperial Resolution of February 4, 1820, concerning the future rabbis' nomination in all the hereditary States of Austrian Kingdom], published in Venice in 1822. Another was Giuseppe Consolo from Verona, a lawyer, who insisted on the need to set up an *Istituto Teologico Israelitico Centrale* [Central Israelite Theological Institute] that would instruct future rabbis in "divine and human sciences"—meaning both religious and secular culture—and make them learned in ancient and modern languages. In spite of the different positions, there was, however, a united and animated participation in the discussion, and disagreements in the Jewish community were resolved mostly within a framework that had been provided from outside. The school of Padua was the result of a common effort that was internal, but in a sense also because of external needs and suggestions.

The Jewish communities did not split, either, when it came to choosing teachers for the school. They had no hesitation in nominating Samuel David Luzzatto, born in Trieste, 27 years old, but already well known and admired for his intellectual qualities, which he had demonstrated as a historian of Jewish religious literature and as a rigorous Hebrew scholar, and the 24-year-old Lelio Della Torre from Cuneo, then well known and highly esteemed for his qualities as a Hebrew poet and a brilliant orator. Both were strictly orthodox as regards the *Halacha*, but they were tolerant and enjoyed good relations with those supporting a modern revision of it. As young men, they could invest energy and devotion in the enterprise and be cherished by the students (as it really happened)<sup>5</sup>.

Thus the Breslau Seminary and the Rabbinical College of Padua were born under different stars, though with a single aim: the preparation and education of a rabbinate that was appropriate for a period in which the Jews were no longer—as they were at the time of the crusades and Christian supremacy—a minority that was different from the surrounding world in its religion and customs, usually closed up in itself, sometimes outlawed or persecuted, but a minority that was active in society, economically and socially integrated, with civil rights and aspirations to full political rights, often attending non-Jewish schools and educated in a non-Jewish culture, and sometimes living more in a non-Jewish milieu than in a Jewish one.

<sup>5</sup> About Luzzatto and Della Torre as Jewish personalities and teachers in the school founded in 1829, cfr. Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi, // *Collegio Rabbinico di Padova*, cit.

## The programmes and courses of the two institutes

When it was founded, the Breslau Seminary, while maintaining its ties with tradition, seemed a more innovative institute than other schools, whose aim was to train rabbis, that were to be found in Central-Eastern Europe, first of all, for its potential students: it offered its services—as the above mentioned historians of German Judaism in the nineteenth century remind<sup>6</sup>—not only to those Jews who aspired to become rabbis but also to those who wished to extend their knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish culture before becoming teachers in the lower schools of their communities and those who wanted to take preliminary courses in Judaism with a view to further studies. So there were three distinct sectors in the Seminary: it was meant to be not only a rabbinical school but also a centre of Jewish life and culture for young German-speaking Jews of the period. And yet, significantly, as early as 1880, about 20 years after it had been founded, the last two sectors were no longer active for lack of students. It is hard to say if the lack of interest in these first two levels of instruction was the result of shortcomings in the teaching, a failure of the courses to live up to expectations, or a tendency of young German Jews in the last years of that century to acquire more a non-Jewish education in non-Jewish schools, as the necessary basis for their integration in German society and State, than a Jewish education in Jewish institutions.

The courses of the Seminary were run by teachers who were familiar with both Jewish and non-Jewish studies, as I have remarked, but who certainly were more scientists, historians, and literary critics than men grown up and deeply steeped in an atmosphere of Jewish belief and piety. They certainly did not refrain from keeping up the traditional forms of worship, but they saw Judaism more as a culture than as the eternal work of divine revelation and the result of prophetic or divine inspiration. Their teachings, therefore, tended to illustrate a Judaism that was considered in relation to the historical-cultural environments it had variously belonged to. Frankel read the Talmudic sources, bearing in mind the ways in which they had been formed (he had written an introduction to the *Mishna*, *Derache' Mishna*, published in Leipzig in 1859, in which this historical aspect, which implied criticism of the idea, dear to orthodoxy, of an oral law given directly to Moses on Sinai, was particularly emphasized). Graetz introduced a Biblical exegesis that set the commentators in the currents of Jewish history rather than seeing them all as contemporaries, as it usually happens in traditional Jewish exegesis (he later became famous as the first great modern historian of Judaism). Bernays and Joël were both influenced by German Romanticism: the former taught Jewish philosophy, and the latter *Midrash*, both linking Greek philology and classical culture with Hebrew language and Jewish texts. Zuckermann was interested in the Hebraic calendar in the liturgy and ceremonies, in the light of the knowledge of mathematics, physics, and astronomy he had acquired in studying the history of mathematics and science. The pedagogical methods of all the masters of the Seminary encouraged objectivity, exactness, and thinking based on the analysis of data and facts. They aimed to transmit to their pupils a historical-scientific knowledge and to train them to be independent from the past evaluations and critical of any absolute authority. The future rabbis and mentors of German Jewry were supposed to combine love of their co-religionists with a love of universal human culture.

The programmes and courses of the Rabbinical College of Padua were more conservative than those of the Breslau Seminary. Luzzatto—as the documents testify<sup>7</sup>—was in charge of the teaching that appeared under the heading of “Oral Subjects” (exegesis, linguistics, history, and theology in Judaism), and Della Torre was in charge of the teaching of “Traditional Subjects” (Jewish rites and homiletics). The College did not offer courses for those who were not intending to become rabbis: the traditional aim of the institute—to form rabbis for Italian-speaking Jewish communities—corresponded perfectly to the personalities of the two teachers who had essentially been educated in their families and religious communities, with a primary loyalty to Jewish piety and tradition, although they were also great (self-taught) readers, above all of Greek, Latin, Italian, and French texts.

We know what the College's programmes were from the *Regolamento* [Regulations] that was published in Venice in 1827, which also contained the admission procedure for students, the school calendar, the hours of lessons, and the nominations of teachers. According to section VII of the *Regolamento*, the course on the Bible was to be accompanied by the comments of David ben Joseph Kimchi, Yzchaq ben Yehuda Abrabanel, and Abraham ibn

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. note 1.

<sup>7</sup> See Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi, *Il Collegio Rabbinico di Padova*, cit.

Ezra; the study of the *Talmud* by Malachi ha-Cohen's introduction, *Yad Malachi*, published in Livorno in 1767, and Yoseph Caro's commentary on ritual, *Bet Yoseph*; Hebrew philology was to use the texts, *Leshon Limudim* by Moshe Haym Luzzatto, *Melizot Yeshurum* by Solomon Loewisohn, and *Bechinat Olam* by Yedayah Bedersi; the study of the 613 *Mitzvot* was to use texts by Maimonides and Aron ha-Levi; examples of sacred oratory could be taken from the sermons of Yosef ben Haym Zarfati (Venice 1616) and Azariah Figo (Venice 1648). Jewish history and theology had not been a central part of the curriculum in Jewish schools in the past and so there were no introductory or support texts: future teachers were invited to organize the lessons themselves. For Jewish theology, however, the collection of sermons *Nefashot Yehuda* and the commentary *Kol Yehuda* on the *Kuzari* (1140), both the work of Yehuda ben Yoseph Moscato and both published in Venice in the late sixteenth century, were indicated as reference works. In the main, then, the teaching project in the *Regolamento* drew on well-known authors who were part of the tradition (though some only recently introduced, such as Moshe Haym Luzzatto, who in the first half of the eighteenth century had been regarded by the rabbis of Padua and Venice as a heretical Sabbatean<sup>8</sup>). The project is striking for the remarkable presence of authors who had been active in Italian territory, although, in some cases, they were from Spain (such as Abrabanel or Zarfati)—a clear sign of a desire, on the part of those promoting the College, to connect up with a peculiarly Italian Jewish tradition. Yet, in spite of the use of the commentaries of the past, the teaching methods were modern: philology, historiography, and philosophy were seen as indispensable tools for acquiring Judaism, leaving aside the traditional method based only on keeping memory alive, arguing about religious texts, and connecting theory and halachic observance.

When the programmes of the College in Padua were implemented, two reforming figures of German Jewry objected to them as being too moderate and cautious: Leopold Zunz criticized them in *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt* [Jewish homiletics, historically developed] which appeared in Berlin in 1832; and Abraham Geiger in an article, *Die Gründung einer jüdisch-theologischen Facultät, ein dringendes Bedürfnis unserer Zeit* [The foundation of a Jewish-Theological Faculty, an urgent need of our times], which appeared in a journal devoted to the historical and scientific research on Jewish religion in 1836<sup>9</sup>. But the modern context was there in the background for these programmes too.

There is an important point in common in the teaching activity of the Breslau Seminary and that of the College of Padua: neither gives any space to the mystical Jewish tradition. Their directors were too sober and clear-headed to appreciate the imaginative and baroque constructions of the *Kabbala*: Frankel came from a Prague where the Jews were sufficiently integrated in society to have distanced themselves from the secret wisdom of Rabbi Yehuda Loew, the Maharal (ca. 1520–1609), who, according to legend, had called into life the Golem when the community was threatened by anti-Jewish accusations; and, since childhood, as he recounts in his *Autobiography* (written in 1847, but published posthumously in Italian in 1878<sup>10</sup>), Luzzatto had abandoned the cabalistic practices and prayers that were still alive in his family, the last legacy of an Italian cabalistic tradition dating back to the high Middle Ages. Later, during his dispute with the Livorno rabbi Elia Benamozegh—whose family belonged to Sephardic Judaism of Morocco and who was a supporter of Jewish mystical thought—Luzzatto was to criticize the Jewish mystics for their poor linguistic knowledge of Hebrew and their philosophical weaknesses in *Vikuah al Hochmat ha-Kabbala*<sup>11</sup>. Luzzatto dedicated this work, which appeared in Gorizia in 1852, to the young Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, a great friend of his son Filosseno and, like him, possessing real linguistic gifts and who 20 years later would become professor of Comparative Linguistics in Milan and the founder of glottology in Italian culture. Ascoli had begun his studies as a pupil in the College of Padua.

And yet, despite this shared rationalist outlook about Jewish learning, the two institutes were different: the German-speaking one seemed to favor an analysis of the sources of Judaism using modern scientific and historical tools with the aim of abandoning older, no longer valid approaches; while the Italian one seemed to want to use those same tools to revive the Jewish tradition, which was to be welcomed in every aspect. Both

<sup>8</sup> Cfr., about the personality and work of Moshe Haym Luzzatto, Joëlle Hansel, *Moïse Hayim Luzzatto (1707-1747). Kabbale et Philosophie*, Paris: Cerf, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. the mentioned article of Abraham Geiger in the vol. 2, 1836, of the *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie*, pp. 1-21.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel David Luzzatto, *Autobiografia*, Padova: Crescini, 1878.

<sup>11</sup> See about the dispute between Luzzatto and Benamozegh on *Kabbala*, Alessandro Guetta, *Philosophie et Qabbale. Essai sur la pensée d'Elie Benamozegh*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998.

schools wanted to preserve the *Mitzvot*: but while that of Breslau was cautiously welcoming toward the desire for changes, for example, in prayer and liturgy, that of Padua was wholly negative with regard to any reform in Jewish life and doctrines. While Frankel took an active part at the Conference of rabbis in Germany that were discussing the relation between tradition and modernity in Judaism, defending his compromise views, Luzzatto declared himself hostile to the very idea of a Conference of Italian rabbis about this subject, as we can see from his correspondence with Isaac Samuel Reggio in the years 1838–1839<sup>12</sup>.

## The fundamental inspiration of the two institutes: scientific reason versus common sense

In 1904, a year celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Breslau Seminary, a deeply felt recollection written by Hermann Cohen, who had entered it in 1857, appeared in a German-Jewish journal.<sup>13</sup> This is how the philosopher described the spirit that animated the school and its teachers, and to which he claimed to have remained true down the years, in the course of which he had become—in 1873—a professor in a German university, rather than a rabbi in a Jewish community:

Where science does not become a part of faith itself, but remains alongside it, then, inevitably, it has a function of control. And if the rabbis are told that their cooperation is necessary, then their very spiritual effectiveness is conditioned by their incessant joint work with science. This is the significance of the tendency and the sense of the school of Breslau; a significance that has not yet been fully considered. This respect in the face of science, as if before the final appeal of all human devotion, was transmitted from these great masters to us all. [...] “Let not words be graven (*Charuth*) in tables of stone, but may freedom (*Cheruth*) be in them”. May the free spirit of science always assist this august school.<sup>14</sup>

Cohen, of course, was well aware, when he wrote those lines, that the Seminary of Breslau, as part of a Jewish community animated by both progressive and conservative tendencies, had to maintain a moderate position, a certain ambiguity as to the relation between faith and reason. We may suppose, indeed, that Cohen himself, having taken part when very young in the conflict that had set Frankel against the orthodox rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch on the source of the oral *Thora*, that is, the oral tradition that had then been codified in the *Talmud*—coming for Hirsch from a divine revelation to Moses at Sinai and for Frankel from human faculties over the centuries—had left the school before finishing his rabbinical studies, hardly two years after his arrival, exactly because dissatisfied with the outcome of the dispute: Frankel, against Hirsch—so Cohen could recognize at that time—had not fully clarified his thinking and had wavered between recognizing the traditional religious vision and defending the historical point of view founded on facts and reasoning<sup>15</sup>. And yet Cohen was convinced that, in its way of educating, the Seminary was fundamentally founded on the scientific spirit.<sup>16</sup> It was the reason, as it is displayed in science—above all in the natural sciences and then in the human sciences—that was the guide there, even when, in the desire to avoid painful lacerations in the Jewish world, the results of its procedures were not always openly and explicitly defended.

<sup>12</sup> The correspondence between Luzzatto and Reggio is contained in *Epistolario italiano francese latino di S. D. Luzzatto*, published by his sons, Padova: Salmin, 1890.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. Hermann Cohen, *Ein Gruß der Pietät an das Breslauer Seminar*, “Ost und West”, 1904, pp. 747-756; repr. in Hermann Cohen, *Jüdische Schriften*, vol. 2, Berlin: Schwetschke 1924, pp. 418-424.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 422-424: “Wo die Wissenschaft nicht in den Glauben selbst verlegt, mit ihm identifiziert, sondern ihm zur Seite gestellt wird, da ist sie unweigerlich zur Kontrollinstanz gemacht. Und wenn der Rabbiner auf ihre unerläßliche **Mitwirkung hingewiesen wird, so wird seine geistige Wirksamkeit selbst durch die unablässige Mitarbeit an der Wissenschaft bedingt**. Darin liegt die Bedeutung der Tendenz und des Sinnes der Breslauer Schule; eine Bedeutung, die noch lange nicht ausgedacht ist. Dieser Respekt vor der Wissenschaft, als vor der letzte Instanz aller menschlichen Frömmigkeit, ging von diesen großen Lehrern auf uns alle über. [...] ‘Die Worte seien nicht eingegraben (*Charuth*) in die Tafeln, sondern Freiheit (*Cheruth*) sei in ihnen’. Möge der freie Geist der Wissenschaft immerdar in dieser hohen Schule walten.”

<sup>15</sup> About Hermann Cohen’s education and his abandoning the Breslau Seminary, see Yehuda Melber, *Hermann Cohen’s Philosophy of Judaism*, vol. I, New York: J. David, 1968, pp. 194 ff.; Irene Kajon, *Contemporary Jewish Philosophy. An Introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 9 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Rightly Francesca Albertini pointed out how Spinoza’s philosophy inspired many teachers of the Breslau Seminary: cfr. her article: *Theologie und Geschichtsphilosophie am Jüdisch-Theologischen Seminar in Breslau (1854-1938): Der Fall von Baruch Spinoza*, in *Der Geschichtsbegriff: eine theologische Erfindung?*, ed. Myriam Bienenstock, Würzburg: Echter, 2007, pp. 98-108.

However, in the years of the first world war—when the sun had set on the age of a positivist faith in scientific reason, to which even the social and political progress of humanity had been entrusted—Cohen was to develop another idea of reason, seeing it at work not so much in science and in the philosophy built on science (according to the Greek style of philosophizing) as in the Jewish sources: reason as the instrument that gives human beings the knowledge of their relationship with God as the Unique and the Holy, and produces religious love, compassion, and kindness in their souls, a practical reason that reveals itself as a divine gift. In his posthumous book, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* [Religion of reason out of the sources of Judaism], published in 1919 and reprinted in a revised version in 1929, Cohen will show how the relationship between human beings and God through a reason which is the guide for our actions in society and history, is the condition of the possibility of human culture: science, law, economics, politics, arts have this reason as their root and their final meaning and aim. Still, Cohen will keep his high appreciation of scientific reason that allows our precise knowledge of natural and historical phenomena.

The general outlook of the Rabbinical College of Padua seemed different: here reason was not seen as a theoretic faculty, the intellect that presides over knowledge of nature and history, but as combining with feeling, and therefore definable as common sense, or sound human intellect. Luzzatto, as he explained in his above reminded *Autobiography*, did not like Maimonides' rationalism in the *Guide of the Perplexed* and in the *Mishne Thora*, or philosophy built on the use of pure theoretic reason. What he had liked since adolescence, as he writes in his recollections, was to read Cicero, the English empiricists, the French sensationalists, the Catholic thinkers of his time, such as Francesco Soave (who can be regarded as the precursor of the liberal Catholic thinkers active in Italy in the mid-nineteenth century, Antonio Rosmini and Vincenzo Gioberti), and philosophers who were able to create a link between the sense and reason, tradition and rational criticism, faith and reasoning<sup>17</sup>. Later, in his books, *Teologia dogmatica israelitica* [Dogmatic Jewish Theology] (1832) and *Teologia morale israelitica* [Moral Jewish Theology] (1832), which he was to write as manuals for his students, borrowing the titles from the tradition of teaching in the Catholic Seminaries, and in his *Introduzione al Pentateuco* [Introduction to the Pentateuch] (1829), he was to defend exactly the point of view, which he considered "upright," that does not oppose heart and head in man, but places them in harmony. Yehuda ha-Levi was to be his model. He edited two collections of Yehuda ha-Levi's poetry in Hebrew (the first appeared in Prague in 1840, the second, longer one, in Lyck in 1864): if Greek thinking—according the famous saying by this mediaeval Jewish thinker and poet that Luzzatto took up in his poem *Derech Eretz o Atizismus*, later translated into Italian by Esdra Pontremoli and published with the title *Il falso progresso* [The false progress] (Padua 1879)<sup>18</sup>—gives only flowers, Jewish thinking gives fruits; if scientific progress is in debt to Greek civilization, moral and religious progress is in debt to Jewish civilization.

Luzzatto was fairly suspicious (as we can infer also from his text *Il Giudaismo illustrato nella sua teorica, nella sua storia e nella sua letteratura*, [Judaism explained in its theory, history, literature], Padua 1848) about the enthusiasm of many of his co-religionists in the peninsula for the Risorgimento, which aimed to create a liberal Italian state: modern civilization seemed to him to contain dangerous germs in that it denies whatever cannot be founded on theoretic reason; hence the devaluation, which the modern mind seems to imply, of all the ideas and feelings grounded on faith, customs inherited from tradition, or the memory of the past. Luzzatto did not share the idea of progress that other Italian Jews of his age strongly supported.<sup>19</sup> Yet he would always reject fanaticism, intolerance and harshness: thus, his correspondence in Hebrew shows him to have been on warm terms with many radical exponents of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the movement which firstly introduced the modern scientific point of view in Judaism, like Abraham Geiger, as well as with orthodox rabbis and Jews in Galizia or Poland.<sup>20</sup>

The fundamental inspiration of the Breslau Seminary, then, differed from that of the Rabbinical College of Padua: set in a German Lutheran context, the former found it difficult to strike a balance between faith and reason and

<sup>17</sup> About Luzzatto's search of a balance between Enlightenment and Jewish tradition in his youth, cfr. Irene Kajon, *L'influenza di Francesco Soave sul concetto di ebraismo di Samuel David Luzzatto*, in *Samuel David Luzzatto. The Bi-Centennial of His Birth*, cit., pp. 55-78.

<sup>18</sup> Luzzatto's Hebrew poem, which compared the Jews and the Greeks, the way of a human who loves God and the way of a human who loves the world and its goods, was published in the journal "Sion", I, 1841, pp. 81-93.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr., about Luzzatto's idea of history, Irene Kajon, *Two Models of Jewish Philosophy of History: Samuel David Luzzatto and Elia Benamozegh*, in *Der Geschichtsbegriff: eine theologische Erfindung?*, cit., pp. 166-177.

<sup>20</sup> See Luzzatto's collection of letters in Hebrew, published in Przemysl in 1882, edited by his son Isaia Luzzatto, with an introduction by David Kaufmann.

seems to have opted for critical, scientific reason to evaluate the Jewish sources; the latter, in an Italian Catholic context, where there was a sense of continuity between past and present, Latin civilization and Christianity, revelation and reason—a continuity demonstrated by the Thomist doctrine that is still alive in the Catholic Church in modern times—took its bearings from a shared human capacity, *recta ratio* or sound human intellect, that embraced both sensibility and reason.

## Concluding remarks

The Breslau Seminary had to close in 1938 as a result of National-Socialist persecution. Here many important figures of German Jewry, who had become guides in their communities, had been trained. Its activities had continued unbroken for various decades, which had seen the transformation both of society at large—from the rise of the German nation and the creation of a State down to the Wilhelmine period, the first world war, the Weimar Republic and its later crisis—and of the Jewish world, which had become more and more integrated in the economic, social, and cultural life of Germany and also more and more forced into a moral and intellectual self-defense. Frankel, who had been its director until 1875, evidently had successors who knew how to maintain the school and its reputation.

The Rabbinical College of Padua met a less traumatic end—but one that was, in its way, equally tragic—both for internal and external causes. It had been profoundly linked to Luzzatto, who was its animating director; after his death in 1865, he was replaced by Eude Lolli, who had been his pupil and who took on the role of chief rabbi of the Padua community in 1869. In 1871, the school closed after going through a period of serious financial difficulties (certainly, not for the first time) and seeing a reduction in the number of its students. Its immediate environment had seen epoch-making changes too: in 1866, Lombardy and Veneto were no longer governed by the Hapsburgs but by the Italian State, which had been proclaimed in 1861. In 1870, the conquest of Rome and the collapse of the Pope's temporal power had shifted the geographical center of gravity of Italian-speaking Jews from the north-east toward the centre of Italy, because of the need to create a new Rabbinical school in this part of the country, which, on one side, had remarkable Jewish communities and, on the other, was the most important from the political point of view.

Since 1887, a Rabbinical College was operative in Rome, presenting itself as the heir of the Padua College, but was unable to continue its excellent research work, particularly in the fields of linguistics and Jewish theology. This school entered in competition with the school of Livorno, which was directed by Benamozegh—whose mysticism, as I have recalled, Luzzatto had sharply criticized—until 1900, the year of his death, and was active until the first decades of the twentieth century (important personalities of Italian Jewry, such as Dante Lattes, Alfredo Toaff, and Elio Toaff were educated in Livorno's institution). Here the cooperation between Judaism and Italian progressive culture, introduced by Benamozegh, was kept alive.

In the period 1899–1922, the Rabbinical College was transferred from Rome to Florence, where Samuel Hirsch Margulies, the chief-rabbi, born in Lemberg, Galicia, gathered round him significant figures from the Italian Jewish world (such as Umberto Cassuto and Alfonso Pacifici, the first Biblical commentator and historian of post-Biblical Jewish literature, the second a protagonist of Italian Zionist movement, both emigrated to Palestine in the 1930s): Margulies made the Florentine community a brilliant centre of Jewish life in the years of his presence in the town.<sup>21</sup> The sudden death of Margulies in 1922 caused the return of the Rabbinical College to Rome the very same year, where, for nigh on a hundred years, it has continued to carry out its function as a training centre for Italian rabbis. At the present times, it is the only institution in Italy that forms Italian-speaking rabbis.

It is true that the Rabbinical College in Rome still has in its “Bibliographical Centre” (depending on the Union of Italian Jewish Communities) both the library that had been created at the Padua institute in its glory days, and the “Luzzatto Archive,” a collection of materials, some still unpublished, including notebooks, diaries, and letters of

<sup>21</sup> Cfr., about Florence's Jewry at the beginning of the twentieth century, Massimo Longo Adorno, *Gli ebrei fiorentini dall'età dell'emancipazione alla Shoà*, Firenze: Giuntina, 2003.

Samuel David Luzzatto<sup>22</sup>. And the Roman College makes a big effort to take again, at least in part, the programmes that were the basis for the teaching work at the Padua College.<sup>23</sup> However, the times changed. According to the new situation of the orthodox Jewry in the State of Israel and the Diaspora, the life of this rabbinical institution also changed: inspiration, methods, and texts of reference are no more similar to those of Luzzatto's age.

It seems to me that there is a discontinuity in the history of Italian rabbinical institutes between the first half of nineteenth century and later periods. The experience of the Rabbinical College of Padua lasted only a few decades and ended without leaving real heirs in Italy: it had trained most of the rabbis who were active between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century—orthodox or moderately reforming rabbis, who were respected and honored heads of Jewish communities, many of whom no longer practised their religion. The need to combine love for the Jewish tradition with a renewal of Judaism, which had been registered by the Padua College, was certainly registered by those who had studied there. But this was never really understood by the rabbinical schools in Italy after 1871, the date of the close of the Padua school. The delicate balance between tradition and modernity was the prerogative of this school, no more present with the same intensity in the late Colleges.

The Breslau Seminary and the Rabbinical College of Padua did not share the same fate. In the former, the violent interruption of its activities followed a long period of influence on the Jewish environment that the institute served; in the latter, the deterioration, mostly because of the historical events, followed a short period of flourishing.

It was an Italian-speaking Jew, resident in Livorno but of Portuguese origins, who transplanted in the United States the seeds sown both by the Breslau Seminary and the Padua College. In him, the two schools were unified, so to speak. Sabato Morais translated Luzzatto's *Lezioni di Teologia Morale* [Course of Moral Theology] into English, published in 1872–1873, and his Prolegomena to a Hebrew grammar (Philadelphia 1896), edited his *Autobiografia* in Italian (Padua 1878), and was a friend and correspondent of the Padua circle that revolved around Luzzatto's son Isaia. At the same time, he was close to the German-speaking Jewish world, both from family ties (his mother, who is of Askenazi origins, was called Bona Wolf) and from his contacts with the Jewish communities of the German cities, through Trieste and Paris.

In a letter from Philadelphia, published in 1879 in "Il Vessillo Israelitico," Morais wrote:

The Jewish faith will be renewed and strengthened in the new continent by promoting everywhere the historical and literary knowledge of the Bible and traditions, [...] giving every encouragement to the young who long to cultivate the knowledge that is our special legacy, [...] making worship attractive by providing the means by which sacred music and oratorical eloquence may become part of school teaching.<sup>24</sup>

In these words, we can hear an echo of a reforming season that had begun in Italy and Germany in the nineteenth century and that deserved to be taken up and developed later in other parts of the world in favor of Judaism.

In 1887 Morais founded in New York the Jewish Theological Seminary, which now, in turn, through its teachers and rabbis, its studies and thinking, brings back to the Jewish communities of Europe and the Mediterranean the spirit that gave birth to it: that mild and balanced spirit which, when faced with conflicts and breakdowns, goes in search of the right means, without hiding the difficulties that such an attempt will necessarily create. The very complexity of Judaism should make us reflect on the original, significant characteristic of an approach that tries to avoid extremism and is now associated with a conservative tendency in present-day Jewish communities.

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<sup>22</sup> See Riccardo Di Segni, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Library of the Collegio Rabbinico Italiano, Rome, Italy*, Special supplement to "Aleí Sefer", ed. S. Z. Havlin, Ramat Gan-Roma 1990.

<sup>23</sup> See Riccardo Di Segni, *I programmi di studio della scuola rabbinica italiana, 1829-1999*, "Rassegna Mensile di Israel", 65, 1999, n. 3, pp. 15-40.

<sup>24</sup> From: Liana Elda Funaro, *Ritratti di ebrei italiani dell'Ottocento nelle pagine di Sabato Morais*, "Materia Giudaica," 2010-11, XV-XVI, p. 284.