

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: A RABBI IN LETTERS: THE MULTI-GENRE
WRITINGS OF RABBI SAMUEL ABOAB
AND THE EARLY MODERN
MEDITERRANEAN

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This dissertation examines the life and writings of Rabbi Samuel Aboab (1610–1694). It positions Aboab—from his birth into a powerful converso family in Antwerp to his four-decade tenure as rabbi of the wealthy Portuguese community in Venice—as a gateway to broader questions relating to converso identity, communication, the formation of a rabbinic “Republic of Letters,” and the evolving contours of rabbinic authority during the early modern period. Aboab served for nearly six decades as a rabbi in Verona and Venice, authored close to four hundred halakhic responsa, and maintained a wide network of rabbinic correspondence across Italy and the Mediterranean. This study constitutes the first sustained scholarly engagement with his life and works. In reconstructing his biography with particular attention to his converso origins and rabbinic trajectory, our study complicates prevailing narratives of post-converso religious identity and integration. The dissertation analyzes Aboab’s responsa and employs network mapping to reconstruct his role in a rabbinic “Republic of Letters,” and explores how this communications network sustained rabbinic careers and reinforced rabbinic authority across

geographic boundaries. This study also offers the first systematic justification for the attribution of the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* to Aboab. It defines the work as Aboab's guide for rabbinic leadership and situates it within the broader context of shifting models of rabbinic authority, thus contributing a new perspective to the study of the early modern rabbinate. Finally, the dissertation examines Aboab's commitment to the Jewish religious life in the land of Israel, focusing on his stewardship of the *Beit Midrash Aboab* in Safed, originally established by his father, Abraham Aboab. It explores the spiritual and religious motivations that may have inspired diasporic, and particularly Portuguese, Jews to engage with the Jewish communities in the land of Israel, and reveals the financial and logistical challenges underlying sustained support for Jewish life there during this period. In bringing the life and "letters" of Samuel Aboab to the fore, this dissertation illuminates the career of an early modern rabbi whose leadership embodied the convergence of halakhic rigor, rabbinic authority, diasporic commitment, and intellectual connectivity across the early modern Mediterranean.

A RABBI IN LETTERS: THE MULTI-GENRE WRITINGS OF RABBI SAMUEL
ABOAB AND THE EARLY MODERN MEDITERRANEAN

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication:

For my Father,

He taught me to ask,

He taught me to think,

He taught me to search for answers, and then

He taught me to ask again

.Acknowledgements:

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Introduction Rabbi Samuel Aboab: A Rabbi in Letters

I. Introduction:

Rabbi Samuel Aboab would be called a success story. The archetype of the seventeenth-century Sephardi rabbi, he stood at the nexus of halakhic expertise, communal leadership, and Portuguese mercantile wealth. Described as “the father of Israel [the Jewish people] throughout the region of Italy,”¹ and as the destination to whom “all the rabbis in Italy sent their queries,”² Aboab occupied a position at the heart of the Italian rabbinate. His life reflects a seamless trajectory of increasing levels of rabbinic prominence and communal influence achieved through the combination of a powerful intellect, diligent scholarship, personal integrity, strategic alliances, and inherited privilege.

A. Dissertation Goals:

The story of Rabbi Samuel Aboab begins with his parents—conversos who returned to Judaism—but extends far beyond one man's biography to illuminate a broader intellectual and religious world. Through a comprehensive examination of Aboab's extensive written corpus-- his “letters,” including his halakhic treatises, personal and professional correspondence, and extensive rabbinic exchanges—this dissertation explores the multifaceted world of PortugueseJewish identity, rabbinic authority, and diaspora consciousness during a period of remarkable religious and cultural transformation.

¹ Rabbi Jacob Emden, *Sefer Torat ha-Kena'ot*, (Lviv, 1870) [<https://hebrewbooks.org/44252>], 51.

² R. Hayim Yosef David Azulay (HIDA), *Shem ha-Gedolim, Ma-arekhet Sefarim* 4 Devar Shemuel, (Livorno, 1746). Hebrew books.org/20876.

Situating Aboab, a distinguished Portuguese rabbi, as the central figure in what may be termed a “rabbinic republic of letters,” extending across Northern Italy³ the dissertation foregrounds the underexamined presence and significance of Sephardi and Portuguese communities in seventeenth-century Italy. While landmark scholarship by Yosef Kaplan,⁴ followed by Miriam Bodian⁵ and other prominent scholars⁶ has elucidated the Portuguese diaspora in Amsterdam, Portuguese Italian communities such as those in Venice, Livorno, Pisa, Ferrara, and Ancona remain relatively understudied.

Particularly significant within these communities, is our examination of the rabbis who led them—figures whose importance emerges clearly through Aboab's extensive correspondence. Some, like Aboab himself, were just one generation removed from converso life, yet they cultivated extraordinary rabbinic scholarship, producing works ranging from halakha to kabbalah, from Talmudic exegesis to philosophical inquiry. Their intellectual accomplishments

³ See appendix 2a and 2b for maps depicting Aboab's extensive correspondence.

⁴ See for example Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro* (Oxford: Littman Library Oxford University Press, 1989). Yosef Kaplan, “The Social Functions of the Herem in the Portuguese Jewish Community of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century.” In *Dutch Jewish History*, 111–55. (Leiden: Brill, 1984). Yosef Kaplan, “Wayward New Christians and Stubborn New Jews: The Shaping of a Jewish Identity.” *Jewish History* 8, no. 1/2 (1994): 27–41.

⁵ See for example, Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). Miriam Bodian. “Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: The Ambiguous Boundaries of Self-Definition.” *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 66–80. Miriam Bodian. “In the Cross-Currents of the Reformation: Crypto-Jewish Martyrs of the Inquisition 1570-1670.” *Past & Present*, no. 176 (2002): 66–104. ⁶ See for example, Yaacob Dweck, “Jacob Sasportas and Problems of Discipline in the Ets Haim Yeshiva.” In *Religious Changes and Cultural Transformations in the Early Modern Western Sephardic Communities*, edited by Yosef Kaplan (Brill, 2019) 383-392. Aliza Moreno-Goldschmidt, “New Jews in Amsterdam: Some Social Aspects Reflected in the Thesouro Dos Dinim by Menasseh Ben Israel.” in *Religious Changes and Cultural Transformations in the Early Modern Western Sephardic Communities*, edited by Yosef Kaplan (Brill, 2019) 452-468. Matt Goldish, “Hakham Jacob Sasportas and the Former Conversos.” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 44 (2012): 149–72.

challenge simplistic narratives about the nature of post-converso religious reintegration, and offer new perspectives on converso identity, adaptation, and innovation.

Moreover, Aboab's rabbinic position and his corpus of nearly four-hundred halakhic responsa, invite us to explore questions concerning the early modern rabbinate, rabbinic authority, the negotiation of halakha, communal governance, and the evolving function of rabbis in early modern Italy. By examining how Aboab and his contemporaries navigated these challenges, the dissertation will enhance our understanding of rabbinic functions and the evolving role of the rabbinate in the seventeenth century.

B. Biographical Sketch:

Rabbi Samuel Aboab was born in Antwerp in 1610 to a powerful converso family. It is possible that he himself was baptized as, at the time, the family had not yet fully renounced their Christian identity and are to be found only using their Christian names.³ They moved to Hamburg shortly after Samuel's birth, and he spent his childhood there.⁴ At the age of thirteen, Samuel Aboab was sent by his father, Abraham, to study under Rabbi David Franco in Venice, the epicenter of Sephardi Jewish life in Europe.⁵ After the untimely death of Rabbi Franco,

³ See further discussion in Chapter I.

⁴ For a more extensive biography of Aboab see chapter I.

⁵ For background on early modern Venice and especially for an understanding of its importance, and the prominence of the Sephardi Jews (Eastern and Western) in Mediterranean trade, see Rober C. Davis, and Benjamin Ravid, eds. *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). Also, Benjamin Arbel, "Trading nations: Jews and Venetians in the Early Modern Eastern Mediterranean". (New York: Brill, 1995). For its position vis-a-vis other Italian port cities, see Benjamin Ravid. "A Tale of Three Cities and their Raison d'etat: Ancona, Venice, Livorno, and the Competition for Jewish Merchants in the Sixteenth Century." *Mediterranean Historical Review* 6, no. 2 (1991): 138-162. For an example of how newer communities like Amsterdam looked to the more established community in Venice for spiritual guidance, see Yosef Kaplan, "The Curaçao and Amsterdam Jewish Communities in the 17th and 18th Centuries." *American Jewish History* 72, no. 2 (1982): 193-211. Also see page 51 in this dissertation for a discussion of how the Amsterdam community reached out to Abraham Aboab, Samuel's father, for guidance on a communal matter.

Aboab remained in Venice to continue his rabbinic education. At eighteen, he married Mazal

Tov, Franco's orphaned daughter—a union that not only solidified Aboab's position among Italy's rabbinic elite but also reflected the strategic alliances characteristic of early modern Sephardi leadership.⁶

In 1637, Samuel Aboab and the extended Aboab family relocated to Verona, where, over nearly fourteen years, he gradually developed his rabbinic identity, carefully building his leadership talents and reputation within the community and the broader rabbinic world. Together with his influential family, he structured the city's Sephardi community and served as its rabbi. His tenure in Verona also marked Aboab's first major engagement with the wider rabbinic world. Over the course of his tenure there, he authored nearly seventy responsa,⁷ corresponding with prominent rabbis and earning recognition as an emerging *halakhic* authority.

During this formative period, he authored *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, a work composed specifically for a rabbinic audience and comprising ten treatises on ritual law. Through this text, Aboab articulates his vision of the ideal seventeenth-century rabbi—a leader tasked with shaping and cultivating halachically rigorous and religiously "orthodox" communities. Although published anonymously in Prague—a peculiarity that will merit further attention,¹² the text stands as a significant milestone in Aboab's rabbinic career, representing an important expression of his emerging rabbinic identity and his expectations for early modern rabbinic authority.

⁶ For a discussion of the importance of family ties, nepotistic hiring practices, and the “inheritance” of Rabbinic positions in Aboab's world, see my discussion of this subject on page 56 footnote 60.

⁷ Responsa 3-70 in Samuel Aboab, *Devar Shemuel* (Jerusalem: Zikhron Aharon, 2022). were authored in Verona. ¹² See Chapter III for this discussion.

Additionally, Samuel Aboab's tenure in Verona marked a significant expansion of his influence beyond the rabbinic sphere. During this period, he emerged as a notable figure in Jewish communal and financial affairs, particularly in matters related to the land of Israel. Central to his responsibilities was the administration of Beit Midrash Aboab in Safed, established in 1632 to honor the memory of his uncle Jacob. Dedicated to advanced Torah study, the institution was initially founded by Abraham Aboab, Samuel's father, to support seven scholars. Following his father's passing in 1642, Samuel assumed full oversight of its operations, as well as the facilitation of emissaries' missions from Safed and Jerusalem. Nearly thirty letters exchanged with the emissaries during this period of his life, attest to his important role in securing funds, procuring letters of recommendation, and ensuring the proper allocation of donations. His work was reinforced by close collaboration with his brother Joseph in Venice and his uncles in Verona, further embedding him within his family's extensive mercantile network and solidifying his position as an important figure in navigating both rabbinic leadership and financial operations across the Mediterranean.

In 1650, Following the death of his mentor, Rabbi Azaria Picho, Aboab was invited to Venice to lead the prestigious Portuguese congregation. Formally known as the Talmud Torah, this community represented the apex of Venetian Sephardi life, housing its wealthiest Jews and most magnificent synagogue. Aboab held this esteemed position from 1650 until his death in 1694, which extraordinary longevity placed him at the center of a broad network of halakhic authorities and rabbinic correspondence, and solidified his legacy as a leading rabbinic figure.

Throughout his career, Aboab expanded his rabbinic network. He authored close to four hundred responsa and corresponded with nearly two hundred rabbis and community leaders,

expanding his influence beyond Italy to the broader Mediterranean and even to Poland and Germany. During his life, he became an authoritative voice in halakhic discourse, with scholars throughout Italy and across the diaspora relying on his rulings. As Hakham Zevi in Altona-Wandsbek observed, “they would not veer from his words”.⁸ In the land of Israel, Rabbi Jacob

Ḥagiz praised him as “our revered leader, steeped in Torah and fear of sin”.⁹ These accolades reflect not only Aboab’s command of *halakha* but also the breadth of his influence — an influence that spanned continents and endured long after his death.

Although Samuel Aboab had no known rabbinic pedigree, his life story is far from “rags to riches”. Born into wealth and privilege, he maintained strong economic and familial ties with his father, brothers, and uncles throughout their lives, as evidenced in his personal correspondence.¹⁰ There is no doubt that his prominent status as a member of the Aboab family provided him with access to resources and contacts that shaped the course of his career. Beyond the material advantages, however, Aboab also absorbed key skills cultivated within the Sephardi Portuguese merchant and banking elite — such as public relations, negotiation, diplomacy, and intellectual creativity. While contemporaries observed that “he always had great wealth in his home,”¹¹ Aboab’s life, correspondence, and successful career reflect his masterful application of the innate and acquired traits that were his legacy as a product of a converso merchant family.

C. A Rabbi in Letters:

⁸ R. Jacob Emden citing his father Hakham Zevi in *Torat ha-Kena’ot*, 51.

⁹ R. Jacob Hagiz, *Shu”t Halakhot Ketanot*, (Jerusalem, 1981), hebrewbooks.org/723, pg13.

¹⁰ As will be demonstrated and explored in Chapter V.

¹¹ Rabbi Jacob Emden, *Sefer Torat ha-Kena’ot*, quoting his father Hakham Zevi, 51.

Rabbi Samuel Aboab was not only a prolific writer but also a diligent documenter, meticulously preserving records of his rabbinic, halakhic, communal, and personal engagements. If one were to distill Aboab's intellectual, religious, and communal concerns into a single concept, *zikaron*—the Hebrew word for memory or record—would be the most fitting choice. As Chapter III will demonstrate, Aboab frequently incorporates the term *zikaron*—or its root *z-kr*, which also denotes memory—in multiple variations throughout his works. Usage of this verb root remains a constant feature of his writing, irrespective of the period in which he was

composing or whether he was based in Verona or Venice. This preoccupation with preservation is most evident in his earliest published work, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*—literally “Book of Memoranda” or “Record Book”—which underscores the centrality of documentation in his thought. The fact that *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* was indeed printed, rather than remaining in manuscript form, further reinforces our perception of Aboab's commitment to ensuring that his ideas and records would be preserved in a more permanent and widely accessible manner.

During Aboab's tenure in Venice, he deliberately employed the term *zikaron* in three significant instances, all of which emphasized his deep commitment to documentation and preservation. The first occurred in 1668, when Nathan of Gaza came to Venice on a messianic mission. Aboab writes:¹²

And while we were still suffering from the first wave of troubles
[caused by Sabbetai Zevi's apostasy]... we suddenly heard trembling voices
and the entire city was rowdy heralding the arrival of the “leader of the way,”

¹² See Appendix 4 for a fully translated and annotated copy of Aboab's documentation of the event in his “Memorial (*Zikaron*) for the Children of Israel.”

and none of us knew for what purpose he comes. We are speaking of the bachelor Nathan of Gaza who caused upheaval throughout the world and caused tremendous upheaval during the year when he was referred to by his followers as “prophet.” When he arrived, we hastened...to defend the honor of heaven...that it not be further desecrated among the nations on his account, and to ensure the safety of those who were in danger—both the community and the individual...and to hasten his departure and escape, according to the plan which is, in our opinion, most efficacious. Nor did we see him and let him leave without escort. Indeed, once the opportunity presented itself to

investigate and elucidate these matters...so as to mollify the multitude and to reproach the poor souls of the land—who stray in their ideas and cause others to err with them—and set them upon the straight path, the obligation falls upon us to entirely eradicate the evil and erroneous ideas, so that they dissipate like smoke, and to elucidate the light of the truth so that it sprouts forth and rises from the earth. So, before this man departed from us, on this past Monday night, on the eve of the 13th day of the counting of the Omer, we met here together—all the members of the Yeshiva with the (lay?) heads and the leaders of the communities of the city, ... and we called him, and he came before us. Aboab emphasized the importance of preserving a memorial of the event and recorded the interrogation of Nathan of Gaza—during which the Venetian representatives compelled him to admit the falsehood of his prophecies—in meticulous detail.¹⁸ Moreover, Aboab felt it was important to publicly disseminate this account to Jewish communities across Europe. He did so under the title *Zikaron le-Benei Yisrael* (“A **Memorial** for the Children of Israel”) a cautionary document for future generations.

The second instance of *zikaron* appears in a collection of nearly seventy divorce writs (*gittin*) and marriage contracts (*ketubot*), either witnessed or issued by Aboab while serving as a rabbi in Venice, which he meticulously compiled as a *Mazkeret Gittin* (“Records of Divorce Writs”).¹⁹ Did Aboab intend this collection for his personal reference, or was he acting on behalf

¹⁸ Nathan’s wording on the confession reveals that he felt coerced to issue it: “Due to the fact that the rabbis of Venice have *instructed me* (emphasis mine)...I have acceded to their words and assert that what I had prophesied regarding Sabbetai Zevi was false.” See Appendix 4 for a full translation of the confession.

¹⁹ R. Samuel Aboab, *Mazkeret ha-gittin she-nitenu be-venezia ve-nisderu al yedei Shemuel Aboab*. Digital reproduction of original manuscript, Ktiv: The International Collection of Digitized Hebrew Manuscripts.

[https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/manuscripts/hebrew-manuscripts/viewerpage?vid=MANUSCRIPTS#d=\[\[PNX_MANUSCRIPTS990001125660205171-1,FL212111897\]\]](https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/manuscripts/hebrew-manuscripts/viewerpage?vid=MANUSCRIPTS#d=[[PNX_MANUSCRIPTS990001125660205171-1,FL212111897]])

of the Venetian *Beit Din* (Jewish Court)? The precise purpose remains unclear, but what is certain is that such systematic record-keeping of divorce writs was a rarity in the seventeenth century. A search of the KTIV manuscript archives, demonstrates that the communal documentation and preservation of divorce writs gained significant traction only in the nineteenth century, making Aboab’s initiative all the more striking. His own extensive engagement with divorce-related responsa¹³ raises the possibility that his increasing involvement with such cases motivated him to insist on preserving these legal records. Regardless, whether driven by practical necessity or a broader vision for institutional memory, Aboab once again emerges as a rabbi for whom documentation and preservation formed a fundamental part of his rabbinic identity and leadership.

Yet a third instance of Aboab’s use of the term *Zikaron* may be found in a set of instructions which he calls *Zikhronot* which he wrote to an anonymous rabbi intending to emigrate to the land of Israel. He makes the recipient aware of many pitfalls and challenges –

¹³ His *Devar Shemuel* includes over thirty responsa relating to divorce and specifically the proper documentation of divorce writs.

especially ethical challenges relating to the distribution of funds -- he is likely to face in that land.¹⁴

The significance of Aboab's record-keeping becomes even more pronounced when examined through the full breadth of his "letters," a term that, in his case, extends well beyond his epistolary correspondence. Aboab was not merely a rabbi who wrote; he was a rabbi who actively constructed his identity and communicated his ideals through the written word. He preserved his legacy by embedding his halakhic rulings, intellectual engagements, and perception of rabbinic authority into a meticulously maintained corpus of multi-genre texts.

D. Aboab's records and the preservation of three genres of "letters"

While his *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* was published during his lifetime, the vast majority of Aboab's "letters" were preserved in four carefully maintained notebooks. These four diaries contain a comprehensive archive of his correspondence, including halakhic responsa as well as what may be termed personal-professional writings. The latter often blur the boundaries between his public and private roles, intertwining moments of personal significance with financial and administrative directives. At times, this took the form of brief personal or familial updates, while in other instances, his letters contained more extended reflections. Upon his father's death, for example, Aboab eulogized him within his correspondence with Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria, an emissary from Safed and personal friend,¹⁵ and with Rabbi Moses Yona of Casale, a rabbinic colleague.¹⁶ Similarly, his letters chronicle family milestones, including births, illnesses, and

¹⁴ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 156.

¹⁵ Meir Benayahu, *Dor Ehad ba'Areẓ: Igrot Rav Shmuel Aboab ve-Rav Moshe Zacut be-Inyanei Erez Yisrael 1639/1666* (Jerusalem: Yad ha-Rav Nissim, 1987). 199.

¹⁶ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 201.

celebrations, often alongside discussions of professional matters—such as student recommendations,¹⁷ financial assistance to emissaries,²⁵ or institutional governance.²⁶

Unfortunately, only two of Aboab's four diaries, covering the years 1636–1666, have survived. These were formerly housed in the Montefiore Collection in London, with a digitized copy available in the National Library of Israel archives. Together, these two notebooks contain nearly 300 letters, approximately half of which are halakhic responsa.

These responsa were later selected, edited, and published posthumously by Rabbi Samuel Aboab's son, Jacob, in *Devar Shemuel*. As *Devar Shemuel* also includes nearly 200 additional

responsa dating beyond 1666, it is evident that Jacob still had access to the now-lost notebooks and the halakhic material they contained. The *Devar Shemuel*, therefore, offers a partial reconstruction of the missing volumes, attesting to the breadth of his halakhic engagement over several decades.

Of the approximately 150 surviving letters in Aboab's notebooks that do not qualify as halakhic responsa, Meir Benayahu transcribed 60–70 related to the land of Israel in *Dor Eḥad Ba-Areẓ*. The rest remain unpublished, and many are examined in this dissertation in connection with relevant topics.

Although Aboab maintained meticulous records, these notebooks were ultimately personal compilations rather than polished archival documents. The handwriting is not always pristine, some sections are smudged, Aboab used lines and half-lines to demarcate between

¹⁷ See for example, Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 194 where Aboab encourages R. Joseph de-Leiria to accept two students despite their youth. For more examples, see Chapter II and our discussion of the functions of the rabbinic network.

²⁵ See for example Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 217 where Aboab writes to the Portuguese communities of Venice and *Frankia* (used in the East to refer to all of Christendom) to raise money to assist the Portuguese community and synagogue *Keter Torah* in the land of Israel. See Chapter V for analysis of several other examples. ²⁶ see Chapter V.

letters, and not all entries are clearly addressed or dated. Additionally, the fluid nature of his correspondence, particularly with close associates such as Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria, complicates genre classification. A single letter might contain halakhic discussion alongside financial updates and personal exchanges. In these cases, Aboab's son, Jacob, extracted and recorded only the halakhic responsa for inclusion in *Devar Shemuel*, omitting the rest of the correspondence. For example, Aboa began a letter to Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria of Safed with a discussion of financial matters and then segues into a halakhic responsum. The responsum appears in *Devar Shemuel* as responsa 24 and 25, while the rest of the letter remained in manuscript form until Benayahu transcribed it as an epistle in his *Dor Eḥad ba-Areẓ*.¹⁸

Given that the two surviving notebooks contain approximately 300 letters, it is reasonable to assume that the two lost notebooks, covering the years 1666 to Aboab's death in 1694,

contained a similar volume of correspondence. This would mean that, in addition to *Sefer haZikhronot*, Aboab left behind a total of roughly 600 letters. Such an extensive body of writing not only attests to his prolific output but also provides a rare opportunity to analyze an early modern rabbi across three distinct genres of discourse. Each genre—halakhic responsa, rabbinic essays, and personal-professional correspondence—reflects a different dimension of Aboab's intellectual and communal engagement.

His halakhic responsa, preserved in *Devar Shemuel*, represent his legal adjudication and scholarly authority, offering insight into his jurisprudential reasoning and engagement with rabbinic contemporaries. *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, by contrast, consists of a series of rabbinic essays

¹⁸ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 191-192

aimed at shaping an idealized vision of rabbinic authority and constructing a framework for communal religious and halakhic “orthodoxy”. Lastly, Aboab’s non-halakhic correspondence, primarily with rabbinic representatives and emissaries from the land of Israel, sheds light on the important phenomenon of early modern religious devotion centered on the Holy Land. At the same time, it reveals his financial influence, strategic oversight, and administrative proficiency in coordinating diaspora initiatives aimed at supporting Jewish life and institutions in the land of Israel.

A particularly revealing aspect of Aboab’s record-keeping is his deliberate selection of items for preservation: Aboab’s notebooks preserve only correspondence written in Hebrew. Though he clearly corresponded fluently in other languages¹⁹—likely Italian, and Portuguese or Spanish,—particularly in matters concerning the administration and financial affairs of *Beit Midrash Aboab* in Safed, none of these multilingual exchanges were preserved in his personal records. While it is possible that he archived his non-Hebrew correspondence separately and

those materials have since been lost, the very segregation of these writings, if it existed, is significant. The distinction between Hebrew and “foreign language” texts reflects a conscious choice, one that speaks to Aboab’s self-perception and the way he intended to frame his intellectual and religious legacy.

Aboab identified first and foremost as a rabbi, and his Hebrew—imbued with biblical, Talmudic, and Midrashic resonance—served as both the medium of his correspondence and the marker of that identity. As we will further demonstrate, his writing exhibits fluency, sophistication, and a deep command of rabbinic sources. By preserving, or at the very least

¹⁹ This will be demonstrated in Chapter V.

privileging, only his Hebrew correspondence, even in non-halakhic matters, Aboab reinforced his place within the broader tradition of rabbinic scholarship and exchange, ensuring that his intellectual contributions were firmly situated within the linguistic and cultural conventions of the rabbinate.

At the same time, Aboab's ability—and willingness—to correspond in a “foreign language” when necessary or advantageous reveals the complexity of his persona.²⁰ It would be a mistake to disregard his converso background and define him solely by the rabbinic role he embraced so assiduously. His linguistic versatility reveals a far more nuanced and dynamic figure. He corresponded in Hebrew with rabbinic contemporaries but used Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese when engaging with family members, merchants, and agents who were not proficient in Hebrew. This bilingual or even multilingual proficiency was not merely a practical tool; it speaks to the adaptability and broad skill set Aboab inherited from his converso upbringing—one that enabled him to navigate mercantile networks, negotiate financial affairs, and oversee institutional management, even from afar. His ability to move fluidly between socio-cultural,

political, and linguistic spheres is essential to understanding the breadth and magnitude of his persona.

Aboab's strong and sophisticated Jewish identity was not forged *despite* his converso origins but was, in many ways, shaped *through* them. His father and uncles arrived in Hamburg still bearing their Christian names alongside their Jewish ones, yet they took immediate and decisive steps to establish a synagogue and acquire burial grounds for the fledgling community. Actively and proudly identifying as Jews, they played a central role in fostering a vibrant Jewish

²⁰ Unfortunately, none of Aboab's “foreign language” correspondence has been preserved.

communal life. Despite never having received a Torah education himself, Abraham Aboab prioritized one for his son Samuel and other converso children in Hamburg, ensuring their full integration into Jewish life. Samuel Aboab, in turn, not only fully embraced his Jewish identity but also rose to prominence in the rabbinate, advocating for a Judaism defined by rigorous halakhic commitment and a vision of communal religious “orthodoxy.”

Despite his unique qualities, Aboab represents not an anomaly but rather an exemplar of an understudied “cohort” of early modern rabbis that warrants further investigation, insofar as their converso backgrounds contributed to shaping their distinctive rabbinic careers as community leaders. His contemporaries and correspondents—including his mentor Rabbi Azaria Picho, colleague, Rabbi Moshe Zacut, and protégé Rabbi Joseph Alkelai²¹—similarly cultivated robust, intellectually sophisticated, and deeply committed rabbinic identities. Many within this circle, particularly Immanuel Aboab and Moshe Zacut, demonstrated a profound attachment to

the land of Israel,²² suggesting that Samuel Aboab's financial commitments to Israel may have been partially influenced by his Portuguese heritage.

²¹ The Alkelai family was a family of scholars that moved with the Aboabs from Venice to Verona. Joseph Alkelai appears to have been a protegee of sort of Samuel Aboab there. See my discussion in Chapter I, and mentions of him throughout the dissertation.

²² See Bernard Cooperman, “Identities Constructed: Immanuel Aboab before the Inquisition in Pisa” forthcoming in a festschrift in honor of Moises Orfali. (Leiden: Brill, 2025) for a discussion of Immanuel Aboab’s relocation to the land of Israel along with thirty-six members of his family. Regarding R. Moshe Zacut, HIDA writes in *Shem haGedolim*, M-121 that he “attempted to go via Verona to the land of Israel but they delayed him in Venice.” Also see Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 337-338 for a description of another attempt by Zacut to relocate to the city of Hebron in the land of Israel.

Aboab's trajectory demonstrates compellingly that converso origins did not preclude the development of profound Jewish identity. On the contrary, they may have catalyzed a particularly dynamic and responsive model of rabbinic leadership. Aboab's career, which left a lasting impact on Mediterranean Jewish communities, merits deeper scholarly examination for its potential contributions to both converso studies and our understanding of the early modern rabbinate.

In sum, Rabbi Samuel Aboab navigated multiple worlds—linguistically, geographically, and intellectually—positioning him at the intersection of diverse scholarly fields. His life and “letters” offer a unique entrée to broader scholarly inquiries into critical issues in early modern Jewish history, including converso identity, rabbinic authority, and the intellectual, communal, and institutional dimensions of the Western Sephardi rabbinate.

The following section will evaluate the current “state of the field” in three key areas: scholarship on Aboab himself, the evolving discourse on converso identity, and the historiography of the Western European rabbinate, with particular attention to Sephardi and Portuguese rabbis—an influential yet understudied rabbinic subgroup. By positioning Aboab within these scholarly conversations, we can appreciate how his life and writings challenge, nuance, and enrich the prevailing historical frameworks.

II. State of the Field: Rabbi Samuel Aboab:

Rabbi Samuel Aboab has been largely overlooked in Jewish historiography despite his undeniable status as a preeminent halakhic authority in early modern Italy, in itself an important locus of Mediterranean and Jewish affairs. As a member of a prominent Portuguese merchant family, and central node of an extensive rabbinic and economic network, Aboab wielded considerable influence, yet he rarely garnered historical attention.

Aboab's relative obscurity in historical scholarship may be attributed, at least in part, to his deliberate avoidance of conflict and controversy—a characteristic examined in the biographical chapter. Unlike his more combative contemporaries, such as Rabbi Moshe Hagiz,²³ Rabbi Jacob Sasportas,²⁴ and the Ashkenazi Hakham Zevi,²⁵ who were frequently entangled in communal, economic, or ideological disputes, Aboab remained largely removed from such conflicts. Additionally, his financial independence as a member of the wealthy Aboab family may have afforded him the autonomy to navigate rabbinic and communal affairs without the need to seek patronage or cultivate political alliances, thereby further insulating him from contentious disputes. Since it is often conflict that draws historians' interest, Aboab's very success in avoiding dispute may explain his diminished presence in the historiographical record.

Like Aboab himself, his major works, *Devar Shemuel* and *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, though published, have not attracted sustained scholarly engagement. Aboab's *Devar Shemuel*, his responsa collection, edited and published posthumously by his son Jacob in 1702,³⁵ was not republished until 2022³⁶ when *Zichron Aharon Press* reissued it with modern halakhic footnotes and indexes. In contrast, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* has garnered slightly more attention, perhaps due to its distinctive style, or because of its initial anonymous publication raising speculation regarding

²³ See for example, Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies*. (New York: Columbia University Press), 1990.

²⁴ See for example, Yaacob Dweck, *Dissident Rabbi: The Life of Jacob Sasportas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

²⁵ See for example, Yosie Levine, "An Intellectual Biography of an Early Modern Port Rabbi" (PhD diss., Yeshiva University, 2020), 289-334 on the Hayun Affair. ³⁵ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, (Venice: Vendramina, 1702) ³⁶ Although it was reissued in photo-offset editions.

its author. Originally published between 1646 and 1649²⁶ in Prague, it is cited by important rabbinic figures such as Rabbi Shimshon Morpurgo,²⁷ Rabbi Hayim Yosef David Azulay (*HIDA*)²⁸ who conclusively attributed the work to Aboab as shown, and Rabbi Jacob Emden.⁴⁰ The *Sefer ha-Zichronot* was republished twice in the twentieth century, once in Munkács (Mukachevo) in 1905 and again in 1998 by Ahavat Shalom Press in Jerusalem. The final annotated version appeared in 2022 alongside the *Devar Shemuel*.

The most comprehensive study of Samuel Aboab to date appears in Meir Benayahu's *Dor Ehad Ba-Arez*, which offers a biographical overview of Aboab and his family. However, much of this information is derived from Jacob Aboab's introduction to *Devar Shemuel*, which Benayahu accepts at face value. While useful as a foundational reference, his account requires further corroboration and expansion.

Benayahu's most significant contribution lies in his transcription of Aboab's correspondence with emissaries from the land of Israel, which provides scholars with invaluable access to these primary sources. By analyzing these letters, researchers can deepen the scholarly discourse surrounding Rabbi Samuel Aboab, Rabbi Moshe Zacut, Rabbi David Havelio, Rabbi Moshe Hagiz, Rabbi Benjamin ha-Levi and the broader subject of early modern Jewish engagement with the land of Israel.

That being said, Benayahu's near-exclusive reliance on correspondence restricts his work in several ways: Firstly, the work fails to capture the broader socio-cultural tensions, financial

²⁶ See my discussion in Chapter III.

²⁷ R. Shimshon Morpurgo, *Shemesh Zedaka* (Venice, 1743), 102A

²⁸ For an extensive discussion on the authorship of the *Sefer ha-Zichronot* see Chapter III in this dissertation. ⁴⁰ Emden, *Sefer Torat ha-Kena'ot*, 51.

pressures, and religious fervor characterizing the period. While the letters reference financial networks connecting diaspora communities to the Holy Land, Benayahu confines his analysis to information explicitly included in this correspondence, preventing exploration of these networks' wider implications. By restricting his investigation to the literal content of letters, Benayahu's study remains bound by the inherent limitations of epistolary sources as historical evidence.

Second, the letters Benayahu transcribes, though valuable as historical sources, are treated primarily as documentary evidence rather than as texts warranting deeper linguistic or rhetorical analysis. Yet the tone, language, structure, not to mention content, of these letters have the potential to reveal far more—offering insight into individual experiences of the emissaries and agents, communal dynamics in the land of Israel and the diaspora, polemical exchanges, and the emotional realities of penury, devastating taxation, and uncertainty.

Third, *Dor Eḥad* remains narrowly centered on Aboab's connections to the land of Israel as reflected in his correspondence, neglecting to construct a broader portrait of his rabbinate, intellectual legacy, and halakhic influence. As a result, significant aspects of Aboab's life and contributions remain unexplored.

Nevertheless, Benayahu's transcriptions have proven invaluable to my construction and understanding of Rabbi Samuel Aboab, particularly as it regards to positioning him within the broader manifestations of religious enthusiasm for the land of Israel, which I examine in Chapter V. My approach, however, extends beyond Benayahu's, and seeks to integrate Aboab's engagement with the Holy Land into a comprehensive analysis of his multidimensional identity—examining his membership in a prominent Portuguese merchant family, his financial autonomy, and his position within the rabbinic elite. This integrative strategy yields a more

comprehensive portrait of Aboab and, through his example, offers nuanced insights into his contemporaries and the Mediterranean world they navigated.

In addition to his personal-professional correspondence, Aboab's halakhic responsa do make an occasional appearance in the historiography. Scholars like Jacob Katz and Bernard Cooperman for example, cite Aboab in the context of a specific legal or historical issue such as the early modern rabbinic attitude to the concept of *Hillul Hashem* (Desecration of God's name).²⁹ Despite this sporadic attention, Aboab as a historical figure, rabbi, and halakhist remains obscure. Nonetheless, his distinctive biography and carefully recorded "letters", will provide us valuable entrée into related fields of inquiry and enable him to contribute meaningfully to broader discussions of rabbinic and early modern Jewish scholarship.

A. State of the Field: Converso Identity and Rabbis of Portuguese Communities:

As a child of conversos who became a rabbi, Aboab's life and writings provide an important counterpoint to the prevailing scholarly discourse on converso identity. Much of the scholarship on the subject has emphasized the "disruptive" role conversos played within normative Judaism, often highlighting figures such as Uriel da Costa³⁰ and Baruch Spinoza,³¹

²⁹ See Jacob Katz, *Goy shel shabbat* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1983), 84–93, and Bernard Cooperman, "Defining Deviance, Negotiating Norms: Raphael Meldola in Livorno, Pisa, and Bayonne," in Yosef. Kaplan, *Religious Changes and Cultural Transformations in the Early Modern Western Sephardic Communities*. edited by Yosef Kaplan. 1st ed. (Leiden ; Brill, 2019). 157-194. Also, see my discussion of Aboab's understanding of this concept in Chapter I.

³⁰ For more recent literature see, Matt. Goldish, "Perspectives on Uriel da Costa's "Example of a Human Life".*" Studia Rosenthaliana* 42 (2010): 1-23, see the discussion of Uriel da Costa in Talya Fishman, *Shaking the Pillars of Exile : "Voice of a Fool," an Early Modern Jewish Critique of Rabbinic Culture*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997). And Uriel da Costa, Semuel da Silva, Herman Prins Salomon, and I. S. D Sassoon. *Examination of Pharisaic Traditions = Exame Das Tradicoes Phariseas : Facsimile of the Unique Copy in the Royal Library of Copenhagen*. (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

³¹ While the literature on Benedict Spinoza is extensive, for a focus on the relationship between him and the Jewish community of Amsterdam and the "disruptive" nature of his converso identity and background, see for example, Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics* Volume 1, *The Marrano of Reason*. (Princeton : Princeton University

who openly rejected rabbinic authority. These individuals are frequently presented as emblematic, if extreme, examples of the broader tensions³² within converso communities, illustrating the challenges of reintegration into Jewish society.

Early studies on converso identity, such as Cecil Roth's 1947 article, *The Strange Case of Hector Méndez Bravo*,³³ brought attention to the phenomenon of *retornados*—individuals who attempted to return to Judaism but ultimately reverted to Christianity. Roth examined the case of a teenage boy who fled Portugal with his mother, was circumcised in Venice as part of his reentry into Judaism, yet later returned to Portugal, confessed before the Inquisition, and resumed life as a Christian. Similarly, Brian Pullan's *A Ship with Two Rudders*³⁴ and his research on Jews and the Inquisition in Venice³⁵ explored the phenomenon of conversos who straddled both Christian and Jewish identities, resisting full religious commitment.

More recent scholarship has further examined the complexities of converso reintegration.

Press, 1989). Steven Nadler, "The Excommunication of Spinoza: Trouble and Toleration in the 'Dutch Jerusalem.'" *Shofar (West Lafayette, Ind.)* 19, no. 4 (2001): 40–52.

³² See for example Carsten L. Wilke. "Midrashim from Bordeaux: A Theological Controversy inside the Portuguese Jewish Diaspora at the Time of Spinoza's Excommunication." *EJIS newsletter* 6, no. 2 (2012): 207–247. MAIA NETO, J. R. "The Struggle against Unbelief in the Portuguese Jewish Community of Amsterdam after Spinoza's Excommunication: Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought in Early-Eighteenth-Century Europe. Studies on the *Traité Des Trois Imposteurs*." *Archives Internationales d'histoire des idées* 148 (1996): 425–437.

³³ Cecil Roth, Francisco Burgos, Hector Mendez Bravo, and Ruy Fernandes de Saldanha. "The Strange Case of Hector Mendes Bravo." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 18 (1943): 221–245.

³⁴ Brian Pullan, "'A Ship with Two Rudders': 'Righetto Marrano' and the Inquisition in Venice." *The Historical Journal* 20, no. 1 (1977): 25–58.

³⁵ Brian S Pullan, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice, 1550–1670*. Totowa, N.J: Barnes & Noble, 1983.

Yosef Kaplan's work on Orobio de Castro³⁶ and his numerous articles on the Portuguese community in Amsterdam³⁷ have demonstrated the extent to which newly returned Jews were perceived as unsettling elements within their communities, challenging the stability of Jewish

institutions. David Graizbord has similarly explored the phenomenon of "fluid identities" among conversos who settled in Southern France.³⁸ Many of these individuals maintained dual affiliations, navigating both Christian and Jewish societies while deliberately avoiding full religious commitment. In particular, conversos' reluctance to undergo circumcision—often a result of economic, social, or cultural considerations—highlights the complex motivations behind converso liminality.³⁹

Assuming a more positive and constructive perspective, some scholars have shifted the lens to conversos for whom the search for identity began with intellectual engagement rather than immediate religious transformation. Historians such as Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Steven Nadler, Yosef Kaplan, and Bernard Cooperman⁴⁰ have studied converso thinkers such as Isaac Cardozo,⁴¹ Menashe ben Israel,⁴² David Nieto,⁵⁵ and Immanuel Aboab, who approached Judaism

³⁶ Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro*. (Oxford: Littman Library by Oxford University Press, 1989).

³⁷ Regarding social and communal discipline, see for example Yosef Kaplan "The Social Functions of the Herem in the Portuguese Jewish Community of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century." In *Dutch Jewish History*, (Btill: 1984), 11-155. Yosef Kaplan, "Wayward New Christians and Stubborn New Jews: The Shaping of a Jewish Identity." *Jewish History* 8 (1994): 27-41. and Yosef Kaplan, "Amsterdam, The Forbidden Lands, and the Dynamics of the Sephardi Diaspora." In *The Dutch Intersection*, (Brill: 2008). 33-62

³⁸ David L. Graizbord, *Souls in Dispute: Converso Identities in Iberia and the Jewish Diaspora, 1580-1700*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.).

³⁹ See for example, Yosef Kaplan, "Amsterdam, the Forbidden Lands" and "Wayward new Christians"

⁴⁰ Bernard Cooperman, "Identities Constructed"

⁴¹ Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981).

⁴² Steven Nadler, *Menashe ben Israel: Rabbi of Amsterdam*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). ⁵⁵ Jakob Josef Petuchowski, *The Theology of Haham David Nieto; an Eighteenth-Century Defense of the Jewish Tradition*. (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1970).

through philosophical inquiry, theological exploration, and rational debate.⁴³ For this group, scholars stress, intellectual conviction often served as the gateway to full religious commitment, a process reflected in their influential writings.⁴⁴

Samuel Aboab represents a new aspect of converso identity. While he most closely resembles this latter group of notable intellects who were religiously committed leaders from converso backgrounds, his role extends beyond that of returnee, nor is that the defining character

of his intellectual output. On a personal level, his responsa reveal his complete and unequivocal commitment to a halakhically rigorous, religiously “orthodox” Jewish identity. On a broader level, his *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* provides a prescriptive guide for rabbis—many of whom, like himself, came from converso backgrounds—for the cultivation of halakhically committed communities. Thus, Aboab’s *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* is not an apologetic or philosophical work for returning conversos. It is a work that assumes, and is predicated upon, the presence of fully dedicated, deeply identified returned Jews and their rabbis. Many of these rabbis, as mentioned, were Aboab’s contemporaries and shared similar backgrounds, including his mentor, Rabbi Azaria Picho, his colleague, Rabbi Moshe Zacut, and his protégé, Rabbi Joseph Alkelai.

How does the portrayal of conversos like Aboab, his family, and many of his colleagues—fully “identified,” committed, and constructive in their religious and communal roles—complicate and refine the prevailing narrative of converso identity as inherently

⁴³ Notably, David Nieto’s *Matteh Dan*, Immanuel Aboab’s *Nomologia*, Isaac Cardozo’s *Las Excelencias de los Hebreos*, and Menasseh ben Israel’s *Conciliator*.

⁴⁴ See for example Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi. “The re-education of Marranos in the seventeenth century.” *Judaic Studies Program, University of Cincinnati, Vol 3* (1980).

disruptive? In what ways do Portuguese rabbis like Aboab and his contemporaries expand, redefine, or challenge our understanding of the early modern rabbinate?

B. State of the Field: The Western European and Mediterranean Early Modern Rabbinate:

As a career rabbi and an important “node” within an expansive Mediterranean rabbinic network, Aboab presents a rare opportunity to refine and enrich the study of the early modern rabbinate. His own biography offers valuable insight into the understudied niche of Sephardi Portuguese rabbis, many of whom, like him, came from converso backgrounds and, despite the disruptions of their past, emerged as remarkably erudite scholars, halakhists, and kabbalists.⁴⁵

The process by which they attained such scholarly and rabbinic stature remains insufficiently

explored and warrants further examination. As historians work toward a more comprehensive understanding of these figures and the seventeenth-century rabbinate more broadly, studying Aboab alongside the contemporaries with whom he corresponded so assiduously, may generate new lines of inquiry and avenues of research, deepening the scholarly discourse on rabbinic authority, intellectual exchange, and communal leadership in the early modern period.

While no comprehensive study of the seventeenth-century rabbinate exists, general scholarship on the institution of the rabbinate⁴⁶ provides a valuable foundation. Simha Assaf’s

⁴⁵ For example, Rabbi Moshe Zacut and Rabbi Joseph Ergas.

⁴⁶ For the medieval period see Jacob Katz *Tradition and Crisis* and “Le-Toldot ha-Rabbanut be-Moza’ei Yemei haBeinayim,” in *Ha-Halakha be-Meitzar Mikhsholim al Derekh ha-Ortodoksia be-Hithavuta* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), 247-260. On the related subject of *Yeshivot* see Mordekhai Breuer, *Ohalei Torah – ha-Yeshiva, Tavnita, ve-Toldoteha*. (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2003) and for the early modern period, see Shlomo Zalman Havlin *le-toldot yeshivot Yerushalayim va-hakhameha be-shelhai ha-mei’a ha-17 ve-reishit ha-mei’a ha-18*. *Shalem* Vol 2 (1976): 113-192. and Havlin’s dissertation, *Rabbi Avraham ha-Levi, mehaber shu”t ginat veradim uvene’i doro* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1983) 1-17.

*Towards the History of the Rabbinate*⁴⁷ offered an early survey, while Simon Schwarzfuchs' *Concise History of the Rabbinate*⁶¹ provided a broader analysis, examining topics such as rabbinic career trajectories, the presence of unofficial, yet recognized rabbinic “hierarchies” and prevailing tensions between rabbis and communal leaders. Valuable as it is for its synthetic analysis, Schwarzfuchs' work remains limited in scope and detail— omitting, for example, the influential rabbinic figures of Rabbis Ezekiel Landau and Jonathan Eibeschütz. Thus, as David Katz stated in 2004 and still holds true today “an adequately detailed and comprehensive academic study of this highest of pre-modern Jewish offices remains a desideratum.”⁴⁸

For the medieval period, scholars such as Abraham Grossman⁴⁹ and, more recently, Ephraim Kanarfogel⁵⁰ have made significant contributions to the study of the rabbinate, often focusing on elite Ashkenazi scholars, particularly the Tosafists, their intellectual output, and the socio-cultural forces that shaped Ashkenazic rabbinic identity. Mordechai Breuer⁵¹ expanded the scope of this scholarship, producing his seminal studies on the rabbinate of late medieval and early modern Ashkenaz, encompassing France and the Holy Roman Empire. Unlike the

⁴⁷ Simha Assaf “le-Korot ha-Rabbanut be-Ashkenaz, Polania ve-Lita” 2nd ed. (Darom: Jerusalem, 1927). ⁶¹ Simon Schwarzfuchs' *A Concise History of the Rabbinate*. (Oxford, UK; Blackwell, 1993).

⁴⁸ David Katz, “A case study in the formation of a super-rabbi: The early years of Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, 1713–1754” (Ph.D Diss., University of Maryland, MD, 2004), 7.

⁴⁹ Avraham Grossman, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981). See also, Yedidya Alter Dinari, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz be-Shilhi Yemei ha-Beinayim* (Jerusalem: Mossad Biyalik, 1984).

⁵⁰ Ephraim Kanarfogel, *The Intellectual History and Rabbinic Culture of Medieval Ashkenaz*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013).

⁵¹ Mordechai Breuer, *Rabbanut Ashkenaz bi-Yemei ha-Beinayim* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1976), and “Ma'amad ha-Rabbanut be-Hanhagatan shel Kehilot Ashkenaz” *Zion* 41 (1976): 47-67.

scholarship concentrated primarily on rabbinic elites, Breuer examined the broader social, political, and intellectual landscape of the broader group of Ashkenazic rabbis.

While Breuer offers valuable and perceptive analyses of the fifteenth-century German rabbinate—examining both its actual and ascribed authority, its relationship with the laity and communal leadership, and its interactions with non-Jewish authorities—his study is brief, spanning fewer than one hundred pages, and is structured more as a sourcebook than a comprehensive examination. Moreover, its scope is confined to the fifteenth century, leaving the transition into the early modern period unexplored.

Moving into the early modern period, Robert Bonfil's *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy*⁵² stands as arguably the most significant contribution to the study of the rabbinate in this era. Bonfil offers a comprehensive examination of the rabbinic role, analyzing its professional qualifications, social standing, responsibilities, privileges, and limitations. He also investigates the scope of rabbinic authority and its evolving relationship with both lay leadership and the broader Jewish community.

Bonfil's most significant contribution, however, is his identification of important transformations within the sixteenth-century Italian rabbinate, particularly the rise of the community-appointed rabbi as a reflection of increasing communal centralization. He demonstrates how the expansion of Jewish communities, and the interest in fostering communal cohesion and improved systemization led to the standardization of rabbinic responsibilities and the imposition of new constraints on rabbinic authority.

⁵² Robert Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford University Press, 1990).

While these studies collectively contribute to the broader discourse on the early modern rabbinate, even Bonfil's work, as thorough as it is for the Renaissance rabbinate in Italy, does not extend past the sixteenth century. In the absence of comprehensive treatments for the early modern period, scholars have turned to focused studies of individual rabbis of the era, which, while narrow in scope, offer valuable insights and important contributions into the diverse functions, tensions, and complexities that characterized the early modern rabbinate.

For example, in the Italian context, studies conducted on Rabbi Leon Modena⁵³ offer important observations on the life of a non-Sephardi, non-pedigreed rabbi in Italy, illustrating the challenges of building a rabbinic career by cobbling together over twenty rabbinic "odd jobs" such as teaching young children, serving as a cantor, and preaching sermons in multiple synagogues.⁵⁴ His troubled family life and difficult economic circumstances, also draw attention to the many challenges of raising children and supporting a family while pursuing a rabbinic career in the Venetian ghetto.⁵⁵

Adding another dimension to this growing field of study, is Daniel Carpi's publication of *Medaber Tahapukhot*,⁵⁶ by Rabbi Leon Modena's grandson, Isaac Min Ha-Levi'im. This firstperson account details the controversies surrounding Min Halevi'im's ordination and rise to the rabbinate in Venice, shedding light on the increasing power of the *kehal* (community

⁵³ Daniel Carpi ed., *Hayei Yehuda: le-Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh de-Modena*. (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1985). Mark R Cohen. *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah*. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press), 1988.

⁵⁴ Cohen, *Autobiography*, 160-162

⁵⁵ See for example, the descriptions in Cohen, *The Autobiography*, 108-111.

⁵⁶ Daniel Carpi ed., *Medaber Tahapukhot: Hibur otobiographi me-ha-me'a ha-sheva-eserei* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1985),

council), the constraints on rabbinic authority, and the tensions these changes created. Together, these studies highlight the diverse experiences of early modern rabbis and the adaptation of both rabbis and communities to shifting circumstances.

Stepping beyond Italy, studies of Ḥakham Zevi⁵⁷ Ashkenazi examine an Ashkenazi rabbi who, despite experiencing personal tragedy and communal conflict, achieved notable success in prominent communities such as Hamburg and Amsterdam. Ḥakham Zevi's responsa, illustrate his attempts to bridge intellectual, if not necessarily cultural, divides between Ashkenazim and Sephardim. In addition, analysis of Zevi's involvement in the Ḥayun affair highlight jurisdictional challenges faced by both Sephardi and Ashkenazi rabbis during the early modern period. Following the affair, Ḥakham Zevi was reprimanded by the Sephardi community in Amsterdam for his "attempt to wield authority over a congregation outside the purview of his jurisdiction," and was subsequently forced to leave Amsterdam.⁵⁸ This "unauthorized" involvement draws attention to a critical aspect of the seventeenth-century rabbinate-- the rabbinic response to heresy and its implications for rabbinic authority and influence. Similar challenges were encountered by Aboab, particularly during his confrontation with Nathan of Gaza when he visited Venice in 1668, and these will be explored further in this dissertation.

Many of the jurisdictional dilemmas and controversies documented in studies of Ḥakham Zevi, were equally prevalent among Sephardi rabbis and their communities. This is particularly evident in studies of more contentious figures within the Sephardi rabbinate, such as Rabbi Jacob

⁵⁷ Levine, "Port Rabbi" .

⁵⁸ Levine, "Port Rabbi," 30.

Sasportas⁵⁹ and Rabbi Moshe Ḥagiz.⁶⁰ Examination of these figures not only expands our understanding of Sephardi communities in Livorno, London, Amsterdam, and the land of Israel, but also illuminate how rabbis grappled with congregations they viewed as either religiously indifferent or resistant to rabbinic authority.

In contrast, Rabbi Menashe ben Israel, a Portuguese rabbi living in Amsterdam who has garnered significant scholarly attention,⁶¹ offers yet another perspective. His most recent biographer, Steven Nadler, highlights Menashe's unique challenges in leading a converso community and his notable contributions, including founding a printing press and publishing *Conciliator* (1632), a work dedicated to resolving biblical inconsistencies.

In addition to these rabbinic figures, studies of significant non-rabbinic figures like Isaac Orobio de Castro and Isaac Cardoso and even the heretic, Baruch Spinoza, further elucidate the intellectual landscape of the Western Sephardi diaspora. These works provide insight into the education, intellectual methodologies and social dynamics of the time, offering a broader understanding of the expectations and achievements within the ranks of the scholars in Western Sephardi communities.

Aboab's role within both the nascent Portuguese community in Verona and the well-established one in Venice uniquely positions him as a representative figure of this important

subset of early modern rabbinic leadership. Examining his personal success alongside his extensive correspondence with Sephardi and Portuguese rabbinic colleagues sheds light on their

⁵⁹ Yaakov Dweck, *Dissident Rabbi*.

⁶⁰ E. Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*.

⁶¹ See Yosef Kaplan, Henry Méchoulan, and Richard H. Popkin, eds. *Menasseh ben Israel and his World*. (Leiden: Brill, 1989). More recently, Steven Nadler, *Menasseh Ben Israel: Rabbi of Amsterdam*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

intellectual versatility and wide-ranging scholarly contributions. These rabbis engaged across multiple genres, from liturgical compositions⁶² to halakhic responsa, and from Kabbalah⁶³ to homiletic⁶⁴ and ethical⁶⁵ literature, demonstrating both their erudition and their adaptability within diverse intellectual traditions. Moreover, their ability to navigate the complexities of their personal, rabbinic, and communal identities underscores the need for further scholarly inquiry into their intellectual and religious impact.

Furthermore, Aboab's life and literary corpus, particularly his *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* written as a guide for rabbis, serve as an important addition to the study of the early modern rabbinate as they provide a valuable extension of Bonfil's critical conceptualization of the early modern communal rabbi. These materials illuminate the evolution of institutionalized rabbinic leadership into the seventeenth century. While Bonfil's analysis, which largely concludes with the sixteenth century, relies primarily on communal records—such as *pinkasim* and rabbinic contracts—that reflect the priorities of community councils rather than rabbis themselves, Aboab's extensive writings offer the counterbalancing rabbinic perspective. His career exemplifies the full maturation of institutional rabbinic authority within structured communal systems, revealing how rabbis navigated increasingly complex leadership roles amid shifting communal and religious demands. Thus, in addition to adding an important rabbinic case study to the growing scholarly

⁶² See for example liturgical poems written by R. Moshe Zacut *Tikkun Shovavim* (Mantua, 1674), hebrewbooks.org/23732 and his liturgical poems in his *Tikkun Hatzot* (Mantua, 1746), hebrewbooks.org/19745.

⁶³ Rabbi Moshe Zacut and his student R. Joseph Ergas who authored the kabbalistic work *Shomer Emunim* (Amsterdam, 1736) hebrewbooks.org/30593

⁶⁴ For example R. Azaria Picho's *Bina la-Ittim* (Venice, 1648) hebrewbooks.org/23998 as well as Samuel ibn Yahya's sermons included in Julia Lieberman, "Sermons and the Construct of a Jewish Identity: The Hamburg Sephardic Community in the 1620s," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (2003): 49–72, in which she explores several of his sermons delivered in Portuguese and which he published in 1629.

⁶⁵ For example, Rabbi Elijah de-Vidas, *Reishit Hokhma* (Krakow, 1594), hebrewbooks.org/11862

corpus, Aboab also serves as a methodological entry point for understanding the complex dynamics that characterized the evolution of the rabbinate in the seventeenth century.

III. Samuel Aboab in Venice: A Rabbi at the Heart of a Mediterranean Network

In addition to examining Aboab as a Sephardi rabbi, his role as a rabbi in Venice—a thriving mercantile republic—invites us to explore the influence of Italy's unique political, sociocultural, and religious circumstances on an individual rabbi and the broader early modern rabbinate. The seventeenth-century Italian peninsula was a patchwork of independent city-states, many of which hosted flourishing Jewish communities. These Catholic city-states were subject to varying levels of inquisitorial oversight⁶⁶; a factor that significantly influenced religious life. Furthermore, the social and economic conditions of Italian Jews were shaped by the widespread confinement to ghettos,⁶⁷ a circumstance that deeply impacted their communal structures and interactions.

These factors collectively shaped Italian Jewish communities, resulting in dynamics vastly different from those of many Western European counterparts, such as those of the Jews of Amsterdam, or Hamburg who lived outside of ghettos and under Protestant rule. I will explore how living in close proximity to the Inquisition and witnessing the rapid expansion of its imposition of social discipline, may have influenced Aboab's perception of rabbinic authority

⁶⁶ For an example of recent work on this subject see Adriano Prosperi's *Tribunali della Coscienza : Inquisitori, Confessori, Missionari*. Nuova Edizione. Ristampa. (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, editore, 2012).

⁶⁷ While the discourse on the early modern ghetto is extensive, my focus here is not on its origins or underlying motivations. Rather, I seek to highlight a few scholars who examine the impact of ghettoization on communal norms, societal structures, urban space, and the broader cultural and social dynamics that shaped daily life. See, for example, Stefanie Beth Siegmund, *The Medici State and the Ghetto of Florence: The Construction of an Early Modern Jewish Community*. (Stanford University Press, 2006), Bernard Dov Cooperman, "The Early Modern Ghetto: A Study in Urban Real Estate." In *The Ghetto in Global History*, Routledge, 2017, 57-73. and Dana Katz, *The Jewish Ghetto and the Visual Imagination of Early Modern Venice*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

and social discipline as expressed in his *Sefer ha-Zichronot*.

Adding to this distinctive religious and social fabric, the significance of Venice, as a center of commerce and social ferment, teeming with religious tensions, spiritual fervor, and intellectual vibrancy cannot be ignored. It was home to four distinct Jewish communities, Ashkenazi, Italiani, and Levantine and Ponentine Sephardim, all of whom had membership in the *Va'ad ha-katan* which formed the nucleus for governance of the Ghetto.⁶⁸ During the early modern period, it became a focal point for the dissemination of Kabbalistic teachings⁶⁹ brought to Italy by emissaries and travelers from the Holy Land. These mystical ideas, disseminated through sermons, liturgies, and books, left an indelible mark. They reshaped communal practices,⁷⁰ inspired confraternities,⁷¹ and fueled new expressions of Jewish spirituality across Europe. Venice's status as a publishing hub amplified these currents, solidifying its role as a center of innovation and debate at the intersection of tradition and modernity.

As a rabbi in Venice, Samuel Aboab could not have been unaffected by the intellectual and spiritual currents sweeping through the city. His correspondence reveals a hands-on involvement in the world of publication, as he advised students and contemporaries on the

⁶⁸ For a more extensive discussion regarding the allocation of power within the *va'ad ha-katan*, see David Malkiel, *A Separate Republic: The Mechanics and Dynamics of Venetian Jewish Government 1607-1624*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, 1989).

⁶⁹ Andrea Gondos, *Kabbalah in Print: The Study and Popularization of Jewish Mysticism in Early Modernity*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2020). Yaakov Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah: Leon Modena, Jewish Mysticism, Early Modern Venice*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) See also my discussion in Chapter V on the subject of Safed Kabbalah in Italy.

⁷⁰ See for example Elliot Horowitz's, "Coffee, Coffeehouses, and the Nocturnal rituals of Early Modern Jewry." *AJS Review*, Spring 1989 Vol. 14:1,

⁷¹ Elliott S. Horowitz, "Jewish Confraternities in Seventeenth-Century Verona: A Study in the Social History of Piety" (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, Connecticut, 1982).

subject.⁷² The extensive source material he cites in his responsa further highlights his ready access to a wide array of printed works.⁷³

Yet, Aboab remains an enigmatic figure when it comes to his stance on *Kabbalah*. On the one hand, his son Jacob attests to his father's proficiency in Kabbalah--specifically citing his knowledge of the *Zohar* and *Sefer Yetzira*.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Aboab maintained frequent correspondence with some of the most prominent Kabbalists of his time, including Rabbi Moshe Zacut, Rabbi Abraham Rovigo, and Rabbi Benjamin ha-Levi. On the other hand, his own writings, including his exchanges with Kabbalists, reveal a striking restraint. Across his published and unpublished works, Aboab quotes the *Zohar* only once,⁷⁵ and even then, he carefully justifies his decision to do so.

Closer examination of Aboab's stance on Kabbalah, one which defies neat categorization, will raise further questions. His personal proficiency in Kabbalah suggests he did not share the views of those in Rabbi Leon Modena's "camp", who vehemently opposed its study.⁷⁶ Yet his public restraint sets him apart from colleague Rabbi Moses Zacut, who not only taught Kabbalah, but engaged in extensive correspondence on mystical subjects, and established confraternities that actively promoted kabbalistic practices.⁷⁷

⁷² See M. Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 298 for examples of correspondence with Rabbi Joseph Ḥamiz and R. Ḥayim aviAttar regarding printing their books in Venice.

⁷³ See my discussion of S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, Responsum 1 in Chapter II.

⁷⁴ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 7.

⁷⁵ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 75.

⁷⁶ Rabbi Leon Modena's *Ari Nohem* is a staunch polemic against the study of Kabbalah. See Yaakov Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah*; David Malkiel, "Rapture and Rupture: Kabbalah and the Reformation of Early Modern Judaism." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 103, no. 1 (2013): 107-121.

⁷⁷ See for example, Eliezer Baumgarten and Uri Safrai. "Rabbi Moshe Zacuto and the Kabbalistic Circle of Amsterdam." *Studia Rosenthaliana* 46, no. 1-2 (2020): 29-49.

While many of his peers chose clear positions in the heated debates surrounding Kabbalah, Aboab seemed to stand apart, maintaining a posture that was neither overtly aligned nor wholly detached. His ability to transcend the fray—a remarkable feat in such a polarized environment, raises its own questions. Did Aboab’s silence reflect a deliberate effort to remain above factional disputes, or was it itself a subtle form of commentary? How did the rise and spread of Kabbalah influence—or perhaps challenge—his vision for universal piety as expressed in his *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*? Positioned at the heart of these spiritual and intellectual crosscurrents, Aboab invites a closer examination of his ideology, religiosity, and approach to spiritual leadership.

When considering Venice's influence on Aboab, we must also recognize it as a city where the currents of Jewish thought and practice flowed in both directions. Just as Aboab’s leadership was impacted by the diverse ideas and influences arriving in Venice, his strategic location and affluent merchant background enabled him to extend his own influence outward. Capitalizing on his position and resources, Aboab built and cultivated a robust rabbinic network comprising over two hundred rabbis and community leaders, while his family was active in mercantile networks that kept him informed, facilitated financial assistance, and amplified his social and cultural impact.

In addition to rabbinic exchanges, these networks were frequently utilized to secure placements for students in yeshivot across Italy and Israel, and to recommend and assist former students in acquiring rabbinic positions.⁷⁸ Additionally, Aboab relied on his merchant connections to streamline financial aid to the land of Israel and negotiate the release of captives.

⁷⁸ This will be explored in Chapter II.

Thus, studying Aboab as a rabbi in Venice is doubly important: it provides critical insights into the geographic, social, and religious makeup of Italian Jewish communities and their rabbis, and allows us to appreciate the global reach and powerful influence of a rabbi at the height of his career.

IV. Dissertation Chapters:

The dissertation encompasses five chapters: an initial biographical examination of Aboab followed by four thematic chapters, each analyzing a distinct genre of his "letters." The

methodological framework employs a dual analytical approach throughout. At the micro level, each chapter interrogates Aboab's specific textual contributions and examines how these writings reflect his character, intellectual development, individual and rabbinic identity, and professional trajectory. Simultaneously, at the macro level, Aboab and his "records" function as a lens through which broader historical phenomena are illuminated—particularly the evolution of the seventeenth-century rabbinate, the realities and significance of early modern rabbinic networks, and the economic and spiritual interconnections between diaspora, particularly Portuguese, communities, and the land of Israel during this period. This methodology allows for both an indepth examination of Aboab, and an appreciation for his contributions to some of the broader intellectual, social, and religious trends that dominated his world.

Chapter One: offers a biography of Rabbi Samuel Aboab which begins by firmly and factually establishing his converso heritage, noting that his father, Abraham Aboab, and uncle, Jacob Aboab, still carried their Christian names Antonio Faliero and Andre Faliero respectively when Samuel himself was born in Antwerp. The chapter methodically traces Samuel's career trajectory, beginning with his childhood in Hamburg, followed by his student years in Venice, his

rabbinic tenure in the small town of Verona, and ultimately, his role as a rabbi in the prominent Portuguese Talmud Torah of Venice.

This biography could be expanded by systematic study of communal and notarial records, particularly from Aboab's time in Venice. However, it breaks new ground in departing from the standard narrative that has defined him in historical works such as Benayahu's *Dor Eḥad*, where Aboab is cast as a scholar following a linear path to Venetian Jewish leadership. Instead, this research situates him within an influential converso family that manifested an intriguing synthesis of commercial acumen with a sophisticated Jewish identity and commitment to Jewish causes, including the establishment of synagogues and schools in their communities of residence, and the endowment of a *Beit Midrash* in distant Safed. Moreover, the Aboab family operated within a broader network that included many families with similar backgrounds, who embraced similar values and balanced comparable objectives.

The chapter demonstrates how Aboab's rise to prominence occurred substantially within his family's sphere of influence, and how he assimilated their mercantile connections, social capital, and financial resources—elements of his circumstances that would manifest throughout his rabbinic and communal activities, and which should not be underestimated. This multidimensional portrait renders Aboab's story more authentic, textured, and nuanced, while offering a framework for examining other early modern rabbis who shared similar backgrounds, ideals, and commitments.

Chapter Two: Examines the centrality of rabbinic networks and responsa exchange to the professional development and influence of early modern rabbis. For prominent figures like Samuel Aboab, Ḥakham Zevi Ashkenazi, and Jacob Sasportas, each of whom authored hundreds of responsa, these textual exchanges functioned beyond their ostensible purpose of resolving

halakhic questions; they constituted a vital mechanism for establishing rabbinic authority and extending intellectual influence across expansive geographic and communal boundaries. Even rabbis of more modest standing produced numerous responsa, while aspiring scholars developed their expertise through careful copying of existing responsa, internalizing both the linguistic patterns and formal structures of these exchanges.⁷⁹ This chapter argues that rabbinic careers in this period were fundamentally constructed and maintained through the responsa system.

Despite their ubiquity in the early modern rabbinic networks and even as responsa appear more prominently as printed works, the multifaceted functions of responsa within the rabbinic arena remain understudied. While scholarship has thoroughly examined intellectual, scientific, and commercial networks—including the ever-popular "Sephardi trade network"⁸⁰—to illustrate their structural, political, and economic significance, rabbinic networks have not received comparable attention. Professional success in early modern fields, ranging from medicine⁸¹ to commerce, depended on strategic navigation of interconnected systems; The rabbinic profession operated within similar parameters, yet the internal mechanics, capabilities, and influence of

⁷⁹ See for example, Yaakov Buksenboim's introduction to *Igrot Melamdim Italia 1555-1591*, (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1986).

⁸⁰ Jonathan Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism 1550-1750*. Third edition. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2020)., Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*. (New Jersey: Yale University Press, 2009). Additionally, Benjamin Ravid has several articles on the subject. For example, "The First Charter of the Jewish Merchants of Venice, 1589." *AJS review* (1976): 187-222. More recently, and exploring a new focus on the path to modernity, see Benjamin Ravid, "The Sephardic Jewish Merchants of Venice, Port Jews, and the Road to Modernity." In *From Catalonia to the Caribbean: The Sephardic Orbit from Medieval to Modern Times*, Federica Francesconi, Stanley Mirvis, and Brian Smollett, Eds. 115-135. Brill, 2018.

⁸¹ David Ruderman explores this network as it pertained to Jewish students specifically, in "The Impact of Science on Jewish Culture and Society in Venice (With Special Reference to Graduates of Padua's Medical School)." In *Gli Ebrei e Venezia: Secoli XIV-XVIII: atti del Convegno Internazionale Organizzato dall'Istituto di storia della Società e dello Stato Veneziano della Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia, Isola do San Giorgio Maggiore* 69 (1987): 417-448. I explore this subject further in Chapter II.

rabbinic networks remain largely obscure. Through detailed maps and tables visualizing Aboab's rabbinic connections, this chapter sheds light on these inner rabbinic circles, emphasizing the role of responsa as both an immediate and long-term conduit for communication within the early modern rabbinic network. It examines how responsa functioned to reinforce halakhic authority and integrity across geographic boundaries, as rabbis strove to ensure that legal discourse remained under rabbinic jurisdiction.

Chapters Three and Four: Examine two aspects of Samuel Aboab's most distinctive work, his *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*.

Chapter Three: Investigates the text's mysterious publication history and anonymous authorship, providing compelling evidence for Aboab's authorship through systematic analysis of linguistic patterns, thematic elements, and halakhic methodology that appear consistently across his known corpus. The chapter concludes by speculating as to possible reasons for its anonymous publication and setting forth the *Sefer haZikhronot* as a crucial source for understanding Aboab's vision for the seventeenth-century rabbinate.

Chapter Four: Analyzes *Sefer haZikhronot*—a collection of ten essays addressed to a rabbinic audience on ritual laws including circumcision, Sabbath observance, and ritual slaughter. Through these texts, Aboab articulates his vision of rabbinic leadership and authority in the creation and cultivation of religiously "orthodox" communities during a period of significant communal transformation. While rabbinic authority has been extensively studied

across historical periods,⁸² Aboab's work represents a critical developmental juncture. In seventeenth-century Italy, as the communal rabbinate became increasingly formalized, Aboab embodies the culmination of this process. His *Sefer haZikhronot* offers unique first-hand insight into how a prominent rabbi conceptualized greater religiosity and halakhic stringency under rabbinic supervision. Eschewing abstract theorization, Aboab defines religious “orthodoxy” through practical applications, advocating rigorous rabbinic oversight mechanisms such as examinations for ritual functionaries including *shoḥtim* (slaughterers), *sofrim* (scribes), and *mohalim* (circumcisers). The work effectively presents Aboab's image of the ideal seventeenth century community rabbi—an embodiment of systematized rabbinic authority defined by universally accepted halakhic rigor.

Chapter Five: Examines the third and final genre of “letters” in Samuel Aboab's significant corpus—his personal and financial correspondence with representatives and emissaries from the land of Israel. The tone and language in these exchanges presents a markedly different dimension of Aboab's personality than his rabbinic or halakhic works. Although Samuel Aboab never relocated or even visited the land of Israel, nor is there any indication that he intended to do so, his correspondence offers important insight into his commitment towards the well-being of individuals and institutions in the land of Israel. At the same time, we can trace the expressions of enthusiasm and fervor that diaspora Jewry directed toward the land of Israel during this period, which were reflected in rising emigration and growing financial support from Jewish communities abroad.

⁸² see our earlier discussion in this introduction beginning on p14 regarding the “state of the field” of the early modern rabbinate.

Scholarly attention to the early modern land of Israel has been extensive,⁸³ with studies typically beginning with the Ottoman conquest in 1517 and examining economic conditions, migration patterns, demographics, intercommunal relations, and the intellectual and spiritual flourishing of the period. This chapter, however, adopts a distinct micro-historical approach, exploring diaspora-Holy Land relations through Aboab's personal correspondence with representatives from various communities in the land of Israel. These letters not only shed light on the era's religious enthusiasm but also expose the tensions and challenges it created, as well as Aboab's efforts to navigate these complexities.

The Aboab *Beit Midrash*, established by Samuel Aboab's father in Safed in 1632, will serve as a particularly illuminating case study for our chapter. This institution invites deeper investigation into both the motivations for and practical challenges inherent in diaspora investments in the land of Israel. The ongoing correspondence between Aboab and the heads of

the *Beit Midrash* concerning this house of study demonstrates the persistent need for external financial support and highlights the complications of managing such institutions from afar. Aboab's letters—containing financial details, communal updates, and significant personal exchanges—provide invaluable insight into the multifaceted relationship between diaspora communities and the land of Israel during this pivotal period.

V. Sources and Methodology:

This dissertation is built upon Rabbi Samuel Aboab's complete corpus: His two major published works, *Devar Shemuel* and *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*,⁸⁴ all extant manuscript materials

⁸³ See my notes in “sources and methodology” below, and in my introduction to Chapter V.

⁸⁴ For my method of bibliographical citing of Aboab's works in this dissertation, see Bibliography, Bibliographical Notations.

containing his personal and financial correspondence which are part of the Montefiore collection, and his *Mazkeret Gittin* (record of writs of divorce) issued in Venice which is housed at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York as MS 6397. All manuscripts were accessed through the digitized archive of the National Library of Israel located at the campus of the Hebrew University.

The dissertation further examines the reception and adaptation of Aboab's works by both contemporaries and subsequent generations, demonstrating their immediate significance and lasting influence. Two illustrative examples merit particular attention: the 17th-century *Pinkas Mohel* by Rabbi Benjamin ben Eliezer ha-Cohen Vitale of Reggio,⁸⁵ a guide for ritual circumcisers that incorporates Aboab's writings and responsa on circumcision, and which details the relevant *halakhot*, practices, and customs; and *Sefer Ta'avat David*, published in 19th-century Salonika by David Yehuda Arditi,⁸⁶ which aimed to disseminate Aboab's teachings among

scribes. Arditi specifically emphasizes the importance of Aboab's essays on scribal writing, urging practitioners to "contemplate [these essays] with purposeful focus, two or three times, and with great deliberation."

I approached Aboab's writings with the intent of examining them as a corpus rather than isolating individual works such as his halakhic responsa. This approach enabled me to position him within a broader context, and as an important node in the early modern Mediterranean

⁸⁵ A contemporary of Aboab, he was a renowned Kabbalist, a student of Rabbi Moshe Zacut and close friend of Rabbi Abraham Rovigo in Modena.

⁸⁶ David Judah Arditi, *Sefer Ta'avat David* (Salonika, 1895). HebrewBooks.org/470

rabbinic and financial networks. This avoids the potential methodological concern of being too closely tied to one figure.

With the goal of mapping and analyzing Aboab's rabbinic network, I systematically catalogued his rabbinic, financial, and personal communications⁸⁷ to create an accurate depiction of his network. The analysis also evaluates the scope, influence, and significance of his connections in both the shaping of his own career trajectory and his impact on the contemporaries he regularly referenced and with whom he communicated.

Moreover, this methodological framework provides significant interdisciplinary value, particularly for network theory scholars. The detailed mapping of Aboab's correspondence provides a case study for examining the structure and dynamics of a specialized professional group, rabbis, within early modern society, thereby enabling scholars to trace interactions and their broader implications. This approach parallels successful interdisciplinary analyses of other early modern professional networks, including scientific societies and medical communities,¹⁰² while providing specific insights into rabbinic authority and communication patterns.

After mapping Aboab's rabbinic network, my next objective was to systematically categorize and analyze the responsa in *Devar Shemuel* to identify the distinct roles responsa played in the life and career of an early modern rabbi. This analysis also assesses the broader significance of responsa for individual rabbis, rabbinic intellectual exchange, and halakhic

⁸⁷ The constraints of the available manuscripts, such as letters that are not addressed or unclearly marked, limited my abilities to include all his personal and financial correspondents in the mapping. ¹⁰² These possibilities will be explored further in chapter II

practice. The early modern period saw a proliferation of responsa, much of which was increasingly published, thus profoundly shaping halakhic discourse and rabbinic scholarship.

While my study focuses on *Devar Shemuel*—Rabbi Samuel Aboab's collection of responsa—it underscores the far-reaching influence of widespread responsa exchange and publication on the development and practice of *halakha*. For instance, it examines the growing distinction between canonical legal codes, such as the *Shulḥan Arukh*, and halakhic responsa, considering the implications of this differentiation for the evolution of early modern halakha.

Reliance on responsa as a historical source presents distinct methodological challenges, many of which I encountered engaging with Aboab's *Devar Shemuel*. While Rabbi Samuel Aboab himself initiated the collection of his responsa, the final compilation underwent editing by his son, Jacob, before publication. The criteria guiding this process remain opaque, and not all the responsa included were preserved in their entirety.⁸⁸ Second, Haym Soloveitchik¹⁰⁴ and Bernard Weinryb¹⁰⁵ have already demonstrated the pitfalls of assuming that rabbinical responsa can be taken at face value. Although some of the issues they raise regarding accuracy of transmission and scribal error are less significant in the early modern era, others, however, remained very relevant for later periods as well. For example, responsa were exchanges between

rabbis, and as such might reflect the ideals and prescriptions of the rabbinic leadership rather than what was necessarily practiced. Rabbis also favored documenting exceptional or contentious cases, or those that showcased their intellectual and Talmudic prowess. As a result,

⁸⁸ For example, M. Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 43 cites a letter from R. Judah Ghiron asserting that only a fraction of the responsa exchanged between his father, R. Yohanan Ghiron and Aboab was included in the *Devar Shemuel*. ¹⁰⁴ Haym Soloveitchik, *She'elot u-Teshuvot ke-Makor Histori* (Responsa as a Historical Source) (Jerusalem, 1990). ¹⁰⁵ Bernard Weinryb, "Responsa as a Source for History (Methodological Problems)," H.J. Zimmels, J. Rabinowitz and L. Finestein (ed.), *Essays Presented to Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (London, 1967), 399-417.

responsa tend to emphasize outliers, making them an unreliable source for drawing conclusions about normative social, cultural, or religious behaviors.

Because my research focuses on the role of responsa within rabbinic life and their importance to the rabbinate, many of these methodological challenges were mitigated. My objective was not to extrapolate how rabbinic ideals translated into public practice but to examine the ideals themselves, the importance of responsa exchange to the early modern rabbinic networks, and the impact of the responsa and the responsa process on the development of halakhic thought. This approach acknowledges the limitations of responsa as historical sources while utilizing them to understand aspects of the internal dynamics of early modern rabbinic culture and thought.

To address the lack of transparency in the editorial process of *Devar Shemuel*, I employed a focused approach. Whenever possible, I cross-referenced Aboab's responsa with comparable materials from Aboab's colleagues, such as Rabbi Moshe Zacut, Rabbi Leon Modena or his grandson, Rabbi Isaac min ha-Levi'im in Venice, and consulted other contemporary sources, including the available record books (*pinkasim*) of local communities, such as Verona, to verify, elaborate upon, or contextualize Aboab's responsa. These supplementary materials provided essential context, enhancing my analysis and reinforcing my conclusions about the central role of responsa in early modern rabbinic life.

My analysis of Aboab's *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* demanded a methodological approach distinct from that used for his responsa literature. This non-responsa work contains extensive *halakhic* treatises while articulating Aboab's expectations for the early modern rabbinate and his vision of communal "orthodoxy" and halakhic stringency. To contextualize and balance this unusual composition, I once again looked to the works of Aboab's contemporaries, focusing particularly

on, sermons, responsa, and correspondence of rabbis who served Portuguese communities similar to Aboab's in Verona and Venice. These included the sermons of ibn Yahya in Hamburg, and R. Saul Levi Morteira in Amsterdam, as well as the works and correspondence of Rabbis Jacob Sasportas, Azaria Picho, Jacob Ḣagiz, and Moshe Zacut. Additionally, Rabbi Leon Modena's responsa and autobiography, along with his grandson's autobiography, *Medaber Tahapukhot*, proved especially valuable. Though both served the Italiani rather than the Portuguese community, these sources provided important perspectives on social norms, cultural trends, and religious expectations in Italian Jewish society.

The methodological challenges in my final chapter, "Samuel Aboab as an Eastern Mediterranean Correspondent," arose from the inherently subjective nature of Aboab's financial and personal correspondence with emissaries and representatives from the land of Israel. These letters frequently blended personal updates and emotional expression with discussions of financial and communal matters, often obscuring or distorting the realities of the period and the situations being described. Aboab's strong commitment to ensuring the success of emissaries and the financial stability of *Beit Midrash* Aboab, while admirable, inevitably influenced his accounts.⁸⁹ As a result, distinguishing between sentiment and fact required careful navigation.

To mitigate this challenge and achieve a more objective perspective, I engaged with the extensive body of scholarly discourse regarding the land of Israel under Ottoman rule. In

⁸⁹ See for example my discussion in Chapter V of Aboab's letter to Rabbi Moshe Saigz, head of *Beit Midrash* Aboab, in which he criticizes the misappropriation of the Yeshiva's endowment funds, while decrying the affront to his father's express instructions.

particular, I drew on Jacob Barnay's research on Istanbul-based financial assistance in the eighteenth century,⁹⁰ Mathias Lehmann's work on Palestinian emissaries,⁹¹ and Mina Rozen's studies on economic developments, intellectual and spiritual currents, and demographic trends in the early modern land of Israel.⁹² This extensive secondary literature provided essential context for Aboab's correspondence, allowing me to situate his accounts within broader historical frameworks and critically assess how his personal commitments and involvement may have shaped his portrayal of events.

Additionally, I drew on my expertise in rabbinic and halakhic language, as well as my thorough knowledge of Aboab's distinctive style and linguistic expressions, to analyze his correspondence in greater depth. This approach allowed me to uncover insights into his personal concerns, activities, and aspirations while also examining how his writings reflected broader economic challenges and political realities in the seventeenth-century land of Israel.

VI. Conclusion:

By situating Aboab within the broader framework of early modern Jewish scholarship, this dissertation illuminates several intersecting subjects central to the study of this period. A careful examination of Aboab's life and "letters" yields insight into the evolution of rabbinic authority during a period of communal transformation, the creation and cultivation of religiously vibrant Portuguese Jewish communities, and the emergence of a halakhically rigorous

⁹⁰ Jacob Barnay, *The Jews in Palestine in the Eighteenth Century : Under the Patronage of the Istanbul Committee of Officials for Palestine*. (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press), 1992.

⁹¹ Matthias B. Lehmann, *Emissaries from the Holy Land: The Sephardic Diaspora and the Practice of Pan-Judaism in the Eighteenth Century*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press), 2014.

⁹² For example, "Minna Rozen: *Ha-Kehila ha-Yehudit be-Yerushalayim ba-Mei'a ha-17*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University and the Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 1984. Minna Rozen, *Jewish Identity and Society in the Seventeenth Century: Reflections on the Life and Work of Refael Mordekhai Malki*. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992). Minna Rozen. "Influential Jews in the Sultan's Court in Istanbul in Support of Jerusalem Jewry in the 17th Century." *Michael* 7 (1981): 396.

Portuguese rabbinic “cohort” whose scholarly networks and productivity deserve further study.

Ultimately, Aboab's case exemplifies some of the most compelling intellectual and religious currents that animated this important period of Jewish history.

Chapter I Rabbi Samuel Aboab: Biography

I. Introduction

The biography of the man who stands at the center of this dissertation, Rabbi Samuel Aboab, is constructed from a wide array of sources. Chief among them is the laudatory introduction to *Devar Shemuel*,¹ penned by his son Jacob² after his father's passing.⁹³ While this expression of filial devotion and admiration must be read with caution, it provides valuable details about Aboab's life and accomplishments. Supplementing this are his numerous halakhic responsa, personal correspondence, published and unpublished writings, and archival records

¹This phenomenon exemplifies a growing cultural trend in the early modern period, where sons published their fathers' rabbinic writings as an expression of filial homage. The practice likely stemmed from the increasing accessibility and popularity of print during this era and may have served as a means for rabbinic heirs to establish themselves within the rabbinic world. Notable examples of this trend can be found within Samuel Aboab's own circles and among Ashkenazi communities, including: David Meldola's publication of his father's, *Mayim Rabim*, Jacob Sasportas' children ensured their father's *Ohel Yaakov* was published (Amsterdam 1737) while Jacob Hagiz's *Halakhot Ketanot* (Venice 1704) was published by his son Moshe Hagiz. Yosie Levine, "An Intellectual Biography of an Early Modern Port Rabbi" (PhD diss., Yeshiva University, 2020), 138n231, adds the following list. R. Samson Bacharach's responsa appeared in *Hut ha-Shani* (Frankfurt, 1679). published by his son nine years after his father's death. R. Ephraim ha-Kohen's *Sha 'ar Ephraim* (Sulzbach. 1688). published by the author's son. R. Meir Goetz published *Even ha-Shoham*, the responsa of his father. Eliakim Goetz, (Dyhernfurth, 1733). R. Benjamin Slonik's *Mas'ei Binyamin* (Krakow, 1633) was published by his grandson. R. Jacob Poppers' *Shev Ya'akov* (Frankfurt, 1742) was published posthumously by his sons. R. Elijah Spira's *Eliyahu Rabbah* (Sulzbach, 1757) was published by his son 45 years after his passing.

⁹³ To date, the only attempt at a comprehensive biography of R Samuel Aboab appears in Meir Benayahu, *Dor Ehad ba'aretz: Igrot Rav Shemuel Aboab ve-Rav Moshe Zacut be-Inyanei Eretz Yisrael 1639-1666* (Jerusalem: Yad haRav Nissim, 1987). Benayahu draws much of his portrayal from R. Jacob Aboab's introduction to *Devar Shemuel*. This approach has potential pitfalls as Jacob glosses over certain periods in his father's life, perhaps due to incomplete knowledge or his own assumptions. Thus the need arises to critically engage with, and endeavor to corroborate, even the most authoritative secondary sources. Unquestionably, Benayahu was a master of Hebrew paleography, and his meticulous transcriptions of responsa and correspondence from this period were invaluable to my research. The accessibility of these transcribed manuscripts permitted me to engage directly with the material, interpret it independently, and develop conclusions that occasionally differ from his. Where Benayahu did not identify his sources or provide reasoning for his assumptions, I sought out alternative sources to either corroborate his claims or challenge them. For example, Benayahu asserts that the Aboab family arrived in Hamburg in 1609 and all the Aboab children, including Samuel, were born there (*Dor Ehad*, 23), but offers no corroborative footnote or explanation. My research suggests that the family only moved to Hamburg from Antwerp in 1612, and thus Samuel and his older brother Jacob (not to be confused with his uncle Jacob—Abraham's brother) were born in Antwerp and moved to Hamburg in early childhood.

² Jacob Aboab, introduction to Rabbi Samuel Aboab, *Devar Shemuel* (Jerusalem: Zikhron Aharon, 2022). Although Jacob authored the introduction and edited the work, he specifically credits his brother David for financing it, and hints to his name in the title DeVaR Shemuel D-David V-Ben R-Rav Shemuel (p. 18).

such as notarial documents that provide essential context and situate his life within the broader historical setting. Even so, certain aspects of Aboab's biography remain obscure, requiring us to bridge these gaps through informed inference and reasoned speculation.

In constructing his biography, it is crucial to recognize that Aboab was more than just a great man who lived in, and left his mark upon, several important cities—he was a figure who transcended the limitations of location. Born in Hamburg, serving as a rabbi in Verona, and ultimately becoming the lead rabbi of the affluent Ponentine community in Venice, Aboab serves as a representative of an extensive Sephardi rabbinic network—centered in Venice but extending from Northern Europe to the land of Israel. Understanding Aboab's life thus requires situating him within this broader geographic and social network.

This extensive Sephardi network played a significant role in both the intellectual and practical aspects of Aboab's life. The Aboab family, through their connections across cities like Venice, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Istanbul, and Jerusalem, played prominent roles within a vast mercantile and rabbinic network that helped shape Jewish life across these regions. Through his corpus of halakhic responsa, Aboab not only demonstrates his intellectual prowess and influence, but also documents the depth of his ties within this network. Archival records and correspondence further illuminate the critical roles played by Samuel—and his father, Abraham—in maintaining and strengthening these connections. As we will see, their involvement ranged from addressing urgent communal crises, such as negotiating the release of

captives,⁹⁴ to providing ongoing financial support for rabbinic scholars in the Jewish communities of the land of Israel.⁹⁵

By synthesizing these sources and appreciating the significance of the Sephardi networks to the Aboab family, we can construct a timeline of Aboab's life and assemble a biographical narrative, even if some details remain beyond our reach. Beyond the timeline, this biography aims to weave together information and insights gleaned from his halakhic writings, communal leadership activities, and familial connections to form a cohesive portrait of Rabbi Samuel Aboab—a figure whose influence extended across borders and left a lasting imprint on the Jewish world.

II. Hamburg: 1610-1623

Samuel Aboab was born in Antwerp in 1610 to Antonio Faleiro, who later adopted the name Abraham Aboab,⁶ and Ana (later Sara),⁷ the daughter of Filipe Dinis, a wealthy Portuguese merchant who eventually settled in Venice. Ana was also the sister of Alvaro Dinis, who took the name Samuel Yahya and was one of the founding members of the Sephardi community in Hamburg in 1605.⁸ Abraham (Antonio) and his brother Jacob (Andre Faleiro) emigrated from Portugal and settled in Antwerp in 1591, where they established a highly successful enterprise specializing in the importation of sugar and spices from Portugal, which they sold throughout Italy and Northern Europe.⁹

⁶ Hugo Martins Index of Portuguese conversos identifies the Christian names of the Aboab brothers. Hugo Martins, "Index of People," in *The Portuguese Jews of Hamburg: The History of a Merchant Community in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 367. For more on the Portuguese members of the Hamburg community see Michael

⁹⁴ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 361–81.

⁹⁵ See Chapter V on Aboab's financial assistance to Yeshivot and emissaries in the land of Israel.

Studemund-Halévy, *Biographisches Lexikon der Hamburger Sefarden* (Hamburg: Christians, 2000); idem, *Die Sefarden in Hamburg: Zur Geschichte einer Minderheit*, ed. Michael Studemund-Halévy (Hamburg: Buske, 1994), including the article in vol. 2 by Ben-Zion Ornan Pinkus, “Die Portugiesische Gemeinde in Hamburg und ihre Führung im 17. Jahrhundert,” 3–36.

⁷ It is likely she assumed the name Sara reflecting her husband’s Abraham. Benayahu writes that Abraham was married to Sara from the house of Señor (*Dor Eḥad*, 28) also a prominent Portuguese merchant family, but he offers no proof of that. Abraham Aboab does mention a brother-in-law Yosef Señor who was married to his sister, not his wife’s brother. Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 65-transcript from Pinkas Verona MS yerushalayim 554: 4, fol. 121b.

⁸ For more on Samuel Yahya see Julia Lieberman, “Sermons and the Construct of a Jewish Identity: The Hamburg Sephardic Community in the 1620s,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (2003): 49–72, in which she explores several of his sermons delivered in Portuguese and which he published in 1629.

⁹ H. P. Salomon, “The Case of Luis Vaz Pimentel, Revelations of Early Jewish Life in Rotterdam from the Portuguese Inquisition Archives,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 31, no. 1/2 (1997): 14-15n15.

Andre Faleiro (Jacob Aboab) was already a pivotal figure in the Hamburg Jewish community by 1611,¹⁰ where he played a key role alongside his relative Samuel Yahya and the prominent Sephardi merchant Ruy Fernandes Cardoso in purchasing burial grounds¹¹ for the community in nearby Altona.¹² Meanwhile, Abraham Aboab remained in Antwerp as late as April 1612,⁹⁶ before departing for Hamburg shortly thereafter.⁹⁷ Immediately upon arrival, he established a private synagogue in his home,⁹⁸ known as Keter Torah.¹⁶ This was the second of three private synagogues that served the religious needs of Hamburg’s Jewish community until

⁹⁶ Jacob Aboab records that Samuel was born in Hamburg in 1610, and makes no mention of Antwerp. Perhaps he assumed Samuel was born in Hamburg since that is where he grew up and the family does not appear to have many ties to Antwerp after their relocation. Instead, they fostered close ties with the communities in Amsterdam and Venice as demonstrated below.

⁹⁷ Salomon, “Pimentel,” 7–30, 14–15n15.

⁹⁸ H. P. Salomon, “The ‘de Pinto’ Manuscript. A 17th Century Marrano Family History,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 9, no. 1 (Jan. 1975): 21n76, explains that “our” Aboabs were one of several 17th century families who adopted the Aboab name upon returning to Judaism, and had no genealogical connection with the ancient Aboab family. This Abraham Aboab must not be confused with another Abraham Aboab who lived in Hamburg at the same time. To distinguish between them, Historians refer to “our” Abraham Aboab as Abraham Aboab Faleiro and the other as Abraham Aboab Cardoso (His Christian name). See for example, Sarraga and Sarraga, “Early Links,” 26, 35. ¹⁶ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 23.

1652,⁹⁹ when permission was granted to build a public synagogue. The Keter Torah synagogue also appears to have functioned as a Talmud Torah,¹⁰⁰ offering Torah studies for boys aged 8 to

¹⁰ According to Cecil Roth, "The Strange Case of Hector Mendes Bravo," *HUCA* 18 (1943): 232, Andre Faleiro, (a New Christian who lived in Portugal as a merchant at Valverde, and his wife Beatriz Gomez) was reported in 1617 as living in Venice as Jews. On p. 238ff Bravo also lists conversos living as Jews in Hamburg but the Aboab brothers are not mentioned. This would suggest that at least Samuel's uncle had transferred to Venice before the boy was sent from Hamburg.

¹¹ Lieberman, "Sermons," 51.

¹² Although Altona was geographically close to Hamburg, it was controlled by the Danish and home to the Ashkenazi community, while Hamburg was a member of the Hanseatic league, and was a free city, and home to the Sephardi community. For a study of the Sephardi cemetery in Altona and its significance, see Marian Sarraga and Ramon F. Sarraga, "Early Links between Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Italy," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 34, no. 1 (2000): 23–55. Marian Sarraga, and Ramon F. Sarraga, "Hamburg's Sephardic Epitaphic Hebrew Poems in Amsterdam Texts," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (2005): 330–70

12. It was in Hamburg that Samuel spent his childhood,¹⁰¹ growing up in a family that was an important part of this developing Sephardi community.

In this brief introduction to Samuel Aboab's birth, we encounter several prominent Portuguese Sephardi families who not only played a foundational role in establishing the Hamburg Jewish community, but also maintained close ties to the emerging Sephardi communities in Amsterdam and the more established community in Venice. These families—

⁹⁹ Lieberman "Sermons," 51.

¹⁰⁰ See my later discussion of the Aboab *Beit Medrash* in Verona and Venice. I suggest the one in Hamburg followed a similar, if smaller, pattern.

¹⁰¹ There is evidence of two other Samuel Aboabs in Hamburg during the seventeenth century. One is Samuel Aboab Cardoso (apparently from the Aboab Cardoso family) who served as a clerk for the synagogues of Hamburg after they unified in 1652. His job was to "register the disputes, the decisions and other occurrences that may arise as ordered by the board." Martins, *The Portuguese Jews of Hamburg*, 129. The second, is Semuel Aboab alias Francisco Domingo de Guzmán, who gave detailed information to the Inquisition in Madrid between 1661 and 1662 about various members of the Hamburg Sephardi community. For more on this Semuel Aboab see Michael Studemund-Halevi and Sandra Neves Silva, "Tortured Memories: Jacob Rosales alias Imanuel Bocarro Francês, a life from the files of the Inquisition," in *The Roman Inquisition, the Index and the Jews* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 107–8. Also, Michael Studemund-Halevi, "Hamburg's Sephardim between Welfare and Poverty," *Jewish Culture and History* 16, no. 1 (2015): 96–104n7.

such as the Aboabs, Cardosos, and Dinis (Yahya), their connections with one another and to the broader Sephardi world merit closer examination. Why do these figures emerge at this particular moment in history, and what can they reveal to us about the communities they helped to shape? Exploring these questions provides important context for understanding Rabbi Samuel Aboab's upbringing and education, his marked halakhic stringency, as well as the broader framework of his rabbinic career within converso communities akin to the one in which he was raised.

The establishment of converso communities in Europe such as those in Antwerp, Venice, Hamburg and Amsterdam traces back to 1540 when the recently established Inquisition in Portugal began its intensive persecution of "New Christians"—those forcibly converted in 1497 or their descendants—prompting a wave of emigration from Portugal. This migration ebbed and flowed throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and over that period hundreds of New Christian families relocated to Northern and Western Europe. By the late sixteenth century,

several Italian cities, most notably Venice, Ancona, Ferrara,¹⁰² and Livorno,¹⁰³ had attracted these emigrants by offering favorable charters to entice wealthy and well-connected merchants. Other communities, such as Pisa,²² housed smaller, though significant, groups of New Christians.

The year 1605 saw a significant surge in emigration, driven by a "general amnesty" agreement between the Vatican and the Spanish Crown. This agreement, made possible after a

¹⁰² For insight into Ferrara's community see Bernard Dov Cooperman, "Identities Constructed: Immanuel Aboab before the Inquisition in Pisa," in the festschrift in honor of Professor Moises Orfali, forthcoming. Immanuel Aboab and his father settled in Ferrara in 1580.

¹⁰³ Benjamin Ravid and Robert Davis, "Jews in International Trade: The Emergence of the Levantines and Ponentines," in *The Jews of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2001), 73–97. ²² Cooperman, "Identities Constructed," 1–2.

substantial collective payment from a consortium of New Christians, secured the release of Inquisition prisoners in Lisbon, Coimbra, and Évora and suspended inquisitorial persecution for one year. While some New Christians returned to Portugal, hopeful that the amnesty marked a lasting shift in policy, many others hastened to emigrate immediately upon their release. When the amnesty expired, the Inquisition resumed its persecution with heightened efficiency,¹⁰⁴ prompting a second wave of emigration as many fled in fear of renewed arrest and oppression. Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that the first decade of the seventeenth century witnessed the growth of two new and important converso communities, Hamburg and Amsterdam. Both cities offered lucrative economic opportunities that drew New Christians seeking safety and a fresh start. The blockade of Antwerp by the Dutch in 1594 further encouraged New Christians to find new outlets for their colonial products.¹⁰⁵ By 1610, Hamburg was home to over 100 families, who secured a residence contract in 1612 and, in these early

stages, Amsterdam developed alongside them.²⁵ The Sephardi communities in the two cities maintained strong ties. Merchants, such as the Yahya and Cardosa family, frequently traveled between them.²⁶ Additionally, the Amsterdam Dotar (bridal society) began registering Hamburg Jews as early as 1617, benefiting brides from both communities. The governing body of the Dotar maintained regular correspondence with prominent Hamburg leaders, and many of these letters remain preserved in the Eitz Hayim archive in Amsterdam.²⁷

¹⁰⁴ For example, the inquisition now instituted an index system registering the names of all denounced ‘accomplices of Jewish rituals’-both in Portugal and abroad. This allowed them to compare imputed and confessed ‘Jewish practice’ and significantly facilitated arrest procedures (Salomon, “Pimentel,” 10).

¹⁰⁵ Martins, *The Portuguese Jews of Hamburg*, 15.

The study of these early converso communities goes far beyond tracking Christian aliases, Jewish names, and mercantile connections. These communities, and the individuals who shaped them, navigated complex and often shifting identities,²⁸ spiritual motivations, and religious challenges. After a century of living as full-fledged practicing Christians, what compelled them to leave their homes and return to Judaism? How did they find the resources and determination to establish communities, hire rabbis, and build synagogues and Talmud Torahs? These individuals, often possessing little to no formal Jewish knowledge, successfully created intellectually and religiously vibrant communities.²⁹

²⁵ Ibid. ²⁶ Lieberman, “Sermons,” 51.

²⁷ Marian Sarraga and Ramon F. Sarraga, “Hamburg’s Sephardic Epitaphic Hebrew Poems in Amsterdam Texts,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (2005): 332–33. ²⁸ There is an extensive literature on converso “identity” and the establishment of their own unique communities.

Much has centered on Amsterdam but there is information regarding other communities as well. For example, see: Daniel Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000); Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). Miriam Bodian, ed., *Cultural and Religious Boundary-Crossing in Early Modern Spain* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2022). David L. Graizbord, *Souls in Dispute: Converso Identities in Iberia and the Jewish Diaspora, 1580–1700* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Renee Levine Melamed, *A Question of Identity: Iberian Conversos in Historical Perspective*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Yosef Kaplan, “The Place of the Herem in the Sephardi Community of Hamburg,” in *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardi Diaspora in Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

²⁹ Examples of this intellectual and religious vibrancy can be found in Samuel Yahya’s sermons discussed in Lieberman “Sermons,” Immanuel Aboab’s *Nomologia*, and Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel’s *Conciliator*.

Abraham Aboab offers an excellent example of these shifting identities and conflicting interests. An émigré from Portugal, Abraham initially settled as a New Christian in Antwerp, where he continued to use his Christian name, Antonio Faleiro. Later, he and his brother Jacob (Andre Faleiro) relocated to Hamburg, where notarial records still referred to him by his

Christian name.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, Abraham was establishing a synagogue and Talmud Torah in Hamburg, and raising an overtly Jewish family. In one of his responsa, R. Samuel Aboab recalls his first teacher, a Rabbi M. ben Oroyo¹⁰⁷ whom his father hired to live in their home, residing in the attic as part of the household.¹⁰⁸ and teach young Samuel. Clearly, providing his son and the children in his community with a Torah teacher was a priority for Abraham Aboab.

Abraham Aboab's life illustrates the delicate balance many conversos navigated—publicly maintaining their Christian identity while actively working to re-establish Jewish religious and communal life. Samuel Aboab, in his turn, is both a product and an integral part of these developing communities, constructed and contrived identities and mass migrations. This context is important to bear in mind as we further explore his life.

The Aboab family's wealth, prominence, and communal activism extended far beyond Hamburg.¹⁰⁹ Nearly every major European Sephardi community in the early modern world bears traces of their influence. In 1630, the Mantua community borrowed a substantial 2,000 ducats from the Aboab brothers, whom they refer to as "ha-kezinim km"h (kevod moreinu ha-rav)

yakov ukm"h (u-kevod morenu ha-rav) avraham aboav " ("the esteemed persons," Jacob and

¹⁰⁶ Sarraga and Sarraga, "Early Links" cite three notarial records as late as Feb. 1622 and May 1623 using his Christian name. 30.

¹⁰⁷ R. Samuel Aboab, *Devar Shemuel, Responsum* 182. Based on the context, this rabbi may have been Ashkenazi or Polish. See Sarraga and Sarraga, "Early Links," 32–33, where she speculates on his identity.

¹⁰⁸ The reference to the aliyot she-be-vateinu (attics in the homes) appears several times in connection to hosting teachers and students in the Aboab school in Verona and in Venice. Indeed, in Samuel Aboab, *Igrot u-Teshuvot baHalakha* MS 112, the Montefiore Library London England (unpublished manuscript) NLI film no F 4626 (hereinafter S. Aboab *Igrot*), Aboab inquires about the halakhic permissibility of converting his attic rooms in Verona, which had initially served as a private synagogue, to "student housing."

¹⁰⁹ In Hamburg itself, there is also evidence of Abraham Aboab solemnizing weddings see Salomon, "Pimentel," 15 n17.

Abraham Aboab), to settle a debt owed to the Duke for leasing apartments in the ghetto.¹¹⁰

Meanwhile, in Venice, Rabbi Leon Modena recorded that half of his monthly income was funded by "ha-kazin r avraham aboav" (the esteemed person," Rabbi Abraham Aboab).¹¹¹ There is also evidence of Abraham Aboab's efforts to arrange a marriage for a young woman born of a converso mother and a Spanish Christian father in Tuscany who makes her way to Venice¹¹²—a sensitive and complex matter.

In Amsterdam, Abraham Aboab was listed as a member of the Dotar (the society for bridal charity) as early as 1635,¹¹³ despite no indication that he ever resided in the city. While such memberships were not unusual for Hamburg Jews, the connections between the Amsterdam elite and Abraham Aboab ran deeper. In 1634-5, while Aboab still lived in Venice, the Amsterdam community reached out to him—rather than directly contacting the Venetian Beit Din, regarding a controversy between two prominent Amsterdam rabbis, Rabbi Saul Levi Morteira and Rabbi Isaac Aboab de Fonseca.¹¹⁴

The dispute revolved around a doctrine promoted by Morteira in a sermon, where he asserted that certain Jews, such as apostates and informers, had sinned so grievously that, they were excluded from *Olam Habah* (the world to come).¹¹⁵ He further claimed that any contrary

¹¹⁰ Shlomo Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sefer, 1977), 42–46. Also see Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 24n8.

¹¹¹ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 25.

¹¹² Brian Pullan, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice 1550–1670* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983), 226f; Lucia Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori del ghetto* (Turin: Zamaroni, 2009), 263–64.

¹¹³ E.M. Koen, "Notarial Records," 219n33. Sarraga and Sarraga, "Early Links," 29, demonstrate that the phenomenon of Portuguese merchant families in Hamburg "investing" in the Amsterdam *Dotar* was common, and began as early as 1617.

¹¹⁴ For analysis of this controversy see Alexander Altmann, "Eternality of Punishment: A Theological Controversy within the Amsterdam Rabbinate in the Thirties of the Seventeenth Century," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 40 (1972): 1–88.

¹¹⁵ His assertion pertained solely to unrepentant individuals who presumed their Jewish identity assured them a place in the World to Come.

assertions—that all Jews merit salvation regardless of any sins they may have committed—were the product of young and inexperienced students who falsely presented themselves as proficient in Kabbalah. The controversy had already embroiled many younger members of the community, whom Morteira referred to as “*talmidim she-lo shimeshu kol zor-kam* “ (intellectually] immature disciples).¹¹⁶

Fearing the dispute would escalate, the Amsterdam Ma'amad (community leadership) was prepared to submit documents from each of the rabbis involved, seeking a ruling from the Venetian Beit Din. Rather than pursuing this route directly, however, they first sent the documents to Abraham Aboab.¹¹⁷ Were they asking for his advice on the matter, or perhaps hoping he would apply his considerable negotiation skills and influence to effectuate a peaceful resolution between the two parties? The text does not reveal the Ma'amad's precise motivations, Abraham Aboab response, however, provides some insight on the matter.

Aboab consulted with two prominent Venetian rabbis, Rabbi Azaria Picho and Rabbi Shemaya de Medina, and all agreed that peace should be sought without formal intervention from the Venetian Beit Din. Aboab counseled the Ma'amad that involving the Venetian Beit Din would only exacerbate the situation and humiliate Rabbi Isaac Aboab de Fonseca, who, (both Picho and de-Medina agreed), would be forced to publicly recant his opposition to Rabbi Saul Levi Morteira's position. Aboab returned the documents to the Amsterdam Ma'amad who renewed their attempts to deal with the matter “in-house”.

¹¹⁶ Altmann, “Eternality of Punishment,” 12–13.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 14.

These examples demonstrate that the Aboabs understood communal responsibility to encompass every facet of community life, engaging in both public and personal concerns with a sense of duty and care. This wide-reaching influence and dedication reflect the family's deep commitment to supporting and strengthening Jewish communities across Europe.

Abraham Aboab's influence extended beyond European shores, most notably to the land of Israel where he established the Beit Medrash Aboab in Safed in 1632¹¹⁸ in memory of his brother Jacob who had died childless shortly beforehand.⁴³ Abraham also cultivated strong ties with emissaries from the holy land, regularly hosting them and facilitating their fundraising efforts by providing letters of recommendation. Additionally, he, like his son and grandson after him,¹¹⁹ served as the Venetian *Gizbar*¹²⁰ overseeing the collection, distribution, and allocation of funds designated for Israel.

This evidence paints a picture of the Aboab family as prominent merchant-bankers within the Portuguese world, deeply entwined with other influential banking families through both financial and familial ties. This close-knit network facilitated their influence across European Sephardi communities, and several of these families used their wealth and influence to develop converso communities across Europe and support Sephardi Jews in need, especially in Israel. Thus, although the Aboabs resided in Hamburg, Venice, and Verona, it is unsurprising that their names—alongside those of prestigious contemporaries like the Shana Tova (formerly Ibn Yakar)

¹¹⁸ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 183. For a translation of the original contract see appendix 5.

⁴³ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 23–24.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 135, transcribes a letter sent by Abraham Aboab in Venice to Safed while serving in his official capacity.

and Yahye¹²¹ families—regularly appear in notarial and communal records beyond their immediate places of residence. Samuel Yahye, for instance, is also listed as a member of Amsterdam’s *Dotar* (bridal charity), despite his never having resided in the city. This fluidity and ease of movement among Europe’s elite Sephardi circles contextualizes both R. Samuel

Aboab’s eventual move to Venice and Verona and the subsequent relocation of the Aboab family, and illustrates how seamlessly they operated within this transnational network.

Abraham Aboab cast a long shadow. How did R Samuel Aboab live up to his father’s legacy of communal activism while also leveraging the skills learned in his father’s home and his family’s extensive network to establish and sustain his rabbinic career for close to six decades?

III. Venice: 1623-1637

According to R. Jacob Aboab, at the age of twelve, young Samuel “articulated his desire to climb mountains [of Torah]...to leave his homeland to grow in Torah and his father thought it good...and he gave him everything he had [since he was] the apple of his eye, and he sent the raven.”¹²²⁴⁸ Abraham sent his son to Venice to study under Rabbi David Franco. Although little is known about Franco himself, it is reasonable to assume that Abraham chose both Venice and this teacher with careful consideration. Venice was then the foremost Portuguese Jewish community, where the Aboab family had established strong connections.¹²³ Abraham may have also been considering a future relocation, as he would indeed soon move his family to Venice.

¹²¹ Lieberman, “Sermons,” 51.

¹²² Reference to Genesis 8:7 when Noah sends a raven out after the flood in order to search for signs of life.

⁴⁸ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 3.

¹²³ Samuel’s uncle, Jacob Aboab, went to Venice as early as 1617 as mentioned above. The Aboabs also had powerful allies in the Venetian government as will be shown below.

Jacob writes that upon Samuel's arrival in Venice, he quickly distinguished himself under the tutelage of Rabbi David Franco, whose "soul clung to his own,"¹²⁴ for [R. Samuel] was unique in his generation... and he learned from [Franco] more than a student could in one hundred years."¹²⁵ Tragically, Franco passed away within the year, leaving Samuel to pursue his studies elsewhere.

From this point, the specifics of Samuel's studies and rabbinic ordination become somewhat unclear. We know that he remained in Venice until 1637, when, at age twenty-seven, he moved to Verona, joining the Verona Beit Din. There he assumed the title of *Rav*¹²⁶ and began to issue rabbinic responsa.¹²⁷ What occurred in the intervening years? Under whose tutelage did he complete his rabbinic studies? We do not possess a copy of Samuel Aboab's *semicha* (rabbinic ordination), nor does his son Jacob reveal who ordained his esteemed father. We can piece together parts of the narrative, yet some details remain elusive. I suggest that following Franco's death, Samuel Aboab continued his studies under the mentorship of Rabbi Azaria Picho. This suggestion is supported by Picho's prominent role as leader of the prestigious Portuguese Talmud Torah community,⁵⁴ and his close relationship with Abraham Aboab,⁵⁵

¹²⁴ Reference to the love between the Biblical Jehonathan and David. 1 Samuel 18:1.

¹²⁵ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 4.

¹²⁶ Isaiah Sonne, "Avnei Binyan: le-Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Verona," *Zion* 3 (1938): 155.

¹²⁷ The first responsum in *Devar Shemuel* is dated 1637, while Aboab was still in Venice. The second is undated, and the third, though also undated, is sent from Verona. From the third responsum through to the 70th, all are sent from Verona. ⁵⁴ "Azariah Picho" is mentioned in the Pinkas of Pisa as early as 1612, and he was still there on 32 of the Omer, 5376 (1616). His contract was renewed for another four years starting November 26, 1625, with a salary of 90 ducats per year, plus a house and garden. While I couldn't find a specific date for his departure from Pisa, he is no longer listed as Hakham there in 1632. Since Aboab arrived in Venice around 1623/4, Franco died a year later, and Aboab married in 1628, it's likely that Picho left Pisa in the late 1620s. He could have been Aboab's teacher either just before his marriage (if Picho left before his contract ended) or shortly after (if he completed his contract).

⁵⁵ For an example see above pg 52.

Samuel's father. Picho's admiration for Abraham is particularly evident in the eulogy recorded in his *Bina La-Ittim*,¹²⁸ where he extolled Abraham's dedication to the Venetian community, his establishment of Torah schools, and his advocacy on behalf of captives and Jews in the land of Israel. Notably, the eulogy also highlighted Samuel Aboab's achievements, a gesture that suggests a unique and personal connection with him, distinct from Picho's relationship with the rest of the Aboab family.

Further evidence of Picho's mentorship can be found in the correspondence between him and Samuel after the Aboab family's move to Verona. The letters reveal a relationship that went beyond typical rabbinic exchanges. Nearly half of Aboab's early responsa (30 out of the 70 written during his time in Verona) were addressed to Picho. The content of these responsa ranged from requests for advice and intellectual discussions to personal updates, indicating a shared history and a deep, multifaceted connection. It is also significant that, in 1650, the Talmud Torah extended an invitation to Aboab to assume the esteemed position formerly held by Picho. Aboab was likely ordained upon his marriage, as was customary among rabbinic students.¹²⁹ At eighteen, Samuel married Mazal Tov, the orphaned daughter of Rabbi David Franco,¹³⁰ and welcomed his mother-in-law into his household.⁵⁹ Was this marriage a strategic decision to solidify his rabbinic standing? Rabbinic family ties were essential within the Sephardi rabbinate

¹²⁸ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 25n12.

¹²⁹ Robert Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy*, 83–84.

¹³⁰ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 4.

⁵⁹ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 28.

,¹³¹ and although Samuel had wealth and connections, he lacked a notable rabbinic lineage. Perhaps his marriage served a dual purpose: it provided Mazal Tov, a woman of prestigious lineage but little wealth with a secure future, while granting R. Samuel Aboab a recognized rabbinic affiliation and entrée into the rabbinic world.

Regarding Mazal Tov herself, it is worth noting that Jacob's introduction to *Devar Shemuel* accords special recognition to his mother. He particularly commended her for "saving her children from [spiritual] destruction in their youth, lest they become impure [by exposure to] ḥukot ha-goyim (the ways of the nations)." What exactly does Jacob mean by "exposure to impurity" and "the ways of the nations", and what do his words imply about the spiritual and intellectual atmosphere in Samuel Aboab's household and in the Venetian ghetto at large? Could Jacob be alluding to the moral and cultural challenges confronting Venetian Jewish youth, particularly the allure of indulgence and frivolity?¹³² Samuel Aboab himself highlights such

¹³¹ The importance of family ties, nepotistic hiring practices, and the "inheritance" of Rabbinic positions (as demonstrated when Aboab's own children inherit his positions in Venice) are subjects of extensive discussion in both rabbinic and academic literature, and the related historiography ranges from the early modern-to the modern periods and spans all "ethnic groups" within Judaism. See for example: Simha Assaf, *Be-Ohole Ya'aqov: Peraḳim mi-ḥaye ha-tarbut shel ha-yehudim bi-yeme ha-benayim* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1943), 35ff; Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 123; Joshua Teplitsky, *Prince of the Press: How One Collector Built History's Most Enduring and Remarkable Jewish Library* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 60. See also Shaul Stampfer, "Inheritance of the Rabbinate in Eastern Europe in the Modern Period: Causes, Factors and Development over Time," *Jewish History* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 36–39, 50n1. For the French context, see Jay Berkovitz, "Patterns of Rabbinic Succession in Modern France," *Jewish History* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 59–82.

¹³² For more on this subject, see Roni Weinstein, "'Shame on the Youth Who Aches for Women': The Marriage Ritual as Seen by the Young," in *Marriage Rituals Italian Style* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 311–50; and Konrad Eisenbichler, ed., *The Premodern Teenager: Youth in Society*, vol. 1, 1150-1650 (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2002).

dangers in a responsum addressed from Verona to Rabbi Azaria Picho¹³³ in Venice. Aboab condemns the establishment of “theatres and circuses” in the Venetian ghetto warning of their corrupting influence: “Where the modest daughters of Israel will mix with peruzot (promiscuous women)... and he [the child] will hear mouths speaking vulgarity—[words] that enter his body like the venom from a snake.” Aboab’s vivid imagery and impassioned critique reflect his deep alarm over the exposure of Jewish youth to harmful cultural influences, a concern that would have certainly permeated his home as well.

Such concerns were not unique to Aboab. The tragic fates of Rabbi Leon Modena’s children starkly illustrate the perils young Jews faced in the ghetto.¹³⁴ Modena’s eldest son, Mordekhai, died in a failed alchemy experiment, while his youngest son, Zebulun, was killed in

a gang fight.¹³⁵ Against this backdrop, Jacob’s reflections may indeed point to the extraordinary efforts his parents undertook to shield their family from these risks.

Alternatively, Jacob may be referencing a different kind of exposure: Interaction with the intellectual and scientific pursuits of “the nations.” While Samuel Aboab’s views on the physical temptations facing Venetian Jewish youth are unequivocal, his stance on the philosophical and scientific endeavors embraced by many, including some of his contemporaries, is less explicit.¹³⁶

¹³³ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 4.

¹³⁴ Marc Cohen, *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth Century Venetian Rabbi*, 108–11.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 118–21.

¹³⁶ Notwithstanding, Aboab explicitly opposed teaching Torah to non-Jews. See *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 75.

For instance, Rabbi Simone Luzzatto, a prominent figure in the Ashkenazi community in Venice, was celebrated for his philosophical and scientific writings.¹³⁷ Even Aboab's mentor, Rabbi Azaria Picho, pursued scientific studies in his youth, though he later lamented the time he had "wasted on such endeavors."¹³⁸ Although Aboab himself shows no evidence of engaging in such studies, we are left to speculate about the values he conveyed to his children regarding them.

Jacob's own intellectual journeys further complicate this question. As an adult, his correspondence with Theophil Unger, a pastor at Herrenlaun-Schütz and an avid collector of Hebrew manuscripts, and his scientific exchanges with Job Ludolf, an imperial councilor in Frankfurt am Main,⁶⁸ highlight his active engagement with non-Jewish intellectuals. If the Aboab household sought to shield its children from external intellectual influences, and Jacob makes specific note of this in his introduction, how do we reconcile this with Jacob's later openness to such pursuits?

Though we lack definitive answers to these questions, contemplating these possibilities enriches our understanding of the social and intellectual environment in which Samuel Aboab's children grew up. It also highlights some of the challenges confronting Jewish families in the Venetian ghetto during this period. After completing his rabbinic studies, where do we find

¹³⁷ On Luzzatto and other contemporaries in Venice who were learned in science and philosophy, see Giuseppe Veltri, "Apologetic Strategies, Scepticism, and Empiricism in Simone Luzzatto's Works," in *Simone Luzzatto's Scepticism in the Context of Early Modern Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 81, and *ibid.*, 209; and Giuseppe Veltri, "The City and The Ghetto: Simone Luzzatto and the Development of Jewish Political Thought," in *Renaissance Philosophy in Jewish Garb* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 195–225. Also see Bernard Cooperman, "Cultural Pluralism from the Ghetto: What Might It Have Meant?" in *Non Contrarii, ma Diversi: The Question of the Jewish Minority in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Alessandro Guetta and Pierre Savy (Roma: Viella, 2020), 21–43.

¹³⁸ Rabbi Azaria Picho, *Gidulei Terumah*, introduction. <https://hebrewbooks.org/24581>

⁶⁸ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 59–61.

Samuel, and what was he doing during this time before he reappears in Verona at age twentyseven? His son Jacob briefly touches on this period, implying that Samuel moved to Verona soon after his marriage.¹³⁹ Both Benayahu and Isaiah Sonne reveal, however, that Samuel not only remained in Venice during this time, but was also joined by the extended Aboab family, who arrived as early as 1625⁷⁰ and settled in the city. While neither scholar provides a definitive reason for the family's relocation to Venice, the move is consistent with what we know about the fluidity of Portuguese merchants' business interests and settlements—particularly considering the Aboab family's strong ties in Venice.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, Venice offered a more stable and flourishing religious environment as compared to Hamburg. Its synagogues, yeshivot, and confraternities provided not only religious opportunities but also intellectual and social connections that likely would have appealed to a family like the Aboabs, invested in both commerce and communal leadership.

Four important pieces of evidence substantiate the Aboab family's presence in Venice during this period. First, Abraham Aboab's appointment as *morshe* (*authorized person*) for the community of Safed in 1632 explicitly tasked him with overseeing, collecting, and sending all

funds designated for Safed.¹⁴¹ While the initial letter of appointment does not identify

Abraham's location, subsequent collection records through 1637 specify funds sent to "the pakid

¹³⁹ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 4. The paragraph begins *ke-hatan yoze mei-hupato* (as a groom leaving his canopy) alluding to Samuel Aboab's marriage and three sentences later, within the same paragraph, he writes "*nata eshel.. beya'ar virona.*" (he planted a tree [of torah study] in the forest of Verona" ⁷⁰ Salomon, "Pimentel," 7–30, 14–15n15.

¹⁴⁰ Sonne, "History of the Jews in Verona," 149. Also, Saraga, "Ties Between Hamburg, Italy and Amsterdam" which demonstrates that Jacob Aboab was conducting business in Venice as early as 1622.

¹⁴¹ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 186. Transcribes his letter of appointment in 1632.

(officer) R. Abraham Aboab in Venice." ¹⁴² After 1637, these responsibilities shifted to Joseph Aboab, Samuel's older brother, who remained in Venice and apparently succeeded his father in managing Safed's financial affairs. ¹⁴³

Second, the *pinkas* (communal register, pl. *pinkasim*) of the Yeshiva Klalit of Venice records that R. Abraham Aboab contributed six ducats, half the monthly salary for R. Leon Modena, until 1638. Daniel Carpi suggests that the arrangement terminated at that time with the Aboab family's move from Venice to Verona. ¹⁴⁴ Third, the Amsterdam community reached out to Abraham Aboab in Venice in 1634-5 to resolve the aforementioned dispute between Rabbis Morteira and Aboab de Fonseca. Finally, Samuel's own presence in Venice during this period is confirmed by the first responsum in *Devar Shemuel*, which he signed while still in Venice in 1637. ¹⁴⁵

IV. Verona: 1637-1650

The usual narrative recounts that the Aboab family relocated to Verona following their illustrious son and brother, Samuel. ¹⁴⁶ This account likely stems from Rabbi Jacob Aboab's introduction to *Devar Shemuel*, in which he writes

¹⁴² Ibid., 135.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 55.

¹⁴⁴ Leon Modena and Daniel Carpi, *Sefer Haya Yehudah* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1985), 96.

¹⁴⁵ Although it is possible, albeit unlikely, that he was already stationed in Verona, and simply in Venice for a short visit when he penned that responsum.

¹⁴⁶ Moshe Gaon, *Yehudei ha-mizrah be-Erez Yisra'el: part B* (Jerusalem: Azriel Press, 1937), 1.

His [Samuel's] father, brothers, and members of his household all came from Hamburg to hear his wisdom. He planted a tree [of Torah] and a well of Torah in the city of Verona...a dwelling for scholars and a school for students.

This description implies that the family moved directly from Hamburg to Verona at Rabbi Samuel Aboab's invitation, after he had assumed some form of rabbinic role there. But is this what actually happened?.

The narrative is problematic for several reasons: For one, we have demonstrated that the Aboab family relocated from Hamburg to Venice, not Verona. In Venice, they left a significant mark through their involvement in communal affairs and their financial contributions to the land of Israel. Additionally, the claim that Rabbi Samuel Aboab took up a rabbinic position in Verona is problematic. While a small number of Sephardi families resided in Verona, they were not permitted to maintain independent Sephardi worship. Certainly no Sephardi rabbinic position existed there prior to the family's move. Finally, one must question why the Aboab family would leave Venice—a thriving Portuguese community and lucrative financial hub—to follow Samuel to Verona. Records indicate that in 1636–1637,¹⁴⁷ during the time of the move, Abraham Aboab was still actively engaged in communal and fiscal activities. The notion that he suddenly “retired” to Verona to bask in his son's success appears highly questionable.

A re-examination of the sources shifts the focus from Samuel to his father, Abraham, as the principal architect of the family's relocation. The *Pinkasim* of Verona reveal that nearly all negotiations surrounding the move, both before and after the family's arrival, were conducted by

¹⁴⁷ See money being sent to him for Safed in Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 74.

Abraham Aboab as the head of the household, not Samuel. Furthermore, it was Abraham who immediately took charge upon their arrival, leading efforts to secure the rights to establish and

house a Sephardi *minyán* (lit. quorum of ten men required to pray communally. Here, place of worship according to a certain rite).¹⁴⁸ These details strongly suggest that Samuel's move was part of a broader family relocation spearheaded by Abraham Aboab as the family patriarch, rather than an independent initiative centered on Samuel's rabbinic career.

What prompted Abraham Aboab to uproot the family remains a matter of speculation. Given their history of strategically motivated moves—from Antwerp to Hamburg, and later to Venice—it is likely that financial considerations played a significant role. Verona, while not a major metropolis, presented economic opportunities, including silk weaving, cloth production, tax farming, and military supply,¹⁴⁹ for enterprising families like the Aboabs. The fact that several prominent Portuguese merchant families related to the Aboabs through marriage,⁸¹ including Shana Tova,¹⁵⁰ Señor, and ibn Yakar,¹⁵¹ migrated with them, supports the hypothesis that the relocation was a calculated venture, motivated by collective confidence in the city's economic promise.

¹⁴⁸ Pinkas Verona III, Entry 18, 8th Tamuz, 1638. Published in Sonne, “History of the Jews in Verona,” 146–47. The Pinkas identifies Abraham Aboab as the head of the family and mentions Samuel as well, yet Abraham is the sole Aboab signatory on the agreement.

¹⁴⁹ Francesca Bregoli, “The Jews of Italy (1650–1815),” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 868–69. ⁸¹ See the Aboab family tree Appendix 1

¹⁵⁰ Pinkas Verona III, Entry 18, 8th Tamuz, in Sonne, “History of the Jews in Verona,” 146–47.

¹⁵¹ Pinkas Verona 554: 4 pg 121 B. in Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 65.

Two significant facts provide evidence of the Aboabs' financial success in Verona. First, a 1648 tax assessment of the Verona community records the Aboab family's contribution at an

impressive¹⁵² 180 ducats¹⁵³ demonstrating their prominence and affluence within the local Jewish community. Secondly, their ability to maintain and even expand their *Beit Midrash* in Safed during their sojourn in Verona—a project requiring substantial financial and logistical resources—attests to their continued economic vitality and adept use of merchant networks during this period.⁸⁶

The move to Verona also enabled the Aboab family to cultivate and expand their communal influence by establishing and developing a thriving Sephardi community there. In fact, Isaiah Sonne believes this opportunity was the primary motivation driving the Aboab relocation. He cites repeated petitions from the city's small Sephardi population directed toward the “mother community” in Venice¹⁵⁴ wherein the Sephardim of Verona sought influential figures

¹⁵² Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 52. For comparison, the daily salary of a day laborer (lavoranto) was one quarter of a ducat. see Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 180. This provides context for the sixteenth century. For the seventeenth century, see Elliot Horowitz, “The Dowering of Brides in the Ghetto of Venice: Between Tradition and Change, Ideas and Reality / ‘Hakhenasat kala’ be-geito veneziya: bein masoret le-ḥidush u-vein eidial le-meziut,” *Tarbiz* no. 3 (1987): 362–63 and n91. One hundred ducats was the annual salary for a master craftsman. Rabbi Leon Modena, after taking on two additional jobs (in addition to the twenty-one others he lists) in 1619–1620 to pay his daughter's dowry, manages to amass two hundred and forty ducats in all.

¹⁵³ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 66.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 112–13.

¹⁵⁴ Sonne, “History of the Jews in Verona,” 142.

to help them establish an independent communal structure. At the time, Sephardi families in Verona were integrated into the Ashkenazi communal framework and were denied voting privileges, the right to form a separate *minyan* (prayer quorum) , and access to a dedicated synagogue.¹⁵⁵ However, it would be reductive to attribute the Aboabs' relocation solely to these petitions. For a family renowned for their successful blend of economic accomplishments with communal leadership, the prospect of extending their influence to another important locale and thereby benefit from Verona's financial opportunities, was certainly an important motive for

their relocation. Their coordinated migration with other prominent merchant families suggests deliberate planning, while their immediate success in establishing a Sephardi *minyan*,¹⁵⁶ highlights their commitment to fostering an independent Sephardi presence. Thus the Aboab relocation was a strategic move that ensured their financial growth, reinforced their social influence, and advanced the broader Portuguese Sephardi network.

Upon their arrival in Verona, the Aboab family's efforts to establish an independent Sephardi community were met with significant resistance, as the Ashkenazi majority vigorously sought to maintain control over communal affairs. Initially, the Aboabs petitioned for the right to establish a *minyan* and, later, used one of their powerful allies in the Venetian government, an official "Avogadore,"¹⁵⁷ to press the Veronese Ashkenazim to grant the nascent Sephardi community a voice in communal matters.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ *Pinkas Verona III*, Entry 18 permission was granted on June 20, 1638 after negotiations. A year later, on August 8, 1639, *Pinkas Verona III*, Entry 19 records the temporary inclusion of several Veronese Sephardim in the Aboab minyan, as the extended family faced delays in securing suitable accommodations in Verona. In Sonne, "History of the Jews in Verona," 146–48.

¹⁵⁷ Sonne, "History of the Jews in Verona," 149. Sonne describes him as an important administrative official (pakid gavoha be-serarat venezya) whose job was to ensure the municipality's rights (lishemor al zekhuyot

Significantly, throughout the negotiation process, the names that emerge in the interactions between the communities are those of Abraham, Samuel's father, and Jacob,⁹¹ Samuel's wealthy merchant brother.¹⁵⁸ R. Samuel Aboab's name appears only once, notably after his father Abraham's passing, when he is chosen to represent the Aboab family and the newly established Sephardi community in negotiating a compromise with the Ashkenazi council. The *Pinkas* records that the Ashkenazim accepted Samuel's representation and agreed to abide by the compromise he reached with their own representative, Rabbi Avraham Segal Pollack (a Polish Jew), despite his inherent shortcoming as a *noge'a ba-davar* (conflict of interest), given Samuel's

position as an Aboab.¹⁵⁹ Sonne suggests that the Ashkenazi community's cooperation was due to Samuel's well-established reputation as a *yoshev ohalim* (scholar, lit. one who dwells in the tents). Unlike his father and brother, who were more involved in the political maneuverings, Samuel devoted himself exclusively to his Beit Midrash and its thirty students,¹⁶⁰ keeping himself away from such conflicts,⁹⁵ and earning him a reputation for piety and Torah scholarship.¹⁶¹

In 1642, while the family was still based in Verona, the patriarch Abraham passed away. He was eulogized both in Italy and in Israel,¹⁶² and his death was a profound loss for Samuel,

hairiya),⁹¹ See for example *Pinkas Verona* III entry 21, December, 1643 in Sonne, "History of the Jews of Verona," 148.

¹⁵⁸ *Pinkas Verona* III, Entry 21 and 22 (Kislev 1643) in Sonne "History of the Jews in Verona," 148.

¹⁵⁹ *Pinkas Verona* III, Entry 23, *Tevet (December) 1643* in I. Sonne "History of the Jews in Verona" 151.

¹⁶⁰ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 5. According to Jacob, Samuel recruited thirty of Italy's finest youth for his yeshiva in Verona. Jacob does not specify if this number of students was dispersed over the fourteen years of Aboab's tenure in Verona. ⁹⁵ Sonne, "History of the Jews in Verona," 150–51.

¹⁶¹ His reputation as a scholar and a pious man is also evidenced in R. Azaria Picho's eulogy for Abraham in 1642. Picho notes Samuel's status as a tribute to his father's greatness. See R. Azaria Picho, *Bina la-Ittim*, et lisepod, derush 74 (Venice, 1648), 197.

¹⁶² Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 25–26.

who frequently mentioned him during the following year.¹⁶³ Determined to honor his father's memory and foster his legacy, R. Samuel Aboab committed himself to continuing his father's support for the Beit Medrash Aboab in Israel, as well as other Sephardi charities there.⁹⁹ His brothers assumed responsibility for the family's financial affairs, including the Aboab merchant activities, and supported Samuel in sustaining their father's charitable initiatives for Israel.¹⁶⁴ Our renewed understanding of the Aboab family's relocation to Verona offers crucial insight into R. Samuel Aboab's rabbinic career and the circumstances that shaped his development as a leader. Far from the image of a young rabbi struggling to carve out a place for himself in adversity, Samuel Aboab flourished at the heart of a prominent, influential family that

not only hired him, but virtually built a community around him. The Aboabs' move to Verona positioned Samuel as the spiritual and religious leader of a nascent Sephardi community while simultaneously shielding him from the harsher challenges of larger urban centers like Venice. Verona, with its small yet rapidly growing Sephardi population, offered Samuel Aboab an environment uniquely suited to his pious nature and intellectual pursuits. Away from the distractions and moral pitfalls of Venice—concerns he expressed in a letter to his student Raphael ibn Dana,¹⁶⁵ wherein he exhorted him to avoid the city “even for the purpose of teaching Torah to ¹⁶⁶ *baḥurim*, (young men)” lest a mitzvah be fulfilled through a

¹⁶³ For example, see Aboab's letter to Rabbi Judah Krispin and Rabbi Benjamin haLevi in Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 196. ⁹⁹ This will be developed further in the chapter V.

¹⁶⁴ This will be discussed in chapter V.

¹⁶⁵ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 176.

¹⁶⁶ Aboab is also playing on the words “madoḥei ha-baḥarut” (the follies of youth) which he uses in his responsa to refer to the morally lax and frivolous atmosphere which prevailed in Venice.

transgression¹⁶⁷—Aboab could focus fully on study, halakhic responsa, and teaching. His time in Verona allowed him to refine his rabbinic skills, build a network of rabbinic correspondents, and develop the confidence and authority that would later serve him in the more challenging environment of Venice.

Samuel's position in Verona was not one of struggle but of growth. Backed by the security of his family's reputation and resources, he was instrumental in establishing a Beit Midrash in Verona, where, according to his son Jacob, he personally selected the brightest and most promising young scholars from across Italy to study.¹⁶⁸ Correspondence with figures such as Rabbi Moshe Foa, Rabbi Nathaniel Trbotti¹⁶⁹ and Rabbi Simha Kagan,¹⁷⁰ in which Samuel turns away potential students due to limitations in funding and teaching staff, lend credence to

Jacob's words. This correspondence also reveals that Samuel Aboab was not the sole instructor at the Beit Midrash, although he regularly tested students and developed personal curricula for some of them.

It is highly probable that Rabbi Joseph Alkelai, from the scholarly Alkelai family who relocated to Verona with the Aboabs,¹⁷¹ also taught at the Beit Midrash. Aboab's correspondence from the period depicts him as Aboab's protégé, and he was appointed as darshan (preacher) immediately after the Aboabs' return to Venice in 1650.¹⁷² Aboab maintained

¹⁶⁷ *mizve ha-ba'a be-aveira* this phrase refers to a situation where a good deed or commandment (*mitzvah*) is performed, but its fulfillment involves or relies on a violation of Jewish law, thus compromising or invalidating the good deed/commandment.

¹⁶⁸ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 5.

¹⁶⁹ Transcribed in Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 72.

¹⁷⁰ Samuel Aboab, *Igrot*, 153 R.

¹⁷¹ Pinkas Verona III, Entry 18, 147 The Alkelais are specifically referred to as scholars.

¹⁷² Pinkas Verona 153:B in Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 69.

regular correspondence with him regarding the progress of individual students and the broader imperative of ensuring a distinct Sephardi community.

The family's influence, coupled with the relatively small scale of Verona's Jewish population, allowed R. Samuel Aboab to shape his role as a rabbi without the intense competition and conflicts that often characterized rabbinic appointments in larger communities.¹⁷³ Though not the pinnacle of his career, Aboab's time in Verona was a critical phase of preparation. By the time he returned to Venice, Samuel Aboab had evolved into a confident and capable rabbi, well-prepared to navigate the complexities of leadership in one of the most prominent Sephardi communities of the early modern period.¹⁷⁴

A. The Beit Midrash in Verona:

The Beit Midrash established by Rabbi Samuel Aboab in Verona expanded upon a model his father had used in Hamburg, and which Samuel would later replicate in Venice. This institution should not be confused with either the Beit Midrash Aboab in Safed¹⁷⁵ or the *Yeshiva Klalit* in Venice and Verona which will be discussed below. The Montefiore collection includes a letter in which Aboab describes aspects of the structure of the Verona Beit Midrash and its

¹⁷³ For an example of the competition involved in securing a post or earning a living, especially for one who lacked wealth and pedigree, see R. Leon Modena's "list of occupations" in Cohen, *Life of Judah*, 160–62. For another example, see S. Aboab, *Igrot*, 58R-59V in which Aboab's writes to Rabbi Joseph Alkelai describing his convoluted machinations and networking efforts in the effort to secure a rabbinic post for him. This includes involving R. Jacob Hagiz and playing the two communities of Livorno and Florence against each other to secure the more desirable post, Livorno, for his protégé. For examples of conflict and controversy see Altmann, "Eternality of Punishment," regarding the conflict between Rabbi Saul Levi Morteira and Rabbi Isaac Aboab de Fonseca in Amsterdam. Also see R. Isaac min ha-Levi'im and Daniel Carpi, *Midbar Tahpukhot*, describing the drawn-out conflict surrounding his rabbinic ordination.

¹⁷⁴ For an example of the confidence and diplomatic skills Aboab developed as he matured, see his response to the Sabbatian movement as described below, and his interactions with Nathan of Gaza. Appendix 4.

¹⁷⁵ For a more extensive discussion of the *Beit Medrash Aboab* see Chapter V.

activities.¹⁷⁶ He writes that the aim is for students to “know the paths of the Mishna, the alleyways of the Gemarah, and the principles of Torah exegesis¹⁷⁷ (ha-midot she-ha-tora nidereshet ba-hem). This indicates that the Beit Midrash was designed primarily for younger students, generally ages eight or nine through twelve or thirteen, corresponding to the period when they learned Mishna and began to study the Talmud.

Aboab’s son Jacob corroborates this focus, noting his father’s individualized approach to each student: “ze le-mikra ve-ze le-mishna” — “this one [student] for [learning] Mikra (written Torah) and this one [student] for Mishna”¹¹⁴—both being subjects suited to beginners.

Additionally, in his correspondence, Aboab consistently refers to these pupils as *talmidim* (students) or *ke-vanim* (like sons),¹⁷⁸ terms that convey youth and inexperience, rather than honorifics like *haverim* or *hakhamim* that he used only when referring to the members of the *Yeshiva Kelalit*.

Another significant feature of Aboab’s Beit Midrash, as revealed in his correspondence, was the practice of the head and some “faculty” members, like Rabbi Joseph Alkelai, personally

housing and feeding many of the students.¹⁷⁹ This model aligns with Rabbi Elijah Capsali’s description of Rabbi Judah Mintz’s yeshiva in late fifteenth-century Italy where he writes “the Master (Rabbi Judah MIntz) went to a small room in the courtyard of the great Synagogue *with*

¹⁷⁶ S. Aboab, *Igrot*, 153 R.

¹⁷⁷ The 13 middot she-ha-tora nidereshet ba-hen (Thirteen Principles of Torah Exegesis) are a set of hermeneutical rules used to interpret and derive laws from the Torah. They form the foundation of halakhic midrash (legal interpretation of Scripture) and are essential for understanding how Jewish law is derived from biblical verses. ¹¹⁴ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 5.

¹⁷⁸ S. Aboab, *Igrot*, 110 R and 143 R.

¹⁷⁹ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 10.

the students lodging with him (emphasis mine).¹⁸⁰ Aboab's dedication to each student is evident in numerous letters from both Verona and Venice, which show his close involvement in each student's progress.¹⁸¹ He crafted individualized curricula based on each student's abilities, conducted periodic assessments, and maintained regular communication with parents to update them on their sons' development.

While precise details about the funding and jurisdiction of the Aboab Beit Medrash in Verona remain unclear, several indications help us piece together a plausible picture of its operation. First, there is no reason to assume it functioned as a public institution. Letters concerning student acceptance, academic progress, and curricula were addressed directly to Samuel Aboab, as opposed to the teachers or Hakhamim of the Beit Medrash, suggesting that he managed these matters personally. His responses, too, are written in his voice alone, with no references to consultations with others or any other form of institutional oversight.

Second, the character of these letters, in that they are not halakhic in nature, is distinctive and provides further insight into the nature of Aboab's Beit Medrash. The letters cannot be classified as *responsa*, and are thus not included in his *Devar Shemuel*. Rather, they convey a more personal or, occasionally, professional, tone, inquiring after a student's progress,¹¹⁹ or

¹⁸⁰ Elija Capsalie in *Venetian Chronicle* as cited by Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 156.

¹⁸¹ Benayhu, *Dor Ehad*, 32, "My hand did not move from his [the student's] to strengthen and encourage him in the study of *Mishnayot*, as I saw he was [particularly] successful with [the study of] them." In a letter to Rabbi Jacob Hagiz in Jerusalem, Aboab follows up on the progress of two of his former students. Samuel Aboab, *Igrot*, 67 R.

¹¹⁹ Samuel Aboab, *Igrot*, 67 R.

suggesting a “curriculum” adjustment,¹⁸² and are preserved in Samuel Aboab’s personal notebooks. This suggests that Aboab accorded them enough significance to copy them into his personal files alongside his responsa, while reenforcing our perception of the Beit Medrash as a personal endeavor of R. Samuel Aboab, and supporting Jacob’s description of his father’s dedication towards his students.

Third, though details regarding the funding of the Beit Medrash are scarce, several possibilities should be explored. Jacob Aboab, Samuel’s son, implies that his father personally financed much of its operation,¹⁸³ seeking community funds only during periods of personal financial hardship. Given Samuel Aboab’s wealth and his consistent advocacy for the importance of Torah education for youth,¹⁸⁴ it is plausible that he personally supported some of the students in his Beit Medrash, particularly those from impoverished backgrounds. This model may reflect a “spin-off” of earlier practices, such as those seen in sixteenth-century Italy, where wealthy individuals hired tutors to live in their homes¹⁸⁵—much as Samuel’s father had employed for him in Hamburg -- and also arranged instruction for some of the poorer students in the community. It is equally likely that tuition fees played a significant role in sustaining the Beit Medrash. Teachers may have earned their incomes directly from payments made by students’ families,¹²⁴ while community funds were allocated to subsidize tuition for poorer students—a practice documented in several Italian communities.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Letter to Rabbi Jacob Levy in Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 73.

¹⁸³ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 5.

¹⁸⁴ See for example, S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 194–96.

¹⁸⁵ See Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 134–35, regarding the wealthy Rietti family in Sienna. ¹²⁴ Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 20.

¹⁸⁶ Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 136.

In sum, Samuel Aboab's Beit Medrash in Verona and Venice appear to have been personalized institutions, shaped by and reflective of Samuel Aboab's leadership, values, and financial resources. This characterization offers a point of contrast to the structure and function of the Yeshiva Klalit in Venice, an institution that was entirely distinct from the Beit Medrash. This begs the question, what exactly was the Yeshiva Klalit? While scholars have made some progress in constructing a picture of this institution,¹⁸⁷ many questions concerning its precise functions, make-up, and authority remain unanswered. As a member of the Yeshiva Klalit in Venice for four decades, Samuel Aboab offers invaluable insights into this important yet enigmatic institution, shedding light on some of its inner workings and communal role.

Robert Bonfil describes the Yeshiva Klalit as it emerged in the seventeenth-century, as "the supreme authority for legal rulings by the sages of the community."¹⁸⁸ Bonfil's sweeping assessment requires corroboration and qualification. Aboab's life and career offer tangible glimpses into the inner workings of the Yeshiva, thus enabling us to attempt this important task. Notably, unlike the Beit Medrash, which was primarily educational in nature, the Yeshiva Klalit often served some clearly judicial functions, frequently operating as a Beit Din to adjudicate disputes within the Jewish community. Both Leon Modena and Aboab note, on several occasions

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 135–37, and Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 17–27. In both of his works, Bonfil focuses on the Renaissance Yeshiva and only briefly mentions the emergence, in the seventeenth-century, of the Yeshiva Klalit (General Yeshiva).

¹⁸⁸ Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 27.

,¹⁸⁹ that per the Yeshiva's policy, monetary disputes were only adjudicated when both parties consented to abide by the Yeshiva's rulings. Aboab's son, Jacob, further attests that these financial disputes constituted a significant portion of his father's responsibilities.¹⁹⁰

Additionally, numerous halakhic responsa in *Devar Shemuel* demonstrate the Yeshiva's active role in issuing *piskei halakha* (halakhic rulings).¹⁹¹ For example, in a responsum

addressing a problematic *get* (divorce writ) presented before the Yeshiva, Aboab writes: "We examined this question here in our Yeshiva and agreed that there is no disputing the divorce [it is halakhically sound] ... Therefore, the (*get*) described in the question is valid according to the law, and the woman is divorced according to the laws of Moses and Israel."¹⁹²

While Chapter Two will explore the precise function of the Yeshiva in relation to halakhic responsa, the example cited here, together with the other evidence presented, confirm the central role of the Yeshiva Klalit as an active judicial body..¹⁹³

Bonfil also suggests that the Yeshiva Klalit was a communal institution, and comprised rabbis from every recognized Jewish community in the city.¹³³ in Venice, all four major Jewish communities—Ashkenazi, Italiani, Levantine (Ottoman Sephardim), and Ponentine (Western or Iberian Sephardim)—were represented. Considering the judicial functions of the Yeshiva Klalit,

¹⁸⁹ Leon Modena and Shlomo Simonsohn, *She-elot ve-teshuvot Ziknei Yehuda* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1955), responsum 29, 45. S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 336.

¹⁹⁰ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 5.

¹⁹¹ See for example S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsa numbers 96, 141, 232.

¹⁹² S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 100.

¹⁹³ Interestingly, This description of the Yeshiva as a Beit Din aligns with Shlomo Havlin's discussion of the function of the "Sephardi Yeshivot" in the land of Israel. Shlomo Zalman Havlin, "Le-toledot yeshivot Yerushalyim ve-ḥakhameiha be-shalhei ha-me'a ha'7 ve-reshit ha-me'a Ha'18," *Shalem* 2 (1976): 2. ¹³³ Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 27.

it would make sense that the Judges represented each of the communities from which a litigant might come. Additionally, we may corroborate this hypotheses from Aboab's other writings. Aboab's *Zikaron leBnei Yisrael*,¹⁹⁴ written in the aftermath of the 1668 meeting with Nathan of Gaza, was signed by shiv'a ro'im (seven rabbis, lit. seven shepherds) in addition to Aboab, representing all four communities.¹⁹⁵ It is possible, however, that this was an *ad hoc* committee organized for the express purpose of Nathan's interrogation, and thus cannot be viewed as reflective of the Yeshiva Klalit's usual composition or functions.

While Aboab provides direct insight only into the Yeshiva Klalit of Venice, recognizing that a primary function of the Yeshiva Klalit, was to serve as a Beit Din, helps explain why many Italian communities maintained similar institutions. Jacob Aboab refers to several "yeshivot klaliyot (the plural form of Yeshiva Klalit) who honored his father" "vekhoh ba'alei hayeshivot... kelaliyot ve-kolelot... lo natenu yekar u-gedula ", ("All the leaders of the yeshivot... klaliyot and kollelot... bestowed upon him honor and greatness"). Aboab's responsa also mention several of these institutions including those in Pesaro,¹⁹⁶ Mantua, Ferrara, and Verona.¹⁹⁷

Aboab's correspondence reveals that the Yeshiva Klalit, in addition to its judicial role, functioned as an intellectual academy as well, perhaps resembling in some ways the scientific and literary societies that flourished in early modern Europe.¹⁹⁸ Its members met regularly to

¹⁹⁴ See appendix 4.

¹⁹⁵ For example, Rabbi Isaac min ha-Levi'im represented the Italiani community, Rabbi Jacob haLevi represented the Ashkenazi community, Rabbi Samuel Aboab represented the Ponentine community, and Rabbi Señor ibn Dana represented the Levantine (Ottoman-Spanish) community

¹⁹⁶ S.Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 336.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., responsa 36, 232.

¹⁹⁸ Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 135–37. This aligns with his description of the Renaissance-era Yeshiva. Also see further discussion of this in my chapter II where I elaborate on this comparison.

engage in scholarly debate, address halakhic issues, and draft responsa.¹⁹⁹ In smaller communities like Verona, meetings occurred once a week, typically on Shabbat afternoons²⁰⁰; in larger communities such as Venice, gatherings likely took place more frequently. Aboab's esteem for these assemblies is evident in his formal salutations, such as *likhevod ma'alat hakhemei hayeshiva* ("in honor of the exalted scholars of the Yeshiva")²⁰¹ or *kevod ma'alat raboteinu* ("our honored and exalted rabbis").

Many aspects of the Yeshiva's research and debates are preserved in Aboab's responsa,²⁰² offering a window into its dual identity as a high-level academy and a Beit Din. These writings reveal a dynamic intellectual environment that fostered rigorous scholarship and halakhic debate and strengthened the interconnectedness of Italian Jewry.

While Aboab's writings clarify some of the Yeshiva Kelalit's intellectual and judicial roles, our knowledge of its technical and procedural operations remains limited. How many rabbis or lay leaders participated, by what criteria was each community's representation determined—population size, tax contributions, or another standard? Furthermore, how were internal power dynamics or conflicts among representatives managed?

¹⁹⁹ See for example S., *Devar Shemuel*, responsa 78, 99, 101, 233, where Aboab mentions scholarly debates and responsa drafting in the Yeshiva.

²⁰⁰ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 36.

²⁰¹ Ibid., responsa 98, 141.

²⁰² Ibid., responsa 96 and 99, as examples demonstrating the Yeshiva's practice of consulting experts to inform their deliberations, when warranted. I introduce these responsa to highlight the Yeshiva's academic nature, characterized by research and debate.

One of the central questions regarding the Yeshiva Klalit—and one we will explore through Aboab’s responsa²⁰³—is the extent of its authority and enforcement power. Did it operate independently, or was its influence intertwined with local community councils? While the Yeshiva received numerous requests for *piskei halakha* (halakhic rulings) on a wide range of issues, to what degree could it enforce its decisions, especially in those instances where community members bypassed it for *arkha’ot shel goyim* (non-Jewish courts)? These considerations will be complemented by a broader inquiry into how the Yeshiva’s structure and influence might need to adapt to the political and social dynamics of individual cities, particularly Venice, versus smaller communities like Verona or Pesaro.

V. Venice 1650-1694:

In 1650, the Aboab family returned to Venice, thus ending the era of the Aboab residence in Verona. In this instance as well, the precise reasons for their relocation remain unclear. While

the *pinkas* of Verona offers no explanation, we can certainly speculate that economic²⁰⁴ and political considerations were at play. Unlike his earlier move to Verona, where Samuel’s rabbinic career developed gradually and subtly, within the broader context of his family, and perhaps, to an extent, under the shadow of his illustrious father, the return to Venice heralded his emergence as a distinct and influential rabbinic personage. Shortly after arriving, Samuel assumed the prestigious position of rabbi for Venice’s Sephardi community, the *Talmud Torah*, succeeding his revered mentor, Rabbi Azaria Picho. Shortly thereafter, he was invited to join the

²⁰³ For my discussion of this subject, see chapter II on the functions of responsa

²⁰⁴ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 67–68. In the *Pinkas Verona* entries cited here, the Aboabs negotiate a final tax settlement with the Verona community to be administered by the Shana Tova family. Benayahu suggests that they had significant funds tied up in Venetian banks.

Yeshiva Klalit and entrusted with the honor of authoring its responsa.²⁰⁵

Upon Aboab's passing, his son Jacob wrote that he was "honored as befits an Av Beit Din."¹⁴⁶ While there is no clear evidence that Aboab officially held this title,²⁰⁶ Jacob's words suggest his father's prominent standing within the Venetian Yeshiva. This is further reflected in his elaborate funeral, in which all four Venetian communities participated, and the collective mourning rituals they observed—indicating Aboab's stature as one of the foremost Italian rabbinic figures of his time.

Samuel Aboab's tenure in Venice marked the pinnacle of his rabbinic career and communal activism. In this thriving hub of Mediterranean commerce, religious and intellectual ferment, and scientific and cultural innovation and transformation, Aboab was ideally positioned at the center of an extensive rabbinic network, reinforced by his family's significant financial

and business connections.²⁰⁷ As rabbi of a wealthy community and an influential member of Venice's *Yeshiva Klalit*, he adeptly expanded and mobilized these connections to promote his halakhic conceptions and visions of religious virtue, facilitate the release of captives from Malta

²⁰⁵ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 5-6. Jacob does not specify a date but implies that it was shortly upon his father's arrival. For more on his position within the Yeshiva Kelalit, see Chapter II. ¹⁴⁶ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 15.

²⁰⁶ See my discussion regarding the Yeshiva's ability to issue titles in Chapter II. I have not found any colleague or contemporary who refers to him by this title.

²⁰⁷ The Aboab family was heavily involved in the colonia trade of salt, sugar and Brazilwood. For more on the Aboab-Faleiro business interests and connections with other new Christian families see Arlindo Manuel Caldeira, "The Island Trade Routes of São Tome in the 16th Century: Ships, Products, Capitals," *RiMe: Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea* 9, no. 2, n.s. (December 2021): 71–72 and n49. We can also trace a relationship between the Aboabs and the prominent de Pinto family beginning from the Aboabs' settlement in Antwerp. The de Pintos dealt primarily in Brazilwood and salt and were among the largest exporters of salt from Portugal. James C. Boyajian, "New Christians Reconsidered: Evidence from Lisbon's Portuguese Bankers, 1497-1647," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 13, no. 2 (July 1979): 153n87. Salomon, "The 'de Pinto' Manuscript," 22.

and Poland,²⁰⁸ provide financial support to yeshivot and communities in Israel, and assist his students and rabbinic colleagues in securing positions.²⁰⁹

Aboab's rabbinate was not without personal challenges, including the heartbreaking loss of four children and two nephews,²¹⁰ as well as a brief period of exile precipitated by his refusal to take an oath.²¹¹ Despite these hardships, Aboab remained resilient. While his son David, who appears to have inherited the Aboab political and financial savvy, worked to secure his return, R. Samuel Aboab used the time in exile to begin compiling *Devar Shemuel*, which would later become a cornerstone of his rabbinic legacy.

Rabbi Samuel Aboab passed away in 1694 after serving more than four decades as the rabbi of the Portuguese Talmud Torah and Av Beit Din in Venice. Before his death, he composed an ethical will for his children, which his son Jacob included in the introduction to *Devar Shemuel*. This document offers a unique lens through which to understand Aboab's values

and priorities. Its striking similarities in content, tone, and language to Aboab's *Sefer haZikhronot* will be closely examined in the dissertation as well.

Aboab's funeral demonstrated the respect and admiration he commanded across the Jewish community. His coffin was carried to the burial grounds first by representatives of his own Ponentine community, and then by representatives of each of the other Venetian

²⁰⁸ The subject of Mediterranean Piracy and captivity during the early modern period has benefitted from extensive scholarly research. See page footnote 189 for further elaboration. On the activities of Venetian Jews specifically see Daniel Carpi, "The Beginnings of the Activity for the Redemption of Captives among Venetian Jews during the 17th Century / "al Irgun ha-peula le-ma'an pidyon shevuyim bein yehudei venizia ba-me'a ha17," *Zion* (1981): 155– 58.

²⁰⁹ S. Aboab, *Igrot* 58R-59V.

²¹⁰ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 215. R. Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 10.

²¹¹ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 12. The details of the incident are exceedingly vague.

communities.²¹² The tributes to Aboab extended far beyond Venice. Rabbis across Italy delivered heartfelt eulogies, praising his piety, scholarship, and leadership. Like his father before him, Aboab was also memorialized in Israel,¹⁵⁴ further attesting to the extent of his influence and his remarkable success in continuing and amplifying the Aboab family's legacy there. Following Aboab's passing, his eldest son, Abraham, assumed his position as rabbi of the Venetian Talmud Torah.²¹³ After Abraham's death, this distinguished role was passed on to Jacob, Aboab's younger son,²¹⁴ solidifying the Aboab family's place as a distinguished rabbinic lineage, and ensuring its enduring leadership and continued impact on Venetian Jewish life.

VI. His Personality

Samuel Aboab's contemporaries described him as a *ḥassid*—a term denoting deep piety—and “*yerei chet*”, one who feared sin, willing to “stand in the breach”¹⁵⁷ to defend God, *halakha*, and rabbinic authority.¹⁵⁸ However, mining his responsa, writings, and

correspondence, revealed a more complex figure. While I found that Aboab projected humility, equanimity, kindness, and steadfast conviction, he was also driven, innovative, and even zealous, particularly in matters of ritual and faith.¹⁵⁹

Aboab's humility was a defining trait. He was unquestionably a *ḥassid*—pious, devout,

²¹² Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 16. For an interesting comparison to the elaborate funeral processions of other rabbis and important personages in the seventeenth century, see Elliot Horowitz, “Jewish Confraternities in Seventeenth-Century Verona: A Study in the Social History of Piety” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1982), 16–17. ¹⁵⁴ Transcriptions of four eulogies are included in R. Samuel Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 25–37.

²¹³ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 16.

²¹⁴ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 58. As confirmation, see Emden *Torat ha-Kena 'ot*, .96. His son Joseph also served as a *dayan* (judge) for the Yeshiva Klalit on at least one occasion as Emden records that he, along with two others, was asked by the “exalted scholars of the Yeshiva” to deliver an ultimatum to Rabbi Moses Haym Luzzatto to cease from teaching and printing his works. (*Torat ha-Kena 'ot* [Levov 1869], 107–9). ¹⁵⁷ La-amod ba-perez ¹⁵⁸ While some of the descriptions used by his son Jacob and by Aboab's rabbinic peers to describe him may be standard adulatory rhetoric, the focus on his piety, *Hassidut*, is distinctive. It may well be his defining character trait, and I have rarely seen his name introduced, without the immediate accompaniment of the adjective, *Hassid*.

self-effacing, and modest. His grief over the deaths of four of his children, which he accepted as God's will, and attributed to his "own sins," reflected his deep piety. His humility extended to his interactions with others; Eulogizing him, Rabbi Moshe Zacut noted that Aboab addressed even his youngest students by name,²¹⁵ a rare gesture of personal concern and validation in an era where honor and social standing were of paramount significance.²¹⁶ Unlike many of his

For example, "haRav **haHassid** Moreinu haRav Shmuel Aboab" in David Judah Arditi, *Sefer Ta'avat David* (Salonika, 1895). HebrewBooks.org/470. R. Haym Yosef Dovid Azulay (HIDA), *Shem ha-gedolim, Ma'arekhet Sofrim Ot d (Devar Shemuel)* (Brooklyn, NY: Moriah Offset, 1982), 14, identifies Rabbi Samuel Aboab as "ha-Rav he-Hassid" "devar shemuel shu"t le-harav he-ḥasid moreinu ha-rav Shmuel Aboab. In the same work, ot z (26) HIDA ascribes the anonymous publication of the Sefer ha-Zikhronot to Aboab's great piety (*Hassidut*). "u-bishevil ḥasiduto lo hizkir shemo aleha". Similarly, Emden, *Sefer Torat ha-Kena'ot*, 51-52) refers to him as "ehad meyuḥad she-be-eder hashem harei hu he-ḥasid ha-mufla moreinu ha-rav Shmuel Aboab (a unique one in the flock of God, he is the *Hassid*, the exceptional, Rabbi Samuel Aboab)". Medievalists like Elisheva Baumgarten in her article, "Who Was a Hassid or Hassida in Medieval Ashkenaz?: Reassessing the Social Implications of a Term," *Jewish History* 34, no. 1-3 (2021): 125–54, have explored the nuanced meanings and implications of the term Hassid/a in earlier periods. In the early modern context, however, the term appears to signify only a life of exceptional piety. This included eschewing physical indulgences like meat and wine, religious devotion, and halakhic stringency—all qualities repeatedly attributed to and exhibited by Aboab throughout his life.

¹⁵⁹ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, "He [Samuel Aboab] was a zealot the son of a zealot in removing [halakhic] stumbling blocks from his nation". 8.

contemporaries, Aboab rarely sought personal recognition or rabbinic honors. Instead, across four hundred responsa and his Sefer haZikhronot, the term honor is associated almost exclusively

²¹⁵ R. Moshe Zacut, Eulogy in Samuel Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 27. "zair kara bi-shemo"

²¹⁶ The concept of honor in the early modern period is central. See for example, Natalie Zemon Davis, "Religion and Capitalism Once Again? Jewish Merchant Culture in the Seventeenth Century," *Representations* 59 (1997): 74–78, on the importance of honor among both the merchant and rabbinic class. On the importance of honor among Aboab's rabbinic contemporaries, see Leon Modena's responsa *Ziknei Yehuda (Simonsohn)* where responsa 86, 94, and 101 engage with the topic of the proper honor to accord a rabbi or Torah scholar and the consequences for one who dishonors him. Leon Modena also adds that dishonoring Torah scholars is unfortunately widespread in his day. Also, see Yocheved Beeri's description of Hakham Yaakov Athias' application to the Intendant of Bordeaux, head of the local royal administration, requesting him to "rebuke the head of the Portuguese Nation, on the paucity of honor and reverence in which they hold their rabbi." "Hakham Yaakov Athias—A Portuguese Rabbi Facing the Winds of Enlightenment and Secularization," in *Religious Changes and Cultural Transformations in the Early Modern Western Sephardic Communities*, ed. Yosef Kaplan (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 414–27, 423. Yaakov Dweck, *Dissident Rabbi: Rabbi Jacob Sasportas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 318, comments that Rabbi Jacob Sasportas spent a "half century thundering about the lack of respect he had received from the lay leadership in the cities he served." On a related note, Levine, "Port Rabbi," 29–30, cites Hakham Zevi Ashkenazi's letter of invitation from the Amsterdam community and his contract which include an exhaustive list of the public honors he would be accorded as rabbi. Levine also asserts that "Hakham Tzvi did not belong to the

with humankind (*Kevod ha-Beriyot*),¹⁶² God,¹⁶³ and the Torah.²¹⁷ As a point of contrast, Rabbi Leon Modena writes, concerning the printing of his *Beit Yehuda*, “Never in my entire life had I so desired anything as to see it printed...for I was certain that from it I would earn merit and honor and an everlasting reputation, which would never be lost.”²¹⁸

Exploring Aboab’s correspondence, I developed a respect for him as a man of principle and unwavering halakhic conviction. Somewhat to my surprise, I also noted, that despite his rigid adherence to halakha, his stringent rulings, and unrelenting stance regarding rabbinic authority,²¹⁹ a thread of genuine kindness, ran through his responsa. He consistently demonstrated concern for the “responsa subjects” offering comfort or advice beyond the halakhic sphere.²²⁰

One example of this sensitivity appears in a responsum from the city of Reggio. The community had a custom during the fast of the Ninth of Av to place the Torah to be read on the back of a person who would “bend with their head facing downward”. Neither the inquiring rabbi, Rabbi Benjamin HaCohen, nor Aboab explains the origin of this custom, though it was likely intended as an expression of mourning appropriate to the day. Nevertheless, Aboab

rabbinic camp willing to forgo its customary honor” (34). His insistence on the honorific trappings contributed to some of the controversies in which he was involved.

For more on specific honors contractually accorded to rabbis see S. Schwarzfuchs, “Tena’ei ha-rabbanut shel haSha’agat Aryeh be-kehila kedosha Miz,” *Moriah* 15, no. 1-2 (1986): 87, par. 21 ¹⁶² S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 168, 172. ¹⁶³ Ibid., responsum 179

²¹⁷ Ibid., responsum 166.

²¹⁸ Cohen, *Life of Judah*, 140–41.

²¹⁹ See my discussion of Aboab and rabbinic authority, “orthodoxy” and “tradition” in chapter IV.

²²⁰ See for example S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 170 wherein he discusses a case where a woman, as a result of illness, sees intermittent, possibly uterine, bleeding, causing her to be consistently considered ritually impure, and forbidden to her husband. While Aboab deliberates on the halakhic issues, he also offers suggestions that might help alleviate the medical problem.

concurr with Rabbi Benjamin HaCohen, stating that he sees "nothing praiseworthy in this custom" and suggesting it would be preferable to discontinue it—provided doing so would not cause discord or unrest within the community. However, appended to the following responsum regarding an unrelated matter, Aboab revisits the issue, proposing a thoughtful solution should the community abolish the custom. He suggests that to provide *korat ruah* (comfort) to the individual who had borne the Torah scroll, the community could bestow upon him another Torah-related honor, such as *gelila* (rolling the Torah scroll).²²¹

Aboab treated correspondents of all ranks with respect, giving careful attention to all aspects of their inquiries. Remarkably, even when he believed someone threatened halakhic integrity—a matter of sacred importance to Aboab, he refrained from publicly naming or shaming them.²²² Early in his career, Aboab exemplified this when he protected the honor of an errant rabbi by contriving a complex solution to a concern regarding problematic *tefillin* straps.²²³

Beyond his natural modesty and self-effacing comportment, and probably reflective of his membership in a family known for its social and commercial prominence, Samuel Aboab's commitment to diplomacy and compromise was also deeply rooted in his aversion to *Hillul*

²²¹ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsa 249-250.

²²² Even Nathan of Gaza, whom he wanted to "remove from the city as quickly as possible" (see appendix 4) is not belittled or shamed by Rabbi Aboab. In contrast, see Emden who refers to Nathan as "ha-shakran he-azum" (the great liar) *Torat ha-Kena'ot* 136 and to Nehemia Hayon and Abraham Cardozo as "nevi'av ha-nevalim ha-teme'im ha-arurim ha-sechalim ha-bahami'im (his (Shabbetai Zevi's) vile, impure, accursed, foolish, animalistic prophets) [.hebrewbooks.org/downloadhandler.ashx?req=44252](http://hebrewbooks.org/downloadhandler.ashx?req=44252) Hakham Zevi's public denigration of his contemporaries, Zadok of Grodno and Judah he-Hassid (Levine, "Port Rabbi," 295-296) and the acerbic rhetoric used by Ashkenazi, Hagiz, Sasportas, and others, may be counterposed with the grace and restraint demonstrated by Aboab when dealing with adversaries and opponents.

²²³ See a discussion of this particular series of responsa below and in chapter II, titled "consensus responsa".

Hashem (the desecration of God's name). Aboab interpreted *Hillul Hashem* broadly, viewing it as any situation where Jews might be perceived—particularly by Christians—as falling short of

expected standards of piety, morality, or ethics. This interpretation was inherently subjective, shaped by the observer's perceptions, which were influenced by social, cultural, and even anthropological norms. Thus, assessing whether a *Hillul Hashem* occurred depended less on absolute standards of right and wrong, and more on how actions were judged within their societal context. An example from Aboab's responsa illustrates his application of *Hillul Hashem*

In responsum 132 Aboab addressed a case where a Jew sought permission to operate a factory on Shabbat. His response considered not only the applicable halakhic implications but also how such actions might be perceived by Christians.²²⁴ Aboab expressed concern that Christians, who scrupulously observed their Sabbath, would witness Jews desecrating their holy day and draw unfavorable comparisons between the two religions, thereby causing a *Hillul Hashem*. Here, the desecration of God's name stemmed not from the halakhic infraction itself, but from a Christian perception that Jews were less religiously observant than expected.

Aboab's reasoning highlights the inherently subjective nature of *Hillul Hashem*, as its occurrence depended on the norms and expectations of the observing party rather than moral absolutes.

Aboab's understanding of *Hillul Hashem* is not original; it builds on established precedents found in both the Talmud and Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*. The Talmud¹⁷² presents a discussion among sages about what constitutes a desecration of God's name (*Hillul Hashem*).

²²⁴ For another example of contemporary rabbinic perception of “external Hillul Hashem” see R. Leon Modena and Shlomo Simonsohn, *Ziknei Yehuda*, 37, where R. Leon Modena warns Jews against frequenting a Christian woman whom the inquisition had labeled a “witch” for fear of *Hillul Hashem* in the eyes of the inquisition. ¹⁷² Talmud Bavli, *Yoma* 86a.

Rav states, “For someone like me [a renowned sage and Torah scholar], [it is considered a *Hillul Hashem*] if I buy meat from a butcher and do not pay immediately [but take it on credit].” Thus an observer might conclude that Rav took the meat without payment by leveraging his prominence. Rabbi Yochanan adds, “For me, [it is a *Hillul Hashem*] if I walk four amot (a few feet) without wearing tefillin.” In all the examples cited here, the occurrence of *Hillul Hashem* depends on the social stature of the individual involved and the prevailing cultural norms. On the topic of *Hillul Hashem* Maimonides elaborates in *Mishneh Torah* ²²⁵ “There are other actions included in *Hillul Hashem* ... For someone who is great in Torah and renowned for his piety, it is considered a *Hillul Hashem* if he does things that cause others to criticize him— even if these actions are not [actual] sins. [For example], if he buys something and does not pay immediately, engages in frivolity and excessive eating and drinking with simple people, or if his interactions with others are not cordial and he angers easily... Everything depends on the stature of the sage.”

In Aboab’s works, we see a significant expansion of the concept of *Hillul Hashem* . For him it is not only scholars who come under scrutiny because of their elevated social and religious status as representatives of Torah, but any Jew who might be perceived by others as lacking in piety, religiosity, or morality becomes a potential source of *Hillul Hashem* . Additionally, while neither the Talmud nor Maimonides specifies the identity of the viewers—whether Jewish or Gentile—Aboab is particularly sensitive to the reactions of the Christian populations, defining *Hillul Hashem* in part by how Jews are viewed in comparison to Christians.

²²⁵ *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, 5:11.

For Aboab, *Hillul Hashem* was not merely a theological or religious issue. Rather, it carried grave consequences, potentially resulting in danger or persecution for the Jewish community. He understood that the legitimacy of the Jewish people in the eyes of Christians was deeply connected to their perceived piety and religiosity. This sensitivity to how Jews were perceived may explain Aboab's wariness of any behavior that could diminish their reputation or harm their collective esteem. Such damage could, in turn, threaten their legal status and right to exist within Christian societies.

Aboab's association between *Hillul Hashem* and physical danger is vividly illustrated in his *Zikaron li-Vnei Yisrael*, a bulletin publicizing the 1668 interrogation of Nathan of Gaza by the Yeshiva Klalit of Venice. In this text, Aboab juxtaposes *Hillul Hashem* with the urgent need to protect Jewish lives, writing: "When [Nathan the Prophet] arrived, we hurried and acted without delay... to ensure that [the name of Heaven] would not again be profaned among the nations, Heaven forbid, *and to address matters concerning life and death.*"²²⁶ This statement, particularly when considered in the broader context of the document, emphasizes Aboab's distinctive capacity to provide both spiritual and pragmatic leadership. While his concern for the community's religious welfare is expected of a rabbi,²²⁷ the *Zikaron* demonstrates Aboab's acute awareness of *Hillul Hashem* as a matter of physical safety as well. His decisive actions—confronting Nathan of Gaza, compelling him to publicly recant his prophecies in writing, and

²²⁶ Emphasis mine.

²²⁷ See for example R. Jacob Sasportas, *Sefer zizhat novel zevi la'Rav Ya'akov Sasportas*, ed. Isaiah Tishbi (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1954), 63.

disseminating the *Zikaron*—were driven not only by theological imperatives but also by a pronounced fear for the physical security of the Jewish people.

Aboab also believed that *Hillul Hashem* could occur internally, within the Jewish community itself, as an inevitable outcome of internal discord. To him as a leader, the specter of *Hillul Hashem* was ever-present and this served as a guiding principle. Internally, *Hillul Hashem* could arise even in matters confined to Jewish life, such as when rabbis failed to present a united front on halakhic issues.²²⁸ This lack of cohesion, Aboab argued, allowed individuals to seek halakhic rulings that suited their personal interests, encouraging a dangerous belief that God's will could be manipulated to align with human desires.²²⁹ Such behavior, in Aboab's view, demonstrated profound disrespect for God's word and diminished its sanctity, thus constituting a clear *Hillul Hashem*.

On this subject, his son Jacob notably described him as a "zealot, the son of a zealot, always ready to stand in the breach against *Hillul Hashem*"¹⁷⁸. This concern permeated Aboab's responsa, where he consistently advocated for compromise to prevent disputes and maintain communal harmony. His abhorrence of *Hillul Hashem* was a driving force behind his approach to financial negotiations,²³⁰ rabbinic arbitration, and halakhic rulings.²³¹ This same principle

²²⁸ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 98-99.

²²⁹ Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), coined the saying, "Where there's a rabbinic will, there's a halakhic way." Alice Shalvi, Shulamit Peck, and Sara Hurwitz, "[Blu Greenberg](https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/greenberg-blu)," *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/greenberg-blu>.¹⁷⁸ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 8.

²³⁰ See for example *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 36 where he cites his hesitation to harm "the honor of the Torah and its students (rabbis)" as reason for not publicizing a particular ruling which is in disagreement with the position of the rabbis in Hamburg and Amsterdam.

²³¹ See for example *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 56 where he rules against a large funeral procession leaving the *tehum* of Venice on the second day of *Yom Tov* (as the second day of a holiday usually only applies in the diaspora, certain halakhic leniencies might apply) primarily for fear of *Hillul Hashem* as gentiles will comment about this blatant disregard of our own commandments.

informed his reactions to the Sabbetai Zevi movement²³² and Nathan of Gaza.²³³ Recognizing the significance of *kiddush/Hillul Hashem* in Aboab's life offers important perspectives not only on his rabbinic position, his decisions and actions, but on prevailing societal and cultural norms as well.

Despite his personal humility and desire for a peaceful community, Aboab was no pushover. His son Jacob noted that his father was a "zealot the son of a zealot" ready to "remove obstacles from the paths of his people."²³⁴ This zeal was especially apparent in his impassioned

stance on *stam yeinam* (Gentile wine),²³⁵ where he took a hard line²³⁶ against the leniencies commonly adopted by Italian Jews.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, he did not shy away from castigating fellow rabbis, (although he was careful not to identify them by name), when he perceived that they failed in their duties as religious authorities. Thus, he writes "What will be the judgement [rationalization/ explanation] that he will give [when he stands] before the Judge of the entire world -- this rabbi who did not punish his student [when he saw him transgressing], rather

²³² See his letter to Rabbi Jacob Sasportas and my discussion below.

²³³ See appendix 4.

²³⁴ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 8.

²³⁵ See several uncompromising responsa on Stam Yeinam including: 55, 69, 49 as well as an entire Essay comprising three sections (Essay 4) devoted to the subject in his *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 70-100. In all of these, his stance on the subject is unyielding.

²³⁶ The issue of Stam Yeinam is a complicated one, and Aboab is certainly not the only one to engage with it. Compare his stance to the rulings of his colleague Rabbi Moshe Zacut in *Shu"t ha-Remez*, 50, <https://download.hebrewbooks.org/downloadhandler.ashx?req=1167> . Also see the responsa of the 14th century *RIBaSH* (Shu"t Ribash, 255) who was especially stringent regarding Stam Yeinam and whom Aboab cites in some of his rulings. Additionally, Aboab's stringencies regarding stam Yeinam were recognized in later works such as R. Haym Yosef David Azulai (HIDA) (*SHyurei Berakha Yore De'ah*, 123 §b) [Hebrewbooks_org_7733.pdf](https://www.hebrewbooks.org/7733.pdf). For further discussion, see Chapter III. ¹⁸⁶ Uncharacteristically, he employs sharp sarcasm when he writes that many of the "rationalizations for permitting *Stam Yeinam* are *diverei borut* (words of ignorance) but he will respond to them in keeping with the teachings of *Proverbs* 26:5, that instruct " *anech kesil ke-ivalto*" (answer a fool according to his folly) *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 91-92. ¹⁸⁷ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-zikhronot*, 99.

permitting him to drink his fill [referring to *Stam Yeinam* specifically, and as a metaphor for other indulgences] and fulfill his desires until he strayed le-tarbut ra'ah (left the fold)?...And what will he answer when he comes to judgment -- the teacher of the nation or the public preacher -- [regarding the fact] that he did not castigate them properly and did not prevent them from transgressing? ...Great is the weight upon this? [teacher's] neck....¹⁸⁷

Aboab's leadership extended far beyond the realm of halakha. In addition to his lifelong commitment to the Jewish settlement in the land of Israel—an occupation which will be explored in depth,²³⁷ he served several terms as the leader of the *pidyon shevuyim* (Captive Redemption) confraternity, dedicating personal funds, time, and political leverage to expedite the release of Jewish captives. His involvement ranged from raising funds within his community to leveraging

social and political pressure both locally and abroad to ensure the freedom of captives.¹⁸⁹ Aboab corresponded with Christian and Jewish agents alike, ensuring the safety and release of captives, particularly those held in Malta and during the Cossack revolts¹⁹⁰ in Poland (1648–49).¹⁹¹

Aboab's wealth and privilege played a significant role in both his personal and professional success. The *Hakham Zevi* remarked that "he always had great wealth in his home," while Aboab's son Jacob noted that he spent "treasures of money" supporting his students and generously hosting Torah scholars.¹⁹² This financial independence granted Aboab a level of

¹⁸⁹ The trade in captives and its close relationship with piracy has recently been a significant focus of the scholarly research on the early modern Mediterranean basin. These studies provide critical context for understanding Aboab's responsibilities and the operations of Italian *Pidyon Shevuyim* (captive redemption) societies.

Key works include Robert Davis's *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500–1800* (London: Macmillan, 2003); Daniel Hershenzon's *The Captive Sea: Slavery, Communication, and Commerce in Early Modern Spain and the Mediterranean* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University

²³⁷ See Chapter V.

Press, 2018). Recent studies also include Mario Klarer's *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019), Joshua M. White's *Piracy and Law in the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), and Tamar Herzig, "Slavery and Interethnic Sexual Violence: A Multiple Perpetrator Rape in Seventeenth-Century Livorno," *American Historical Review* 127, no. 1 (2022).

These works illuminate several dimensions of Aboab's efforts at Captive Redemption, and the challenges he faced. The distinction between captives held for their "exchange value" versus slaves kept for their "use factor" (Davis) would have shaped how Aboab approached each case, as the nature of a captive's status dictated the negotiation strategies and possible outcomes. The emphasis on letter-writing and written appeals as central tools in securing a captive's release (Hershenson) highlights the importance of Aboab's skillful use of written communication, reflecting the broader networks of diplomacy and advocacy he navigated. Furthermore, the unintended result of increased interaction between Muslims and Christians due to the Mediterranean pirate trade highlights the complex, cross-cultural dynamics that Aboab and his contemporaries had to navigate (Hershenson). This helps contextualize Aboab's frequent collaboration with Christian agents in places like Malta, where such relationships were crucial for securing the redemption of Jewish captives. For more on Jewish captive negotiations see Eliezer Bashan, *Shivyah ufedut ba-hevra ha-yehudit be-arzot ha-yam ha-tikhon (1391-1830)* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1978). For Jewish captives in Malta and insight into the workings of the Venetian *pidyon shevuyim* (captive release) society, see Cecil Roth, "The Jews of Malta," *Transactions (Jewish Historical Society of England)* 12 (1928-1931): 213-21.

¹⁹⁰ Adam Teller, *Rescue the Surviving Souls: The Great Jewish Refugee Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

¹⁹¹ Regarding Samuel Aboab's assistance for the 1648-9 captives see Meir Benayahu, *Igrot r' Shemuel Aboav ve-r' Moshe Zakut u-Venei Hugam be-Inyanei Erez Yisrael, yerushalayim unk.* (5715) 142, 163-164. To contextualize Samuel Aboab, the Venetian involvement, and the enormity of the captive and refugee crisis resulting from the 1648-1660 wars in Poland, see Teller, *Rescue the Surviving Souls*, part 2: "Capture, Slavery, and Ransom: The Trafficked in the Mediterranean World."

¹⁹² Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 5 With regard to students specifically, Jacob writes "...and his students shall eat an equal portion [to members of the household]" (*Devar Shemuel*, 10). In contrast, Elijah Capsali's description of Yeshiva students in Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 20, specifies "and those students [who were part of the Yeshiva] *would be fed from their own funds, but they ate together at one table*". It is difficult to assess from Aboab's writings exactly what the term "hosting" constituted in the early modern period. In his introduction, Jacob states, "his [Samuel Aboab's] home was wide open [to guests]" *Devar Shemuel*, 10. Additionally, when Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria fell ill freedom and assertiveness uncommon among his contemporaries. For example, when Aboab

sought to secure the release of the esteemed Palestinian scholar Rabbi Shmuel Germazian from

Maltese captivity, he used his influence within the *Pidyon Shevuyim* (Ransom of Captives)

society to raise the maximum ransom limit from the confraternity's established one hundred *reals*

to two hundred. In another instance, Aboab personally contributed an additional one hundred

reals to the amount allocated by the society for the release of Rabbi Hayim Navarro, an

influential scholar, and raised a further sixty *reals* from family and friends. This brought the total

ransom to two hundred and sixty *reals*, ensuring Navarro's immediate release.²³⁸

²³⁸ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 364.

Moreover, Aboab demonstrated both halakhic and diplomatic acumen by channeling the funds through an external source, thereby ensuring that the confraternity would not be compelled to violate its own bylaws. These bylaws were rooted in the Talmudic passage in *Masekhet Gittin* 4:6, which prohibits redeeming captives for more than their “market value” to prevent an unsustainable financial burden on Jewish communities. Initially, the confraternity set a cap of 100 reals for ransom payments, which was later increased to 200 reals under Aboab’s leadership.²³⁹ Aboab’s strategy of working around these limitations by utilizing channels outside the Pidyon Shevuyim society to secure a captive’s release, while not uncommon, highlight his

while serving as emissary from the land of Israel to Italy, Aboab writes that he recovered for a year and a half among his [Aboab’s] brothers and friends in Venice (Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 136), though the specifics of the recovery process, including where he stayed for such a long period of time, are not provided. Others use the term as well, without specifying. See for example Matt Goldish, “Rabbi Abraham Rovigo’s Home as a Center for Traveling Scholars,” *Italian Jewish Networks from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century: Bridging Europe and the Mediterranean*, ed. Francesca Bregoli, Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, and Guri Schwarz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 25-38. For more insight on the motivations, meaning, and implications of hosting in early modern Europe see David B. Goldstein and Marco Piana, eds., *Early Modern Hospitality* (Toronto: Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2021), as well as David B. Goldstein and Julia Reinhard Lupton, eds., *Shakespeare and Hospitality: Ethics, Politics, and Exchange* (New York: Routledge, 2016). Also see Debra Kaplan’s article “Nourishing a Community: Food, Hospitality, and Jewish Communal Spaces in Early Modern Frankfurt,” *AJS Review* 45, no. 2 (2021): 302-333, for some of the challenges involved in Jewish public hospitality in a constricted space like the ghetto in Frankfurt am Main.

determination to adhere to halakhic principles while successfully addressing urgent communal needs.

He was a principled man who insisted on paying all taxes “²⁴⁰ ” ke’ahad ha’am (like a regular person), despite his exemption as a Torah scholar, and adamantly refused any form of

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ 195 Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*,

9. ¹⁹⁶ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 9.

“loan or gift”¹⁹⁶. His son Jacob records that there was a brief period²⁴¹ when his father had lost his wealth, and the children were hungry. Still, his father maintained his refusal to accept “communal funds” for himself or his family. His one concession, writes Jacob, was acceptance of financial assistance for his students.

In contrast to rabbinic contemporaries such as Rabbi Leon Modena,¹⁹⁸ Rabbi Isaac Min ha-Leviim,¹⁹⁹ Rabbi Jacob Sasportas,²⁰⁰ and Rabbi Moshe Hagiz²⁴²—whose careers were often marked by controversy—Rabbi Samuel Aboab’s tenure stands out for its relative tranquility. This harmony was no mere coincidence. Aboab believed that fostering a peaceful and productive community reflected God’s will and exemplified *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of God’s name).²⁴³ He drew upon his considerable skills and extensive networks to conscientiously pursue this vision. A striking example of this emerges in a volley of correspondence with Rabbi Azaria Picho regarding the permissibility of using “pre-tanned” tefillin straps as opposed to those tanned *lishma* (specifically for ritual use).

Aboab initiates the discussion with Picho when he was troubled by the possibility of a ruling permitting the use of such straps, gaining traction in Italy. While deeply concerned about the potential halakhic repercussions of this ruling and determined to issue a public and

²⁴¹ Benayahu suggests this was in 1660 based on a letter from Samuel Aboab to Safed where he writes that he can no longer support the Beit Medrash and that he has found another donor to assist. Benayahu, *Dor ehad*, 250-251.

¹⁹⁸ Rabbi Leon Modena’s autobiography recounts frequent clashes and constant tensions with both rabbinic and communal authorities in his pursuit of a stable (and lucrative) rabbinic position. Cohen, *Life of Judah*, 104-5, 152.

¹⁹⁹ He became embroiled in fierce “herem wars” between Venetian rabbis, led by Rabbi Simḥa Luzzatto, and the rabbis of Ferrara, who ordained Isaac against Venice’s wishes. His book, “*Medaber Tahpukhot*” edited by Daniel Carpi, includes an extensive description of the events. ²⁰⁰ Dweck, *Dissident Rabbi*.

²⁴² Meir Benayahu, “Le-toledot Batei ha-midrash bi-yerushalayim ba-mei’a ha 17 (Pe’ulatam shel R. Yaakov Hagiz u-Moshe Beno le-Tovatom),” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 21 (1948): 22-24 and Havelin, “Le-toldot,” 113-92, 132-35.

²⁴³ Aboab’s concern with maintaining peace within the Jewish community as a form of *Kiddush Hashem*, and his concern with its counterpart *Hillul Hashem* is a thread that runs through all his works.

unequivocal refutation of the leniency, Aboab was equally concerned about preserving the dignity of the rabbi who had endorsed it. To this end, Aboab was determined to avoid naming the rabbi or harshly criticizing the ruling's halakhic flaws and its potential negative impact on Italian Jewry.²⁴⁴ Balancing these priorities required strategic thinking and diplomatic action.

Aboab's conversation with Picho concerning this matter unfolds across three responsa²⁴⁵ allowing us to observe Aboab's commitment to his goal, as well as the creativity he applies in formulating and evaluating multiple solutions with his mentor. In his first proposal, Aboab demonstrates his knowledge of "current rabbinic events" and the ease with which he navigated within the Italian rabbinic network to achieve his objective. He suggests that Rabbi Azaria enlist the help of his grandson, Rabbi Judah Picho, a master scribe and respected rabbi. At the time, Judah Picho was involved in drafting a public ruling that prohibited a separate leniency related to the proper inscription of the letter "kaf" in Torah scrolls. Aboab proposes appending the tefillin strap ruling to Picho's teshuva thereby issuing a comprehensive general ruling regarding ritual scribal practices. This strategy would address the problematic tefillin strap leniency indirectly,

thereby avoiding any explicit criticism of the lenient rabbi or sparking halakhic controversy on this specific issue.

²⁴⁴ In S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 7, Aboab raises the specific concern that the halakhic legitimacy of Italian Jews' tefillin will be questioned by Jews in other communities should the leniency become widespread in Italy.

²⁴⁵ See S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsa 7, 15, 19.. See an extensive discussion of this responsa series in Chapter II, "Building a Consensus."

Rabbi Azaria Picho, however, rejected this proposal, though the responsa do not specify his objections. Aboab returned to the “drawing board” posing a second, and then a third solution. The third solution, outlined in *Responsum 19*, was ultimately adopted by Aboab, Picho, and a cohort of Italian rabbis. This approach framed the tefillin strap question as a halakhic query posed for collective deliberation—a format I term a “consensus responsum” in my chapter on responsa. *Responsum 19* includes a copy of this public query: “The question is asked: Is one permitted to buy leather [straps] that have not been tanned *lishma* [specifically for ritual use]?” Italian rabbis contributed their opinions, and once they reached consensus that only *lishmatanned* straps could be used for tefillin, the ruling was publicized with the affixed rabbinic signatures, circulated, and later preserved in *Devar Shemuel*.

This example offers a glimpse into Aboab's character, demonstrating that the longevity and stability of his career not only reflect his prominence as a rabbi but also attest to his skill in navigating communal affairs with tact and diplomacy.

Aboab's correspondence with Rabbi Jacob Sasportas during the height of the Sabbatean movement²⁴⁶ reveals additional qualities that distinguished him as a communal leader and contributed to his long-term success.

Sasportas initiated the contact with Aboab, as he did with several others in late 1665 or early 1666 as the movement was rapidly escalating. In a period rife with fear, conflict, and religious fervor, Aboab's calm and deliberate approach stands in stark contrast to Sasportas'

²⁴⁶ Jacob Sasportas first wrote to Samuel Aboab as the Sabbatian movement was growing rapidly. While his letter is undated, the stories and events he includes suggest it was written in late 1665. Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 497-498, dates Aboab's response to Sasportas in February 1666 which would corroborate my suggestion regarding the date of Sasportas' initial letter.

impassioned and polemical style. Sasportas' letters, brimming with fiery critique and urgency, include dramatic statements such as:

I called out in a great voice [va-ekra be-kol gadol] ...and I said to them [the communities and their leaders], if you will not hasten and fear for yourselves, have mercy on others...for I hear and understand the future, but you see only the one [present] vision...I was like a screamer to whom no one responds...and I called out in a great voice: 'Cease and know that you are among feral wolves, scattered lambs of Israel, lest they attack you and devour you [yirmesu ve-tarfu], and no one will save us, and we will surely die.

Sasportas also unleashes harsh critiques of rabbis and leaders influenced by Sabbetai Zevi, devoting no fewer than twenty-three lines of his letter to Aboab to belittle their qualifications.²⁴⁷ He dismisses them as lacking in both knowledge and experience, writing:

They are not yod'ei sefer (knowledgeable people)]; they are even [ignorant of] a 'light [easy] tractate.' Nor do they have bread, new clothes -- and even old ones [items symbolizing leadership or status²⁴⁸]. Nor rabbinic robes, not even tattered ones. Among them are teachers instructing others before they themselves have 'ripened,' and this is [the fulfillment] of the prophet's curse: 'The youth will be their officers.'

In contrast, Aboab's response reads like becalming oil spread upon a rather turbulent sea. His tone is measured and inclusive, addressing many of Sasportas' concerns while avoiding the condescension and alienation that characterized Sasportas' critique. Aboab is pragmatic,

²⁴⁷ Rabbi Jacob Sasportas, *Sefer zizhat novel zevi*, 65-66.

²⁴⁸ A reference to Isaiah 3:6 "I cannot succor for in my home there is neither bread nor clothing."

focusing primarily on safeguarding Jewish communities from the physical and spiritual dangers

posed by the Sabbatian movement. His correspondence bears the hallmarks of a true leader: acuity, care, diplomacy, and foresight. We must also consider that Aboab, as an experienced communal leader recognized the delicacy and tension of the situation and was treading very carefully here, adopting a more conservative rhetoric lest he insult members of his own community during this very delicate period.

Aboab begins by dismissing the Sabbatian “miracle tales” – a matter of great concern to Sasportas, with a blanket refutation based on the stories’ lack of corroboration: “They [Sabbatian followers] believe any sign for the good, even if it is only ‘according to one [witness].’”²⁴⁹ He critiques the hysteria surrounding Shabbetai Zevi, pointing out that it contradicts the prophetic vision of the Messiah as a universally exalted figure: (the glorious of all generations, a banner upon the mountains) “*pe'er kol ha-dorot omed le-nes harim*”.

While Aboab does not shy away from rebuking hesitant leaders, his critique is concise and precise, avoiding Sasportas’ extended invective. In one striking line, he laments: “*The elders are taking their cues from the young.*” He then shifts his focus to urging leaders to encourage genuine repentance rather than accepting the forms of repentance promoted by Shabbetai Zevi.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ afilu al pi ehad Aboab draws upon the halakhic principle that an account is considered credible only when corroborated by the testimony of two witnesses. “al pi shenayim edim yakum davar” (Deut. 19:15)

²⁵⁰ The waves of repentance that accompanied the Sabbatian movement muddled the waters for many rabbis, since the drive towards repentance lent the movement legitimacy. Some rabbis hesitated to intervene, fearing they might discourage genuine repentance—a concern Jacob Sasportas relates from rabbis in Amsterdam (*zizit novel zevi*, 66). Aboab hoped to question Shabbetai Zevi and slow the movement’s spread while guiding the repentance endeavors toward true spiritual renewal, which would ultimately result in true redemption. ²¹⁰ Memorial for the People of Israel see appendix 4

Aboab's primary concern, however, was the safety of the Jewish people as he feared the reaction to the messianic excitement. This fear, which he later reiterated during his famous 1668 meeting with Nathan of Gaza,²¹⁰ remained central to his thinking throughout the Sabbatean saga.

In his correspondence, Aboab emphasizes: "It is *our obligation* (my emphasis) to be extremely wary of the hatred of our enemies and to warn each community: You are arousing jealousy [and hatred] upon us from the nations of the world...and they will [ultimately] mock us...*Nothing takes precedence over pikuah nefesh (saving a life)* (my emphasis). Rather than issuing fiery denunciations, Aboab's strategy focused more on guiding communities, including his own, to reduce public clamor, and avoid provoking external threats.

Aboab concludes by trying to defuse Sasportas' intensity, by counseling overall caution and patience, and advising "vehazne'a lekhet" (a restrained (lit. modest) approach) until further clarity emerges. He awaits guidance from the *hakhamim* of Israel and Istanbul, from whom he has not yet received any word, and emphasizes that he will share the truth, upon hearing it from those scholars, whatever it is found to be.

The comparison highlights Aboab's intellectual acumen and leadership experience and abilities, something we will note again in his interrogation of Nathan of Gaza himself and his decision to publicize and disseminate Nathan's recantation in his 1668 *Zikaron Li-Vnei Yisra'el*. Aboab cuts through the complexities of Sasportas' arguments to address the critical issues: the lack of evidence for Shabbetai Zevi's messianic claims, the failure of the movement to align with prophetic expectations, and the physical dangers posed to the Jewish community. Aboab's clarity of thought, concern for communal safety, and measured response reflect the hallmarks of his successful leadership. His ability to evaluate both the immediate crisis and potential long-term

consequences enabled him to navigate one of the most volatile periods in Jewish history with restraint, foresight, and an unwavering commitment to the preservation of his people.

Chapter II Rabbi Samuel Aboab as Author of Rabbinic Responsa

I. Introduction:

Rabbi Samuel Aboab, a remarkably prolific author, left an indelible mark on the world of rabbinic scholarship.¹ Four diaries documented his extensive correspondence. Unfortunately, only two of these have survived, spanning the years 1636 to 1666.²⁵¹ These notebooks, written almost entirely in Aboab's own hand, contain nearly 300 letters, that include a wide range of materials encompassing personal correspondence, financial transactions, and halakhic responsa. Many of these remain unpublished.²⁵²

The correspondence preserved in these diaries offers invaluable insight into Aboab's activities beyond his purely rabbinic duties. They highlight his significant efforts to financially support communities and scholars in the land of Israel,²⁵³ his negotiations for the release of

¹ In the latest edition of *Devar Shemuel* (Jerusalem: Zikhron Aharon, 2022) the editor, Yonatan Bleier, has carefully annotated the responsa. As part of his work, he cites numerous later halakhic materials, such as the renowned

²⁵¹ For a discussion of evidence concerning the other two notebooks, see M. Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 257-258 and Bezalel Devlitsky, "The Hasid R. Samuel Aboab and His Letters," *Kovetz ets hayim* 2 (2008): 219-33, 224-226 [in Hebrew]. The responsa recorded in the notebooks matches the text of those that were published in the *Devar Shemuel* such that there are no significant omissions, additions, or changes identifiable between the two texts. This suggests that R. Jacob Aboab compiled the *Devar Shemuel* using his father's notebooks. There are however, several responsa that Jacob did not include in the *Devar Shemuel* and remain in manuscript form. For example, there is a letter from the *Montefiore manuscript*, Aboab, *Igrot* 92 V and R, on the subject of ritual tanning of tefillin straps that does not appear in the *Devar Shemuel*. Additionally, Benayahu (*Dor Ehad*, 43) records an instance in which Rabbi Judah Ghiron of Florence asserts that *Devar Shemuel* contains only a fraction of an extensive halakhic exchange between his father, Rabbi Yohanan Ghiron, and Aboab. Since the responsum in *Devar Shemuel* matches the manuscript version found in Aboab's notebooks—neither of which includes the additional responsa published by Rabbi Judah Ghiron—Devlitsky (225n16) suggests that Aboab may have selectively edited his own notebooks according to his own criteria.

²⁵² Refer to my introduction for a detailed analysis of the notebooks, including their published and unpublished content.

²⁵³ For example, the notebooks contain forty-four letters to Safed alone. The majority of these were published in Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 183-257. See also Aboab, *Igrot*, 67V

twentieth century halakhic code, *Mishna Berurah* of Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, and Rabbi Solomon Eiger's nineteenth-century halakhic work, *Gilayon Maharsh" a* who refer to or engage with the responsa of the *Devar Shemuel*. For some examples, see Responsum 76n422, Responsum 280n805, and Responsum 319n871. Jewish captives in Malta,²⁵⁴ and his dedication to redeeming captives in general,²⁵⁵ and

reuniting refugees with their families in the wake of the Chmielnicki massacres in Poland.²⁵⁶

As part of this impressive record, Aboab's son Jacob compiled and edited three-hundred and seventy-five of Aboab's halakhic responsa and published them under the title *Devar Shemuel*.

Compared to his Italian contemporaries, the corpus of Rabbi Samuel Aboab's responsa is exceptional in both scale and scope. The renowned sixteenth-century Rabbi Meir Katzenellenbogen (the Maharam of Padua) published ninety responsa. Among seventeenth-century rabbis, Aboab's close friend and colleague Rabbi Moshe Zacut produced sixty-five responsa, Rabbi Joseph Ergas' *Divrei Yosef* includes sixty-eight, and Rabbi Leon Modena's *Ziknei Yehuda* contains one hundred and thirty. The nearly four hundred responsa in Aboab's *Devar Shemuel* provide an imposing contrast.

In addition to his responsa, Aboab authored extensive halakhic essays on the ritual laws of divorce,²⁵⁷ *safrut* (ritual scribal writing),²⁵⁸ and circumcision, in which he highlighted areas of widespread negligence or laxity and offered suggestions for improvement and correction. For example, in his essays on ritual scribal²⁵⁹ writing and circumcision,²⁶⁰ Aboab complained that sacred rituals and complex halakhic practices were increasingly being performed by individuals lacking the requisite training, experience, and halakhic expertise. He advocated for systematic

²⁵⁴ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 361-381.

²⁵⁵ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 142.

²⁵⁶ This letter has not yet been published. In it, Aboab tells of a young woman who was redeemed from slavery in the aftermath of the revolts, and he attempts to reunite her with her father, who refuses to accept her back into his home, Montefiore 66 R.

²⁵⁷ Rabbi Samuel Aboab, *Mazkeret ha-gittin she-nitenu be-venezia ve-nisderu al yedei Shemuel Aboab*.

²⁵⁸ David Judah Arditi, *Sefer Ta'avat David* (Salonika, 1895).

²⁵⁹ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 162..

²⁶⁰ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 164.

and documented halakhic and practical training as well as consistent rabbinic oversight, to remedy the situation. These essays circulated widely, and their influence is clear from their

incorporation into contemporary works. For example, Aboab's essay on laws and medical practices related to circumcision was included in the *Pinkas Mohel* (Circumciser's Guide)²⁶¹ compiled by his colleague, Rabbi Benjamin haCohen of Reggio.²⁶² Similarly, his essay on ritual scribal writing was republished as late as 1895 in Salonika, where Rabbi David Judah Arditi included it as the central essay in *Sefer Ta'avat David*, a pamphlet for ritual scribes.²⁶³ Aboab's *Sefer ha-Zichronot*²⁶⁴ further illustrates his active involvement in the religious and scholarly currents of his time. The work, containing close to twenty comprehensive treatises,²⁶⁵ addresses additional halakhic and ritual topics that Aboab believed required improved rabbinic supervision and attention. With its distinctive, even unique, structure and content, *Sefer ha-Zichronot* reflects Aboab's clear goal, to enhance both the rigor and understanding of religious practices. He pursued this objective by methodically exploring these chosen topics and offering practical solutions to improve adherence to the issues he considered most pressing in his generation.¹⁷

Aboab's diverse writings offer a portal enabling us to understand him, both as an active communal leader and as a rabbi attuned to the religious, social, and cultural challenges of his

²⁶¹ This "guide" includes prayers, practices (*minhagim*), and liturgical poetry (*piyutim*) relating to circumcision in addition to Aboab's essay.

²⁶² In Rabbi Benjamin ben Eliezer haCohen Vitale of Reggio. *Pinkas Mohel*, Digital reproduction of original manuscript, Ktiv: The International Collection of Digitized Hebrew Manuscripts. [https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/manuscripts/hebrew-manuscripts/viewerpage?vid=MANUSCRIPTS#d=\[PNX_MANUSCRIPTS9900018023202051711,FL157289655\]](https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/manuscripts/hebrew-manuscripts/viewerpage?vid=MANUSCRIPTS#d=[PNX_MANUSCRIPTS9900018023202051711,FL157289655])

²⁶³ Arditi, *Ta'avat David*.

²⁶⁴ See chapter III and IV for more extensive discussion of this work and its significance.

²⁶⁵ The *Sefer ha-Zichronot* comprises ten principal essays, but many are further divided into sub-categories

¹⁷ See chapter IV on *Sefer ha-Zichronot* and rabbinic authority

time. His correspondence and prolific responsa reveal a man deeply engaged with the pressing issues of his era, while his essays reflect his commitment to addressing halakhic lacuna he perceived within his generation.

This chapter examines Samuel Aboab's halakhic responsa and rabbinic correspondence, tracing their development from his early years as a young scholar in Venice, through his tenure as rabbi of the emerging community in Verona, and culminating with his peak years as a prominent halakhic authority ruling on halakhic questions (Hebrew: *Posek*) in Venice. The responsa help us to investigate several questions that will be crucial for this dissertation. What did it mean to be a rabbi in seventeenth-century Italy? What expectations did rabbis have for the religious lives of their communities?

Going beyond their specifics, the responsa further reveal Aboab establishing himself as an active participant in the rabbinic sphere, and in the world of communications among rabbis during the early modern period. The wide range of subjects addressed, and the broad geographic spread of his correspondence, showcase the vibrant and dynamic intellectual landscape of Mediterranean rabbinic scholarship—a world that remains underexplored. Aboab's responsa not only demonstrate his contributions to this intellectual world, but also illustrate how responsa as a genre was used by him and his contemporaries to build, maintain, and strengthen a wide-reaching and inter-connected rabbinic and halakhic network—a rabbinic world of letters.

II. Mining a Responsum: To Rabbi Joshua Leib Lonigo of Ferrara, 1636.

The opening responsum in *Devar Shemuel*, written by Samuel Aboab in 1636 in Venice, shortly before his family relocated to Verona, is addressed to Rabbi Leib Lonigo of Ferrara. It is a purely “academic” responsum, without practical relevance or immediate halakhic ramifications. Still, it provides glimpses into the intellectual and scholarly pursuits of the young

rabbi, and highlights the issues that were prominent in the rabbinic world to which Aboab and his correspondent belonged.

The responsum delves into the precise interpretation of a comment in the *Nimukei Yosef*, a medieval commentary on Rabbi Isaac Alfasi [the RY"Y]²⁶⁶. The subject under discussion is the principle that "the plaintiff has to give the benefit of the doubt." In his commentary, *Nimukei Yosef* is unclear regarding whom he identifies as the plaintiff and whom the respondent in the case under consideration. Aboab and Lonigo, in their correspondence, attempt to clarify the *Nimukei Yosef's* intent through meticulous analysis of his wording. Notably, their correspondence reveals an implicit assumption that both parties were referencing the same edition of the *Nimukei Yosef* and, by extension, the RY"Y.²⁶⁷

Books in Venice: In the following paragraph, Aboab directs Lonigo's attention to another text he is confident will interest him, quoting at length from Yosef Shalom's *Derekh Tamim*²⁰-- a lengthy, double-columned collection of comments on Alfasi, published in Venice in 1622.²⁶⁸ Aboab's decision to quote the text at length, rather than refer Lonigo to it, suggests that Lonigo was not in Venice, with its renowned publishing houses and abundance of printed works, and thus may not have had access to this particular work.

Samuel's focus on Alfasi's post-Talmudic work, rather than directly engaging with

²⁶⁶ *Nimukei Yosef* was written by Josef ibn Habib, a Catalanian and successor of the RaN (Rabbeinu Nissim ben Reuven). In modern publications, his commentary, like that of the RaN is appended to the Halakhic condensation of the Talmud of Rabbi Yizhak Alfasi (RY"Y), an 11th-century Moroccan scholar.

²⁶⁷ Bomberg published the RY"Y as *Sefer Rav Alfasi* with the commentary of the *Nimukei Yosef* in 1522–23. For more on the publication history of *Nimukei Yosef* see Yaakov S. Spiegel, "Nimukei Yosef" by Rabbi Joseph Haviva [Hebrew]. *Sidra: A Journal for the Study of Rabbinic Literature*, Vol 4 (1988), 111–162. ²⁰ Of note: Aboab does not mention the author, Yosef Shalom.

²⁶⁸ *Sefer Tamim* is part of a volume containing four separate treatises. The first of these treatises is Tam ibn Yahya's *Ohalei Tam*, which Aboab uses as the title for the entire volume.

Talmudic sources, is also noteworthy. This choice may, in part, reflect the restricted access to Talmudic texts following their burning and banning in late sixteenth-century Italy.²⁶⁹ More significantly, however, it likely stems from Samuel's desire to share the newly printed *Derekh*

Tamim with his colleague, Lonigo, and to express his concerns regarding its content and approach, now widely accessible in its published form.

Aboab defending tradition: Progressing further into the responsum, Aboab articulates his concerns—offering an early glimpse into his fervent, even zealous, dedication to halakhic tradition. In his commentary, *Sefer Tamim* posits that the *Nimukei Yosef* “got it backwards,” mistakenly ascribing the role of plaintiff to the respondent and vice versa. Aboab's response to this assertion exhibits an almost instinctive reaction: “I was alarmed by what I saw, and I was distressed by what I heard. How could one, emboldened by his own thoughts, entertain such ideas about the *Nimukei Yosef*? How could he [*Derekh Tamim*] regard his words [those of the *Nimukei Yosef*] as shards of broken pottery [easily dismissed], suggesting that he misspoke [literally: his mouth betrayed him] in a matter [so obvious] that even school children would know...”

This incident is the first of many in which Aboab passionately defends the status of the earlier authorities.²⁷⁰ The notion that a sixteenth-century commentary could so readily dismiss the work of a much earlier halakhic predecessor deeply troubled him. His commitment to upholding and preserving revered aspects of halakhic tradition—the principle that earlier rulings must be approached with respect and caution—became a defining feature of Aboab's life and

²⁶⁹ Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 131.

²⁷⁰ this will be explored further in this chapter as well as in Chapter III.

scholarship. His dedication to meticulous and faithful transmission of halakhic knowledge in this initial foray into the rabbinic world of responsa, foreshadows his broader mission to construct and safeguard the traditions of Jewish law.

A rare expression of personal emotion in Aboab's responsa: Despite its esoteric “academic” content, the responsum held great significance for both Aboab and Lonigo. The responsum opens with Aboab's heartfelt apology for his delayed response, explaining that his father had been gravely ill for many weeks, requiring Samuel's constant care. He describes his ordeal vividly and at great length.²⁷¹ “I was constantly at his side...with a broken heart...and sleep was absent from my eyes for worry...until God cured him...may He be praised.”

While profuse apologies for delayed correspondence are a common feature of responsa,²⁷² Aboab's detailed account of his father's illness and his own anxieties is unusual for him. In subsequent responsa to Rabbi Lonigo, all of which could be similarly qualified as “academic,” Aboab remains strictly on point and never engages in a personal exchange.²⁷³ Throughout the rest of the *Devar Shemuel*, expressions of emotion, to the extent they are present, are directly related to the responsa. For example, “I was overjoyed to receive your responsum...”.²⁷ Only in his personal correspondence (as opposed to halakhic responsa) with friends or associates, such as

²⁷¹ seven lines of the responsum are dedicated to this apology.

²⁷² Bernard Cooperman, “Defining Deviance, Negotiating Norms: Raphael Meldola in Livorno, Pisa, and Bayonne,” in *Religious Changes and Cultural Transformations in the Early Modern Western Sephardic Communities*, ed. Yosef Kaplan (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 174-75, for similar expressions in the correspondence between Raphael Meldola and Joseph Ergas.

²⁷³ See for example, S.Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, Responsum 5 where he opens with the simple word “Response:”²⁷ For some examples of these flowery expressions of excitement and joy see S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 55 and 56.²⁸ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 194 in a letter to R. Joseph de-Leiria he shares the sadness at the passing of his aunt and the joy of a betrothal and a circumcision in the family.

Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria, does Aboab share more extensive personal revelations.²⁸

Background of a migration: Perhaps this unusual display of personal emotion can be attributed to Aboab's relative youth and inexperience at the time. Yet, a closer examination of his correspondent, Rabbi Leib Lonigo, the period in which the letter was written, and the purely "academic" nature of the responsum, suggest that there is more at play here. Who, then, was Rabbi Leib Lonigo? According to *Toldot Gedolei Yisrael*—the standard biographical dictionary

of the field,²⁷⁴ he is Joshua Leib Lonigo, who lived in Ferrara before eventually moving to Venice. S. Simonsohn, however, has demonstrated that the opposite is true. Rabbi Leib Lonigo actually began his rabbinic career in Venice, studying under Rabbi Ben Zion Sarfati, with his ordination confirmed (*haskamah*) by Rabbi Leon Modena.²⁷⁵ He did not leave for Ferrara until 1636,²⁷⁶ where he remained thereafter.³² In 1625 while still in Venice, Lonigo signed a *Haskama* for the book *Sefer haYashar*. This indicates that he was senior to Aboab, who was only fifteen at the time. Though Lonigo was older than Aboab, by 1636, when Lonigo left for Ferrara, they were already colleagues and friends. Why did Lonigo leave Venice, and what is the significance of his responsum to Aboab almost immediately after settling in Ferrara? The departure of Rabbi Leib Lonigo from Venice is closely tied to a tragic scandal that unfolded in the Venetian Ghetto in March 1636. Rabbi Leon Modena details the event in his autobiography

²⁷⁴ Nepi-Ghirondi in *Toledot Gedolei Yisrael* (Trieste: 1853) hebrewbooks.org/7541 25§7:

²⁷⁵ Leon Modena and Shlomo Simonsohn, *She-elot ve-teshuvot ziknei Yehuda* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1955), 45, 57. Also see pg.179 for a transcription of the *haskamah*.

²⁷⁶ Moses Avigdor Shulvass, "Sippur ha-zarot she-avru be-italia: yozei la-or al yadi," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 22 (1949): 1–21. ³² Several of his responsa exist from his period in Ferrara: see for example Shlomo Simonsohn, "Some Disputes on Music in the Synagogue in Pre-Reform Days," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 34

(1966): 99–110, 103. Nepi-Ghirondi, 125 §7 also mentions having manuscripts in his, Ghirondi's, own collection that Lonigo wrote to the *parnasim* of Monferatto in the name of the Yeshiva Kelalit of Ferrara in 1646 regarding the rights of loan bankers.

*Life of Judah*²⁷⁷: Two influential Jewish merchants—Grassin Scaramella, and Sabbadin Catelano—conspired to store stolen goods valued at 70,000 ducats, including silk, silken garments, and gold, within the ghetto. When the theft was exposed, Modena describes the ensuing panic. Many Jews, including his own daughter and son-in-law, fled to escape persecution, while others faced imprisonment or banishment. The scandal and its far-reaching

consequences served as the impetus for R. Simone Luzzatto's renowned *Discorso Circa il Stato de gl'Hebrei* in 1638 in defense of the Jewish people.²⁷⁸

Rabbi Azaria Picho, then serving as the rabbi of the Talmud Torah community, alludes to this calamity in his *Bina la-Ittim*, emphasizing the severe financial burden placed on Venice's wealthy Jews, who were compelled to pay heavy fines and repay the stolen funds. Is it possible that the upheaval caused by this scandal drove the Aboab family—esteemed merchant-bankers who likely bore a significant financial toll—to depart Venice and reestablish themselves in Verona, where we find them as early as 1637?

A contemporary account of the event, titled *Sippur ha-Zarot she-Avru be-Italya* ("An Account of the hardships which transpired in Italy"²⁷⁹)³¹ describes how Venetian Jews narrowly avoided expulsion as a result of the scandal. Despite this reprieve, the anonymous author notes

²⁷⁷ Marc Cohen, *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi*: 143–46.

²⁷⁸ For more on this scandal, see Bernard Dov Cooperman, "Cultural Pluralism from the Ghetto: What Might It Have Meant? In " *Non contrarii, ma diversi: The Question of the Jewish Minority in Early Modern Italy* (2020): 21–43. 23 fn6,7.

²⁷⁹ My own translation.

that many prominent Jews fled to Ferrara to avoid persecution, including Rabbi Leib Lonigo, who, “despite his innocence in the scandal,” sought refuge there.²⁸⁰

The “backstory” to Aboab’s first responsum offers important perspective. It was a purely academic exchange since there was nothing else to talk about—Rabbi Leib Lonigo had only recently arrived in Ferrara and did not face any immediate, pressing concerns requiring resolution. What was urgent, however, was his need to maintain connections with former colleagues and associates, despite his forced relocation to the much smaller Jewish community of Ferrara. Determined to remain engaged and relevant within the broader rabbinic world, Lonigo

promptly initiated this scholarly exchange with his old friend and colleague who remained in the Venetian metropolis, Samuel Aboab.

In his response to Lonigo, Aboab notably adopts a more personal tone. Perhaps this is a reflection of the shared trauma his family endured in the aftermath of the Venetian scandal.²⁸¹ While his later responsa assumed a more formal tone, Aboab’s initial personal response might also be understood as an attempt to establish rapport and solidify the foundation of his correspondence with Lonigo—a relationship that would later develop into a more conventional rabbinic exchange.

Building bridges through responsa: When Aboab himself relocated to the small town of Verona in 1637, he maintained a vibrant “academic” correspondence with Lonigo. The

²⁸⁰ Shulvass, “Sippur ha-zarot,” 18.

²⁸¹ Aboab does not cite the scandal specifically, but Picho’s allusion to the grave toll it took on the wealthy Jews of Venice combined with Aboab’s lengthy recounting of his father’s illness and the Aboab family’s relocation to Verona in 1637 suggests that the scandal did not leave them unscathed.

importance Aboab placed on Lonigo as a rabbinic correspondent, as well as the mutual benefits of their exchange, are particularly evident in a responsum issued by Aboab around 1642.²⁸² In this responsum, Aboab assembled the signatures of numerous rabbis for a consensus ruling prohibiting the use of phylactery (*tefillin*) straps which were not tanned in a ritually acceptable manner.²⁸³

While the majority of the signatories, including Rabbi Leon Modena, Rabbi Azaria Picho and Rabbi Simha Luzzatto were notably Venetian, the last two are from Ferrara: Rabbi Leib Lonigo and his young protogee,²⁸⁴ Rabbi Paltiya ben Hannanya of Moncelisi who writes that his

master, Rabbi Lonigo, “has made me a slave [devoted student] forever...and I could not refuse a great one like him..who commanded me.. to affix my signature...”

This brief glimpse into the exchange between Samuel Aboab and Rabbi Leib Lonigo early in Aboab’s rabbinic career, offers valuable insights into the development, functions, and inner workings of a rabbinic network. The broader implications of these interactions—particularly the strategic use of responsa to construct a rabbinic “republic of letters” and to reinforce halakhic authority—will be explored further in this chapter and will offer a more profound understanding of the mechanics and significance of rabbinic correspondence in this period.

The responsa exchanged between Aboab and Lonigo, which we have categorized as

²⁸² The consensus responsum is not dated, but the last responsum concerning this topic, responsum 19--in which the idea of publishing a consensus responsum is broached, is dated 1642.

²⁸³ See my discussion of this consensus ruling, and the process of issuing such a ruling, below.

²⁸⁴ Nepi-Ghirondi *Toledot Gedolei Yisrael* 125§7 identifies Moncelisi as a contemporary of Lonigo, Zacut and Aboab. Simonsohn, “Some Disputes,” 102, identifies Lonigo as the lead rabbi of the Yeshiva Klalit in Ferrara while Moncilisi was a younger student/colleague.

“academic”, invite a deeper exploration of the significance of this genre within Rabbi Samuel Aboab’s scholarly world. Responsa are typically understood as serving a practical purpose—providing immediate rulings or opinions on matters of halakhic concern. Nevertheless, more than twenty-five percent of the responsa included in *Devar Shemuel* fall into the category of purely “academic” exchanges, with little to no direct practical application. This raises an intriguing question: Why did Aboab, Lonigo, and many of their contemporaries devote considerable effort to such theoretical exchanges?

III. Responsa as a Nexus for Intellectual Exchange and the Development of Halakhic Thought.

One of the most fascinating and under-appreciated functions of responsa was its role as a medium for scholarly exchange, with academic responsa serving as a primary form of intellectual “currency”. Aboab, as a prominent figure in the rabbinic world of his time, actively participated in what can aptly be termed a “rabbinic republic of letters”.⁴¹ Over one hundred of his published responsa, addressed to correspondents as far away as Poland, Izmir, and the land of Israel, were less addressed to immediate practical matters than to more “abstract academic letters.” They are treatises on talmudic and halakhic principles, and are vehicles through which Aboab connected with local as well as foreign scholars in a dynamic and creative exchange of ideas.⁴² Through this mode of interaction, Aboab not only familiarized himself with scholars beyond his immediate circle, but also gained access and contributed to the development of new strains of halakhic, Talmudic, and biblical interpretation. Exploring Aboab’s involvement in such scholarly correspondence, provides insight into the impact of responsa on his own intellectual development and the broader landscape of halakhic thought.

Thus, in addition to personal correspondence,⁴³ Rabbi Samuel Aboab exchanged several letters of a scholarly nature with the emissary Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria⁴⁴ as well as R Juda Crispin

and Rabbi Solomon Ashkenazi of Safed.⁴⁵ In Aboab's letter to the latter, he poignantly conveys his intention to "engage in studying, thrust and parry, enjoying their knowledge, and drinking, with thirst, their words," thus manifesting a clear departure from urgent halakhic or communal matters. These letters served as a method for Aboab to reach out and fortify relationships that might otherwise wither or attenuate due to a lack of exchange.

Second, Aboab utilized scholarly correspondence to develop and maintain his rabbinic network beyond what was required to resolve immediate exigencies. This network ultimately

⁴¹ On the effort to construct a Jewish "republic of letters" among sixteenth-century intellectuals, see Bernard Dov Cooperman, "Amicitia and Hermeticism: Paratext as Key to Judah Moscato's *Nefutsot Yehudah*," in *Rabbi Judah Moscato and the Jewish Intellectual World of Mantua in the 16th–17th Centuries*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 79–104. For the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century context, see Cooperman, "Defining Deviance," 161. ⁴² Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 190, 192, 194, 195.

⁴⁴ See S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, Responsa 24, 29, 34 for examples.

⁴⁵ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 51.

proved instrumental in addressing urgent communal crises, such as the redemption of captives, captured in Malta.²⁸⁵ For instance, when Rabbi Samuel Germazian, a prominent Jerusalem scholar, was captured by Maltese pirates, Aboab, despite having no personal connection to him, received word of his capture through his extended network and reacted swiftly. He mobilized resources through the *Pidyon Shevuyim* society, contributed his own personal funds, and secured additional contributions from his brothers and his brother-in-law, Rabbi Shlomo Shanah Tova, to facilitate Germazian's release.²⁸⁶

In addition to his active work on the *Pidyon Shevuyim* society, Aboab employed this network to coordinate and oversee fundraising efforts for impoverished communities and scholars in the land of Israel. A series of eight letters exchanged between Aboab and the

²⁸⁵ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 361–381. These are transcripts of letters exchanged with, or concerning, Jewish captives in Malta.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 367.

emissaries Rabbi David haLevi and Rabbi Yom Tov Zahalon, detail Aboab's meticulous guidance of their fundraising endeavors following calamities in Safed in 1654.²⁸⁷ These letters vividly demonstrate not only the breadth and efficacy of Aboab's rabbinic network, but also his unwavering commitment to utilizing it in service of the causes to which he was devoted. Thus, for instance, Aboab advised the emissaries to prioritize Amsterdam over Venice, reserving fundraising in Venice for a later date, explaining that the latter had recently funded the construction of a new synagogue and would likely be less financially responsive.²⁸⁸ Additionally, Aboab provided letters of introduction to communities in Amsterdam, Casale, Ferrara, and Flanders, while issuing follow-up instructions regarding the collection and distribution of the funds. Similarly, his correspondence with his rabbinic colleagues, Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria and

Rabbi Jacob Hagiz include frequent references to funds he had raised, requests for confirmation of receipt of those funds, or specific instructions for their allocation.²⁸⁹

A letter from Aboab in Verona to R. Haym Norzi in Mantua directs us to another important aspect of responsa and the rabbinic network.²⁹⁰ Aboab writes to:

Inquire after [the well-being] of a dear and honored member of our community, Rabbi Jacob ben Rabbi Abraham Karo who desires to dwell in the shelter of your holy communities. And he requested of me to recommend him to your excellency in Torah, that he [Rabbi Haym Norzi] should treat him well, light his way (guide him), and assist him..so he [the young Rabbi Jacob] will find favor in the eyes of

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 234-238.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 234-235

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 220 and S.Aboab, *Igrot* 67V.

²⁹⁰ S. Aboab, *Igrot* 44R.

the *Parnassim* and the appointed ones...for he [R. Jacob] is worthy of kindness and honor since he walks in innocence...enjoys the labor of his hands, is pleasant unto heaven and mankind and engages in *mitzvot* with his body and his money...may my words be read with [the] love [I intended them]...

The exact nature of Aboab's request remains unclear. However, Aboab's mention of the fact that Rabbi Jacob "enjoys the labor of his hands" would indicate that he has a profession or a trade and that he is not seeking employment in rabbinic capacity, or as a teacher, or supported student, in the yeshiva. The mention of the fact that he "does mitzvot with his money" indicates that R. Jacob is not seeking financial assistance. Thus we may conclude that Rabbi Aboab wishes to ensure that R. Jacob will be socially integrated into the community and accorded the level of honor and respect due him. Nonetheless, the letter corroborates Aboab's commitment to utilizing his connections to advocate for his students in various ways—facilitating placements in Yeshivot, negotiating appointments, and following up on their performance and welfare.

In a letter to Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria in Safed, Aboab is far more explicit. He strongly "encourages" him to accept two young students into his yeshiva, and reassures him that their inclusion will only serve to enhance the institution's reputation and strength.²⁹¹ In a letter to R. Jacob Hagiz, Aboab thanks Rabbi Hagiz for updates regarding two of his former students who had recently joined Hagiz's yeshiva in Jerusalem.⁵³

Additionally, Aboab's academic responsa served as an introduction to scholars outside his immediate circle, providing him access to fresh currents of halakhic, Talmudic, and biblical thought. Drawing a parallel with early modern medical correspondence, it becomes evident that

²⁹¹ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 194.

⁵³ S. Aboab, *Igrot* 67V.

both spheres shared similar functions. For instance, Steike and Stuber's studies of the early modern medical correspondence reveal that "In many cases, such a request for a second opinion was for a physician the occasion to establish an epistolary contact with a colleague... Especially interesting case histories offered a good opportunity to make desirable acquaintances".²⁹² In the medical world, and among the scientific societies of the time, establishing and maintaining such contacts through correspondence enabled a physician or "fellow" to remain attuned to the latest new developments and data available in his field.²⁹³

To extrapolate, rabbinic correspondence doubtless served as a means for Aboab and his peers to establish their presence in the world of scholarly exchange and plug in to new developments. Most importantly, these interactions fueled new ideas and creative thought, stimulating, and fostering a vibrant and dynamic intellectual conversation.²⁹⁴

A second brief comparison with contemporary medical correspondence reveals the added benefits Aboab stood to gain from engaging in scholarly exchange, particularly in the context of the early modern era.²⁹⁵ Much like in the scientific and medical arenas, letters provided a platform for the exchange of theoretical and hypothetical ideas, free from the constraints of official decrees or ordinances. Correspondence offered a space for open, secure and anodyne critique, thereby fostering an atmosphere of inquiry and discussion.²⁹⁶ As David Kronick

²⁹² Hubert Steinke and Martin Stuber, "Medical Correspondence In Early Modern Europe: An Introduction," *Gesnerus* 61, no. 3-4 (2004): 139-60, 147.

²⁹³ Andrea Rusnock, "Correspondence Networks and the Royal Society, 1700-1750," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 32, no. 2 (June 1999): 155-69, 155-157.

²⁹⁴ Peter Miller explores these ideas in his book *Peiresc's Mediterranean World*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 36-48, 265-279.

²⁹⁵ See David Kronick, "The Commerce of Letters: Networks and 'Invisible Colleges' in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Europe," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 71, no. 1 (January 2001): 28-43.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30-31. Miller, *Peiresc's Mediterranean World*, 8-17.

explains, “The erudite letter provided freedom of information exchange and expression of ideas because it existed, for the most part, outside the scrutiny of governmental censorship systems and the restraints of religious and national controversy.”²⁹⁷ Although the contexts differ, the notion of increased freedom in correspondence as opposed to the rigidity of published works, resonates strongly. It is challenging to trace the precise influences of Talmudic thought or halakhic rulings directly back to correspondence. Nonetheless, given the robust and dynamic nature of rabbinic correspondence, as well as Aboab’s frequent engagement with both earlier and contemporary responsa, it is reasonable to assert that many such instances exist. This assertion is supported by the remarkable scope of Aboab’s *Devar Shemuel*, which incorporates over two hundred citations of specific responsa²⁹⁸ drawn from fifty-two different responsa works.

IV. The Geographic Reach and Cultural Implications of Aboab’s Responsa:

While academic responsa were instrumental in establishing and facilitating a rabbinic network, other forms of responsa played an important role in Aboab’s life and network as well.

Many of Aboab’s responsa engage with issues that had significant halakhic and practical implications while also reflecting social nuances and cultural pressures. Examination of Aboab’s responses to these questions reveal much about his thought process, halakhic priorities, and religious tendencies as he assumes more prominence on the larger rabbinic and halakhic stage.

In 1637, Samuel Aboab relocated to Verona with his family, where he assumed the role of rabbi

²⁹⁷ Kronick, “Commerce of Letters,” 30.

²⁹⁸ See for example S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, Responsum 129, where he cites the responsa of the sixteenth-century *MaHaRYT* (Rabbi Joseph de Trani), and Responsum 244 where he cites his contemporary *MoHaRaSHDaM* (Samuel de Medini).

in the nascent Sephardi community established by his father together with several prominent Portuguese families. The responsa from this period in Aboab's life reflect both his intellectual maturation and growing recognition as a rabbi and *Posek*.²⁹⁹

Many of Aboab's responsa from this period tackle complex halakhic issues with practical implications, and also reflect some of the cultural and social realities of the time. Analyzing this type of responsa, written as Aboab is gaining prominence, provides valuable insight into Aboab's thought process, his halakhic priorities, and his overarchingly stringent approach to *Halakha*.

A. Responsum 6: To Rabbi Moshe Zion of Izmir:

Responsum number six to Rabbi Moshe Zion of Izmir, serves as an excellent case study. In this responsum, Aboab endeavors to ascertain whether porcelain dishes, due to their glass-like smoothness, share the halakhic status of glass. Specifically, whether porcelain, like glass, can be used interchangeably for both dairy and meat without necessitating a *koshering*³⁰⁰ process in between.

Before delving into the responsum itself, several “context clues” provide valuable insight. For instance, the distant origin of the responsum suggests that the issue at hand was not of immediate urgency. Rather, it appears to have been a topic of ongoing discussion among the

²⁹⁹ Aboab authored 68 responsa during his fourteen years in Verona and at least forty letters of financial and personal correspondence—mostly with emissaries from the land of Israel.

³⁰⁰ Rabbinic halakha requires that utensils which came in contact with hot non-kosher foods be “koshered” before they can be used. Based on (Num. 31:22-23). The halakha required that utensils used directly in a fire require immersion in fire, those used with water, require immersion in boiling water. At the extremes are crockery, which is so porous it cannot be koshered, and glass which is so impervious that it requires no koshering.

rabbinic class, one with potentially significant, long-lasting and far-reaching cultural implications.

Evidence from the trade of porcelain dishes in the early modern Ottoman Empire supports this. By the early seventeenth century, porcelain had become a symbol of status within Ottoman society. Over the course of the century, its popularity spread, reaching even the homes of the less affluent, alongside other luxury goods such as silk and coffee.⁶³ It is unsurprising, then, that responsa from this period reflect the Jewish community's acquisition and use of porcelain dishes. The distinctive smoothness of these dishes—markedly different from the pitted surfaces of traditional pottery—raised an important halakhic question. Could their glass-like smoothness render them impervious to the absorption of meat or milk, thereby allowing their use for both without the need for koshering between uses?

The widespread use of porcelain and the importance of this halakhic question are further evidenced by the fact that several prominent Ottoman rabbis engaged with the issue in their responsa and halakhic works, including the renowned sixteenth-century North African Rabbi

⁶³ There is ample evidence that porcelain dishes were “all the rage” in the Ottoman world of the seventeenth century, and were often used to display prominence and power. For some discussions, See Ariel Salzmann, “The Age of Tulips: Confluence and Conflict in Early Modern Consumer Culture (1550–1730),” in *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550–1922: An Introduction*, ed. Donald Quataert (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 83–106; Justin Anthony Mann, “The Power of Porcelain: Authority and Landscape in Early Modern Cyprus” (master’s thesis, East Carolina University, 2016); Anne McCants, “Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking about Globalization in the Early Modern World,” *Journal of World History* 18, no. 4 (2007): 433–62.

David ibn Zimra (RiDbaz"Z),³⁰¹ the seventeenth-century Rabbi Haym Benvenisti of Izmir,³⁰² and the eighteenth-century Rabbi Haym Yosef David Azulai (HIDA).³⁰³

Aboab explores the subject in his characteristically well-organized, meticulous and methodical fashion. In attempting to ascertain if porcelain qualifies as glass for kashrut purposes, Aboab begins by systematically engaging with various halakhic perspectives that compare the composition and manufacture of glass to porcelain, aiming for a conclusive halakhic determination. He draws from a range of sources, beginning with Avot de Rabi Natan, composed in the second century by R. Natan ha-Bavli to the late medieval works of Rashba (Rabbi Solomon ben Aderet, 1235-1310), Tur (Rabbi Jacob ben Asher, 1270-1340), Beit Yosef (Rabbi Joseph Karo, 1488-1575), and his own contemporary, R. Haim Benvenisti's (1603-1673) *Shiyarei Knesset ha-Gedolah*. Unable to arrive at an unequivocal conclusion with these sources alone, Aboab consults various *sefarim ḥizonim* (external sources) (indicating the availability of, and his familiarity with and reliance upon, such non-halakhic source material), on the potential composition of porcelain dishes and their manufacturing process, in the attempt to determine an accurate comparison with the glass production process, which was thoroughly understood in Venice. Ultimately, despite, or perhaps because of, the wealth of information at his disposal, Aboab refrains from issuing a categorical ruling on the kashrut status of the dishes. Unlike his contemporary Benveniste who permitted their interchangeable use (but remained stringent regarding their use on Passover), he concludes, as is often his approach, by recommending a stringent stance in the absence of unequivocal evidence enabling leniency.

³⁰¹ Rabbi David ben Zimra (Ridbaz) *Teshuvot Ridbaz* (Jerusalem, 1987), vol. 3, 1a 401 (old 844).

³⁰² Rabbi Hayim Benvenisti, *Shiyarei Knesset ha-Gedola*, hebrewbooks.org/42559 85aL (Orach Haim 451 Beit Yosef glosses 30)

³⁰³ Rabbi Hayim Yosef David Azulai, *Maḥzik Beracha* (Livorno: Castillo-Sa'adon, 1785) Orach Hayim 92a 451:10

Responsum six underscores Aboab's distinctive tendency towards stringency, a characteristic that becomes increasingly pronounced throughout *Devar Shemuel*. It also reveals Aboab's methodical and meticulous approach to *Halakha*, particularly as it relates to addressing new technologies.

This responsum, sent to Aboab from a considerable geographic distance and addressing an important technological advancement, invites a deeper exploration of this type of responsum and its potential ramifications. Although Aboab certainly understood that his ruling would not have immediate relevance for the community in Izmir (where R. Hayim Benvenisti was rabbi), the issue was far from merely theoretical. Responsa of this nature could have profound social, cultural, and financial implications. While Halakha routinely engages with technological developments, it is in this instance that we observe how Aboab personally approached such questions. This responsum offers our first glimpse into how Aboab perceived his role as a rabbi, halakhist, and posek in navigating such an important and impactful subject.

B. Aboab's Responsa as Contributions to Multi-Generational Halakhic Conversation

Aboab's response to the technological innovation and widespread use of porcelain dishes exemplifies his broader methodology in halakhic decision-making while also reflecting his view of his role as a *posek* in addressing long-term, significant halakhic issues. By referencing both earlier and contemporary authorities, and offering a thorough, considered analysis that includes insights from non-halakhic experts, Aboab situates himself within a broader, multi-generational framework of halakhic responsa. This suggests that he perceived his responsa as contributions to an ongoing halakhic discourse, aimed not only at resolving immediate questions but also at

shaping future deliberations. In this way, his responsa were intended to have far-reaching implications, extending both backward into tradition and forward into the future.

In addition to enabling Aboab to remain halakhically, socially, and culturally current, Aboab appreciated the importance of responsa, and his active participation in this genre, as a bridge between past and future halakhic thought.³⁰⁴ He frequently integrated the responsa of earlier rabbis into his own deliberations, engaging in a dynamic process of building upon, and sometimes negotiating with, the research and opinions put forth by both preceding and concurrent rabbinic authorities, as noted earlier with the opinion of R. Hayim Benveniste. By the same token, Aboab understood and expected his responsa would likely serve as point of reference for others in future halakhic deliberations. His meticulous research and comprehensive presentation of his opinion, sources, and rationale attest to the gravity with which he approached responsa, even in cases where he explicitly indicated an inability to furnish a conclusive ruling. In a responsum to Zante, for example, Aboab describes the extensive measures he employed in his efforts to provide an appropriate response.³⁰⁵ This meticulous approach is similarly evident in his treatment of a non-conforming letter "yud" which had been inserted in a name³⁰⁶ on a *get* (writ of divorce, pl. *gittin*). Here, Aboab recounts his exhaustive search through *gittin* from

³⁰⁴ Compare Cooperman, "Defining Deviance," regarding Raphael Meldola's *Mayim Rabbim*: "Both the structure and content of *Mayim Rabim* clearly underscore a view of halakha as an ongoing discussion and debate" (166).

³⁰⁵ See my discussion of this Responsum 99 later in the chapter.

³⁰⁶ The accurate spelling of the names of the husband and wife in a *get* is of critical importance, and a misspelling can invalidate the *get*.

various locales, including Venice, Ferrara, Frankfurt, and other "Ashkenazic cities" in pursuit of a similar spelling precedent.³⁰⁷

Aboab's place in the halakhic thought of his era can be seen in a well-studied responsum³⁰⁸ in which he addressed the halakhic implication of new developments in the silk industry. In response to a query from Rabbi Gur Aryeh Halevi of Mantua, Aboab proposes a method for operating a Jewish-owned silk factory on Shabbat in accordance with halakhic principles.⁷² Although his solution is intricate and largely impractical, it becomes a key reference in subsequent halakhic responsa on the matter.³⁰⁹ By the twentieth century, the seminal halakhic work, *Mishna Berura*⁷⁴ demonstrated that, with a few notable exceptions, Aboab's approach had been largely set aside in favor of a more straightforward and lenient halakhic resolution.³¹⁰

Despite its ultimate rejection in the practical realm of halakha, this particular responsum is significant for a number of reasons. It highlights Aboab's position on the forefront of some of the most important and impactful technological, cultural and halakhic trends in the Jewish world. Questions about the halakhic implications of silk production, a burgeoning trade in Italy at the

³⁰⁷ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 232.

³⁰⁸ Ibid. See discussions of this responsum in Jacob Katz, *Goy shel Shabbat* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1983), chap. 7, 84–93, and Cooperman, "Defining Deviance," 174–76. ⁷² S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 132 to Mantua.

³⁰⁹ See for example Rabbi Ishmael ben Abraham Isaac Cohen, a 19th century Italian scholar, in his responsa, *Shu"t Zera Emet* hebrewbooks.org/740 39b-41a who explains the infeasibility of implementing Aboab's suggestion, and offers a far simpler solution, asserting this is the one that had been accepted by Italian Jewry for generations. ⁷⁴ Authored by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, (1838-1933).

³¹⁰ *Mishna Berura* vol. III 244, Sha'are Teshuva §5 Hebrewbooks.org/14171 6a

time, were at the forefront of Jewish intellectual discourse.³¹¹ Additionally, the issue of keeping open a Jewish-owned factory on Shabbat was an important one that would require a feasible solution.³¹² While Aboab's did not fit this criteria due to its complexity, his involvement from the inception of the conversation reflects his stature on the halakhic stage and his ability to confront trending halakhic issues. Furthermore, in his contribution to a multi-generational halakhic

conversation on a matter concerning new and developing technologies, this responsum vividly illustrates the rabbinic desire and intent towards ensuring the continued relevance of halakha in the early modern world.

V. Currents and Conflict in Aboab's Responsa.

When faced with the challenge of accommodating new technologies, Aboab's decisionmaking consistently opts for more stringent rulings. Why? Responsum Eighty-Two, addressed to Rabbi Joseph Azriel Cohen of Casale, helps us to understand the realities, as well as Aboab's concerns and priorities when engaging with his contemporaries.

A. Responsum 82: To Rabbi Azriel Cohen of Casale: A Tendency Towards Stringency.

A recently widowed woman, mother of (at least) two children approached Rabbi Azriel Cohen of Casale with her sad tale. She has lost her husband while still in the early stages of pregnancy, and, shortly thereafter—while allegedly still unaware of her condition—became betrothed. Now, she pleads that in order to satisfy [*le-hafik razon*] her betrothed she may be

³¹¹ Cooperman, "Defining Deviance," 173–74.

³¹² Ibid. Also see Katz, *Goy shel Shabbat*, chap. 7, 84–93.

permitted to waive the requisite twenty-four-month waiting period until her infant is weaned³¹³ and marry immediately after the baby's birth.

The socio-cultural and economic tensions underlying this responsum are palpable. The woman's swift betrothal following her husband's death—remarkably, even apparently before realizing pregnancy—suggests the existence of significant pressures, likely economic, compelling her to remarry with urgency. These pressures may have been driven by a need to avoid destitution and secure her survival and that of her children.

Additionally, while the woman uses the term *le-hafik razon* (to satisfy) her betrothed, the reality of her situation is stark: Should she be required to wait the two years, there would likely be no betrothed to “satisfy,” and in the meantime, she and her (born and unborn) children would suffer. Aboab himself notes that many are lenient in related cases and that he is aware the querist, R. Azriel Cohen is desirous of a lenient ruling here as well. “For I know that all the desires and thoughts of the sho’eil ha-to’ein [querist-advocate]³¹⁴ presenting this and subsequent arguments, desires [me] to be lenient and not stringent as he hinted in the [incorporation of his choice of] sources [all of which rule leniently on related questions].”

Nonetheless, just as in the case of the porcelain dishes and the silk factory, in this weighty social matter, Aboab does not deliver the desired lenient ruling.

Why not?

³¹³ An explanation for this restriction follows

³¹⁴ S Aboab's term

Aboab presents both halakhic and “extra-halakhic” considerations. In the first part of the responsum, he addresses the general *takanah* (ordinance) established by *Chazal*,³¹⁵ which forbids women from marrying while pregnant or nursing an infant, a restriction lasting up to 24 months. Aboab unequivocally asserts that contemporary rabbis lack the authority to permit exceptions beyond the leniencies embedded in *Chazal*’s original ordinance.³¹⁶ He methodically refutes the leniencies proposed by several notable early modern rabbis which Rabbi Cohen of Casale included in his query, Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi (1455-1525 Ottoman Empire), Maharam of Padua (Rabbi Meir ben Isaac Katzenellenbogen 1482 –1565), and Rabbi Yehoshua Boaz Baruch of Sabbioneta³¹⁷ (d. 1557 Italy). The second part of the responsum, also halakhic, focuses on the

specific circumstances of the woman in question that may justify leniency. Among the most notable considerations were her inability to nurse the child immediately preceding the current one, and her consistent reliance on a wet nurse after all her previous births due to insufficient milk production.

The rabbinic ordinance mandating a two-year waiting period before remarriage is rooted in the concern for the infant’s well-being -- specifically to prevent malnourishment. This risk arises if the mother conceives again, potentially causing a reduction or cessation of her milk supply while the child is still nursing. In the present case, however, the woman’s consistent reliance on a wet nurse to meet her children’s nutritional needs introduces significant halakhic considerations. R. Cohen of Casale argues that her total inability to nurse immediately prior to

³¹⁵ An acronym for *Hakameinu Zikhronam Livrakha* ('Our Sages of Blessed Memory'), referring collectively to the rabbinic sages of the Mishnaic (c. 200 BCE–200 CE) and Talmudic (c. 200–500 CE) eras, whose interpretations and rulings form the foundation of halakha.

³¹⁶ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 176.

³¹⁷ Author of *Shiltei ha-Gibborim* (Mantua, 1554).

this pregnancy, coupled with the consistent need for supplementation through all her births, may render her halakhically classified as “unable to nurse” (*zimuk shadayim*, lit. withered breasts). This classification constitutes a valid leniency, permitting early remarriage, as the infant’s health and vitality would inevitably depend on a wet nurse regardless of the timing.

Aboab contends, however, that this does not constitute sufficient grounds for leniency. He asserts that a definitive halakhic determination of her status as *zimuk shadayim* cannot rest on a single occurrence—that of her youngest child, particularly since, in most previous births, she merely required supplementation. Milk supply, he explains, can vary significantly from one childbirth to the next. Rather, a full-fledged halakhic *hazaka*—established through three consecutive births with a complete inability to nurse—would be required to classify her as a genuine case of *zimuk shadayim*.

Ultimately, Aboab concludes, “my heart prevents me from permitting [the marriage]”. He explains that despite instances in recent and contemporary responsa where leniency was granted, the circumstances outlined in those responsa do not align satisfactorily with those presented here.

Then, after explaining his halakhic rationale, Aboab introduces “extra-halakhic” considerations: He emphasizes that the ordinance of chazal is fundamentally designed to safeguard the welfare of children—an imperative that, in his view, warrants a stricter, rather than more lenient, application. Second, and perhaps the factor that most reflects Aboab’s state of mind, he expresses deep concern about the potential misuse and overextension of this leniency by others. In a pointed allusion to the Book of Esther, Aboab voices this apprehension, cautioning against a scenario in which “the word shall go out to all the women, to be dismissive

of their husbands' deaths and the endangerment of their children in their eyes.”³¹⁸

This responsum reveals more than Aboab's decided inclination towards stringency. Specifically, his final “extra-halakhic” concern for the misappropriation and extrapolation of halakhic leniencies deserves further attention. His apprehension is also evident in his *Sefer ha-Zichronot*, where he cautions “

For if a prominent rabbi with his great wisdom and knowledge ascertains for himself [in his studies]...a *heter* (leniency) it appears [to me] that it becomes him to hide it in his heart...For once he writes [the leniencies] in a book, [his lenient rulings] will inevitably proliferate...and when one [who reads the book] sees that, heaven forbid, the issue becomes insignificant (lit. “light in his eyes”), the [subsequent readers] will add [further leniencies] to them....³¹⁹

Aboab's awareness of the accessibility and influence of his responsa is particularly evident in cases like these, and it induces him to opt for a stringent stance. In doing so, he aims to achieve a dual objective: reinforcing the authority of Chazal (as in this responsum, 82) and, as an extension, safeguarding contemporary rabbinic writings against potential misinterpretation and misuse.

Aboab's concerns were likely tied to broader challenges facing rabbinic and halakhic authority. Among them were the rise of powerful lay institutions, the proliferation of printed

³¹⁸ Notably, *Shut Hakham Zevi*. hebrewbooks.org/829 35a relies on Aboab's implied leniency regarding a woman who indeed has a halakhic *ḥazakah* that she cannot nurse, in his lenient ruling regarding a similar case in his community. He writes that even R Samuel Aboab who was known to be exceptionally stringent “*u-khevar nitparseim mei-ḥasiduto shel harav MaHaRaSH Aboab heyoto maḥmir me'od bi-teshuvato*” accepted this particular leniency.

³¹⁹ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-zichronot*, 38, regarding a famous leniency of Rabbi Judah Mintz that permitted “crossdressing” on Purim.

works, and the resultant encroachments on rabbinic prerogatives in establishing halakhic norms and maintaining their relevance. These themes will be addressed more comprehensively in the chapter dedicated to Aboab's perception of rabbinic authority. Aboab's vigilance as expressed in responsum 82 at least, highlights the public nature and wide accessibility of rabbinic responsa—a subject that warrants further examination in the context of this responsa chapter.

B. Concerns Regarding the Public Nature of Responsa: A Possible Explanation for Stringency.

The rapid increase and proliferation of responsa publication in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries caused them to be widely available. Rabbis were the target audience for this increased publication and reaped multiple benefits from it, as responsa literature filled a similar role for the rabbinate as did journals for other academic pursuits—serving as forums for scholarly communication and engendering ongoing study.³²⁰

At the same time, the rabbis faced the challenge of being unable to control or restrict public access to responsa, a situation that clearly troubled Aboab. While his apprehension is clear, one may wonder how significant these concerns were in practical terms. To what extent

would lay individuals actually seek out responsa texts, and for what purposes? Perhaps Aboab's concern stemmed from the knowledge that responsa, which often engaged with prevailing societal, cultural, and religious dynamics, would naturally attract public attention. Or perhaps he worried that parties would seek out memorable opinions. Indeed, certain responsa, particularly those dealing with social scandals, might well have sparked public “debate” and discussion. Aboab addresses a related phenomenon in his essay on *Stam Yainam*,³²¹ where he criticizes

³²⁰ Kronick, “The Commerce of Letters,” 132.

³²¹ S. Aboab, *Sefer-ha-Zikhronot*, 84.

learned individuals who, through inaccurate quotations of R. Elijah Mizrahi's responsa, mislead the broader public, which he claims "*asher ein la-hem eisek im ha-iyun*" (lack engagement with the 'halakhic esoterica') of responsa. His critique suggests that while responsa were rarely accessed by the general public, learned laymen might nonetheless engage with and disseminate them, particularly when the issues addressed resonated with their concerns.

Widespread access to responsa thus posed a threat to both halakhic "orthodoxy" and rabbinic authority.³²² If laymen could interpret, apply, and disseminate responsa indiscriminately, the stability and legitimacy of the halakhic process would be severely undermined. The role of the rabbi, who, by way of his *semikha* authorization, traditionally held the exclusive right to issue halakhic rulings in the form of *pesak*, would be similarly threatened.³²³

Aboab contended with yet another concern stemming from the widespread accessibility of responsa: the phenomenon of "responsa shopping." Yossie Levine⁸⁹ refers to this as "Psak in the Age of Window Shopping," drawing a parallel between the practice of seeking multiple halakhic opinions on a single issue and what historians describe as a "consumer revolution." Levine explains that as shopping became increasingly prevalent in early modern Europe,

consumers were exposed to a broader range of options, fostering the perception that superior alternatives might always exist elsewhere.

In the rabbinic world, this "consumer revolution" manifested itself in the proliferation of responsa and in the linguistic and halakhic flexibility often inherent in their formulation. As we

³²² See chapter IV.

³²³ *Semikha* undergoes significant changes during this period. See my discussion of this subject in Chapter IV.

⁸⁹ Yossie Levine, "Port Rabbi," 58-68.

will demonstrate later, Rabbis frequently employed nuanced language and less forceful rhetoric in the effort to present their rulings as opinions rather than definitive judgments, thereby opening the door and encouraging other rabbinic perspectives to be sought and incorporated into a final decision. Levine stops short of asserting that rabbis or lay people might use the abundance of responsa now available to actively “shop” for rabbinic opinions most aligned with their personal needs or preferences. But this is exactly what Aboab explicitly identifies as a serious issue and warns against it.

Thus, Aboab and several of his contemporaries repeatedly emphasized that they would issue a ruling regarding a monetary dispute only *after* both parties agreed to adhere to their decision,³²⁴ indicating an escalating concern regarding the prevalence of “responsa shopping.” Aboab also rails against rabbis who enable this practice by issuing responsa “on demand”, accusing them of contributing to a grave *Hillul Hashem* since they subtly convey the idea that humans can manipulate God’s will to align with their own desires³²⁵ This practice effectively suggests that individuals can dictate their preferred ruling and continue soliciting opinions until receiving a favorable one. When rabbis acquiesce to issuing responsa whenever requested, allowing the petitioner to selectively implement rulings, they potentially transform halakhic discourse from its proper academic and legal function into a system that merely accommodates personal preferences rather than upholding religious principles.

Aboab’s vigilance in protecting the integrity of halakhic authority reflects a broader concern for the preservation of rabbinic leadership and the sanctity of the halakhic process. In light of this, we turn to consider an emerging dynamic in his responsa after his return to

³²⁴ See for example, S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 11.

³²⁵ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-zikhronot*, 85, 98. Also see our discussion of Aboab and *Hillul Hashem* in Chapter I.

Venice—the Yeshiva Klalit of Venice. What role will the Yeshiva play in Aboab’s responsa, his defense of rabbinic authority, and his construction of a rabbinic network?

VI. Aboab in Venice, and a Glimpse of the Yeshiva Klalit:

Beginning in 1650, with his return to Venice, Aboab increasingly refers to the Yeshiva Klalit in his responsa. Unfortunately, we still lack a comprehensive understanding of the Yeshiva’s structure and operations. It is also unclear what role Aboab occupied within the institution—whether he was simply a member, held an official position, or even bore a specific title. Still, his responsa offer some insight into these questions.

In his introduction to *Devar Shemuel*, Jacob Aboab notes that upon his return to Venice, his father was accorded the “great honor... to author the rulings in the name of the scholars in the Yeshiva Klalit.”³²⁶ Jacob further claims that after Aboab’s death, the Yeshiva members accorded him high honor “as befits an Av Beit Din (Chief Judge).”⁹³ This would suggest that Aboab held a significant position within the Yeshiva, even if it was not formalized by an official title. Was this merely the hyperbole of a devoted son? While this may be, at least we can confirm that Aboab was indeed a member of the Yeshiva, as evidenced by his signature on the *Zikaron le-Vnei Yisrael*, issued by the Yeshiva in 1668 pursuant to their interview of Nathan of Gaza.⁹⁴

Aboab’s authoring of divorce-writs on behalf of the Yeshiva,³²⁷ demonstrates that he served additional roles beyond those of a regular member. While I could find no references from

contemporaries that explicitly bestow an official title upon him, it is clear that Aboab held an important role in the Yeshiva’s activities.

³²⁶ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, intro. 6.

⁹³ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, intro 15 ⁹⁴

See appendix 4.

³²⁷ S. Aboab, *Mazekeret ha-gittin*.

Aboab's responsa also imply that he was more than one among equals. For example, in a responsum addressing a complex question about ritual slaughter, Aboab writes, "When I lectured on this subject before the excellencies of the Yeshiva and before the 'bodkim' [s. *bodek*, overseers of ritual slaughter³²⁸] and *beki'im* (s. *baki*, experts) in our community, they agreed with me."³²⁹ More significantly, in Responsum Seventy-Eight, Aboab recounts, "For when I saw that all were in agreement in our Yeshiva with his [the querist's] opinion...I urged them to quickly affix their signatures as they did [orally] the previous Shabbat [when the issue was discussed in the Yeshiva]." These two quotes highlight two important points. First, they confirm the regularity of Shabbat gatherings for responsa discussions in Yeshivot, a practice also attested by Aboab for his Yeshiva in Verona,³³⁰ and practiced in similar institutions, such as the Yeshiva founded by Jacob Hagiz in Jerusalem.³³¹ Additionally, Aboab's reference to affixing signatures after Shabbat implies that the deliberations themselves were informal and could not be documented during the Sabbath, which may have required someone, like Aboab, to finalize and formalize the responsa afterward. Perhaps this was one of Aboab's responsibilities—writing up the decisions and distributing them for signatures before returning them to the questioners? That being said, the responsa included in *Devar Shemuel*, while frequently referencing discussions held in the Yeshiva, should not be mistaken for the official responsa issued by the Yeshiva itself. A clear distinction can be made between the two, as Aboab's responsa, even when

³²⁸ The "bodek" also checked the carcasses to ensure that they exhibited no deformities or illnesses which would invalidate their consumption.

³²⁹ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, Responsum 96.

³³⁰ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, Responsum 36.

³³¹ Meir Benayahu, "Le-toledot batei ha-midrash bi-yerushalayim ba-mei'a ha-17," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 21 (1948): 7.

referring to a Yeshiva discussion or ruling, provide only brief mentions of the Yeshiva's decision without offering specific details. Instead, Aboab's responsa tend to focus on other aspects of the question at hand—whether a minor detail, a side point, or an academic debate—rather than the main ruling that was the subject of the Yeshiva's deliberation. In the aforementioned responsum seventy-eight, where Aboab “urged the Yeshiva to quickly affix their signatures to the written responsum [of the Yeshiva],”³³² Aside from that remark, the bulk of Aboab's responsum is directed personally to Rabbi Joshua Menagen of Rome, and Aboab writes: “I was left on my own [at my leisure] to engage with some of the words of [your] ruling [in the initial responsum sent to the Yeshiva].” This shows that while Aboab acknowledges the Yeshiva's deliberation, his response centers on a more detailed examination of an issue that was not addressed in the Yeshiva's original ruling, perhaps because it was presumed not directly relevant.

Another example further highlights the distinction between Aboab's responsa and the official rulings of the Yeshiva. In a letter to “the honored notable, Menahem Ziona,”³³³ Aboab explains that he only received the responsum addressed to him personally after the Yeshiva had already received an identical responsum and ruled on the matter “by three judges.” Aboab apologizes, noting that it appears the original letter sent to him never reached its destination, preventing him from offering a personal opinion prior to the Yeshiva's ruling. Nevertheless, once the Yeshiva had issued its decision, Aboab could only urge Menahem Ziona to accept and abide by it.

What shall we make of the fact that the Yeshiva Klalit did not bestow an official title upon Rabbi Samuel Aboab? The answer may be closely tied to the status and function of the

³³² S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, Responsum 78.

³³³ S. Aboab, *Igrot* 51R perhaps this letter was not included in the *Devar Shemuel* because it did not technically qualify as a halakhic responsum, as Aboab introduces no new halakhic material.

Yeshiva as an institution—an issue that warrants further exploration. If the Yeshiva was not formally recognized by the Venetian community as a *Beit Din*, it is likely that it could not assign official titles in the same way a legally sanctioned court might.

The issue of the Yeshiva's official status is particularly intriguing when considering the broader role of the Yeshiva Klalit in Aboab's responsa and the broader responsa process itself. As previously discussed, the Yeshiva Klalit in Venice appears to have functioned as both an academic forum and a judicial body. However, its authority as a judicial body remains unclear. In contrast, evidence from other cities such as Ferrara and Livorno, each of which had a Yeshiva Klalit, shows that their respective Yeshivot Klaliyot operated in some official capacity as a Beit Din, issuing formal rulings in the name of the Yeshiva.³³⁴ In Venice, however, no such official rulings are extant, leaving us to wonder about the nature of the Yeshiva's judicial authority. Was it formally recognized by the Venetian community as a Beit Din, or did it operate more informally, adjudicating matters on a case-by-case basis? Perhaps it was merely advisory?

Even without official recognition, we can suggest that the Yeshiva played a significant role in the communal and religious life of Venetian Jews. Given the size and complexity of the Jewish community in the city, it is plausible that cases requiring adjudication arose frequently, necessitating the regular convening of the Yeshiva as a judicial body. These circumstances may have granted the Yeshiva a “semi-official” authority, despite the lack of formal designation by the Venetian government.

³³⁴ For Ferrara, see Nepi-Ghirondi on R. Lonigo who issues it in the name of the Yeshiva, and in Livorno, see *Divrei Yosef* Hebrewbooks.org/710 44 issued in the name of the Yeshiva Klalit of Livorno.

But did the Yeshiva influence Aboab's responsa? Let us now turn to an analysis of a responsum in which the Yeshiva plays a prominent part.

Responsum Ninety-Nine is addressed to Aboab from the rabbis in Zante,³³⁵ Aboab is ultimately unable to provide a conclusive response or alternative solution to the problem. While this outcome is not uncommon, the responsum is significant as Aboab incorporates a detailed account of the attempts he made, and measures he undertook, to provide an answer. Close analysis of the responsum will therefore prove highly instructive to understanding not only the important dynamic of the Yeshiva in Samuel Aboab's responsa, but also offer more insight on the responsa process and the complexities of rabbinic discourse and correspondence.

A. Responsum 99: To the Rabbis of Zante: Additional Insights into the Yeshiva Klalit

To the Exalted Rabbis of the City of Zante,

[On the question] Regarding the law [legally acceptable way] of spelling the name of the woman Badukia in divorce writs. They [halakhic opinions] are divided among five different approaches.

Aboab responds: The rabbis have asked me to render my opinion on the law [regarding] the divorce (get) of a woman...and they are divided among five possible ways of writing her name properly [in a halakhically acceptable manner]... In addition to debating the issue in the Yeshiva, [they] investigated and inquired after a man knowledgeable in the Greek language who might instruct us [about] the enunciation and vocalization [of] the source of this name Badukia, and how it is

³³⁵ This is one of two responsa in the *Devar Shemuel* that came from Zante.

spelled among the Greeks...for with our ears we have not heard this name until today and including today...we have [also] not seen it written among the rulings of the recent scholars [aḥaronim]. And even in Sefer Shemot ha-Gittin (a

compendium of names for use in writs of divorce) that was printed here [in Venice] in alphabetical order, and which was compiled from [a combination of] many books and [based upon] many authors and established rabbis from many places, mention of it [the name Badukia] has not arisen...these [aforementioned attempts to gain insight into the name] are the reasons delaying our response to the question from my teachers [the questioners from Zante]. [Otherwise] we would have hastened it by many days as is our obligation.

Behold, therefore, not to rule [conclusively] on the halakha le-ma'aseh (practical matters of halakha) have I come [in this responsum], but rather lehishtashe'a (to “engage” lit. to enjoy) with the halakha regarding the [specific] arguments of my teachers and their proofs [halakhic reasoning].

Although the responsum is addressed to Aboab, the Yeshiva and its members are prominently featured: “And when it was heard in our Yeshiva [the arguments on both sides of the Budekia case], *we* inquired and *we* investigated...”³³⁶ Aboab’s casual reference to the Yeshiva suggests that the presentation and discussion of responsum within this forum was a common—and possibly integral—aspect of the responsa process. In analyzing this responsum, we will first examine the role of the Yeshiva and then explore the responsum itself, highlighting the nuanced functions of responsa and revealing important information about the responsa process.

³³⁶ Emphasis mine

B. The Role of the Yeshiva:³³⁷

The advantages offered by presenting responsa in the Yeshiva setting, might explain why Aboab repeatedly emphasizes the involvement of the Yeshiva in every step of the responsa process.³³⁸ For instance, “and when I saw that all opinions in our Yeshiva were in agreement...”¹⁰⁷ or “when I lectured [on the subject matter of the responsum] in front of the exalted members of the Yeshiva and before the *bodkim* [responsible for checking animals that were ritually slaughtered] and the proficient ones [*bekiim*],³³⁹ they agreed with me...”¹⁰⁹

The Yeshiva setting enabled teachers, colleagues, and perhaps even students to engage in scholarly debates over intellectual or practical halakhic issues, fostering the expansion of knowledge and the refinement of skills in real time.³⁴⁰ Occasionally, the contributions or distinctions made by members of the Yeshiva would be specifically noted or highlighted.¹¹¹ Even during his tenure in Verona, a far smaller and less significant community than Venice, Aboab asserts that he “brought the matter for discussion in the Yeshiva during Shabbat afternoon *as was the practice [minhag]* (my own emphasis).³⁴¹ Presenting a responsum before a wider audience was especially advantageous in circumstances where more exposure and resources

³³⁷ For more references to the Yeshiva in Aboab’s responsa see Responsum numbers 4, 19, 36, 78, 96, 98, 141, 232, 336.

³³⁸ See for examples responsa 78, 96, 141, 232, 289, 336

¹⁰⁷ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 78.

³³⁹ Indicating those who are proficient in specific halakhot. In this case ritual slaughter. ¹⁰⁹ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 96.

³⁴⁰ For example, Benayahu, “Le-toledot batei ha-midrash,” 7–8, demonstrates these advantages by analyzing this practice and its impact on students of varying ages in the Beit Midrash of R Jacob Hagiz in Jerusalem ¹¹¹ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 96.

³⁴¹ Ibid., Responsum 36.

might hold the key to a solution. In the Zante case, for example, Aboab inquires after members of the Yeshiva who might have access to native Greek speakers to assist with identifying the Greek origins of the problematic name Badukia.

C. The Authority of the Yeshiva:

The Yeshiva Klalit's ability to enforce its decisions remains a subject of significant debate, closely tied to the ambiguity surrounding its official status. Additionally, while it may have wielded some authority due to its institutional standing, particularly in financial matters,³⁴² the exact mechanisms of enforcement remain uncertain. Aboab's responsa, however, attest to a certain level of authority carried by the Yeshiva. He repeatedly asserts that neither he nor the Yeshiva would arbitrate in a financial dispute unless both parties agreed to accept their ruling as final.³⁴³ Consequently, when Aboab responds in his capacity as a representative of the Yeshiva, there exists an expectation of adherence on the part of the questioner, underpinned by the authority inherent in the Yeshiva's role as a Beit Din, (whether ad-hoc or institutional), that is distinct from that found in Aboab's personal rabbinic responsa.

Responsum 232 posed to Rabbi Mordekhai Bassan of Verona illustrates this phenomenon. The query centers again upon a problematic name spelling in a *get*. Aboab initially

³⁴² It is especially in the case of financial matters, that Aboab stresses the rule of the Yeshiva, that both parties must agree to abide by his ruling. See for example Responsum 336.

³⁴³ Note that Shlomo Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sefer, 1977), 374, writes that the yeshiva in Mantua had a similar rule in place. Also see Leon Modena and Shlomo Simonsohn, *She-elot u-teshuvot ziknei yehuda*, 45-46, a generation before Aboab, references this rule as well. See further discussion of this subject in Chapter IV. ¹¹⁵ My own emphasis

declares his personal inclination towards a stringent ruling in this matter, “Hoshesh ani al azmi le-haḥmir ke-divrei Rabbeinu Tam”¹¹⁵ ("I am inclined *for myself* to rule stringently, in accordance with the words of Rabbeinu Tam"). Aboab follows, however, with the caveat that if the questioner consults with the *hakhamim* of Mantua and Ferrara, paralleling his own consultation with certain *hakhamim* from the Yeshiva [in Venice] who align with the questioner's more lenient inclination, his reservations regarding the leniencies “would rest.” This, in turn, would allow him to “feel comfortable” endorsing the more lenient ruling [on behalf of the Yeshiva].

Despite the Yeshiva's important role in responsum Ninety-Nine, the question was not addressed to them, but rather to Aboab himself. Is there significance to the fact that the rabbis of Zante chose Aboab as the recipient of the inquiry? To answer this, we must consider the content of the responsum within its cultural and halakhic context.

D. The Content of Responsum 99, and Aboab as the Addressee:

The inquiry centers on the proper spelling of a woman's name, *Badukia*, in a *get*—a halakhically weighty matter, as an incorrect spelling of a proper name (of the man, woman or city) can invalidate a divorce. This responsum, however, represents the tip of a rather large iceberg. During the early modern period, there was a notable increase in halakhic material including responsa, essays, pamphlets, and even full-length books addressing the subject of proper name spelling in *gittin*. In the course of the responsum, Aboab references one such compilation recently published in Venice³⁴⁴ Other works, such as Rabbi Moshe Habib's *Ezrat*

³⁴⁴ He is most likely referring to *Sefer Sheimot* published in Venice in 1657 and written by Simha ben Gershon haCohen hebrewbooks.org/6449

Nashim (published in the Ottoman Empire)³⁴⁵ and Rabbi Benjamin haLevi's *Seder Netinat Get* (published in Safed),¹¹⁸ also appeared during the seventeenth century.

This heightened attention to name spelling was not due to a new stringency in halakha or *minhag*, but likely stemmed from the new geographic and demographic realities of the early modern period. Communities had grown significantly in size and became far more dispersed than in the medieval era. This expansion led to the introduction of many new names and pronunciations, especially female names,³⁴⁶ which were often adopted from the local languages and cultures. The Mediterranean region in particular, with its confluence of Greek, Arabic, and

Spanish-Portuguese influences, as well as the constant movement of merchants and the establishment of new settlements, became a hub for these questions, necessitating frequent halakhic attention and treatment.

Given this context, one might propose that the rabbis of Zante, as representatives of a provincial outpost, turned to Aboab seeking guidance from the capital. The existence of only one other responsum from Zante in *Devar Shemuel*, however, challenges this assumption. A more convincing explanation lies in Zante's status as a small island province and Venice's prominence as a mercantile metropolis and linguistic and cultural hub. The rabbis likely surmised that Aboab, situated at the epicenter of trade and cultural exchange, would possess linguistic expertise or access to resources unavailable in their local context.

³⁴⁵ R. Moshe ben Habib, *Sefer Ezrat Nashim* (Istanbul, 1731) hebrewbooks.org/8529 ¹¹⁸ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 147-148.

³⁴⁶ Likely because the male names were assigned in a public setting at the Brit Milah, while female names may have been assigned in a much more informal setting.

Notably, Aboab's response does indeed reference five divergent opinions and highlights the challenge of not finding a source for the name, despite the literary and human resources (native Greek speakers) available in Venice.

I propose, however, that the Zante rabbis turned to Aboab not solely because of his strategic location in Venice but also due to his recognized expertise in divorce law, particularly in the critical area of name spelling. Over the course of his career, Aboab authored nearly forty responsa on divorce-related matters, with eighteen specifically addressing the precise spelling of names—a stark contrast to his Italian contemporaries, such as Rabbi Moshe Zacut, Rabbi Leon Modena, and Rabbi Joseph Ergas, who published none on this subject. In one particularly notable and innovative responsum, Aboab even advocated for appending *nekudot* (Hebrew vowel markings) to the names in *gittin* as a means of addressing these intricate challenges.³⁴⁷ Thus, it is plausible that the rabbis of Zante considered that even if a complete resolution proved

unattainable, Aboab's opinion, bolstered by his recognized expertise in divorce law might carry significant weight, helping to preempt potential controversy over such a complex issue.

E. “Render My Opinion” Responsa Literature as a Work in Progress

Aboab's opening phrase, “they have asked me to render my opinion” while standard, warrants closer attention, as it offers important insight into both the conventional language and underlying currents of rabbinic responsa. Dr. Yosie Levine, in his dissertation on Ḥakham Zevi,³⁴⁸ a contemporary of Aboab, demonstrates that sending the same question to multiple rabbis was a well-established and accepted practice, indeed a characteristic feature of the early modern rabbinate. He also explains how rabbis navigated the Talmudic injunction against

³⁴⁷ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, Responsum 94.

³⁴⁸ Levine, “Port Rabbi,” 45-46.

“responsa shopping” by employing phrases such as “I have come to render my opinion,” or the equivalent disclaimer *le-halakha, ve-lo le-ma’aseh* (to elucidate the halakha, but not for practical application). This carefully worded language provided other rabbis the freedom to render their opinions in what could now be considered a theoretical debate. Thus, In Aboab’s response to Zante, he acknowledges that the rabbis from Zante likely sought several rabbinic opinions, and that his was not necessarily the definitive authority on the matter.

Thus, despite his qualifications and position, Aboab, recognizing the possibility that the Zante rabbis might pursue other opinions, astutely leaves an opening for them to do so. His carefully worded response, however, will raise important questions and serve as a catalyst for our analysis of the specific functions filled by rabbinic responsa during the early modern period.

VII. The Functions of Aboab’s Responsa: Advancing Rulings and Opinions, Arriving at Halakhic Consensus, and Joining a Rabbinic Republic of Letters.

“Regarding this name [Badukia] “we must admit that we could not find one Jewish witness or one Greek witness who can testify or elucidate for us the pronouncement of this name...”

Consequently, Aboab explains that he cannot offer a definitive *pesak* on its spelling. Despite this, he proceeds with a lengthy responsa in which he “plays” and “engages”³⁴⁹ with the halakhic deliberations presented by the Zante rabbis. This raises an important consideration regarding the fundamental purpose of responsa: In scenarios where a conclusive *pesak* or solution is unattainable, what role do responsa play?

³⁴⁹ He employs the term *le-hishtashe’a*.

This section explores three central functions of Aboab's responsa: 1. Advancing halakhic rulings and opinions, 2. fostering consensus among rabbinic authorities, and 3. contributing to a robust and dynamic rabbinic network.

Analyzing how Aboab utilized responsa to fulfill these three important functions illuminates their significance in both his career and that of his contemporaries. Particularly noteworthy is the crucial role responsa played in establishing a "rabbinic republic of letters"—a scholarly network that Aboab and his numerous correspondents actively sought to participate in, enhance, and cultivate. This interconnected intellectual community did more than merely facilitate sophisticated rabbinic discourse; it enabled Aboab and his scholarly interlocutors to construct a methodology of responsa formulation, provide a structure for the development of halakhic thought, and shape halakhic practice, all while reinforcing the centrality of the rabbinate to that process.

A. Advancing Halakhic Rulings or Opinions:

The most obvious and recognized function of halakhic responsa is to address practical halakhic matters by providing rulings or opinions, and Aboab's *Devar Shemuel* is an excellent example. Responsa falling under this category account for over 60% of the collection. We have already seen examples of this in the discussions regarding porcelain dishes, silk production on Shabbat, and the woman seeking permission to remarry early. While these present some examples of the range of questions Aboab engages with in his *Devar Shemuel*, the work spans the entire panoply of subjects addressed in Jewish Law.

Four important questions stand out, and they demonstrate how responsa functioned in practice. First, what was the querist expecting? A definitive answer, an opinion, or a discussion

of his ideas? Secondly, did Aboab believe or expect his response would be automatically adhered to or was he trying to add to a potpourri of other responses and be evaluated in that context? Thirdly, to what extent were Aboab's rulings or opinions actually adopted in practice? And finally, can we identify any variables which can predict the outcomes of any of the above questions?

The language used by the querists in posing their questions varies and is often ambiguous. It is unclear whether querists were approaching Aboab seeking definitive rulings or merely requesting his halakhic opinion. Perhaps that depends on the subject matter or the circumstances, but it is difficult to infer any clear pattern. Some querists use phrases like "please render an opinion" or "please advise us,"³⁵⁰ suggesting they wanted guidance or opinions rather than a binding decision. Others ask "is it permitted"¹²⁴ or "what is the [halakhic] ruling,"³⁵¹ which seem to request an unambiguous ruling.

Aboab's own phrasing in response compounds the uncertainty. He often uses expressions that suggest he believes that his opinion, rather than a binding ruling, is desired, and he responds in kind: "I will engage with this responsum"³⁵² or "I will render my opinion."³⁵³ Yet, in some cases, he adopts a more definitive, even authoritative tone. For example, in a responsum regarding the problematic spelling of the name Yehudit in a *get*, he writes "And therefore [in consideration of the halakhic discussion cited in the responsum] the divorce [writ] mentioned in the question is Kosher according to the law [halakha] and the women is divorced in accordance

³⁵⁰ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, Responsum 22. ¹²⁴

Ibid, Responsum 346

³⁵¹ Ibid, Responsum 286.

³⁵² Ibid, Responsum 112

³⁵³ Ibid, Responsum 124

with [the laws of] Moses and Israel.”³⁵⁴ Similarly, in a discussion concerning a mikveh (ritual bath) with an appropriate quantity of rainwater supplemented by "drawn water" from a well to facilitate immersion, he unequivocally states: “The drawn waters do not render it [the mikveh] Pasul (not Kosher for immersion) **in any way** [emphasis mine} and therefore the mikveh in question is kosher for immersion.”³⁵⁵ It is also challenging to ascertain any correlation between the tone of the query and the language used in the responsum.

Aboab’s language and the structure of his responsa also offer little insight into his expectations regarding their acceptance. Rather than implying a hierarchical prioritization,³⁵⁶ they are written as peer-to-peer collegial communications akin to the early modern republic of letters—a comparison to be explored further.³⁵⁷ Did he view his rulings as binding, or did he see himself primarily as an “opinion giver”? Addressing these questions would be easier if *Devar Shemuel* included an “epilogue” outlining the aftermath of each responsum—a fanciful notion, of

course, but one that underscores a significant challenge connected to responsa works:

Determining which opinions were accepted, which rulings were implemented, and under what circumstances is difficult if not impossible. For example, in the case of the silk factory operating on the Sabbath, his stringent recommendation was overruled in favor of a more lenient practical solution. Nonetheless, this responsum is widely cited as a seminal exposition of the various

³⁵⁴ Ibid, Responsum 100

³⁵⁵ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, Responsum 101.

³⁵⁶ This term generally refers to the prioritization of tasks based on their importance in the critical path. I borrowed this term to describe a context where the opinion of one contributor is valued above that of another, based on the academic or social standing of the former as related to the latter.

³⁵⁷ See below.

issues surrounding the thorny subject of *amira le-akum* (asking a gentile to perform work) on the Sabbath.

Probability alone would dictate that at least a portion of Aboab's responsa were accepted and adopted by the querying party. However, we may posit several additional factors which may have influenced their reception. For instance, Aboab's reputation as an experienced *posek* in specific areas of halakha may have heightened the value placed on his rulings on that particular halakhic topic. We explored this possibility in the discussion of the above responsum concerning the problematic name *Badukia* in a *get*, and Aboab's expertise in divorce law. Aboab displays similar proficiency in ritual scribal law, and this is reflected in his *Devar Shemuel* which includes over sixty questions on that subject as well as in his popular essay on the subject.³⁵⁸ Aboab's reputation and experience in these areas of halakha could have lent additional authority to his responsa, inducing the querist to accept his opinions on these matters.

Finally, we must account for the role of Geography. It stands to reason that a questioner reaching out from a nearby location would require and expect a definitive response urgently, and Aboab would be expected to respond in that vein, rather than offer a non-committal exposition of the problem. Also, the ruling in that case would likely be accepted and adhered to. While this is

an interesting hypothesis, the scant information we have is insufficient to posit any tendency in either direction, and we are left with questions that require further research.

One interesting observation is that despite Aboab's well-deserved reputation as being stringent, a *maḥmir*, responsa continued to be addressed to him on a consistent basis. Perhaps this

³⁵⁸ Arditi, *Ta'avat David*

is because of the great degree of respect with which he treated his interlocutors,³⁵⁹ or because of the concern he displayed by offering suggestions which would obviate the problems.

One conclusion is clear: Rabbis posed genuine questions in search of substantive answers—in the form of both rulings and opinions. Unfortunately, responsa alone cannot provide a reliable measure of an individual rabbi's halakhic authority or indicate to us what were his own expectations for his responsa to be followed. We have no consistent way to determine how frequently or for what reasons rulings were accepted or successfully implemented.

Thus, while responsa filled the most fundamental of rabbinic duties—answering practical halakhic questions, we will suggest that it had additional, and more overarching purposes as well that encouraged rabbis like Aboab to engage so avidly in this medium.

B. Responsa as Building Halakhic Consensus:

While responsa might assume a hierarchical authority, rabbis had no way of enforcing it except within their own communities,³⁶⁰ and even then, often only with the backing of the

community council. Rabbis certainly had no formal jurisdiction over individuals outside their immediate sphere.³⁶¹ In matters of particular significance, where rabbis sought to bolster the

³⁵⁹ See biography page 79

³⁶⁰ My father, who grew up in the German Jewish community of Washington Heights (New York) often repeated this (probably apocryphal) story. The town *shoḥet* walks into the rabbi's study holding a lung with a *sheila* (halakhic problem) "Herr Rabbiner, ist das Kosher," he asks? The rabbi examines the lung and issues a *psak*. Then he says, "Ich habe dich schon lange nicht gesehen" The *shoḥet* responds, "herr Rabbiner, ich habe ein *posuk* gefunden: *ubasar ba-sade tereifa... la-kelev taslikhun oto* (meat on the field is treif, give it to your dog). Als ich ein *sheila* hatte, habe ich ein schticklein fleisch genommen und es vor das hunde gestellt. Wenn das hunde es gegessen hat, ist der fleisch *treif*, und wenn er es nicht isst, ist das fleisch kosher." (when I had a *sheila* I put a piece of the meat before the dog. if he ate it, the meat is *treif*, if he didn't eat it, the meat is Kosher), Und warum bist du jetzt gekommen," (why did

³⁶¹ See a more extensive discussion of rabbinic authority and the enforcement of rabbinic and halakhic decisions in Chapter IV. ¹³⁶ For a discussion of the case and some of the rabbis involved, see Shlomo Simonsohn, "The

weight and authority of their rulings, they introduced a remarkable innovation—what we might call a “consensus responsum”, though Aboab refers to it as a *Pesak Klali* a “general” or “collective ruling.”

To achieve this, Aboab would send his halakhic opinion to several correspondents, to try to create a collective ruling. The resulting contributions would be incorporated into a collective ruling, now carrying substantial rabbinic ‘weight’ due to the signatures and opinions of multiple authorities.

“Consensus responsa” are typically found in cases of considerable halakhic complexity, especially those with clear socio-cultural sensitivity. Issues surrounding problematic marriages and divorces frequently fell into this category. In such cases, or in cases of wide ranging debate, such as the renowned Tamari-Venturozzo divorce case,¹³⁶ rabbis would initiate or participate in a consensus responsum to enlist others to their cause, or to align halakhic opinions with their own, striving to produce a definitive and authoritative ruling acceptable to all parties. Ideally, this approach would resolve contentious issues effectively, preventing further conflict or prolonged discord. As we shall see, consensus responsa were only effective some of the time.

you come now) asks the rabbi? “Herr Rabbiner, das hund ist zu gross a *machmir*,” (rabbi, the dog is a great *maḥmir*) came the response.

The *Devar Shemuel* catalogues a number of scenarios wherein Aboab was either asked to provide his opinion or volunteered it unprompted. For example, Responsa 291 to Rome

Scandal of the Tamari-Venturozzo Divorce,” *Tarbiz* 28 (1959): 375–92; and *Toldot ha-yehudim be-dukasut mantovah* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1964), 364–67. Y. Yudlov, “Bibliographical Notes on the Tamari-Venturozzo Affair,” *Alei Sefer* 2 (1976): 114–15; and E. Kupfer, “Further Clarifications Concerning the Tamari-Venturozzo Divorce Scandal,” *Tarbiz* 38 (1969): 54–59.

addresses a case where a girl was (possibly?) wed under deceptive circumstances, while Responsum 350 chronicles a convoluted saga involving an apostate woman who had been betrothed to a Jewish man. It delves into the ensuing monetary, cultural, and halakhic repercussions for both her father and her (former?) fiancé. Additional instances in the *Devar Shemuel* where Aboab's counsel is sought, likely owing to the intricate and sensitive nature of the matter, include Responsum 313 to Ancona, which engages with a complex inheritance issue, and his response to the rabbis of Rovigo, which pertains to the feasibility of expanding the capacity of the Rovigo cemetery by superimposing additional layers atop the existing graves.³⁶² In all these instances, Aboab emerges as an active participant and a contributor to the formation of halakhic consensus.

C. Aboab as “Consensus Builder:” Leather Tanning for use in *Tefillin* (Phylacteries)

Here, we turn to a case in which Aboab was not merely a participant but the initiator and driving force behind the creation of a 'consensus responsum'. This situation emerges early in *Devar Shemuel*, where a young Aboab, just beginning his rabbinic career, spearheads a consensus responsum on an issue of great personal and religious significance: the ritual tanning (*Ibbud li-shma*) of leather straps for *tefillin*.

Observing Aboab, then a rabbi in Verona, as he navigates the consensus-responsum process allows us to witness his passion, and grasp the intensity of his concern, as he advocates

for his position. This case also highlights the centrality of the consensus responsum in the career of an early modern rabbi. Almost incidentally, it provides an opportunity to appreciate Aboab's astute and unhesitating utilization of his and his family's networks to achieve his goals.

³⁶² Samuel Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, Responsum 342.

Responsa Seven, Fifteen, and Nineteen:

To Rabbi Azaria Picho: On the Subject of Ritual Tanning of Tefillin Straps:

Aboab broaches the subject of non-ritual tanning of tefillin straps at the conclusion of Responsum Seven, written by him, in Verona to Picho in Venice. At this stage, the issue of ritual tanning appears as an addendum to a lengthier, unrelated responsum. Yet Aboab's concerns are clear.

Referencing a ruling “that was shown to me by... Rabbi Benjamin Semega, [regarding] the work of the Rabbi, the Posek [Aboab cites no name]³⁶³ ... permitting the tanning of the tefillin in a non-ritual manner.³⁶⁴ And he [the anonymous Posek] permits this even *le-kathila* (ab initio)! .. It [the lenient ruling] is astounding in my eyes [as it goes] against almost all the *poskim* and against the ancient and established custom throughout the diaspora of Israel... I worry lest, God forbid, in the future this lenient *hora'a* (ruling lit. teaching) will [lead to] making communities [break up] into factions—those that permit and those that forbid [the pre-tanned straps]. Not only that, but Italian communities will be suspect in the eyes of the rest of the diaspora [Jews], who will not find them trustworthy on the matter of the ritual tanning of the leather according to the [proper] law.

Aboab concludes the paragraph—and apparently the letter—by seeking Picho's counsel

³⁶³ Aboab does not mention his name, but we know he is referring to Rabbi Shabetai Be-er from Venice and Jerusalem. This ruling appears in his book *Be'er Esek* ch. 10 Hebrew Books.org/603

³⁶⁴ The significance of this leniency is that it would allow “pre-tanned” leather straps to be attached to tefillin—something which would reduce the cost significantly.

on the matter. Then, in a rather telling gesture, he “reopens” the letter, returning to the issue as if unable to set it aside, and re-emphasizes the gravity of what is at stake. He stresses that he could find no halakhic opinion to justify such leniency. Aboab’s anxiety over this issue is palpable.

Aboab pursues the subject in two subsequent full-length responsa to Rabbi Azaria Picho. Responsum Fifteen reveals that Aboab’s urgency has made a notable impression on Rabbi Picho, and the initial stages of the 'consensus responsum' process are already discernible here as Aboab writes:

My heart rejoices in the ruling of His Excellency in Torah [an honorific referring to Picho]... to forbid [render halakhically invalid] non-ritual tanning of tefillin straps. I rejoiced and [shared this ruling with others], bringing them joy as well. Aboab follows by confiding in Rabbi Picho his internal conflict and uncertainty regarding the next steps in the process. He expresses a deep sense of urgency to prevent the spread of this leniency, while simultaneously voicing concern for the reputation of the lenient rabbi. In an attempt to reconcile these conflicting priorities, Aboab proposes several creative solutions.³⁶⁵ Ultimately, Aboab proposes the 'consensus responsum' as a strategy to publicize rabbinic opinion on this matter without directly confronting the lenient rabbi. His presentation of this solution is worth quoting, as it outlines the foundational elements of the consensus responsum. Moreover, it offers invaluable insight into how an early modern rabbi perceived and utilized the consensus responsum as a tool of rabbinic authority and communal guidance.

“Having noted His Excellency in Torah's hesitation regarding this approach
[an earlier compromise/solution suggested by Aboab], I proposed that perhaps it

³⁶⁵ See our discussion of these solutions in Chapter One pg X

would be more fitting in the eyes of God to issue a 'general ruling' [psak stami] in the form of a question-and-answer [responsum], without [directly] addressing the current disagreement. Instead, [only transcribing] the essence of the Din (law), [as articulated] through the four *hilukei ha-sevarot* (reasoned arguments) put forth by His Excellency in Torah... and demonstrating through these arguments that the overwhelming majority [of poskim] forbid [non-ritual tanning].³⁶⁶

Aboab's responsum Nineteen to Rabbi Azaria Picho, dated 1643, begins with a succinct and direct appeal:

I will add [to my earlier responsum where I initiated this request] and seek his countenance [agreement] to issue a public ruling, in writing, on the prohibition of leather tefillin straps that have not been ritually tanned. For, as it sounds, it [the leniency] has spread, the scab on the skin,³⁶⁷ across the regions of Italy... If it pleases my master [referring to Picho], and if they send me a general ruling from the sages of the city [Venice], we [Aboab and his family?] will be able to affirm and establish it with signatures from sages in the land of Israel, Constantinople, and Poland, so that all may testify [that it is] the practice of Israel to prohibit it [non-ritual tanning]...

³⁶⁶ Samuel Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 15.

³⁶⁷ This is a play on words, as the phrase *ha-mispaḥat ba'or* (scab on the skin) is used in Leviticus 13:6 to refer to the spread of *tzara'at* (biblical leprosy). Here, Aboab is suggesting that the "ill"-conceived leniency regarding the skins-referring to the leather tefillin straps, is spreading like a disease.

As Aboab observes the growing acceptance of this leniency³⁶⁸, his sense of urgency becomes almost palpable. He shifts from offering suggestions and requesting guidance to making an impassioned plea to Rabbi Picho, urging him to act swiftly in securing opinions and

signatures from Venice's leading rabbis. Although the Aboab family retained influential contacts in Venice,³⁶⁹ Aboab determined that Picho, as the prominent rabbi of the Talmud Torah community in Venice, had the most direct and efficient access to the requisite rabbinic endorsements for this distinctly ritual issue. Aboab's determination is evident as he presses Picho on this issue, emphasizing the importance of the Venetian signatures to the responsum's success. Once those signatures have been secured, Aboab was confident he could mobilize his (and his family's) international network to gain widespread rabbinic affirmation, thereby lending substantial weight to the responsum.

Although the *Devar Shemuel* does not include any further responsa on the subject, Aboab's diaries provide a crucial piece to the puzzle³⁷⁰: It appears Picho came through with the necessary Venetian signatures, enabling Aboab to proceed as planned. Thus, in an undated letter to Picho, Aboab details the progress he has made in securing the desired Italian signatures and his plans to acquire additional ones from abroad.³⁷¹ Aboab writes:

Regarding the ritual tanning of tefillin straps, I have already acquired the signatures of the *hakhamim* of Mantua, and I have sent it [the responsum] to the rabbis of Modena. I will also send it to Ferrara, so that the words will become public

³⁶⁸ It is difficult to ascertain if the leniency was indeed proliferating, or perhaps only "talk" was. Either way, Aboab was intent on nipping it during its early stages, before it became a matter of significant controversy.

³⁶⁹ See Chapter I.

³⁷⁰ S. Aboab, *Igrot* 92 R and 92 V.

³⁷¹ Jacob Aboab omitted this letter from the *Devar Shemuel* as it does not strictly qualify as a *halakhic* responsum.

throughout Italy. If God decrees it, I will send it to the land of Israel to receive the agreement of the sages there. Additionally, I will send a copy in our name to the Gevir (notable), the sage, and physician Rabbi Samuel Cohen of Krakow, who will acquire signatures from the great ḥakhamim of Ashkenaz during the customary fair... May God help us to honor His name.

The final details of this consensus-building 'saga' are provided by Rabbi Samuel Aboab's sons in an addendum to Responsum Nineteen in the *Devar Shemuel*. They recount that among their father's works, they discovered a copy of the 'general ruling' or 'consensus responsum' that Aboab had worked so tirelessly to create, and they include it here. The responsum is signed by the prominent rabbis in Venice at the time: Rabbi Leon Modena, Rabbi Simha Luzzatto, Rabbi Azaria Picho, and Rabbi Nehemiah Saraval.³⁷² It also includes the signatures of Rabbi Nathaniel Trabotto of Mantua,³⁷³ and Rabbis Leib Lonigo and Paltiya de Moncelisi of Ferrara. Notably, the consensus responsum printed in the *Devar Shemuel* does not include any signatures of rabbis from outside Italy. Does this suggest that Aboab was unsuccessful in acquiring those additional signatures? Given his passion, tenacity, and close ties with rabbis in the land of Israel, I find this hard to believe. It is more plausible that the copy found among his writings represents an earlier version of the responsum and therefore does not include all the non-Italian signatures. Aboab's initial foray into the realm of consensus- responsa appears to have been a success. He incorporated important rabbinic opinions, garnered numerous crucial signatures, and effectively disseminated his responsum throughout Italy. Furthermore, the *Devar Shemuel* contains no

³⁷² Modena and Simonsohn, *Ziknei Yehuda*, 52.

³⁷³ Ibid., 42.

subsequent discussions on the matter, indicating that the leniency was effectively curtailed before it escalated into a controversy. Even the *Sefer Ha-Zichronot*, in its discussion of widely practiced leniencies regarding *tefillin*, published only a few years after this episode, makes no mention of this one,³⁷⁴ reinforcing the impression that Aboab's intervention had a decisive impact, or, perhaps, indicating that the leniency was not quite as prevalent as Aboab feared.

Not all consensus responsa were quite as successful. There were occasions where consensus remained elusive or not universally acknowledged, as exemplified by the notorious Tamari-Venturozzo divorce case, which incorporated numerous rabbinic responsa from across Italy and as far as Safed and Salonika. Similarly, the protracted dispute over the mikveh in Rovigo³⁷⁵ led to the composition of three full-length halakhic treatises,³⁷⁶ demonstrating a distinct lack of actionable consensus.

Irrespective of their outcomes, consensus responsa provide a unique portal into some of the most contentious social events and distinctive cultural mores of the era. Aboab and his correspondents were keenly attuned to developments and tensions in the diverse Italian communities, and actively participated in various stages of their resolution. This is evident on several occasions throughout the *Devar Shemuel* where Aboab acknowledges multiple contemporary opinions and responsa regarding a subject and then issues his own opinion. For example, “my heart is inclined to be stringent like those [rabbis] who forbade it [the issue in

³⁷⁴ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 164-170.

³⁷⁵ For a discussion of the controversy and the role played by R. Yehuda Aryeh Modena see Howard Tzvi Adelman, “Women, Wine, and Song: Leon Modena and the Battle of the Mikveh at Rovigo: The Sho't That Were Heard around the World.”

³⁷⁶ *Mikveh Yisrael* by R. Judah ben Moses Saltero (1607 Venice) Hebrewbooks.org/1797 *Mashbit Milhamot* by R. Isaac Gershon (1606 Venice) Hebrewbooks.org/1796 and *Palgei Mayim* by R. Moses ben Jehiel (1608). Hebrewbooks.org/1301

question].”³⁷⁷ These responsa furnish crucial insights into Aboab's active involvement, driven by a sense of duty or by direct summons, in the religious, communal, financial, and social affairs of communities far beyond his own.

Responsa that aim to build halakhic consensus served an especially vital function in Italy, where the rabbinic landscape lacked regular meetings and reliable centralized structures.³⁷⁸

While the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed several significant lay synods in Italy in which rabbis actively participated, resulting in the establishment of noteworthy ordinances,³⁷⁹ these events were far from consistent. Moreover, by the seventeenth century, as Italian Jewish communities consolidated power and became increasingly protective of their autonomy, the need—or inclination—for these synods gradually faded.

This is in stark contrast to Poland, where the renowned lay “Council of the Four Lands,” was instrumental in cultivating rabbinic networks and fostering consensus. Despite the limited participation and authority of rabbis in the organizational and managerial aspects of the Council-- they served primarily on the Council’s Beit Din, recording and “notarizing” the Council’s rulings -- the vitality of rabbinic cohesion in Poland emanated from the regularity and consistency of these meetings.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 325.

³⁷⁸ Louis Finkelstein, *Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages* (New York: Praeger, 1924), records a synod at Ferrara in 1554, but states that there were none for a century prior to it. We have no evidence of consistent meetings or synods of this sort afterwards. 92-95.

³⁷⁹ Finkelstein, *Jewish Self-Government*, 92-95.

³⁸⁰ For more on the Council of the Four Lands See S. Zeitlin, “The Council of the Four Lands,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 39, no. 2 (1948): 211–14. More recently, Adam Teller, “Councils,” YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. <https://encyclopedia.yivo.org/article/320>. Francois Guesnet and Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Sources on Jewish Self-Government in the Polish Lands from Its Inception to the Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), chap. 2, and Judith Kalik, “Office Holders of the Council of Four Lands, 1595–1764,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 34, no. 34 (2022): 129–62

Absent meeting like these, these consensus-building responsa acted as a crucial conduit, linking rabbis across early modern Italy and providing insights into the communal and social challenges faced by their peers, as well as exposure to new halakhic and cultural developments. Aboab demonstrates how rabbis consistently sought input from one another, most notably turning to his teacher and mentor Rabbi Azaria Picho, and as his career progressed, engaging his colleagues for their opinions on complex issues with which he grappled.

"Consensus responsa" illuminate yet another distinctive aspect of Aboab's life while drawing attention to an important facet of the early modern rabbinate. In contrast to the territorial lay councils (Va'ads), rabbis like Aboab actively sought cross-community engagement. These rabbis participated actively in a robust correspondence with colleagues from various communities spanning a wide geographic range. They both solicited and provided halakhic perspectives to foster consensus and ideally reach a resolution agreeable to all parties involved. Thus, while Aboab's role as a rabbi was defined within his community and in relation to the council's expectations,³⁸¹ it is evident that a crucial part of being an early modern rabbi involved transcending those boundaries. "Consensus responsa" reveal that Aboab and his correspondents frequently and intentionally ventured beyond the confines of their respective communities, actively contributing not only to the evolution of Halakha, but also to the establishment and development of socio-cultural norms in Jewish communities throughout Italy.

D. Joining the "Rabbinic Republic of Letters": Aboab and Rabbinic Hegemony in Halakha

So far, we have explored how Samuel Aboab's responsa illuminates the ways in which rabbinic correspondence influenced the lives of individual rabbis in the Mediterranean region

³⁸¹ See my extensive discussion of the community rabbi in Chapter IV on *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* and rabbinic authority.

while fostering collaboration and interaction among them. Stepping back, we can view Aboab's responsa from yet another perspective — as more than numerous isolated rulings. They are a cohesive body of work that reflects his standing within a broad and interconnected rabbinic network. This network, maintained and developed through a continuous flow of rabbinic responsa and correspondence, exemplifies what can be termed “a rabbinic republic of letters.”

While our earlier discussion of “academic” responsa introduced the concept of a “rabbinic republic of letters” within the broader framework of the rabbinic network and its manifold advantages, we now return to this topic with a grounded and more nuanced understanding of Aboab's extensive responsa and the multifarious roles they played. This shift in

focus allows for a deeper investigation into the unique characteristics and inner workings of the “rabbinic republic of letters” as a distinct phenomenon within the rabbinic network, its overarching significance for Aboab, and his influential role within it.

The extensive geographic reach of Aboab's correspondence, as illustrated in the accompanying maps, reveals that many rabbis across the Mediterranean—regardless of age or experience—shared his keen interest in participating in a robust rabbinic network. Responsa served as the foundation of this network, functioning as both its sustaining lifeblood and the primary currency through which rabbis exchanged ideas and built connections.

While the network provided practical benefits—prestige, intellectual growth, and professional opportunities—it was the “rabbinic republic of letters” that served a far more significant, and comprehensive purpose for Aboab. It offered a means to preserve and consistently bolster rabbinic authority over halakhic decision-making, and ensure that the knowledge and processes underpinning it remained firmly in rabbinic hands. For Aboab,

responsa literature, in addition to its specific “function” could represent far more than the sum of its parts; it was the means through which rabbis asserted their exclusive role as interpreters and guardians of halakha.

Aboab’s prolific correspondence, exchanged exclusively with other rabbis and steeped in rabbinic language and frequent references to talmudic, midrashic, and halakhic sources, demonstrated not only his expertise, but his conviction that halakha must remain the domain of those loyal to *chazal* as its originators, for only such rabbis could safeguard halakha’s integrity amidst the challenges posed by a rapidly evolving world. Beyond this defensive role, “a rabbinic republic of letters” offered a means of constructing a rabbinic world that both upheld the stewardship of halakhic interpretation and shaped its dissemination.

Aboab’s writings reflect both this reactive and proactive vision for halakha, the role of the rabbi and *posek*, and the overarching significance of the “rabbinic republic of letters”. Reactively, he was deeply concerned with maintaining halakhic integrity and rabbinic authority in the face of developments such as the rapid spread of print, increasing migration, and, in his case, the unique challenges posed by converso communities. His *Sefer ha-Zichronot* repeatedly deplores the decline of halakhic standards and meticulousness in areas such as *milah*,³⁸² *sheḥitah*,³⁸³ and *safrut*,³⁸⁴ which Aboab attributed to widespread ignorance and inexperience.³⁸⁵ Yet, Aboab pairs his critique with proactive, concrete proposals: Instituting frequent testing, licensing, and surprise inspections of all these “practitioners” to reinforce rabbinic oversight and restore halakhic integrity.

³⁸² R. Samuel Aboab, *Sefer ha-zikhronot*, 162-63.

³⁸³ Ibid., 55-58.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 168-69.

³⁸⁵ See an extensive discussion of this ignorance and possible explanations for it in Chapter IV.

Similarly, Aboab's *Devar Shemuel* consistently reflects his deep concern for preserving the authority and relevance of chazal and the rabbinate. He consistently and explicitly affirms this throughout his responsa as demonstrated in our earlier discussion of Responsum 82 concerning the widowed mother's desire to remarry early. There, Aboab explained that chazal were concerned with safeguarding the safety of the infant and emphasized that contemporary rabbinic rulings should align with this perspective. Similarly, in responsum 49 to Rabbi Shimshon Basilea, on the subject of *Stam Yeinam*, Aboab dedicates over twenty lines to stressing the enduring relevance of chazal's decree against *Stam Yeinam*, which had been instituted to prevent mixed marriages. He firmly asserts "lo bateil ha-sibba ve-lo ha-me-sovev" (neither the logic [for the decree of *Stam Yeinam*] nor its results/context are obsolete), and warns that Italian

Jews, who disregard this ordinance in contemporary times, do so at their own peril. The consequences, he argues, are precisely what chazal foresaw: an increase in "*hayei hefker li-zenot bi-venot ha-aretz*" (a life of abandonment to promiscuity with the daughters of the land) among Italian Jews.³⁸⁶

While responsa are by nature reactive, addressing concerns and problems as they arise, I propose that the sheer volume of Aboab's responsa and the immense amount of time he devoted to composing them suggest that he had a broader, more encompassing vision for responsa and the "rabbinic republic of letters", one akin to the proactive rabbinic framework he advances in his *Sefer ha-Zichronot*. Specifically, Aboab envisioned responsa as the foundation of a halakhic system which would be capable of refreshing itself on an ongoing basis through the active

³⁸⁶ See our discussion of the significance of *Stam Yeinam* to Aboab in Chapter III.

participation and nourishment of a broad and diverse community of intellectuals. Thus, through the array of contributors, the ensuing halakhic system would naturally be responsive to emerging questions and societal changes, all while remaining firmly rooted in its rabbinic foundations. For him, the "rabbinic republic of letters" was not merely a reactive forum for resolving contemporary halakhic, social, and cultural issues which had arisen, it was a forward-thinking and anticipatory endeavor, seeking to ensure the continued centrality of halakha and the critical importance of the rabbis who were its arbiters. Through responsa and collaborative discourse, Aboab sought to construct a rabbinic system where halakha remained dynamic, resonant, and securely under the stewardship of those most qualified to guide it.

VIII. Conclusion:

Aboab's prolific responsa reflect his central role in Italian Jewry's halakhic world, and offer valuable insight into the many functions responsa served in the life of an early modern rabbi. His correspondence with figures such as Rabbi Leib Lonigo, highlights both his avid engagement in academic rabbinic exchange and the crucial role intellectual networks played for an aspiring rabbi. Meanwhile, his responsa addressing cultural shifts and emerging technologies provide a lens through which we can examine how he engaged with new realities as both a *Posek* and as a member of the Yeshiva Klalit of Venice. Despite their diverse subjects and multifaceted significance, all of Aboab's responsa share a common denominator: a steadfast commitment to upholding halakhic continuity and reinforcing rabbinic authority with rigorous stringency in an evolving world.

Taken together, Aboab's responsa reveal still more: His deliberate effort to fortify halakhic discourse under exclusive rabbinic authority for future generations. This vision is most evident in his avid participation in the rabbinic republic of letters, where he intended his responsa to function not only as a tool for addressing contemporary halakhic dilemmas, but as a means of ensuring the longevity of halakhic authority itself. By contributing to multi-generational and geographically expansive discussions, Aboab helped shape and sustain responsa as a dynamic and distinctly rabbinic discourse. His prolific engagement in this system, reveals a leader who not only responded to halakhic challenges, but worked to define the very mechanisms through which they would continue to be addressed.

Chapter III. Rabbi Samuel Aboab as author of Sefer ha-Zikhronot

Introduction:

The *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, now widely accepted as the work of Rabbi Samuel Aboab, has a complex and curious publication history. The book initially appeared anonymously, without a specified place of publication or date.³⁸⁷ In a 1975 study on the subject of *Stam Yeinam*³⁸⁸ (gentile wine) in Italy, Gershon Cohen³⁸⁹ demonstrated that *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* had almost certainly been published in Prague as early as 1646. He notes that earlier bibliographers had correctly determined that the book was printed in Prague by 1649, but they had overlooked a critical appendix, which may not have been included in all copies, that provides evidence for the earlier date. This appendix contains a reference to a sermon by the Maharal of Prague on the subject of *stam Yeinam* (gentile wine). The sermon holds no particular relevance to our present discussion, but the appendix also includes a remark by the author of the *sefer ha-Zikhronot* that is significant. The author states:

Also, the Rabbi Elijah ibn Hayim (RENH) signed a ruling together with all the rabbis of each city on the prohibition of *stam Yeinam*... and that ruling is included in his [R. Elijah ibn Hayim's] responsa in the second section, *Siman* 10.

Cohen emphasizes that the second section of R. Elijah ben Hayim's responsa first appears in the edition of *Mayim Anukim* published in Venice in 1646. Based on this, he concludes that early copies of *Mayim Amukim* must have reached Prague in 1646, just as the printing of *Sefer*

³⁸⁷ R. Hayim Yosef David Azulay (HIDA), *Shem ha-Gedolim: Ma-arekhet Sefarim* (Vilna), 22, hebrewbooks.org/67721

³⁸⁸ see my discussion below for a more expanded definition and explanation of this term.

³⁸⁹ Gershon Cohen, "Le-Toldot ha-Pulmus Stam Yeinam be-Italia," *Sinai* 77 (1975): 62–90.

ha-Zikhronot was nearing completion. The printers, therefore, incorporated the reference into an appendix before finalizing publication, suggesting to Cohen that *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* was indeed printed in 1646.

Because the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* was published anonymously, its authorship remains a subject of scholarly debate, though a compelling historical trail points to Rabbi Samuel Aboab. The first explicit attribution to Aboab emerged in 1703, nine years after his death, when Rabbi Moshe Hagiz made this claim in his *Leket ha-Kemakh*.³⁹⁰ This attribution gained further credence when the distinguished eighteenth-century scholar Rabbi Hayim Yosef David Azulai (known as HIDA) affirmed it in his authoritative work *Shem ha-Gedolim*.³⁹¹ By 1985, when Meir Benayahu published Aboab's correspondence with scholars in the land of Israel in his *Dor Ehad ba-Aretz*, the attribution had become so well-established that Benayahu is convinced of its truth³⁹². Contemporary historians and publishers have largely followed suit, routinely crediting Aboab in modern editions of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*.³⁹³ Conclusive proof of Aboab's authorship remains elusive however. This uncertainty is compounded by the work's peculiar publication circumstances—as HIDA notably observed, "The book [*Sefer ha-Zikhronot*] does not mention who the author is, not his name, nor the name of his city, and to hide this information, the paper [on which it is printed] is dark and the print is poor"

³⁹⁰ R. Moshe Hagiz, *Leket ha-Kemakh I*, (Amsterdam), 29, hebrewbooks.org/7690.

³⁹¹ R. Hayim Yosef Dovid Azulai (HIDA), *Shem ha-Gedolim, ma'arekhet sofrim (Devar Shemuel)* (Brooklyn, NY: Moriah Offset, 1982), 22.

³⁹² Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 45.

³⁹³ See for example *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* (Munkacs: Druck von Kahn und Fried, 1915) and *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* (Jerusalem: Zikhron Ahron, 2021).

Indeed, the unusual nature of this anonymity so struck HIDA that it prompted him to undertake a broader examination of anonymous authorship in rabbinic literature. He presents this

analysis in his *Shem haGedolim* immediately following his entry on *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*.³⁹⁴

HIDA asserts that since the Geonic period, rabbis took care to associate their names with their works. He notes that even when scholars like the *Rosh* (The thirteenth century Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel) or the Tosafists omitted formal attribution, they nonetheless ensured their authorship was known and transmitted through their students. Indeed, the anonymous publication of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* so intrigued HIDA, that he extends his analysis to examine the halakhic implications of unsigned works. Ultimately, while conceding their permissibility, he advocates strongly for authorial attribution. The uncertainty surrounding the authorship of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, and its confusing publication history poses important questions for us—students of the book and of Rabbi Samuel Aboab: Did Aboab indeed author the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*? If so, why did he choose to publish it anonymously, and under such strange circumstances?

Our primary task is clear: To establish Aboab's authorship definitively, and second—perhaps more intriguingly—understanding the rationale behind the peculiar publication of the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*. The work appeared not only anonymously but also far from Aboab's Italian center of activity, and he notably never confirmed or denied his authorship. This unusual publication “strategy” demands explanation: Did Aboab deliberately choose this path of anonymity for specific reasons? Perhaps it was not his choice, and the manuscript was stolen and published without his consent?

³⁹⁴ Azulay, *Shem ha-Gedolim*, 22, 46-47.

II. “State of the Field”

Gershon Cohen’s revision of the timeline, dating the publication of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* as early as 1646, is significant, as it places this milestone within Aboab’s tenure in the small community of Verona, when he was thirty-six years old.

Benayahu provides a brief overview of the publication history of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* and the debates surrounding its attribution before it was widely accepted as the work of Rabbi Samuel Aboab.³⁹⁵ The earliest reference to *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* appears in Shabbetai Bass’s work *Siftey Yesheirim*, published in Amsterdam in 1679. Bass provides a brief description of the text, noting its publication in Prague and attributing its authorship to Rabbi Isaac ben Haim Jeshurin, the *Av Beit Din* of the Sephardi community in Hamburg. This indicates that the authorship of the work was already a matter of discussion during Rabbi Samuel Aboab’s lifetime. The debate persisted even after his passing, as demonstrated by Rabbi David Tevele in *Shaarei Zion*, published in Hamburg in 1713, nearly two decades later, where he also credits the work to Rabbi Isaac Jeshurin.

Outside of Hamburg, there appeared to be a stronger consensus that *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* was authored by Rabbi Samuel Aboab. In *Leket haKemakh*, published in Amsterdam in 1703, Rabbi Moshe Hagiz attributes the work to Aboab, as does Rabbi Shimshon Morpurgo in *Shemesh Tzedakah*, published in Venice in 1743. Over the course of the eighteenth century, Aboab’s association with *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* became increasingly acknowledged.

³⁹⁵ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 45-49.

This trend culminates with HIDA, who, in his *Shem haGedolim* asserts unequivocally that Rabbi Samuel Aboab authored both *Devar Shemuel* and *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*.³⁹⁶ However, HIDA offers no new evidence to substantiate this claim. Instead, he relies on the attributions made in *Leket haKemakh* and *Shemesh Tzedakah*, treating them as authoritative and citing no alternative possibilities.

III. Proving Aboab's authorship:

A. Contemporary Affirmation of Authorship.

Although R. Moshe Hagiz is identified as the first to openly assert Samuel Aboab's authorship of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, Rabbi Moshe Zacut, Aboab's close friend and colleague, already so intimated upon Aboab's death in 1694. Zacut composed an elegy for Aboab that includes subtle yet unmistakable allusions to his authorship. While the poetic form concealed its intent from many, Zacut's references offer a beautifully crafted and compelling affirmation of Aboab's role as the author of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*.

R. Moshe Zacut's elegy is based upon the cantillations³⁹⁷ of the Torah. These ancient symbols indicate the proper manner in which the verses were to be chanted. They also provide punctuation, informing the reader where to pause and for how long. Each cantillation has a name, and Rabbi Zacut, in a double entendre, reinterpreted each such name to characterize Rabbi Aboab.

Verse Seven in the Elegy refers to Rabbi Aboab's *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*.

³⁹⁶ Azulay, *Shem ha-Gedolim*, 22.

³⁹⁷ More commonly called "trop" or "te'amim" For more on the origin and use of cantillations, see A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development* (New York: Holt, 1929), 35–70.

שורש פורה ראש מעקר ת"לשא

גד"ול הק"טין הפך לבב

לל ב פש"טא כל עקמימות,

יצרה בישא קרית ספר זכרון

בפה ול ב

“Roots which sprout forth bitter issue³⁹⁸ did he uproot and extricate³⁹⁹

The great one made himself small¹⁴ ; He transformed two hearts¹⁵ into one¹⁶

He made forthright⁴⁰⁰ all that was distorted⁴⁰¹ by the evil inclination --

The scribe of Sefer Zikaron⁴⁰² in words and heart.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁸ Deut. 29:17 Interpreted as a person who harbors evil thoughts

³⁹⁹ The cantillation he uses here is “talsha” (today called “telisha”). This indicates an especially melodious chant, which is “removed” from the more standard and monotonal cantillations. R Zacut’s double entendre means that R Aboab was able to uproot untoward behavior in the community.

⁴⁰⁰ Another cantillation, pashta, denoting a simple straight sound, here the double entendre indicates forthrightness and simplicity.

⁴⁰¹ Lit. made serpentine. Zohar (I,35b) teaches that the primordial serpent who caused Eve to eat from the forbidden fruit was the manifestation of the evil inclination.

⁴⁰² Lit *Kiryat Sefer*. While the word “*sefer*” fits here elegantly, and could be interpreted as simply an allegoric “book of remembrance” such as is allegorically maintained by God (Malachi 3:16), the word “*kiryat*” is entirely out of place here. This is a fine example of one of those subtle and inscrutable hints that Jewish poets were wont to plant in their works. The Talmud (BT Avoda Zara 24b) comments that the Persians call a scribe “*dvir*” because the verse (Judges 1:11) states that the city of Dvir was originally called Kiryat Sefer. Thus since “*dvir*” is associated with a book, the Persians in Talmudic times called a scribe “*dvir*”. This reference is now understandable. Rabbi Aboab was the scribe of Sefer Zikaron.

⁴⁰³ The Torah requires the recollection of the obligation to eradicate *Amalek* using the words, “Remember”, and “do not forget”. The Talmud (BT Megillah 18a) asks, “do not forget” already implies “remember”. Why the seemingly superfluous commandment to remember? Do not forget implies remembering in one’s heart, while remember adds the obligation to remember by reciting with the mouth (speech).

This verse in the elegy describes faithfully the role of the *Sefer ha-Zichronot*. It seeks to uproot some prohibited behaviors which had become commonplace in Italy. With his innate humility and kindness Rabbi Aboab explains the need for these changes and makes them palatable. Thus did he bring the Jewish people closer to God and the proper observance of His commandments. By writing *Sefer ha-Zichronot*, Rabbi Aboab ensured that his message would be remembered in the heart, in speech, and in writing.

B. Textual Comparison to Determine Authorship:

¹⁴ Another pair of cantillations called Zakef Gadol and Zakef Katon. Both indicate important pauses. The former is more melodious (Gadol, large) and the latter is simpler (Katon, small). The double entendre indicates that R Aboab was a great scholar who was humble. The reference is to the Talmudic legend (BT Hullin 60b) where the moon, which was created large, was subsequently reduced.

¹⁵ The Shema (Deut. 5:5) commands one to love G-d with all one's heart. However, the word used for heart is "*levavkha*" (using the letter "bet" twice) rather than the simpler and more common "*libkha*" (which uses the letter "bet" only once). The rabbinical interpretation is that one should love G-d with both one's hearts, the good heart (inclination) as well as the evil heart (inclination). One who has two hearts also has an evil inclination.

¹⁶ The Talmud (BT Megillah 14a) notes that the prophetess Deborah sat beneath a palm tree, to indicate that just as the palm tree has only one heart (it grows straight up without branches) so do Israelites have only one heart focused on the One above. Thus R Zacut notes that R Aboab transformed people with two hearts – both good and evil inclinations -- to people with only one heart focused on G-d.

In addition to *Sefer ha-Zichronot*, Aboab authored the extensive responsa collection *Devar Shemuel* and an ethical will, *Mishmeret ha-Kodesh*, which his children published as part of the introduction to *Devar Shemuel*.⁴⁰⁴ These works, along with his published and unpublished correspondence, provide a rich body of material for analysis. By examining stylistic, halakhic, thematic, and linguistic patterns across these texts, I aim to use comparative analysis to establish a compelling case for Aboab's authorship.

Stylistic Consistency:

⁴⁰⁴ Jacob Aboab, *Mishmeret ha-Kodesh* in the introduction to *Devar Shemuel* (Jerusalem: Zikhron Aharon, 2022), 21-24.

The most distinctive stylistic feature of Aboab's work is embodied in his *Sefer haZikhronot*. While the term *sefer zikhronot* literally translates to “book of memories” or “book of remembrances,” in Aboab's context, a more fitting translation might be “record book,” or “book of memoranda” reflecting his intent to document and address issues of halakhic, religious, and ritual importance. In this work, Aboab identifies ten major areas of ritual law, detailing their halakhic significance and providing practical guidelines for ensuring proper observance.

A striking parallel to this distinctive stylistic framework appears in *Devar Shemuel*, Responsum 156, where Aboab writes, “[this is] the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* given [by me] to a scholar who was going to live in the Land of Israel. [Its purpose is] to prompt him to sanctify himself, to establish safeguards for himself in some [areas of] transgression that members of our generation stumble upon.” In essence, Aboab provides the scholar with a book of memoranda, a guide filled with notes of critical importance to keep in mind as he embarks on this new chapter of his life. Within this responsum, Aboab enumerates fourteen areas of ritual practice for the scholar to carefully observe and remember.

The stylistic and thematic similarities between this “mini *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*” in *Devar Shemuel* and the comprehensive *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* are noteworthy. Six of the themes addressed in the responsum overlap directly with those in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, while the remaining eight pertain more specifically to challenges unique to life in the land of Israel. The shared themes include meticulous inspection of the slaughter knife, proper appointment of individuals responsible for *nikur* (deveining animals and removing tallow), vigilance in avoiding usury—

especially concerning funds belonging to widows and orphans,⁴⁰⁵ care with oaths, Torah study (particularly teaching), and maintaining family purity in sexual relations and avoiding *peritzut* (promiscuity). Additionally, both works emphasize the importance of ensuring that all stages of cheese production are overseen by a Jew and utilize kosher utensils and vessels.

These distinctive stylistic features serve as important evidence linking *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* to Aboab's broader corpus, reinforcing the case for his authorship through both content and form.

Linguistic Features:

In addition to stylistic consistency, Aboab's distinctive language resonates across all his writings. Aboab's essays, correspondence, and responsa exhibit his exceptional command of the Hebrew language, as well as his skillful integration and manipulation of Talmudic and Midrashic references. These abilities allowed him to actively engage in the efflorescent world of intellectual and halakhic exchanges among Mediterranean rabbis. A close analysis of his writings, revealed recurring phrases and linguistic choices that characterize his distinctive "voice". Among these,

⁴⁰⁵ To ensure widows and orphans had funds for their basic needs, the Talmud (Bava Mezia 70a) permits investing their money in certain financing strategies which would ordinarily be rabbinically prohibited as usurious. In most cases, Aboab was very wary of the prevalent, and often problematic, use of these leniencies.

one of his most notable and frequently used expressions is *ke-mazkir ve-lo ke-mazhir* — “as one who reminds (or mentions), not as one who admonishes.”⁴⁰⁶

This phrase is central to Aboab’s introduction to *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, where he writes: *ki lo bati le-hazhir ki im le-hazkir ya’an mi’ut erki ani makkir* (For I have come not to admonish, but rather to remind, since I recognize my small stature⁴⁰⁷) Here, Aboab connects the term “remind” (*le-hazkir*) with the title of his work, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* (literally–“Book of Remembrances”), framing his purpose as one of gently guiding his readers to recall and observe neglected halakhot or mitzvot, whether forgotten unintentionally or ignored willfully.

Aboab employs this phrase in his responsa as well, especially when attempting to convey a distinction between strict halakha and “halakhic caution”. For example, in Responsum 320, addressed to Rabbi Solomon Ayalon of Livorno, Aboab discusses whether a Sephardi Jew traveling to Ashkenazi cities may partake of their meat, given certain Sephardic stringencies in ritual slaughter. While permitting the practice, Aboab adds: “*I will say, as one who reminds and not as one who admonishes,*” and then proceeds to emphasize the need for greater vigilance in frequently checking slaughter knives to ensure they meet halakhic standards.

In Responsum 352 to Mantua concerning ritual slaughter, Aboab employs the same phrase while recommending that spleens be deveined shortly after slaughter, as practiced in

⁴⁰⁶ Aboab is careful that his words of caution not be construed as a “warning”. Under Jewish Law a person is not liable for punishment unless he is forewarned that the action he is contemplating is forbidden and punishable. This alliteration is common among later authorities, though it was used at least once prior to Aboab. The anonymous piyyut Adir dar bi-Metuḥim recited on Shabbat ha-Gadol in the Ashkenazi Western rite, outlines the various prohibitions associated with Passover and prefaces his liturgical poem with these words. The halakhic liturgical poem is recorded in manuscripts dating from the 13th century and is cited by Tosafot (BT Zevaḥim 95b s.v. eira). Aboab was probably familiar with this poem as it was likely recited by the Ashkenazi community in Venice.

⁴⁰⁷ *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 3.

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Venice, to prevent breakage and ensuing halakhic questions. Because the matter pertains to a

procedural suggestion rather than an immediate risk of transgression, Aboab frames it as a reminder, not a admonishment.

By contrast, in Responsum 257 to Rabbi Abraham Zorfati of Genoa, Aboab modifies the phrase *ke-mazkir u-mazhir*—“to remind *and* to admonish.” Here, he addresses the issue of a questionable *eiruv* that might permit carrying on Shabbat. Aboab acknowledges his lack of sufficient information to issue a definitive ruling but nonetheless feels compelled to issue both a reminder and an admonishment. He explains that the severity of the matter—potentially involving a *safek de’oraita* (a doubt concerning a Torah-level prohibition)—justifies his stronger tone.

Talmudic Phrases and Halakhic Source Materia

In addition to his distinctive stylistic patterns and characteristic turns of phrase, Aboab’s writings exhibit identical citations of Talmudic passages and halakhic sources across his works. These shared references further reinforce the consistency of Aboab’s halakhic thought and provide additional support for his authorship of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*.

One notable example concerns the prohibition of *Stam Yeinam*. Emphasizing the enduring pertinence of the rabbinic ban against *stam yeinam*,⁴⁰⁸ Aboab cites a Talmudic passage⁴⁰⁹: “*In all [halakhic matters], a Beit Din can overrule an equal Beit Din, except for the eighteen [halakhic rulings], which even if Elijah and his Beit Din overrule them [in messianic times], we do not*

⁴⁰⁸ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 75.

⁴⁰⁹ TB Avoda Zara 36a.

heed him.” Aboab stresses that the prohibition of *stam yeinam* is among these eighteen, highlighting its immutable status and enduring authority within Jewish law.

Aboab returns to this same source in Responsum 49, addressed to Rabbi Menachem Shimshon of Azila, regarding a question on *Stam Yeinam*. Seizing the opportunity to expand on the prohibition’s severity, Aboab cites the identical Gemara: “*Since early days, [the Jewish people] accepted this prohibition upon themselves and their descendants, so much so, that the Gemara states it is one of the eighteen halakhic rulings that even Elijah the Prophet cannot annul.*” The repetition of this passage across his works demonstrates Aboab’s consistency in emphasizing the enduring relevance and status of this rabbinic prohibition.

Aboab’s focus on the proper inspection of the slaughter knife is another instance where his works share identical halakhic references. In both *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* and *Mishmeret HaKodesh*,⁴¹⁰ Aboab cites Rabbi Joseph Karo’s statement: *harbeh zarikh yishuv ha-da’at*—“*Much composure of mind is needed [for this task]*.”⁴¹¹ He also observes in both texts that not everyone possesses the necessary sensitivity to properly check a knife: *ve-lo kol adam margish hargasha ha-zarikha li-vedikat ha-sakin*—“*Not everyone is capable of “feeling” the requisite [level of] sensitivity to inspect the knife.*”

Finally, Aboab presents an almost identical illustrative example in both works, reproducing it nearly verbatim. He describes a scenario in which an individual inspects a knife two or three times without detecting any nicks, only to discover one “after preparing his heart in

⁴¹⁰ Jacob Aboab, *Mishmeret*, 22, and Samuel Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 53, where he adds *harbeh zarikh yishuv hada’at li-vedikat ha-sakin*

⁴¹¹ Shulḥan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, 18 §14
S. Aboab,

fear of God.”⁴¹² This example highlights not only the technical precision required but also the spiritual mindfulness essential to the task—a theme Aboab consistently integrates into his writings.

C. Thematic Comparison.

Aboab’s *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, *Devar Shemuel*, and *Mishmeret ha-Kodesh* exhibit notable thematic parallels, an examination of which will further substantiate his authorship of *Sefer haZikhronot*. Equally important, this thematic comparison reveals the remarkable consistency of

Aboab’s core principles and priorities across his writings and as he matured. From *Sefer haZikhronot*, composed as a young rabbi in the fledgling Sephardi community of Verona, through the responsa he authored throughout his career, and culminating in his ethical will, Aboab remained steadfastly engaged with the same fundamental concerns.

Each work assumes its own distinct character. *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* offers a systematic and in-depth halakhic treatment of ten major topics deliberately selected by Aboab, while *Mishmeret haKodesh*—a brief, three-page ethical will—distills his most essential values for the next generation. *Devar Shemuel*, shaped by the queries he received, presents a challenge for tracing thematic continuity, yet we will demonstrate how Aboab strategically employs his responsa as a vehicle to reinforce key ideas, whether by introducing his own questions or elaborating on relevant issues.

Regardless of the distinctive construct of each work, the thematic coherence across them is unmistakable. Aboab’s engagement with these concerns was not episodic, but a defining feature of his rabbinic career. His writings reflect not only a consistent halakhic methodology but

⁴¹² *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 53 and *Mishmeret*, 22

also an enduring commitment to addressing the religious and communal challenges he deemed most pressing.

Since *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* is well-organized and provides an extensive discussion of the core principles under examination, it will serve as our primary framework for analysis. Using it as a reference point, we will trace thematic parallels across Aboab's other works, demonstrating how these foundational ideas manifest throughout his writings.

1. *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* opens with an essay titled “**The Obligation to Listen to Jewish Judges,**” where Aboab stresses the continued halakhic relevance of rabbinic authority and contemporary Jewish judges. He concludes *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* with an essay on “justice” (*Din*) where he emphasizes the necessity of adjudicating exclusively in Jewish courts before Jewish judges.⁴¹³ Strikingly, his ethical will begins with the very same directive: “not to go to their [non-Jewish] courts, in their paths [of judgment] and their rulings...” The fact that this principle appears so prominently in both works highlights its paramount importance to Aboab, and reflects his lifelong commitment to preserving halakhic integrity and rabbinic authority.
2. In his **second essay**, Aboab explores “**The Laws of Clothing,**” focusing primarily on the prohibition of *sha'atnez* (the forbidden combination of wool and linen). He admonishes his children of its severity in his ethical will as well, emphasizing the very same Talmudic phrase concerning those who transgress: *nalo'z u-me'iliz et aviv*

⁴¹³ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 184-187.

S. Aboab,

sheba-shamayim (“he is perverse and estranges his Father in Heaven (from him)”⁴¹⁴). In both works,⁴¹⁵ Aboab cites Maimonides, who explains that wearing *sha’atnez* repels divine mercy, as the transgression is neither driven by *ta’avah* (overwhelming desire) nor offers tangible benefit, but is committed solely in defiance of God’s will.

3. A. Aboab’s **third essay, “On the Subject of Ritual Slaughter and Forbidden Foods,”** is divided into three sections, two of which are dedicated to the laws of ritual slaughter. Given Aboab’s sustained engagement with this topic and its extensive thematic parallels across his works, it will be addressed later in this section, alongside a discussion of his fourth essay on *Stam Yeinam*—arguably his most significant and impassioned treatment of any subject.

B. In his last section of **Essay three**, regarding “**forbidden foods**,” Aboab makes a noteworthy remark regarding *matzah* baking—a topic to which he also dedicates a specific clause in his ethical will. In both instances, he emphasizes the same directive: “One should bake *matzah* only in small batches to prevent the dough from sitting too long while being rolled and prepared for the oven, risking fermentation and becoming *hametz* (leavened).”⁴¹⁶

- C. In that same section (**Essay three**) on “**forbidden foods**,” Aboab emphasizes the necessity of inspecting food for insects and maggots—a concern he reiterates in his ethical will, where he

⁴¹⁴ Talmud Bavli, Kil’ayim 9:5.

⁴¹⁵ *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 22, and *Mishmeret*, 22.

⁴¹⁶ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 62, and *Mishmeret*, 21.

dedicates a separate clause⁴¹⁷ to the subject of meticulous care in food preparation.

4. A thorough examination of **Essay Four** on *Stam Yeinam* will be presented later in this discussion.
5. **Essay Five, “On the Subject of *Taharah* (Purity) and *Kedushah* (Sanctity),”** finds a direct parallel in the final and most extensive paragraph of *Mishmeret ha-Kodesh*, simply titled *Kedushah*. While *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* primarily focuses on the laws of family purity and ritual immersion, it also admonishes against broader concerns such as promiscuity, inappropriate gender interactions, and relationships with non-Jewish women⁴¹⁸—issues that form the central focus of Aboab’s corresponding passage in his ethical will.
6. **Essay Six** explores the prohibition against “**shaving the corners of the beard, rounding the edges of the head, and growing sidelocks**”. This discussion closely

⁴¹⁷ Jacob Aboab, *Mishmeret*, clause 15, p. 23.

⁴¹⁸ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 105-106.
S. Aboab,

parallels “commandment” Fourteen in Aboab’s ethical will, where he admonishes regarding “shaving the five corners of the beard.” While *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* provides a detailed halakhic analysis, defining the five forbidden corners and prohibiting the use of a razor, the ethical will presents a more direct and urgent admonition regarding shaving the beard. In both works, Aboab expresses concern over the increasing prevalence of Jewish men shaving their beards—*Sefer ha-Zikhronot* noting it as a growing issue, and *Mishmeret ha-Kodesh* [written many years later] lamenting its widespread adoption. The distinction between the two texts is significant: *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* approaches the subject through the lens of halakha, while *Mishmeret ha-Kodesh* conveys a broader religious and cultural perspective, emphasizing that beyond legal technicalities, a Jewish beard is a sign of identity and should not be discarded.

7. Aboab’s **seventh essay on *ribbit* (usury)** is one of his most extensive, and his ethical will, though far more concise by nature, devotes a relatively longer passage to the subject as well. In both works,⁴¹⁹ he introduces the discussion with the same emphatic statement from the *Talmud Yerushalmi*: “One who lends at interest is like [one who] *kofer* (denies) the God of Israel, who took him out of Egypt.”⁴²⁰ He also laments the widespread disregard for this prohibition, admonishing in both texts that “the severity of the mitzvah has been forgotten from the majority of the nation.”⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ Jacob Aboab, *Mishmeret*, 23, and S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 113.’

⁴²⁰ TB, Bava Mezia 8:8

⁴²¹ Jacob Aboab, *Mishmeret*, 23, and Samuel Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 113.

8. **Essay Eight** addresses the gravity of **oaths and promises**, emphasizing the caution one must exercise before invoking God's name. Aboab's ethical will echoes these admonishments, and in both works, he employs strikingly similar language to highlight

the widespread flippancy of his generation in this matter. In *Mishmeret ha-Kodesh*, he laments: *asher al kol devar zehok ve-kalut rosh ... margela be-fumei shem hashem*.

("That with respect to all matters of humor and lighthearted speech... their mouths are accustomed to [using] God's name").⁴²² Similarly, in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, he cries: *veashmateinu gadla ad ha-shamayim, she-yihyu tinokot vi-yeladim vi-yeladot margilim et leshonam bi-nedarim u-shevu'ot* ("And our culpability is great [it extended] to the heavens, that children and boys and girls regularly accustom their tongues to [uttering] oaths and promises.").⁴²³ In both instances, Aboab's deep concern over this issue is unmistakable.

9. **Essay Nine** explores the **three covenants of Judaism—Sabbath, circumcision, and tefillin**—so designated in the Torah as more than mere commandments but as sacred *brit* (covenants) between God and the Jewish people.⁴²⁴ While Aboab's discussions on circumcision and *tefillin* primarily address practitioners such as circumcisers and *sofrim*, his essay on the Sabbath is directed toward the broader Jewish community. Here, he not only emphasizes meticulous observance but urges rabbis to promote

⁴²² S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 22.

⁴²³ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 129.

⁴²⁴ Gen. 17:10, Ex. 31:14, Ex. 13:10.

active engagement with the numerous halakhot and customs associated with Sabbath observance instead of mechanical or rote fulfillment.

In *Mishmeret ha-Kodesh*, Aboab additionally cautions against inadvertently transgressing Sabbath restrictions due to carelessness, illustrating his point with someone momentarily removing their hat—whether out of respect to greet a passerby or due to the heat—only to absentmindedly carry it for several feet or from the street into their own

property, thereby violating the Biblical prohibition forbidding carrying or *ha-avara meireshut li-reshut*. (transferring between domains) on the Sabbath.⁴²⁵ He cites this very same scenario in *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 150 to Rabbi Shimon Yona of Casale regarding the permissibility of establishing an *eruv* in his city. After addressing the halakhic question, Aboab takes the opportunity to highlight the need for greater attentiveness to the details of Sabbath laws, noting that such lapses often go unnoticed, leading individuals to unknowingly violate the prohibition by carrying beyond four *amot* or transferring an item between public and private domains.

10. In his **final essay**, Aboab examines the six fundamental values described in *Pirkei Avot* as the "pillars of the world": **Torah, prayer, gemilut ḥassadim (acts of kindness), justice, truth, and peace**.⁴²⁶ He explains that, rather than following the Mishnah's order—which begins with Torah—he will first discuss prayer, reserving Torah for last because "it is the most beloved and significant".⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ Jacob Aboab, *Mishmeret*, 21.

⁴²⁶ Avot 1:1; 1:18

⁴²⁷ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 175.

A. Prayer: *Kavanah* (proper intent) and Proper Timing

Aboab devotes a substantial portion of his essay on prayer to the importance of praying with *kavanah*⁴²⁸ and ensuring one arrives early to the synagogue, thereby allowing time for preparation and unhurried prayer.⁴²⁹ He elaborates on the meaning of *kavanah*, stressing that it requires focusing on the words' significance and articulating them precisely, rather than rushing through them. To facilitate this, he advocates for arriving early: "And one of the things that is very helpful to [ensuring proper] *kavanah* is arriving early at the synagogue...[otherwise]

because he is rushed, he cannot pray with the proper intent, nor articulate the letters [sounds] [of the prayer] properly."⁴³⁰ This directive parallels his ethical will, where he exhorts his children to offer "prayers with *kavanah* and in their proper time... [recited] with tranquility and calm."⁴³¹ In both texts, he echoes the teaching from Masekhet Berakhot: "[The devout] would arrive early and stay late in the synagogue."⁴³²

B. Truth: Integrity in interpersonal relationships.

Aboab's discussion of **truth** in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* focuses on the importance of honesty in all human interactions: "If truth is absent, all dealings between people cease—whether intellectual or financial."⁴³³ He further underscores this principle by recalling that the first of the five questions a person is asked upon arrival at the Heavenly Court is, "Were you honest in your

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 177.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 179.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Jacob Aboab, *Mishmeret*, 23-24.

⁴³² TB Berakhot 8a

⁴³³ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 187.

⁵¹ Ibid.

[interpersonal] interactions?”⁵¹ Similarly, in *Mishmeret haKodesh*, he directly addresses the necessity of integrity among human dealings: “Each person must master his [evil] inclinations, conduct his affairs with honesty, and ensure that his mouth and heart are in accord.”⁴³⁴⁴³⁵ In both works, he highlights the primacy of truthfulness by citing the same Talmudic passages: “One who speaks falsehoods cannot endure in My sight”⁴³⁶ and, regarding human relations “Jerusalem was not destroyed until its people of *amanah* (faithfulness) vanished.”⁴³⁷ Aboab interprets *amanah* (lit. faith) in both instances as faithfulness—specifically, honesty—reinforcing his

conviction that ethical conduct in interpersonal relations is fundamental to both religious and communal stability and permanence.

C. Torah: The importance of Teaching Torah

Aboab concludes *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* with an essay on the importance of Torah study, particularly the education of young children. While minimizing the centrality of technical pedagogic issues such as the precise order of study, the age at which *Mikra*, *Mishnah*, and *Gemara* are introduced or the amount of emphasis placed on memorization, he stresses that each child must be taught according to his individual abilities. The responsibility for this, he insists, falls upon teachers, who must adapt their instructional methods to ensure each student receives an education suited to his strengths.

This conviction is reflected in the accounts of the teaching methods Aboab himself used.

⁴³⁴ A talmudic expression (TB Nazir 2a) denoting that a person should not mislead others by thinking one thing but saying another.

⁴³⁵ Jacob Aboab, *Mishmeret*, 22.

⁴³⁶ Jacob Aboab, *Mishmeret*, 23, S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 187

⁴³⁷ Jacob Aboab, *Mishmeret*, 23, S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 188.

His son Jacob remarked that Aboab tailored his instruction to each student's needs, "[He taught] each sheep⁴³⁸ individually, one in scripture, one in Mishnah, and each according to his intellect and good character.."⁵⁷ Aboab's attentiveness to the abilities of his students is further evident in a letter to Rabbi Jacob haLevi, in which he writes

Regarding the distinguished student, your grandchild...my hand has never left his, to strengthen and encourage him in the study of *mishnayot*...as I have seen that he is particularly adept at them. In addition to them [mishnayot], I instructed an older student...to review with him one halakha every day so he should master it well in order to [begin] to expand his heart in the study of Gemara, [and thereby] enabling him to enter [the study of Gemara] with the rest of the students [his peers]...⁴³⁹

The same theme appears in *Mishmeret haKodesh*, where Aboab stresses the critical role of hiring teachers and ensuring proper Torah instruction "to be careful to ensure the teaching of young children and to appoint melamdei tinokot (teachers) for them. ". He uses the identical *Talmudic* passage in both texts, to reinforce this idea⁴⁴⁰: "Any city that does not have teachers of young children, must be destroyed, since the world exists only through the chatter of young children [studying Torah]."⁴⁴¹

D. Two Central Themes: Ritual Slaughter and Stam Yeinam:

⁴³⁸ Lit., flock. In this context, child. Aboab borrows from Gen. 32:16 "each flock separately"

⁵⁷ Jacob Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 5.

⁴³⁹ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 73.

⁴⁴⁰ Jacob Aboab, *Mishmeret*, 23, S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 194.

⁴⁴¹ TB Shabbat 119b.

These two themes deserve special attention as they assume great importance for Aboab, appearing repeatedly in all his works.

1. **Ritual Slaughter: Checking the knife.**

Throughout his writings, Aboab consistently emphasizes the issue of *sheḥita*—particularly the examination of the *sheḥita* knife-- underscoring the significance he ascribes to it. His third essay, *On Forbidden Foods*, is primarily devoted to precisely this topic.⁴⁴² His ethical will likewise contains a lengthy passage on the matter, admonishing that *she-rov ha-olam nikhshalim bah* (most of the world errs in it). Were one to identify a recurring concern in Aboab's halakhic thought, this would undoubtedly be a prime candidate.

His preoccupation with this issue is evident as he devotes to it three distinct responsa in *Devar Shemuel*, reflecting his concern with this particular halakhic issue. Aboab repeatedly underscores the necessity of properly inspecting the knife even when the subject matter of the responsum at hand is only tangentially related.

In Responsum 200, addressed to Bazolo, Aboab discusses which finger is preferable for checking the knife's sharpness. He rules that each slaughterer should use the finger he finds most sensitive, but he concludes with a cautionary note: the *Beit Yosef* advises periodically alternating the *finger nail* (emphasis mine) used for checking, as it might become nicked after prolonged use, thereby invalidating it. Aboab includes this exact teaching in his *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* essay as well.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴² S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 44-58.

⁴⁴³ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 53.

Responsum 282 explores the precise *shi'ur* (size) of a *pegima* (nick) sufficient to disqualify a *shehita* knife. The analysis, sources cited, and ultimate ruling are almost identical to a similar discussion appearing in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* ⁴⁴⁴

In Responsum 320, addressed to Rabbi Solomon Ayalon in Livorno, Aboab addresses a question about the permissibility of a Sephardi Jew eating meat in Ashkenazi communities, whose standards for *bedikat ha-re'ah* (checking lungs for blemishes which can render the animal not kosher) are less stringent. While permitting this practice, Aboab avails himself of the opportunity to issue a broader exhortation: Those who wish to demonstrate particular *zerizut* (zeal) in the area of *kashrut* should focus on meticulous *bedikat pegimot ha-sakin* (inspection for nicks of the knife). Once again, this responsum exemplifies Aboab's tendency to use any opportunity to advocate for this issue, reinforcing its significance as a recurring theme in his halakhic thought.

2. Stam Yeinam (Gentile Wine):

Aboab's fourth and longest single-topic essay in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* is devoted to systematically addressing the contentious issue of *Stam Yeinam*. In the aforementioned study on *Stam Yeinam* in Italy, Gershon Cohen observes that Aboab was the first Italian rabbi to "take the bull by the horns" and launch a full-fledged polemic against the widespread leniencies and dismissive attitude prevalent among Italian Jews.

The original rabbinic ban on *Stam Yeinam* prohibited consuming or even deriving benefit from wine produced, or even touched, by non-Jews. Originally instituted in post-Biblical times

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 44-45.

as a safeguard against intermarriage, the prohibition was also intended to reinforce communal boundaries by discouraging excessive social interaction and assimilation with gentiles.

In Aboab's Italy, however, the prohibition was often treated with extreme leniency or simply disregarded, as evidenced by the numerous lengthy responsa from other Italian rabbis, including Rabbi Moshe Zacut⁴⁴⁵ and Rabbi Raphael Meldola.⁴⁴⁶ In his extensive study on *Stam Yeinam* in early modern Italy, Gershon Cohen demonstrates that this was a long-standing challenge, already a subject of concern in the fifteenth century. Rabbis including Rabbi Joseph Colon (*Maharik*), Rabbi Judah Minz, and Rabbi Meir Katzenellenbogen (*Maharm Padua*) all grappled with the issue, and virtually every Italian rabbi in Aboab's day—among them Rabbi Leon Modena, Rabbi Menachem Azariah de Fano, R. Aboab, Rabbi Moshe Zacut, and Rabbi Raphael Meldola—felt compelled to address it in some context.⁴⁴⁷ Cohen further highlights that the laxity surrounding *Stam Yeinam* was notorious beyond Italy's borders, prompting condemnations from leading rabbis in Safed, beginning with Rabbi Joseph Karo, and Salonika, all of whom decried the leniencies practiced by Italian Jews.⁶⁷

Aboab confronts this issue in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, devoting an extensive twenty-five-page section of his essay⁴⁴⁸ to cataloging the numerous leniencies practiced by Italian Jews and

⁴⁴⁵ R. Moshe Zacut, *Shu"t ha-RaMaZ* responsa 49 and 50 on *Stam Yeinam*. hebrewbooks.org/1167

⁴⁴⁶ R. Raphael Meldola, *shu"t Mayim Rabim, Yoreh Deah, Helek Sheini, questions 24, 25 and 26*. hebrewbooks.org/1040

⁴⁴⁷ Cohen, "Le-Toldot ha-Pulmus," 80-90.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 71-74.

⁴⁴⁸ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 75-100.

systematically dismantling their legitimacy. Likewise, in *Devar Shemuel*, he repeatedly uses inquiries concerning *Stam Yeinam* as a platform to denounce the prevailing laxity of Italian Jewry toward this fundamental rabbinic prohibition.

For instance, In responsum forty-nine, Aboab compares the situation in Italy to that prevailing in Ashkenaz, France, Spain, and Turkey, and laments the relative permissiveness of Italian Jews. He condemns their neglect of the prohibition in stark terms writing: “Ten measures of heresy descended into the world, and the [Jewish] people of Italy took nine.”⁴⁴⁹ Similarly, in responsum fifty-five, he states explicitly that Italian Jews regard *Stam Yeinam* as *hetter gamur* (completely permissible).

These concerns are echoed by his younger contemporary, Rabbi Raphael Meldola, who writes in his responsa work, *Mayim Rabbim* that “people [in Italy] today, believe [*stam Yeinam*] is no longer a prohibition because there are no longer libations to idolatry [a primary reason for the original ban]. Therefore, they argue, if the rationale for the decree is no longer relevant, so too is the decree itself. They consider those who abstain from *stam Yeinam* to be acting out of excess holiness, asceticism, or *humra* (stringency), akin to a Nazirite seeking abstention.”⁷⁰

Aboab’s deep concern over the leniency of Italian Jews—and their blatant disregard for a decree instituted by *Chazal*—permeates his writings on *Stam Yeinam*. His extensive treatment of the issue in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, along with six distinct responsa in *Devar Shemuel*,⁷¹ reflect his continuous efforts to combat widespread permissiveness and restore stricter adherence to this rabbinic prohibition.

⁴⁴⁹ TB Kiddushin 49b hyperbolically extols or denigrates various locales and people by declaring “ten measures of [a certain trait] descended onto the world, and nine of them were arrogated by [that locale or people]”. ⁷⁰ R. Raphael Meldola, *Mayim Rabim Yoreh Deah, Helek Sheini*, 26. Hebrewbooks.org/45659 21bL ⁷¹ S. Aboab, Responsa numbers 49, 55, 69, 153, 162, 175.

Halakhic Psak:

Finding overlap between *Devar Shemuel* and *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* in halakhic rulings (*psak*) is more challenging than it might initially appear. The *halakhic* discussions in *Sefer haZikhronot* are narrowly focused on the specific subjects selected for the essays, resulting in a thematically limited scope. In contrast, *Devar Shemuel*, though shaped by editorial choices, is primarily composed of responsa exchanged with other rabbis, inherently dictated by the questions posed. While Aboab occasionally uses a responsum as a "springboard" to address related (or tangential) issues, his ability to expand the discussion remains constrained by the context of the inquiries which initiated the responsum.

Despite these challenges, there are notable instances where the two works are indisputably aligned. One such example appears in Aboab's discussion of *sha'atnez*. In Responsum 169, Aboab refers to "*the law regarding leather sewn with linen threads that connect it to wool garments, as is customary in some places.*" Similarly, in *Sefer haZikhronot*⁴⁵⁰ he provides the same example, quoting the *Tur*: "*Therefore, he (RoSH) was stringent for himself and would not sew leather [which had been] stitched with linen beneath a wool garment, because the stitching connects the leather and the wool garment together*".

One of the most intriguing instances of overlap between Aboab's works, is his direct reference to *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* in *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 171. In *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, Aboab strongly advocates that only experienced circumcisers (*mohalim*) perform the ritual, insisting that inexperienced individuals should operate under strict supervision. He emphasizes that lack

⁴⁵⁰ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 34-35.

of knowledge about key halakhic details can lead to errors that invalidate the circumcision. To illustrate, Aboab cites a ruling of the *Beit Yosef*⁴⁵¹: “*The main part of the*

mitzvah of circumcision is to reveal the entire ‘crown’ along with the surrounding ‘strip’[of skin] which is its essence”. Ignorance of this detail, Aboab asserts, can invalidate the ritual.

In Responsum 171, written in response to a question from Mantua about halakhic invalidations of circumcision, Aboab references the same halakha from the *Beit Yosef* and explicitly mentions *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*. He notes, however, that the discussion in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* offers no new halakhic ruling but instead clarifies a doubt raised by Rabbi Joseph

Karo regarding the precise definition of the “crown” in circumcision: “*That which is written on this matter in Sefer ha-Zikhronot has no new legal bearing, rather it clarifies one of the doubts raised by Rabbi Joseph Karo in the name of the sages of Spain*”.

In addition to providing another important piece of evidence supporting Aboab’s authorship of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, this particular overlap highlights Aboab’s continued desire for anonymity. There is no doubt that Aboab is referencing his own *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, which had been published more than twenty years earlier. Yet, he neither explicitly claims authorship nor subtly alludes to it. This returns and reinforces the most intriguing question surrounding the work: Why did Aboab initially choose to publish the work anonymously, and why did he remain steadfast in preserving that anonymity throughout his life?

IV. Aboab’s Anonymity:

⁴⁵¹ *Shulkhan Aruch, Yoreh De’a*, 264:5.

Samuel Aboab composed *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* in Verona and published it in 1646 while serving as rabbi there. Given Verona's status as an established center for the publication of Hebrew books,⁴⁵² it would have been a logical choice for publication. Venice, geographically close and home to some of the most renowned Hebrew publishing houses of the time, was another viable option, especially as Aboab's family maintained a strong presence in the city,

which could have facilitated the process. Surprisingly, however, Aboab chose to send the manuscript to Prague for publication—possibly entrusted to his younger colleague, R. Isaac ben Haim Jeshurin.⁴⁵³ The Prague edition omitted attribution, employed inferior materials, and geographically distanced the work from Aboab's name and reputation.

This decision suggests that Aboab deliberately pursued anonymity, a conclusion further evidenced in responsum 171 discussed above, where he avoids acknowledging his connection to the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* he is citing. Even after Aboab's death, his son Jacob, in the introduction to *Devar Shemuel*, omitted *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* from the list of his father's published and unpublished writings.⁷⁶ Was Jacob genuinely unaware of his father's authorship, or had Aboab explicitly instructed him to uphold this secrecy posthumously? Either possibility points to Aboab's deliberate and sustained effort to obscure his authorship.

This enduring anonymity is far from a trivial curiosity. What motivated Aboab to publish this work anonymously and what can his motivations reveal about his deeper intentions and aspirations for the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*?

⁴⁵² Meir Benayahu, "Yedi'ot al Hadpasat Sefarim ve-Hadpasatam be-Italia," *Sinai* (1954): 172–177.

⁴⁵³ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 46, speculates that they were friends. Later (49) he posits that Aboab gave Jeshurin the manuscript to edit and publish in Prague, which may explain why some credited him with its authorship. ⁷⁶ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 7.

Aboab's contemporaries, such as Rabbi Moshe Hagiz, and later figures, including HIDA, attributed his anonymity to his profound piety and humility. HIDA explicitly remarks: *Sefer zikhronot – le-rov ḥasiduto lo hizkir shemo alav* (“And due to his piety, he did not note his name on it”).⁴⁵⁴ Given that *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* includes frequent exhortations to rabbis to address prevailing leniencies, combat halakhic ignorance, and rectify communal shortcomings—such as laxity in Sabbath observance, Aboab's decision to remain anonymous reflects an intentional act of modesty. By concealing his authorship, he sought to avoid any perception of self-

aggrandizement or the impression that he regarded himself as uniquely qualified to offer such critiques.

This explanation, while consistent with Aboab's reputation for piety and modesty, feels insufficient. He went to great lengths to ensure the text was published far from home and without any association with his name. Even if one were to suggest that the text was stolen or published without his consent, it appeared early in his life and was already circulating, as evidenced in his own responsum. Why, then, did he make no effort to correct the misunderstanding—or the lack of understanding—surrounding its authorship?

One plausible explanation lies in Aboab's youth and relative inexperience at the time of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*'s publication. At thirty-six years old, he was serving as a rabbi for the small Sephardi community in Verona. Could he have feared that his age and lack of expertise might undermine the work's reception? Readers—particularly the rabbis for whom the text was intended—might have dismissed it, questioning his authority or expertise. Furthermore, the text contains candid critiques and bold recommendations for rabbinic leadership and communal

⁴⁵⁴ Azulay, *Shem ha-Gedolim*, 22.

reform. Such content could easily have been perceived as presumptuous or overly ambitious coming from someone of his, as yet, modest stature within the rabbinic world.

Furthermore, he may have had detractors. He didn't want them to dismiss his book because of their animus towards him. Moreover, he was a great *machmir*. This is evident in his Devar Shemuel. He didn't want that to stand in the way of popular acceptance of the book. The book simply examines the halacha in a forthright manner, and encourages people to adhere to it. He didn't want the conversation to be about him, he wanted it to be about his ideas.

While these factors may explain Aboab's desire for anonymity, the strength of his commitment—extending even posthumously— suggests there are aspects of the *Sefer haZikhronot*'s publication and purpose that remain unknown. The “back story” of the work, therefore, retains some mystery.

The book itself poses its own set of puzzles. The Sefer ha-Zikhronot comprises ten major essays, most subdivided into two or three sections, each addressing a central topic of *issur veheter* (ritual law or practice), such as the laws of the Sabbath, circumcision, and ritual slaughter. Each essay features a substantial halakhic treatise on the ritual subject, followed by a critique of prevailing halakhic ignorance or leniency, practical guidance for strengthening observance, and proposals for improving adherence to halakha.

This unique combination of halakhic rigor, practical application, and ethical critique resists neat categorization. *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* is neither a purely halakhic work—whether a code or responsa—nor a treatise on philosophy or *mussar* (ethics), nor a collection of sermons. Its structure and style have no clear parallel among contemporary texts. Even its title, which translates as “Book of Remembrances” or “Memoranda,” invites further questions: Whose memoranda are these? What is being remembered or documented?

To address these questions, we must turn to the author of the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*. Writing as a young rabbi in early modern Verona, product of a prominent converso family with access to an extensive rabbinic network, Aboab's *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* reflects both his aspirations and his understanding of a rabbi's role in seventeenth-century Italy. What did he envision? What did he seek to create? His answers emerge in this "book of memoranda," offering a rare window into his goals and the ideals he sought to advance. As we have demonstrated, the themes explored in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* remained central to Aboab's thought throughout his life. A closer examination of these ideas, which we will explore in the following chapter, illuminates his distinctive approach to rabbinic authority and his broader vision for the seventeenth-century Italian rabbinate.

Chapter IV: *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*: A Guide for Rabbis:

I. Introduction:

In the previous chapter, we argued that Samuel Aboab was the author of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*. This important work represents a literary genre distinct to Aboab, and merits scholarly attention as a unique contribution to rabbinic literature. Additionally, its structure and content provide a portal into Aboab's vision and intended audience. Several of Samuel Aboab's contemporaries authored books aimed at lay or converso audiences. Notable examples include Immanuel Aboab's *Nomologia*, Menasseh ben Israel's *Conciliator*, and David Nieto's *Matteh Dan*, which seek to explain and defend Jewish beliefs. In contrast, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* belongs to an entirely different category. Aboab engages neither in apologetics nor in philosophical discourse; rather, addressing a rabbinic audience, he focuses on ten core areas of *issur ve-heter* (ritual law lit. forbidden and permitted), including Talmud Torah, the laws of forbidden foods, and *sha'atnez* (the prohibition of mixing wool and linen). These subjects, traditionally under the purview of the rabbinate, illuminate Aboab's priorities and objectives: delineating rabbinic responsibility, reinforcing halakhic authority, and articulating a vision of religious "orthodoxy".

Each of the ten essays in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* follows a clear didactic structure. Aboab first identifies common halakhic pitfalls, misunderstandings, or rationalizations with which rabbis are likely to contend within their communities. He then prescribes the correct course of action, emphasizing the role of the rabbi in upholding and systemizing halakhic meticulousness. For instance, in discussing *borer* (the prohibition of selecting or separating on the Sabbath), he outlines the halakhic issues involved in separating mixed foods and advises that individuals should be counseled to prepare their food in separate containers before the Sabbath to avoid

transgression.⁴⁵⁵ This exemplifies his broader method: diagnosing individual and communal lapses in observance and offering pragmatic yet stringent solutions.

For all its methodical approach and consistent structure, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* remains a puzzle.

Beyond its anonymous publication, it resists classification within any established genre of Jewish literature. Both Aboab's contemporaries and later scholars struggled to define its nature.

Shabbetai Bass, a contemporary of Aboab, found it impossible to succinctly categorize the work as halakha, ethics, or critique (*mussar*), instead resorting to a lengthier description of its contents in his *Siftei Yesheiniim*: "And they are [the subjects included in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*] rectifications, customs [*minhagim*], and laws..."⁴⁵⁶ The title page of the original Prague edition of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*⁴⁵⁷ similarly offers a broad characterization, stating that the book contains "things that are appropriate for old and young and for each member of Israel to pay attention to them." This led Meir Benayahu, Aboab's twentieth-century biographer, to classify it as a work of ethics and critique⁴—a characterization that, while convenient, oversimplifies its content. More than half of the book consists of rigorous halakhic treatises and expositions, making such a label inadequate and inaccurate. Yet even from a halakhic perspective, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* does not fit neatly into any familiar category. It is not structured like a halakhic code or a manual, and it is certainly not a work of responsa.

What, then, was this book? What purpose did it serve? And why does it defy easy categorization?

⁴⁵⁵ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 141.

⁴⁵⁶ *Siftei Yesheiniim*, Amsterdam 1680. 22 hebrewbooks.org/45266

⁴⁵⁷ One can find a copy in the introduction to the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* published by Zikhron Ahron, 2022.

⁴ M. Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 45.

The publication of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* coincides with a period of significant innovation in Jewish printing. This era witnessed the emergence of community-specific prayer books, some, like the *Mahzor Kehilat Kodesh Romi* featured novel commentaries—occasionally published anonymously.⁴⁵⁸ It was also the time of Daniel Bomberg's groundbreaking *Humash Mikraot Gedolot*, which revolutionized Jewish textual presentation by printing the biblical text alongside *Targum Onkelos*, Masoretic notes, and selected rabbinic commentaries—a format that would become the standard template for biblical study.

Within this context of textual experimentation, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* emerges as a distinctive literary contribution, crafted in an innovative style for a specific audience: the Italian community rabbi. This rabbinic figure, exemplified by Aboab himself, represents a new paradigm of religious leadership for communities that were developing along trajectories distinct from those in earlier periods. Consequently, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* reflects several concurrent developments: a relatively new communal organization for Jews, a changing task for rabbis, and an evolving sense of religious propriety and devotion. In its fastidious insistence on halakhic punctiliousness, it reflects a rigorous set of criteria for Jewish piety. In all these things, the work serves us as a key not only to the views of R. Samuel Aboab but also to the world within which he lived.

II. New Communal Organization and the Rabbinic Role:

⁴⁵⁸ The *mahzor* was originally published in Bologna in 1539-1540. The edition held by the Jewish Theological Seminary today, includes a commentary on this Two-volume prayerbook, titled *Kimha de-Eevshuna* (lit. *unripe wheat*). Although this commentary was published anonymously, the JTS copy includes a page bound into the first volume of the work which states the name of the author (Yohanan Treves), along with a poem from him in which he expresses his gratitude for the chance to produce the commentary, and urging people to buy it.

The early modern period in Italy and Western Europe is marked by institutionalization, increased bureaucratization, and formalized, delineated authoritative roles. The religious, political, economic, and social fabric of European society was transformed. This institutionalization,

which has been extensively studied, manifested in various domains—from the emergence of the "Leviathan State"⁴⁵⁹ to the reorganization of lay religious life through confraternities.⁴⁶⁰ This pattern is evident too within the Jewish communities of Renaissance Italy, in the rise of “fixed forms of organization”⁴⁶¹ or “fixed and institutionalized organizational frameworks.”⁴⁶²

Throughout the sixteenth century, Jewish communal life saw a significant consolidation of power, with lay leadership assuming increased authority over various aspects of communal activities. This period witnessed the formation of councils (*va'adim*), which were responsible for managing essential communal affairs such as taxation, charitable endeavors, burial societies, and care for the sick.⁴⁶³

As part of this broader systemization, Bonfil identifies the emergence of the communal rabbi as a pivotal development. This figure first appeared in small, homogeneous communities like Verona as early as the mid-sixteenth century, but by the seventeenth century, had become a widespread

⁴⁵⁹ For additional literature on consolidation and systemization of state apparatuses and bureaucracies see for example Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*; (Cambridge ; Cambridge University Press, 1997). who examines some of these new forms of systemization as they manifested or were employed in the war/finance nexus.,

⁴⁶⁰ For some examples, see Nicholas Terpstra, *The Politics of Ritual Kinship: Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University, 2000).; More recently, Konrad Eisenbichler's anthology, *A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Confraternities*, (Boston, Brill, 2019) and specifically his introduction, 1-7. For more on the structures and functions of early modern confraternities see Christopher Black, *Early Modern Confraternities in Europe and the Americas.: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. (Ashgate, Aldershot, England 2006).

⁴⁶¹ Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 102.

⁴⁶² Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 106.

⁴⁶³ Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 187-197.

and accepted institution.⁴⁶⁴ Bonfil explains that the communal rabbi's role emerged from the council's growing need to consolidate communal power and authority. One of the rabbi's important responsibilities was to issue bans, but only with the explicit approval of the council. The rabbi was strictly prohibited from issuing bans independently. This arrangement ensured that this authority remained firmly in the hands of the communal leadership. In essence, the

communal rabbi became an integral part of the movement towards centralized leadership by working in tandem with the council to maintain clear governance and prevent power breakdowns during critical times. By designating one rabbi to hold this authority, communities could safeguard against unauthorized actions by other rabbis, who risked being banned themselves for overstepping their bounds.⁴⁶⁵

While officially tasked with *le-lamed u-le-harbiz Torah* (teaching and disseminating Torah),¹³ the communal rabbi's responsibilities were intentionally left broad and largely undefined. Beyond the clearly proscribed duty of promulgating bans, rabbis were expected to engage primarily in Torah instruction and judicial arbitration.⁴⁶⁶ Unlike earlier periods, when specific contracts outlined duties such as delivering weekly sermons, rabbis of this era operated within a more fluid framework. As Bonfil observes, "At this point [late 16th century], rabbis already tended to see their positions integrated in an organic way within the leadership structure of the community, and not only in terms of specific services in return for which they received a fixed

⁴⁶⁴ See Bonfil's discussion of this development in *Rabbis*, 101-186.

⁴⁶⁵ Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 100-101, 111-115.

¹³ Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 110

⁴⁶⁶ Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 120.

salary.”⁴⁶⁷

Just how did rabbis themselves perceive their roles within this evolving and, at times, rapidly changing environment? What did it mean to serve as a communal rabbi in seventeenth-century Italy, and how did one navigate the obligations, prerogatives, and boundaries of rabbinic authority? While Bonfil’s analysis provides a broad picture of sixteenth-century Italy, it leaves us to wonder how these changes manifested in the lived experiences of rabbis in the following century. How did rabbis of that era envision their own roles and responsibilities as communal

rabbis—a brand new type of rabbi, working closely with community councils to ensure communal cohesion and stability?

As a seventeenth-century rabbi, Aboab reflects the transformations Bonfil describes. *Sefer haZikhronot* reveals the extent to which Aboab differed from his predecessors and even many of his contemporaries—actively embracing the increasing communal cohesion and systemization of his time to fortify the early modern rabbinate. His vision extended beyond issuing halakhic rulings and responding to inquiries as they arose. He took a comprehensive approach, aiming to formulate systematic solutions that not only resolved immediate communal or halakhic concerns but also reinforced the rabbi’s role as both guardian and guide of religious “orthodoxy.”

What does this term “orthodoxy” convey in Aboab’s work? It is more than halakhic stringency, which would be more accurately termed “orthopraxy” as it refers to the correct practice of halakha. The concept of religious “orthodoxy,” encompasses the broader experiential dimension of Jewish religious life. While orthopraxy concerns itself primarily with the technical correctness

⁴⁶⁷ Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 156.

of ritual performance, Aboab's conception extends to the lived experience of halakhah's demands and its integration into individual and communal consciousness.

Thus, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* is a programmatic statement, shaped by three interwoven forces:

Aboab's perception of the rabbinic role, his own deep-seated piety, and the wealth and confidence of the Portuguese elite. Aboab does not simply react to communal developments—he asserts how things *should* be run, embodying a rabbinic vision informed by both religious rigor and the strategic assertiveness of his mercantile background.

III. *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*: Intended Towards a Rabbinic Audience.

Aboab composed the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* as an outline and guiding vision for himself and his fellow rabbis as they navigated the evolving role of the rabbinate and the community in seventeenth century Italy. In addition to stating in his introduction that he is addressing the “great ones” [referring to rabbinic leaders] as they have a greater responsibility to critique the nation, Aboab fills his text with additional indications that his primary audience consisted of rabbis like himself.

First, the frequency and explicit manner in which Aboab directly addresses his rabbinic peers throughout *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* leaves no doubt as to his intended readership. He refers to them using various titles, including rabbis,⁴⁶⁸ shepherds,⁴⁶⁹ leaders, guides, and teachers.^{18 470} For example, regarding violation of *Sha'atnez* he exhorts: “Therefore it is upon you, my teachers and

⁴⁶⁸ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 55. In the section beginning “Bo'u Rabbotai”

⁴⁶⁹ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 178 “ve-ra'uy le-abir ha-ro'im... Le-harim mikhshol mi-pnei ha-am”.

¹⁸ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 56 “le-koah ha-rav o ha-more.... Alav ha-davar le-taken. (regarding ritual slaughter)

⁴⁷⁰ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 86 ve-atem rabbotai anshei emet... ve-goderei Perez "

²⁰ *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, page 36.

rabbis, to go out... And anyone who has the power to protest [against these infractions] should protest."²⁰ Similarly, on the subject of *Stam Yeinam*, about which Aboab was particularly passionate, he addresses "our rabbis, the remnants, whom God has appointed upon his nation..." urging them to "zealously go from door to door"⁴⁷¹ and remove all that is forbidden²² from [the people's] homes."²³

At the same time, Aboab includes himself in this responsibility, using collective language to emphasize shared accountability. His phrasing, such as *bo'u, rabbotai* ("Come, [fellow]

rabbis"),⁴⁷² and his description of communal challenges—"our astonishment grew very much when we witnessed the proliferation of ritual slaughterers in the cities"⁴⁷³—demonstrate his full identification with his rabbinic peers. He consistently employs pronouns like "we" and "us" to reinforce this sense of solidarity, as seen in his admission: "For we are to blame for several illegitimate leniencies that we have seen."⁴⁷⁴

In his focus on halakhic infractions, ritual law,⁴⁷⁵ and issues specific to rabbinic leadership we see that Aboab targets a distinctly rabbinic audience rather than a broader group that might include lay leaders. Furthermore, the nature of Aboab's advice and criticism within the *Sefer haZikhronot*, explicitly addressing the distinctive powers and responsibilities that lie within the rabbinic purview, clearly assumes a rabbinic audience. For example, when discussing the

⁴⁷¹ Ex. 32:27 refers to the Levites who were instructed to ferret out and execute those who served the golden calf. ²² Amos 6:10 Aboab uses a cute alliteration substituting "azamim" in the original for "issurim", and referring in this case to *Stam Yeinam* ²³ *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 99

⁴⁷² *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 55.

⁴⁷³ *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 55.

⁴⁷⁴ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 35.

⁴⁷⁵ i.e. *Sha'atnez, sheḥita, Stam Yeinam*

importance of ensuring food is worm-free, he states "he [the rabbi] must preach in public about this topic [severity of the prohibition against consuming worms and their prevalence in food]." By emphasizing the act of preaching and the obligation of rabbis to stress certain issues publicly, Aboab emphasizes their distinct authority and leadership role in the process of disseminating religious teachings. Likewise, in his essay on *Sha'atnez*, he unequivocally states: "And it is your obligation as leaders and teachers to speak out...and punish those who fail to comply."⁴⁷⁶ Aboab highlights the essential role of rabbis as leaders and teachers who have a responsibility to maintain and, if necessary, enforce, halakhic order within the community. He urges "teachers and guides," to "erect barriers and gates," a directive traditionally and historically associated with the

rabbinate.⁴⁷⁷ The constant repetition of the terms "teachers," "leaders," and "preaching," throughout the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* leaves no doubt regarding Aboab's target audience.

Yet another indication that Aboab was addressing his rabbinic colleagues, is the extensive halakhic introductions accompanying each of Aboab's *Zikhronot*. Occupying anywhere from thirty to seventy percent of each essay, the comprehensive halakhic analysis, spanning rabbinic discourse from the Talmud to contemporary authorities, assumes a readership proficient in advanced halakhic thought and methodology. A brief synopsis of Aboab's essay on *Sha'atnez* (the prohibition of combining wool and linen) will demonstrate:

⁴⁷⁶ *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 36

⁴⁷⁷ The very first Mishna in *Avot* exhorts rabbis to "erect a fence around the Torah"

³⁰ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 22.

Aboab dedicates sixteen and a half double-columned pages to his essay on *Sha'atnez*, with twelve pages focused entirely on a halakhic treatise examining which specific processes—spinning, weaving, pressing, or sewing—constitute the prohibited combination of wool and linen. He explicitly states his objective: “We will transcribe the relevant Mishnayot and Rabbinic discussions [*sugyot*] in their proper order, so the issues with each opinion may be clarified and the halakhic ruling will emerge clearly and vividly.”³⁰

Aboab introduces the four major medieval halakhic opinions on the subject:

1. **Rashi (Solomon ben Isaac, France, 1040-1105):** The most lenient view, Rashi maintains that *Sha'atnez* applies only when wool and linen are combed, spun, or woven together. Aboab includes discussions that challenge Rashi's interpretation and highlights the halakhic implications.

2. **Rabbeinu Tam (Jacob ben Samuel, France, 1100-1171):** Taking a stricter stance, Rabbeinu Tam rules that *Sha'atnez* is forbidden even if the materials are processed separately (combed, spun, woven) and only later combined through a process of either weaving, sewing, or pressing. Aboab raises objections to this position and partially resolves them by transitioning to the even stricter view of Rabbi Samson.

3. **Rabbi Samson (ben Abraham) of Sens (France, 1150-1230):** Rabbi Samson extends the prohibition to cases where wool and linen are not processed together, but frequently come into contact, such as wearing a wool robe over a linen robe.

4. **Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimone, Spain, Egypt, 1138-1204):** The most stringent view, Rambam extends the concept of *Sha'atnez* to fabrics where the two materials are thoroughly mixed and compressed, even in the absence of traditional forms of combination such as spinning, weaving, or sewing. According to Rambam, any significant form of joining—whether through spinning, weaving, or pressing—renders the fabric *Sha'atnez*. He even includes in the prohibition cases such as tying bundles of wool and linen together.

For each authority cited, Aboab conducts a systematic and meticulous analysis, evaluating their arguments, referencing supporting texts, and providing detailed proofs, questions, and refutations. After summarizing the positions, noting areas of agreement and divergence, and offering his own opinions, Aboab arrives at a critical determination: According to Rambam, the prohibition of *Sha'atnez* is so severe that any combination process—spinning, weaving, or pressing—constitutes an *issur de'oraita* (Biblical prohibition--a strict category that derives directly from the biblical text). Even according to the less stringent authorities such a combination would still constitute a rabbinic prohibition.

Aboab transitions to the final four pages of his essay with a pointed critique: “We are greatly astonished that there are certain places where they are not mindful of this prohibition.” He highlights lapses in adherence to the prohibition, citing specific instances of ignorance or leniency that he had observed. In this closing section, Aboab exhorts rabbis to address these shortcomings, reinforcing their responsibility to uphold and enforce halakhic standards.

Aboab's deliberate use of polished, rabbinic Hebrew, rich with biblical phrases and double entendres, and interwoven with frequent allusions to classical rabbinic literature—serves as the final indication of his intent to address a highly educated rabbinic audience. At the same time, it

offers insight into his perception of the rabbinic and intellectual capabilities of his Mediterranean contemporaries. His correspondents and readers, including prominent figures such as Rabbi Moshe Zacut,⁴⁷⁸ Rabbi Isaac Aboab da Fonseca,³² and Rabbi Azaria Picho,³³ shared Aboab's converso background. However, despite operating in a multilingual context where expositions of this nature in Portuguese, Italian, or Ladino might have been expected were he addressing a broader or less learned audience,⁴⁷⁹ Aboab consistently employed rabbinic Hebrew as the medium for his correspondence and scholarship, including *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*. This stylistic and intellectual choice highlights his own erudition, and reflects the high expectations he held from his audience.

Within this rabbinic audience, Aboab's primary focus is on community-appointed rabbis like himself—figures deeply embedded in their communities through regular preaching, teaching,

and leadership. While not all Italian rabbis at the time held formal communal roles—many served as preachers (*darshanim*) or fulfilled other specific functions for confraternities⁴⁸⁰—

Aboab envisions communal rabbis as uniquely positioned to confront the religious and halakhic challenges he raises in the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*.

IV. Rabbi Aboab's View of the Rabbi's Role:

⁴⁷⁸ S. Aboab, Devar Shemuel, responsa 55, 178.

³² S. Aboab, Devar Shemuel, responsum 243 ³³

S. Aboab, Devar shemuel, responsa 7, 8.

⁴⁷⁹ See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "The Re-Education of Marranos in the Seventeenth Century". (Cincinnati: Judaic Studies Program University of Cincinnati, 1980) for explorations of some of these translated works. Bernard D. Cooperman notes that David Meldola asserts that he translated his father's responsa from their original Spanish and Italian into Hebrew before sending them to print." *Defining Deviance*," 166.

⁴⁸⁰ E. Horowitz, "Jewish confraternities," 122

A. An Introduction:

In his introduction to the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, Aboab articulates his vision of rabbinic responsibility:

Love thy neighbor as thyself...he [R. Akiva] taught...when one finds his friend straying from the right path, he should draw him [back] with words, and he should return him [to the right path] and he should reinstate him to Torah and service [of God]. The principle that emerges [from these words is that]: All of Israel is obligated [by this commandment] ...but the great ones must be especially assiduous, since their prominence, granted by God, has required them [by Him] not to abandon it. Like a father to his son, like a rabbi to his student, like a master to his servant, like a leader to his nation...anyone who has the ability [because of his position] should fill his mouth with critiques and his tongue should be quick to speak eloquently...anything he finds in his strength to do, he should do and rectify [what is wrong.]

Later in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, Aboab is even more explicit, vividly depicting the rabbi's role as one of continuous oversight and intervention.

In the same way we expect a Melamed (teacher of young children) to teach the good and the right to their students, and to carefully oversee (supervise) all of their activities, so too, it [the obligation to teach the good and right and oversee the

activities] rests and [the obligation] is doubled on every Rabbi in his city to supervise the activities of the community or communities under his hand [jurisdiction] specifically, and to investigate what their activities are in private and in public, so that he will not harm himself and others [by not ferreting out the wrongs in the community]. He should correct that which is crooked whether it is an individual or public [transgression], for he is a father and rabbi to all the people of his city or his community, and their Torah needs and their service to heaven rest upon him. He will have to provide an accounting [for failure to fulfill his obligation to them] in the future.⁴⁸¹

Aboab's selection of the *melamed*—typically a lower-ranking schoolteacher, as the paradigm for the rabbi reflects both his personal vision for his own rabbinate and, as we shall demonstrate, broader trends within the Italian rabbinate of his time. The “panopticon approach”⁴⁸² to education, prevalent in early modern Italy⁴⁸³, positioned the *melamed*, or teacher, as an authority figure with

intimate knowledge and remarkable control of his students' thoughts and actions. Aboab extends this model to the rabbi, envisioning an ideal leader who remains deeply attuned to the dynamics

⁴⁸¹ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 196-197.

⁴⁸² Michel Foucault discusses the panopticon most extensively in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, first published in 1975. Foucault's analysis is based on Jeremy Bentham's architectural design called the “Panopticon,” which Bentham proposed in the late 18th century.

⁴⁸³ See Bonfil, *Jews in Renaissance Italy*, 134. Though he does not use the term Panopticon, he describes a routine of strict, constant supervision of the students which extended even as far as supervising their behavior during mealtime. See Ronni Weinstein in “Between Liberty and Control: Jewish Juveniles in Early Modern Italy” *Zemanim: Rivon leHistoria* (2008): 30-37 and his description of seventeenth century teacher-student relations and mutual expectations. He is the one who recalls Foucault's Panopticon in relation to the educational methodology of early modern Italy, 34-35

and activities of his community, maintaining vigilant oversight and exercising authority akin to that of a schoolteacher, to ensure compliance and rectification of behavior when necessary.

Beyond his disciplinary-supervisory role, Aboab saw the rabbi, like a teacher, as the community's ultimate spiritual and religious guide. He viewed him as a figure of profound halakhic knowledge—versed in texts, legal rulings, and communal practices—whose duty was not merely to uphold the law himself but to ensure that every member of the community was versed in halakha, and rigorously observant.

What shaped Aboab's perception of rabbinic responsibility and authority as all-encompassing—not only spiritual guide and teacher but also the one individual ultimately responsible for the community's religious, spiritual, and moral conduct and well-being? He offers no specific talmudic or medieval source supporting his assertion comparing the rabbi's job to that of the melamed. Moreover, communal rabbinic contracts of his period contented themselves with assigning the rabbi the general task of “teaching torah.”⁴⁸⁴ While some contracts from the period specify particular rabbinic duties, such as preaching or serving as a chazzan, these roles were typically undertaken by rabbis—though famously by R. Leon Modena—seeking to supplement their income by taking on additional rabbinic responsibilities within and beyond their communities.⁴⁰ These, however, were discrete tasks—functional rather than authoritative—and did not ordinarily include sweeping declarations affirming the rabbi's role in oversight,

⁴⁸⁴ Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 110 ⁴⁰ See for example R Yehuda Aryeh Modena's discussion of his duties and obligations as Rabbi in his autobiography, Mark Cohen, *Life of Judah*, 60-62. Also see, Daniel Carpi ed. and Isaac min Ha-Levi'im, *Medaber Tahapukhot*, (Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv 1985) regarding the duties he assumed upon the death of his grandfather, R. Leon Modena, 12.

maintenance, or the rectification of public morality. The absence of such explicit precedents directs us to the possibility of external models.

Given the religious landscape of early modern Italy, is it possible that Aboab and his contemporaries were influenced—at least in part—by the dominant model of religious oversight: the Catholic Inquisition? This is not to suggest that Jewish leaders possessed the institutional structure, power, or authority of Catholic inquisitors, but rather that their emphasis on conformity and religious discipline may have paralleled similar efforts being promoted by Jesuits and other Catholic authorities throughout society.⁴⁸⁵

Our discussion of Aboab's repeated affirmations of, and insistence on, rabbinic oversight will demonstrate that he saw the role of the rabbi not as an imitation of any external structures but as an extension of an intrinsic, halakhically grounded duty to safeguard communal religious integrity. Aboab would undoubtedly reject any suggestion that his vision of the rabbinate was shaped by Catholic inquisitors, asserting instead that it was firmly rooted in Talmudic and halakhic tradition.

This conviction is central to *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, where Aboab establishes rabbinic authority not merely as a historical precedent but as a binding biblical injunction as interpreted by the very

⁴⁸⁵ The question of the relationship between Aboab's efforts at social and religious discipline and those of the Catholic Church through the inquisition and other institutions is one which we cannot explore in the present context, but which certainly deserves further treatment. Of course, the approaches to the inquisition and its social and religious impact on early modern society are numerous and multi-faceted, but any exploration of this subject would begin with Adriano Prosperi's magisterial work *Tribunali della Coscienza. Inquisitori, Confessori, Missionari*. For related studies see, Christopher Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, New Haven, Yale University Press 2009 and Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: the social institutions of a Catholic state, to 1620*. Cambridge, MA Harvard University Press 1971

early rabbinic exegetes. In his opening essay, aptly titled “*On the Obligation to Listen to the Judges of Israel*,” he anchors contemporary rabbinic authority in the Torah’s command:

“According to the Torah that they [judges] instruct you and the judgment that they declare to you shall you act. Thou shalt not sway from that which they [judges] tell you, right or left.”⁴⁸⁶ He follows with the *Sifri*,⁴⁸⁷ which interprets “that they instruct you” as referring to *mitzvot assei* (positive commandments) and “thou shalt not stray” as referring to *mitzvot lo-ta’aseh* (prohibitions).

Aboab then explores a central halakhic question: Does this injunction apply to all Jewish courts throughout history, or only to the Sanhedrin, the seventy-member high court resident in the Temple? He decisively concludes that the obligation extends to all Jewish courts, past and present, regardless of size. Expanding the term *judges*, he asserts that it applies to all “those who are great in the knowledge of Torah,” citing Maimonides and *Sefer haHinukh*⁴⁴ to trace the historical continuity of this obligation: “Included in this commandment [‘According to the Torah that they instruct...shall you act...’] is also the obligation to listen and obey in every time period as commanded by the Judge, that is to say, he-*Hakham ha-gadol* (the great scholar) who will be among us in our time.”⁴⁸⁸

Aboab’s opening words in his second essay reflect his confidence in his model of rabbi as religious authority figure and his conviction that this authority should, and will, be universally

⁴⁸⁶ Deut. 17:11

⁴⁸⁷ *Sifri* is a midrashic text from the early second century A.D. on the Biblical books *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*.

⁴⁴ *Sefer ha-Hinukh* is an anonymous work written in thirteenth-century Spain and explains the reasons behind each of the 613 Biblical commandments (*Taryag mitzvot*).

⁴⁸⁸ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 5 citing from *Sefer ha-Hinukh*

recognized within the Jewish community. He writes: “*After we have prefaced in our previous zikaron (essay) how far the power of a good court extend, and how much all Jews are obligated to honor its or rulings, now we can apply that [to all] the forthcoming zikhronot [essays]...*”⁴⁸⁹

This assertion sets the foundation for the entire remainder of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, reinforcing the inseparable link between rabbinic authority and halakhic integrity.

Aboab delivers on his promise, repeatedly emphasizing this connection throughout his work. In his essay on oaths and promises, for example, he stresses that although a father or husband is halakhically permitted to annul his wife’s or daughter’s oath, he should first consult a rabbi to ensure that the annulment adheres to halakhic standards⁴⁹⁰. Even in matters where halakha grants non-rabbinic figures a role, Aboab insists on the rabbi’s decisive authority. For him, rabbinic leadership is not merely an advisory role but an essential safeguard of halakhic integrity. In Aboab’s vision, the rabbi, halakhic authority, and halakhic fidelity are inextricably bound.

Recent scholarship has identified this same propensity toward expanding and emphasizing the rabbinic role among Aboab’s contemporaries, with even more pronounced manifestations appearing among eighteenth-century rabbis across various European communities. This suggests that Aboab’s approach reflected broader currents within Jewish intellectual thought and communal leadership that resonated strongly in subsequent generations.

Rabbi Saul Levi Morteira (1596-1660), who served as a rabbi for the Portuguese community in Amsterdam in the early seventeenth century, rebuked his congregants for laxity in Sabbath

⁴⁸⁹ S. Aboab *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 22

⁴⁹⁰ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 132.

observance, *Shaatnez*, and the laws of ritual slaughter.⁴⁹¹ By the eighteenth century, Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz (1690-1764), an Ashkenazi rabbi who served in Prague and Altona, articulated a broader vision of rabbinic authority, aligned with those expressed by Aboab in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*.

In Eybeschutz' collection of sermons, *Ya'arot Devash*⁴⁹² he exhorts his followers to maintain the sanctity of the *sukkah*, warning against frivolity, mixed-gender socializing, and games of chance during the festival. Clearly, his concerns segue to an attempt to influence the general spiritual atmosphere of the community and they extend beyond the mere enforcement of halakhic strictures and behaviors. He demonstrates this in a sermon delivered on the ninth of Tevet, where he reminds his audience of the deeper significance of *mitzvah* observance, emphasizing that it is insufficient to love God in one's heart while performing commandments perfunctorily. Instead, he urges his community to actively invest in the fulfillment of mitzvot,⁵⁰ reinforcing his role not only as a halakhic authority, but as a spiritual guide devoted to cultivating religious sincerity and commitment.

Jacob Emden's (1697-1776) account of the *takanot* enacted by his father, Ḥakham Zevi (1656/1718), reflects a similar model of rabbinic leadership that combined halakhic rigor with practical intervention. In an effort to improve kashrut standards, Ḥakham Zevi implemented measures to increase the availability of kosher wine⁴⁹³ and to ensure increased availability of

⁴⁹¹ Marc Saperstein, "The Rhetoric and Substance of Rebuke: Social and Religious Criticism in the Sermons of Ḥakham Saul Levi Morteira." *Studia Rosenthaliana*, 34:2 (2000) 131-152. The subject of rabbinic rebuke will be discussed further below.

⁴⁹² R. Jonathan Eybeschutz, *Yaarot Devash*, hebrewbooks.org/32683, 21.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 33.

⁴⁹³ Levine, "Port Rabbi," 23.

supervised kosher milk after having observed widespread use of unsupervised milk purchased from gentiles.⁴⁹⁴ These enactments reflected active rabbinic reinforcement of halakhic standards within Amsterdam's Jewish community—an initiative that parallels Aboab's own articulation of rabbinic responsibility as we will demonstrate below.

While Aboab insisted passionately throughout *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, that his expectations and beliefs of rabbinic authority were grounded, and ubiquitous in ancient and contemporary rabbinic

literature, the inquisitorial atmosphere that characterized his environment, may have played an important role in widespread dissemination and acceptance of that form of rabbinic oversight and authority among early modern Italian rabbis and communities.

B. The Rabbi as Constant Overseer of Community Activities and Behavior

“[the obligation] is doubled upon every Rabbi in his city to supervise the activities of the community or communities under his hand [jurisdiction] specifically, and to investigate what their activities are in private and in public.”

Aboab's vision of the rabbinate demanded unwavering vigilance, with the rabbi serving as both guardian and enforcer of halakhic and ritual standards within his community. He saw his own role as an exacting one of meticulous oversight, ensuring that nothing ethically, halakhically, or ritually improper went unchecked. In *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, he articulates this expectation with striking clarity, emphasizing that a rabbi must maintain constant awareness of communal behaviors, much like the *melamed* who supervises his pupils. His essays reflect this conviction,

⁴⁹⁴ Levine, “Port Rabbi,” 36.

detailing his extensive familiarity with the daily lives of his community members—from homes to marketplaces—thereby enabling him to identify and rectify deviations from halakhic norms.

Aboab's critiques span a wide spectrum, equally addressing both minor infractions and more serious halakhic lapses. Some of his concerns center on practices that, while not outright violations, in his view, failed to comport with proper religious observance. For instance, he censures parents who bring young children to synagogue, arguing that their presence distracts both their parents and the congregation, undermining meaningful prayer.⁴⁹⁵ He also calls out seemingly minor halakhic oversights which have broader implications, for example entrusting

the ritual immersion of dishes to children below bar or bat mitzvah age⁴⁹⁶—an error that invalidates the immersion and reflects a troubling laxity in halakhic observance.

Aboab severely chastises those individuals whose ignorance or negligence cause the entire community to “stumble” in significant areas of Jewish law. In his discussion of *Sha'atnez*, he rebukes those who purchase woolen garments from non-Jews without verifying their composition, lamenting that clothing presumed to contain *Sha'atnez*⁴⁹⁷ is routinely worn and resold within the Jewish community. His depiction of store owners with storerooms full of such garments—worn indiscriminately by themselves, their wives, and their children and sold to Jewish customers—graphically depicts individual carelessness in halakhic observance that can result in widespread transgression.

⁴⁹⁵ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 179- decries their playing with water during the services.

⁴⁹⁶ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 104.

⁴⁹⁷ On the basis of *hazaka*--a legal presumption based on an established status or pattern of behavior (Halakhic presumption).

While *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* also contains extensive essays on weightier communal concerns—such as ritual slaughter, usurious practices, and circumcision—Aboab remains consistent in his focus on precise halakhic detail throughout his book. His critiques expose not only common lapses but also the underlying flawed reasoning or the careless attitudes that perpetuate them. Sensitivity to these behaviors, attitudes and opinions requires that the rabbi immerse and integrate himself within his community and understand all aspects of his congregants’ lives and mindsets as we shall see. This reinforces Aboab’s conviction regarding rabbinic responsibility -- that a rabbi’s role extends beyond issuing rulings or delivering sermons, to active engagement in communal life, thereby ensuring that halakhic precision and ethical integrity were upheld in practice, not merely in theory.

Aboab’s frequent use of collective phrases such as “we have seen” or “we have investigated and found” reveals that his vision of rabbinic responsibility was not merely his personal inclination but one he expected his rabbinic peers to share. He envisioned the rabbi not only as a legal authority but as an architect of communal piety, responsible for cultivating an environment of religious discipline, moral uprightness, and spiritual awareness. *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* reflects this vision, portraying the rabbi as the guardian of both Jewish law and the moral fabric of the community.

Aboab recounts with admiration an initiative he learned from his student, which exemplifies this belief.

And may they be mentioned with thousands of blessings, the rabbis in the city of our God (no specific name is given)...who ordained together a great ordinance to

review periodically, several times a year, [to investigate] within the homes and the rooms [of the community]...to inquire regarding the dwellers there, who they are, who their neighbors are, who comes and who goes. And if they note [a situation wherein] they must be wary of closeness that is forbidden or inappropriate, they remove from there whomever they deem [problematic] in order to remove him from sin, and they bring him [to live] elsewhere.⁴⁹⁸

Aboab does not merely endorse this practice; his laudatory recounting reveals its importance to him. For Aboab, ensuring halakhic “orthodoxy” was inseparable from maintaining the community’s moral and spiritual integrity. He urges the adoption of this or similar practices wherever feasible, particularly in settings where people live in close quarters or share communal spaces. His words reveal him as a rabbi deeply committed to the idea that religious life must be actively cultivated, that halakhic observance must be reinforced and supported by continuous vigilance so as to preserve a community’s ethical and spiritual foundations.

Aboab reinforces his conviction through numerous first-hand accounts he shares in *Sefer haZikhronot*, many of which he learned from friends, students, and colleagues. These stories are not merely illustrative anecdotes, however; they function as data points in his broader effort to define the scope of rabbinic responsibility.

One such account, shared to emphasize the necessity of meticulousness in ritual slaughter, recounts the experience of an elderly and seasoned *shoḥet*. After checking his knife and finding no nicks, the *shoḥet* handed it to a colleague standing nearby, who discovered two imperfections

⁴⁹⁸ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 107.

that the experienced colleague himself could neither detect nor feel, even when directed to the precise spots.⁴⁹⁹ This story, like the one about home inspections, serves a dual purpose. On one level, it underscores the fallibility of even the most experienced individuals, reinforcing Aboab's insistence on relentless vigilance in halakhic practice. On a deeper level, it contributes to his broader argument about the rabbi's role—not just as a halakhic authority but also as an active observer, problem solver, and guide.

Clearly, many of these anecdotes took place in communities beyond Verona. Why did Aboab collect them, and why did he record them and share them? His ongoing effort to accumulate and transcribe data, and to observe and analyze experiences other than his own, assisted him in the construction of this comprehensive vision of the rabbinic role and indeed provided him the raw material for *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*. By presenting various scenarios, challenges, and halakhic

dilemmas, experienced by communities and rabbis throughout Italy and even beyond, he was able to piece together a comprehensive guide enabling rabbis to understand, navigate and engage with the realities of communal life. These anecdotes reveal to him that he was not alone. Rabbis across different communities were acutely aware of the halakhic, religious, and spiritual challenges confronting their congregations, and themselves.

This collective awareness reinforces Aboab's conviction that a rabbi must possess an intimate knowledge of his community, attuned to even the subtlest deviations in practice and belief. For Aboab, such vigilance is fundamental; nothing should fall beyond the rabbi's purview and oversight. However, awareness alone is insufficient. Aboab envisions the rabbi as not merely an

⁴⁹⁹ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 56.

observer but an active agent of improvement—one who identifies, corrects, and guides his community toward greater halakhic and spiritual integrity.

C. The Rabbi's Responsibility to Correct Errors and Some Examples of "Errors", including an excursus on "popular religion"

"... and he should correct that which is crooked whether it is an individual or a public [transgression],"

Many of the practices Aboab deemed "crooked" fall within what historians and sociologists now categorize as "popular religion" or "lived religion." How shall we describe them as part of Jewish living in the early modern period? Scholars of American religious history such as Robert Orsi and David Hall offer some context by distinguishing between these concepts. They note that "popular religion" is often viewed pejoratively, associated with "primitive, ignorant, and marginalized practitioners"⁵⁰⁰ or with beliefs and rituals influenced by profane (or even pagan)

culture.⁵⁰¹ In contrast, the concept of "lived religion" denotes a tolerant perspective, which recognizes that religious expression in daily life frequently diverges from its institutionalized or doctrinally prescribed forms. Hall emphasizes the importance of understanding the "context and content" of lay religious expression and "everyday thinking," and how religious beliefs and behaviors of lay people are shaped by daily life.⁵⁰² This area of scholarship examines both formally sanctioned and informally developed religious actions and ritual behaviors, such as

⁵⁰⁰ Robert Orsi. *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem*. (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1985), xxxviii

⁵⁰¹ David D. Hall, *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), vii

⁵⁰² David Hall, *Lived Religion in America*, vii

burial practices and hymn singing, that blur the lines between institutionalized faith and popular piety.⁵⁰³

Within the context of the early modern Jewish world, the late Elliot Horowitz offers a valuable framework for applying the concepts of *popular* and *lived* religion to Jewish practices of the period, though he refers to the latter as “popular piety”.⁶² For example, he uses this term to describe the early modern revival of the custom of *tikkun ḥazot*—a midnight ritual mourning the destruction of the Temple—and its accompanying practices, as well as the confraternities and groups that observed it.⁵⁰⁴ By contrast, he classifies the *Veglia*, the nocturnal vigil held before a baby boy’s circumcision in Italy, as an example of *popular religion*. These vigils, which were intended to prevent damage to the newborn from demons and impure spirits, metamorphosed into feasts, often accompanied by bacchanalia, dancing, and gambling, thus reflecting a fusion of religious ritual and social entertainment,⁵⁰⁵ and closely resembling the forms of *popular religion*

described by Hall and Orsi. As Horowitz writes “It [the *Veglia*] maintained itself as a popular tradition, untouched by the religious authorities [until the early seventeenth century], and hence an authentic expression of the religion of the people.”⁵⁰⁶

Horowitz’s observations provide a valuable framework for understanding Aboab’s perspective on popular and lived religious practices—encompassing all actions not explicitly mandated by

⁵⁰³ Meridith McGuire. *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. (Oxford University Press, 2008) 22–25.

⁶² Horowitz may have been responding to the cultural and intellectual trends of the 1960s and 1970s when he began his work, which sought to understand popular practice in the Jewish world.

⁵⁰⁴ Elliot Horowitz, “Coffee, Coffeehouses,” 17–46

⁵⁰⁵ Elliot Horowitz, “The Eve of the Circumcision: A Chapter in the History of Jewish Nightlife” *Journal of Social History*, autumn 1989, Vol 23:1, 45–69.

⁵⁰⁶ Elliot Horowitz, “The Eve of the Circumcision” 51.

halakha—regardless of their sociological classification. Horowitz demonstrates that in postTridentine Europe, both Jewish and Christian authorities sought to regulate or reform all aspects of non-institutionalized religion. While the Catholic Church pursued this goal by sacralizing the profane—for example, transforming feasts and parades into solemn processions and sermons— Jewish institutions, including the rabbinate, sought to curtail such practices, either by eliminating them entirely, or by imposing strict regulation.⁵⁰⁷ As we shall see, these popular practices posed a challenge for rabbis, and Aboab’s response seeks to rectify or suppress these religious practices.

Aboab’s expectation that rabbis must “correct that which is crooked” is stated clearly and with little embellishment. This is likely because, for Aboab, the boundary between straight and “crooked” was easily demarcated: Anything dictated by halakha or fully aligned with halakhic thought and practice was proper, while any deviation—whether stemming from ignorance, complacency, or deliberate intent—required correction. As Aboab saw it, his role as rabbi was to identify these deviations, determine their causes, and correct them accordingly.

This was no simple undertaking, as enforcing halakhic rigor inevitably provoked resistance, tension, or even outright conflict. Aboab had to navigate these challenges deftly, devising strategies to implement his vision of religious life and assert his commitment to stringent halakhic interpretation and enforcement. While the extent of his success remains uncertain, *Sefer*

⁵⁰⁷ Elliot Horowitz, “The Eve of Circumcision” 47-53

ha-Zikhronot reveals important aspects of his approach, describing his goals and offering glimpses into how he sought to realize them.

What, then, were these “crooked” practices? Many indeed align with what Orsi and Hall term “*popular religion*”—not deliberate or pious adaptations of religious norms, but rather expressions of ignorance, superstition, or complacency. Others had deeper religious, cultural, or social rationales, which Hall and Orsi may have called lived religion and Horowitz popular piety. Nonetheless, Aboab’s goal was consistent-- to eliminate entirely all problematic practices, thereby enforcing greater halakhic rigor and conformity on individual, communal, and even intercommunal levels. His overarching goal was to align religious life in all its forms more closely with halakha.

“Popular religion” and its associated practices were a significant concern for Aboab in *Sefer haZikhronot*, where he explicitly articulates his opposition to certain customs he deemed problematic and emphasizes his desire to abolish them. One such example was the popular activity of cross-dressing on Purim and at wedding festivities, intended to heighten joy and celebration. While acknowledging Rabbi Judah Mintz’s renowned responsum permitting the practice,⁵⁰⁸ Aboab strongly objects, citing concerns over increased gender mixing on such

occasions and the potential violation of *sha’atnez*, as people often borrow their “costumes” from non-Jews without verifying their composition.

⁵⁰⁸ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 38.

In addition to his own concerns, Aboab invokes an earlier ruling from Rabbi Eliezer of Metz, a prominent medieval Ashkenazic authority, who explicitly forbids the practice⁵⁰⁹ to support his stance. He avers that had Rabbi Judah Mintz been aware of this passage, he would never have issued a lenient ruling⁵¹⁰

Beyond his opposition to “popular religion”, Aboab expresses dissatisfaction with other aspects of religious practice in his time. Whereas a sociologist or historian might view many of the practices he condemns as natural expressions of religious life within specific cultural or economic contexts, Aboab sees them as stemming from ignorance, complacency, or negligence—deficiencies he believes must be eliminated through increased rabbinic oversight—which would result in improved halakhic rigor and heightened awareness.

Ignorance, for Aboab, is evident in everyday halakhic laxity, such as women failing to fully immerse dishes for proper purification or men purchasing *tzitzit* without ensuring the threads were spun *lishma*. He decries the complacency that results in rote mitzvah performance and sloppiness. In his essay on Shabbat, Aboab stresses the need for both meticulous observance as well as passionate engagement with the commandments.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁹ *Sefer Yere'im* section 385-6 hebrewbooks.org/downloadhandler.ashx?req=14133 indeed prohibits even temporary cross-dressing and even for merrymaking, but does not mention Purim. Since certain prohibitions are relaxed on Purim if their intent is to induce an atmosphere of jollity (Rem'a Orah Haim 695 §2) it is possible that Yere'im too would have been lenient in the case of Purim. Unsurprisingly, R Shmuel Aboab does not raise this possibility.

⁵¹⁰ See Tamara Morsel-Eisenberg “Anxieties of Transmission: Rabbinic Responsa and Early Modern “Print Culture” *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol 82:3, July 2021 for a discussion of how rabbis deal with “problematic” or contradictory earlier responsa. Suggesting that one rabbi was unaware of a previous ruling was a respectable and commonly used “out” 381-383.

⁵¹¹ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 140-141

Yet Aboab is neither unaware of nor indifferent to the impact of social and economic realities on religious life. While he acknowledges, for example, that frequent travel necessitates more individuals learning to perform ritual slaughter, thereby ensuring they have access to kosher meat while on the road, he does not accept these exigencies as justifications for halakhic laxity. Warning that introducing *ad hoc shoḥtim* reduces oversight and increases the risk of improper slaughter, Aboab uses these circumstances and his associated leniency as a vehicle for increased rabbinic intervention and regulation. He urges rabbis to grant special permission for “travelrelated slaughter,” but only under strict conditions. “Then he [the rabbi] should grant him [the traveler] permission [to slaughter] until he reaches his destination with the explicit and binding condition that he must not continue to slaughter anymore [after reaching his destination]”⁵¹² He further advises those permitted to do *sheḥita* under these conditions to do so sparingly.⁵¹³ This exemplifies Aboab’s desire and intent to extend rabbinic supervision and halakhic integrity beyond the physical boundaries of the community.

On a more fundamental level, Aboab was disturbed by willful mistakes, made by individuals who believe a particular practice is completely permissible or at most a halakhic stringency. The most obvious example of such a practice was the liberal consumption by Italian Jews of *Stam Yeinam* (wine produced by Gentiles). In addition to his fierce condemnation of imbibing *Stam Yeinam*, Aboab is deeply disturbed by the dismissive attitude so prevalent among Italian Jews who viewed this important prohibition as a matter as a halakhic stringency at best, or a matter of choice at worst.⁷³ As Aboab understands it, the threat inherent in Italian Jews’ trivialization of

⁵¹² S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 56.

⁵¹³ SS. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 56.

⁷³ See my discussion of *Stam Yeinam* in Chapter III.

Stam Yeinam, is to the status and authority of Chazal as the formulators and promulgators of the

policy. Aboab's stance on the authority of chazal is emphatic and consistent across all his works.

For example, in a responsum to Rabbi Mordekhai Bassan of Livorno he states:

To them [chazal] alone was given the permission, based on the rationale, esoteric wisdom, and insights in their possession, and according to the gravity of the situation and the needs of the time and place, to prohibit or permit, [be] lenient or stringent, without being required to disclose their reasoning to future generations. [This ensures that] Torah will not become subject to individual scrutiny or doubt regarding what has already been established by the great *Beit Din* [chazal].⁵¹⁴

A threat to Chazal is a threat against the linchpin of rabbinic authority, and by extension, against contemporary rabbis' function as the contemporary interpreters of halakha. As such, it is intolerable. Aboab's intransigence on this matter, or any perceived slighting of Chazal, extends way beyond the parameters of *Stam Yeinam*, and is evidenced throughout the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* and the *Devar Shemuel*.⁵¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, he urges punishment when necessary.

Across all these cases—from cross-dressing on Purim to lapses in *safrut* and ritual slaughter—Aboab is unwavering in his conviction that religious deviations must not be tolerated. His guiding principle is clear: halakhic integrity must be upheld at every level, and it is the rabbi's

⁵¹⁴ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 139.

⁵¹⁵ See for example his *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 82 regarding the mother of the baby whom he forbids to remarry despite having solid halakhic leniencies upon which to rely. Of course see also our discussion of this responsum in Chapter II and his *responsa* on *Stam Yeinam* (49, 55, 69, 153, 162, 175) and our discussion of that subject in Chapter III.

duty to ensure that all religious life, whether *popular*, *lived*, or *institutional*, conforms to rigorous halakhic standards.

Aboab's unfailing and vigorous pursuit of halakhic "orthodoxy" invites us to question the motivations behind this pursuit and explore how they shaped his vision of the rabbinate in his day. Was Aboab's mission part of a broader religious phenomenon, as described by Elliot Horowitz, in which both Christian and Jewish institutions sought to regulate and clearly demarcate the boundary between the sacred and the profane, institutional religion and popular religion? Or perhaps Aboab's strict halakhic stance is typical of the fervor often associated with children of returned converso families, meticulously devoted to the texts of the Judaism he had so assiduously studied and internalized over time? His vision of rabbinic leadership appears to demand not only strict adherence to halakha but also passionate engagement—Judaism as a lived experience rather than a passive inheritance. Perhaps both motivations in tandem contributed to constructing Aboab's vision of a halachically meticulous and zealous rabbinate?

D. Rabbinic "Tools of the Trade:" "correcting" the problems:

Whatever his precise motivations, Aboab emphasizes the rabbi's duty to overcome obstacles and address challenges using the most effective means available to establish halakhic, religious, and spiritual "orthodoxy" within the community. In *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, he examines various strategies and approaches that he and his contemporaries could employ to achieve them, focusing especially on two: preaching and excommunication.

Preaching:

Aboab maintained that speech was the rabbi's most valuable tool, enabling him to engage with his community—whether generally addressing the lay population or specific groups of craftsmen or artisans⁵¹⁶—to achieve his objectives. He saw speech as a means to "raise awareness," as in his

discussion of fully immersing a dish to render it ritually permissible for use,⁵¹⁷ or to remind men that tzitzit strings must be spun *lishma*.⁵¹⁸ More significantly, he advocated for public preaching as a form of *protest* against prohibitions that impacted the community's financial well-being or which required a major change in daily conduct. Thus for example, on the subject of *Sha'atnez*, Aboab writes:

Each one [rabbi] should speak many and profound words regarding the subject of removing sha'atnez from the nation of God. And he [the rabbi] should announce in public the severity of the prohibition, and it [sha'atnez] shall not be seen nor found among the holy nation.

Similarly, regarding the prohibition of males shaving with a razor, he writes:

Behold, it is before you, my teachers and rabbis, the known solution to this problem [the prohibited act]—to preach in public [about] how severe this prohibition is and how many lashes one [who transgresses] is punished with...

Aboab places a lot of value on the power of rabbinic preaching, castigating those who "fail to protest" or "turn away from the needs of the generation"⁷⁹ when they don't avail themselves of

⁵¹⁶ See for example Aboab addressing tailors in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 37

⁵¹⁷ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 104.

⁵¹⁸ See for example, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* pg. 43 regarding *tzitzit* strings that must be spun ritually.

⁷⁹ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 99.

the opportunity. How realistic were his expectations of the rabbinate? In other words, was it realistic to expect rabbis to frequently preach sermons of reproach? How realistic are Aboab's assumptions regarding the abilities of his colleagues and his expectations regarding the efficacy of their sermons?

Marc Saperstein demonstrates that most rabbinic sermons of this period were not devoted to rebuke or even to “raising awareness,” but were primarily didactic—intended to educate, inform, and transmit tradition. As he explains, the rabbi’s objective in the sermon was to “expose his listeners to classical texts with the full richness of their problematics and insights, define and defend the boundaries of acceptable doctrine...”⁵¹⁹ Nevertheless, at certain times of the year, particularly on the Sabbath of Repentance, sermons of admonition were not only appropriate but expected. Rabbis used these occasions to address a range of communal concerns, including several issues that preoccupied Aboab.

Saperstein’s study of Rabbi Saul Levi Morteira, leader of the Portuguese community in Amsterdam in the early seventeenth century, illustrates this point. In his sermon on the Sabbath of repentance 1620, Morteira rebukes his congregation for their casual use of obscenities and oaths⁵²⁰—a concern Aboab addresses explicitly in his writings.⁵²¹ In his *Sabbath of Repentance* sermon of 1630, Morteira also sought to “raise awareness” regarding meticulousness in Sabbath

⁵¹⁹ Marc Saperstein, “The Rhetoric of Rebuke,” 133

⁵²⁰ Saperstein, “The Rhetoric of rebuke,” 134-135.

⁵²¹ An entire Essay 8 is dedicated to this subject. See S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 126-136

⁸³ Saperstein, “The Rhetoric of Rebuke,” 134-135.

observance and the prohibition of *sha'atnez*⁸³—issues of clear importance to Aboab and likely shared by many of their contemporaries.

Similarly, as previously noted, Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz, a prominent Ashkenazi leader of the early eighteenth century, utilized his pulpit to admonish his community, addressing concerns that aligned with Aboab's, including the imperative of performing mitzvot with diligence rather than by rote.

Aboab's expectations for the rabbinic pulpit, therefore, were not unrealistic. We have demonstrated that Rabbis in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did use their positions to address religious, ritual, and spiritual matters within their communities, and Aboab urged them to do so consistently and passionately.

Aboab also believed that rabbinic preaching could drive change, leading the community toward greater halakhic stringency and rigor. But how realistic were these expectations? Did his contemporaries share his aspirations? Saperstein suggests that, to some extent, they did. He shows how rabbis meticulously crafted their homilies, employing a range of rhetorical and pedagogical strategies not only to convey their message, but to ensure it resonated with and influenced their communities.

One such example appears in Rabbi Saul Levi Morteira's sermon notes, where he expounds on the famous first paragraph of the *Shema*—the quintessential declaration of Jewish identity: "*And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your possessions.*" Morteira "teases out" these well-known words to address concerns particularly

relevant to his converso audience:

- *With all your heart*—“with your entire body, including matters of menstrual impurity.”
- *With all your soul*—“applying to those who come from the Iberian Peninsula, sullied in their souls, yet who do not take care to purify themselves, adorning their outward appearance while neglecting to rectify what they have corrupted.”

Saperstein emphasized the rhetorical potency of such a sermon, built upon a foundational Jewish prayer that every congregant knew and took pride in. By embedding his message within the *Shema*, Morteira sought to create a lasting mental association—ensuring that each time his listeners recited the prayer in their daily liturgy, they would be reminded of his words and their personal relevance.⁵²²

At the same time, crafting and delivering sermons of rebuke posed significant challenges. They had to ensure their words did not unduly offend any particular individual or group while also avoiding excessive repetition. Reiterating the same admonitions too frequently risked desensitizing the audience, causing them to disengage the moment they recognized a familiar subject.

Even in seemingly minor details, rabbis carefully structured their sermons. Saperstein notes, for example, that Morteira was particularly mindful of his phrasing, framing critiques in a positive

⁵²² Saperstein, “Rhetoric of Rebuke,” 136-139.

⁸⁵ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 110-112.

manner. Rather than explicitly condemning intermarriage, he emphasized aspirational goals, such as “keeping our community holy,” allowing the underlying message to remain implicit yet clear.

Aboab suggests that in certain circumstances, a rabbi can effect greater change by privately engaging with, and addressing, gatherings of professional groups such as barbers,⁵²³ tailors,⁵²³ and ritual slaughterers,⁵²⁴ to instruct and admonish them on halakhot and practices specific to their respective trades. He advises rabbis to approach such groups, particularly in cases where they had ignored the rabbi's public admonitions.⁵²⁵

With all these efforts, rabbis still faced significant opposition or resistance if they tried to overturn or abolish a beloved practice. For example, Bernard Cooperman describes the strong opposition faced by Rabbi Raphael Melodala in 1718, when, as the new rabbi of Pisa, he endeavored to abolish the beloved practice of visiting the thermal baths on Sabbath afternoons.

⁵²⁶ Recognizing this, Aboab suggests that in such cases, there are other weapons in the rabbinic arsenal as we shall see below.

E. Punitive Powers, Including an Excursus on the Practice of Excommunication [*Herem*] in Italy:

Rabbis in Italy had access to various punitive measures to enforce communal and halakhic norms. A responsum addressed to Aboab from Rabbi Abraham ben Meyer of Poland,⁵²⁷ offers

⁵²³ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 37.

⁵²⁴ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 56.

⁵²⁵ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 112

⁵²⁶ Bernard Cooperman. “Defining Deviance,” 177-178.

⁵²⁷ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, responsum 201.

important insight on the subject,: Rabbi Abraham ben Meyer inquires about the rabbinic authority to censure an individual who violates *Maarufia*—the medieval prohibition, still observed in many parts of Poland, against a Jew encroaching on an exclusive business or professional arrangement between another Jew and a Christian. He inquires whether the rabbi may formally designate the offender as a *rasha*, a classification with significant halakhic ramifications, or if public reprimand (*ga'arah*) must suffice. Aboab, acknowledging the financial and cultural weight of *Maarufia* in Poland, rules that the rabbi may indeed impose the designation of *rasha* as a form of punitive action.

This responsum is particularly significant as it underscores the subjective nature of rabbinic disciplinary measures, which must account for the individuals involved, the specific circumstances, and the broader geographical context. In this case, Aboab issues a stringent

ruling, reflecting the weight accorded to *Maarufia* in Poland. Whether he would have reached the same conclusion in an Italian city where *Maarufia* was not observed, remains uncertain.

Moreover, the responsum highlights the range of punitive measures available to rabbis, including *ga'arah*—a form of severe castigation—and the more consequential designation of *rasha*.

Beyond the public disgrace associated with this label, being deemed a *rasha* carries halakhic ramifications, such as rendering the individual ineligible to serve as a witness in legal (halakhic) proceedings.

Notably, excommunication as a potential recourse is mentioned by neither the querist nor Aboab in the responsum. Likewise, throughout the vast majority of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* and *Devar Shemuel*, Aboab does not present excommunication as a viable punitive measure. This absence

reinforces Bonfil's aforementioned ⁵²⁸ assertion, that by the late sixteenth century—and certainly in Aboab's time—excommunication had become the prerogative of the communal council rather than the rabbinate in Italy.

It is important to recognize, however, that the evolution of the delegation of the power of *herem* from the purview of the rabbi to that of the council was neither swift nor entirely without rancor. Rather than an abrupt or uniform transfer of authority, it unfolded gradually, and was marked by tensions and resistance in various Italian communities.⁵²⁹ A case in Padua, beginning in July

(Tammuz) 1585⁵³⁰ and culminating only in January (Shevat) 1601,⁵³¹ vividly illustrates the complexities of this rather rocky transition. As *herem* is such a well-known penalty, an excursus describing the incident in Padua is warranted.

The episode begins—as compelling stories often do—with the birth of a child out of wedlock. The mother, Golda the *Ashkenazit*, approached the *parnassim* seeking financial support for her child, warning that if assistance was not provided, she would either abandon the infant or publicly reveal the father's identity. The *parnassim*, deeming the situation “potentially

⁵²⁸ See 188 of this chapter and footnote 8 there.

⁵²⁹ For a case addressing the nature and authority of communal legislation and *herem* in sixteenth-century Italy, see Bernard Dov Cooperman, “Theorizing Jewish Self-Government in Early Modern Italy,” in Mauro Perani, ed., *Una Manna Buona per Mantova: Man Tov le-Man Tovah* (Florence: Olschki, 2004), 365-380. For a study of the nature and use of *herem* in Amsterdam during the eighteenth century, see Yosef Kaplan, “The Herem in the Sephardic Community of Amsterdam in the Eighteenth-Century,” *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Volume 1, Division B (1990): 195-201 (Hebrew).

⁵³⁰ Daniel Carpi, *Pinkas Va'ad Kehillat Kodesh Padua I* (1578-1603) (Jerusalem: 1973) Ordinance (parte 200-202), 181-182.

⁵³¹ Carpi, *Pinkas Padua I*, ordinance (parte 691), 388

⁹⁵ Carpi, *Pinkas Padua*, (parte 200), 181.

dangerous,” sought and obtained special authorization from the communal council (*Va’ad*) to “interrogate, clarify, investigate, demand, and compel”⁹⁵ whomever necessary, in both Jewish and non-Jewish courts, to resolve the matter clandestinely.

At the time, Rabbi Samuel Archivolti, serving as rabbi in Padua, took issue with the council’s approach. Acting unilaterally, he issued a *herem* against the man he identified as the father, a prominent community member named R. Moshe Manhig. In response, the council swiftly enacted an ordinance in August (*Av*) 1585, explicitly restricting rabbinic authority in matters of excommunication:

From today and onward, no Rabbi...who resides here in Padua is permitted to decree, whether by niddui or herem [two forms of excommunication] any person, be he who he may be, for any reason...except with the desire and permission [of]

at least two parnassim from our community... and any decree or herem done without the agreement of the parnassim will be like broken shards...⁵³²

The dispute did not conclude peacefully, as Rabbi Samuel Archivolti fiercely protested this curtailment of rabbinic prerogative. Seeking support, he enlisted Rabbi Samuel Judah Katzenelbogen, whose intervention ultimately facilitated a compromise. This resolution is reflected in Ordinance 691, which qualifies the scope of the earlier ruling:

⁵³² Carpi, *Pinkas Padua* (parte 212), 185-186

⁹⁷ Carpi, *Pinkas Padua*, (parte 691), 388

⁹⁸ Aboab, *Igrot* 70 V.

We have come to clarify [Ordinance 212] [to say] that from this day onward, that parte [212] is to be understood [as applying] to derara de-mamona (monetary matters), but any matter [constituting] afrushei mei-issura (preventing a sin/transgression), the rabbi is permitted le-nadot u-le-haḥarim on his own.⁹⁷

Following this ruling, no further official ordinances on the subject appear until the conclusion of the Pinkas in 1630, suggesting that, at least in principle, rabbis retained the authority to issue unilateral *ḥaramot* in matters pertaining strictly to *issur ve-hetter* (ritual law).

Evidence from as late as 1665 reveals that disputes over rabbinic authority to impose *ḥaramot* persisted in Italy. In a letter addressed to Aboab from Genoa, Rabbi Abba Mari Abitob seeks his intervention in a local conflict, highlighting this ongoing struggle. A *ḥakham* in the city, having been publicly insulted by a community member, responded by issuing a *ḥerem* against the man—despite a communal ordinance prohibiting rabbis from imposing *ḥerem* or *niduy* without the approval of the *ma'amad* (council).⁹⁸ Aboab responds by attempting to negotiate a

compromise. He firmly reasserts the *Ma'amad's* authority, and urges the affronted *Ḥakham* to withdraw his *ḥerem* voluntarily. At the same time, he calls upon the *Ma'amad* to secure an apology on behalf of the *Ḥakham*, emphasizing the importance of *Kevod ha-Torah* (honor of the Torah) as represented by the *Ḥakham*.

The compromise in Padua and Aboab's letter from Genoa suggest that no standardized protocol governed this aspect of rabbinic authority in Italy as each city/state was independent. The extent of a rabbi's disciplinary power depended largely on the specific community, the individual rabbi, and the particular circumstances at play. However, one thing that is certain, is that by the

midseventeenth century rabbis in Italy could no longer issue unilateral *haramot* with impunity.

This reality explains why Aboab does not recommend *herem* as a viable option for himself or his rabbinic peers.

Aboab and his contemporaries in Italy did have alternative punitive avenues at their disposal.

When necessary, they could appeal to government officials to enforce penalties, impose fines, or intervene as the situation required. In Venice, the *Cattevarri*—officials specifically assigned to police and oversee ghetto affairs—played a central role in enforcing communal decisions.

Rabbi Isaac min ha-Levi'im, the grandson of Rabbi Leon Modena served as the Italiani rabbi in Venice during Aboab's time. He recounts the frequent reliance of rabbis and the communal council on the *Cattevarri* to mediate various matters, particularly disputes over council appointments.⁵³³ He describes one notable incident, in the days preceding the holiday of Rosh Hashanah (New Year), when the council decreed that individuals with outstanding communal

debts would be barred from leading prayers unless they settled their dues before the holiday. The ruling amounted to a stark ultimatum: *If you want to pray, pay up.*

The decision ignited “screaming and fighting,” and R. Baruch Luzzatto even threatened to escalate the matter to non-Jewish courts. Faced with mounting tensions, Rabbi Leib Luzzatto and

⁵³³ Carpi, *Medaber Tahapukhot*, 67-69.

Rabbi Joseph Colorno sought the intervention of the *Cattevarri*, who swiftly did so to annul the ordinance, restoring (temporary) order to the community.⁵³⁴

R. Isaac min Ha-Levi'im recounts another occasion where fierce opposition arose against the *va'ad* when they sought to implement an ordinance imposing an age restriction on candidates for the position of *hazzan*. Leading the resistance was Rabbi Isaac Veltira, who had had previous altercations with the council, joined by R. Isaac min ha-Leviim and others, who appealed to the *Cattevarri* for intervention. The officers responded decisively, threatening to impose a hefty fine of 500 ducats⁵³⁵ on the *parnassim* who promulgated the ordinance should they proceed to apply the restriction or introduce any similar regulation concerning the office of *hazzan*.⁵³⁶

Notably, throughout *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* and *Devar Shemuel*, Aboab never once suggests appealing to the government to impose punitive measures. For Aboab this was tantamount to a desecration of God's name.⁵³⁷ If censure and excommunication were largely unavailable to the rabbinate, and if, for Aboab, government intervention was likewise unacceptable, what avenues remained for rabbis to assert their authority over wayward constituents?

Unfortunately, on this particular subject, Aboab and the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* leave us wanting.

While the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* implies that rabbis did indeed have some degree of authority to act against individuals who breached halakhic standards, Aboab's expressions are frustratingly

⁵³⁴ Carpi, *Medaber Tahapukhot*, 58-59.

⁵³⁵ Carpi suggests that R. Isaac is exaggerating the sum to demonstrate the intensity of the *Cattevari's* response, as 500 ducats was a very large sum of money. 58-59.

⁵³⁶ Carpi, *Medaber Tahapukhot*, 59-60.

⁵³⁷ see my discussion of Hillul Hashem in Chapter I.

vague—advising rabbis to "punish them [transgressors] as their eyes see fit...and thus the whole nation will see and fear." or similarly vague instructions to "punish them [transgressors] strictly." All we are able to glean from the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* regarding rabbinic punitive measures is to repeat our earlier statement that Italian Jewish communities did not have a set protocol or systemized set of punitive measures. Thus, Aboab recognizes that there was no choice but to relegate the particulars to the discretion of the individual rabbi, and options available to him, -- the precise nature and scope of such powers remaining ambiguous.

**V. Rabbi Aboab's Vision: The Rabbinic Creation of Religiously
"Orthodox" and Halakhically Rigorous Communities.**

*He should correct that which is crooked...for he is a father and rabbi to all the people of his city or his community, and their Torah needs and their service to heaven rest on him. He will have to give an accounting [for failure to fulfill his obligation to them] in the future.*⁵³⁸

In creating his vision of the seventeenth-century rabbi, Aboab sought not merely to respond to halakhic infractions—whether through speech, admonition, or punishment—but to actively shape a halakhically rigorous and "orthodox" community.

We will recall that Aboab grew up in a family of wealthy businessmen and bankers with whom he maintained close contact throughout his life. He was imbued with the confidence and abilities

⁵³⁸ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 196-197

that are commonly associated with access to money and was clearly adept at managing money, addressing missing funds⁵³⁹ and conflict resolution.⁵⁴⁰ He skillfully accomplished various challenging and complex tasks in his service to the Jewish people. He was constantly and actively involved in raising funds for Jews in the land of Israel, served as Parnas on the confraternity for Captive Release and personally engaged in negotiations for the release of several captives.⁵⁴¹ Polish rabbis sought his assistance, which he readily provided, in the aftermath of the 1648-9 massacres,⁵⁴² and his hands-on management of his family's Beit Midrash in Safed is consistently reflected in the numerous letters he composed concerning potential and current students, as well as allocation of funds.⁵⁴³

Aboab's character as a "doer" permeates *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*. His approach was both preventive and directive: rather than merely addressing infractions post-facto, he sought to establish communal norms that would integrate halakhic consciousness into daily life.

This commitment to shaping religiously "orthodox" communities is evident in the range of solutions Aboab proposes, spanning from ad-hoc interventions to broader systemic policies. While some of his measures were responsive, addressing immediate challenges as they arose, they also reveal his broader vision of rabbinic leadership as a constructive force.

⁵³⁹ For a more elaborate discussion on Aboab's involvement in financial matters see Chapter V

⁵⁴⁰ see Chapter I

⁵⁴¹ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 361-381.

⁵⁴² S. Aboab, *Igrot*, 66R

⁵⁴³ for extensive discussion of Aboab's fundraising efforts for scholars and yeshivot in the land of Israel see Chapter V.

To better understand how Aboab translates this vision into practice, we will examine two selections from *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* that illustrate his socially attuned approach to halakhic

enforcement. One such case addresses the widespread issue of *sha'atnez* in the linings of woolen hats—a problem Aboab identifies as particularly prevalent. He advises individuals to request that milliners use silk thread, rather than the customary linen, when attaching linings (typically made of silk or another permissible material) to woolen hats. By explicitly insisting on silk thread, they reinforce the seriousness of their request and ensure that the tailor does not substitute linen.⁵⁴⁴

Beyond this precaution, Aboab strongly advocates employing only Jewish tailors, viewing this not only as a halakhic safeguard but also as a communal and economic benefit, aligning with the principle that “the highest form of charity is providing someone with the means to support themselves.”⁵⁴⁵ He reasons that Jewish milliners, when made aware of the prohibition, would never knowingly sew *sha'atnez* into their hats. Aboab cannily wraps his halakhic ruling within his broader vision for rabbinic leadership in which religious observance is intertwined with economic and social responsibility.

Aboab applies a similar approach in addressing the halakhic challenges of *Halav akum* (milk obtained from a non-Jew), proposing a “simple and beneficial”⁵⁴⁶ solution: employing a Jew to oversee the milking process. This arrangement, he explains, ensures increased access to kosher

⁵⁴⁴ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 36.

⁵⁴⁵ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 37. Here, Aboab is citing the ruling of Rambam, *hilkhot matnot aniyim* 10:7 regarding the laws of charity.

⁵⁴⁶ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 66.

dairy products while also serving as an act of *hesed* (kindness), providing the *mashgiah* (overseer) with a livelihood.

These examples, as simple and *ad hoc* as they are, highlight the intersection between halakha and social realities within the rabbinic world. Aboab's recommendations not only address halakhic

concerns but also reflect his broader approach to rabbinic leadership. For him, legal rulings are closely intertwined with social awareness and economic considerations.

Some of Aboab's suggestions, however, were in fact impractical or difficult to implement. One notable instance, discussed earlier, regards keeping a silk factory running on the Sabbath. Aboab contrived an overly complicated and wholly unrealistic solution while, ultimately, the more lenient one that he eschewed as problematic, is the method that was broadly implemented.⁵⁴⁷ Similarly, in his essay on *Sha'atnez*, Aboab initially suggests employing only Jewish tailors or having non-Jewish tailors work under strict supervision within the Jew's home.

While these proposals may address the relevant concerns, Aboab himself realistically acknowledges their unfeasibility, leaving one to wonder about the logic behind his initial proposal. I argue that this incongruity emerges from a fundamental tension between three defining aspects of Aboab's leadership and personality, his strict and often uncompromising approach to halakha, his pragmatic, action-oriented character, shaped by his upbringing in a wealthy Portuguese Jewish merchant family, and his understanding of the rabbinic role as one that required active guidance, involvement and problem-solving within the community.

⁵⁴⁷ see the discussion of this responsum above in Chapter II.

Given Aboab's relative youth and inexperience when composing *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, I regard this work not as a rigid or fully defined model of rabbinic authority but as an effort to forge an equilibrium among the three aforementioned forces which at times incline towards divergent courses. At times, this tension leads him to adjust his rulings or opinions in response to communal needs; at others, he considers the halakhic principles at stake as too essential to compromise, even when some flexibility would ease their implementation.

Aboab's discussion of *sha'atnez* illustrates the former situation where his pragmatic instincts and socio-cultural awareness override his initial inclination to halakhic stringency. His ideal solution—employing Jewish milliners exclusively—ensures the highest level of halakhic observance while also creating economic opportunities for Jewish workers. However, Aboab ultimately concedes that given the widespread nature of the issue, this approach is not universally viable. Instead, he shifts toward a more practicable alternative, requiring increased oversight through frequent inspections of non-Jewish tailors and milliners.⁵⁴⁸

By contrast, in his discussion of a silk factory operating on Shabbat, Aboab prioritizes halakhic principles over practical or communal considerations. While he attempts to devise a workaround to keep the factory running without direct Jewish labor, his solution is overly complex and ultimately impractical. Unlike in the case of *sha'atnez*, where he reluctantly adopts the more lenient and more practical solution, here he refuses to do so, though alternative solutions were widely promulgated.⁵⁴⁹ This distinction underscores the limits of his pragmatism—he is willing

⁵⁴⁸ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 36-37.

⁵⁴⁹ See for example a 19th century Italian work of responsa by Rabbi Ishmael ben Abraham Isaac Cohen, *Sefer Shu"t Zera Emet* who explains the difficulties that implementing Aboab's suggestion involve, and offers a far simpler solution, asserting this is the one that had been accepted by Italian Jewry for generations. hebrewbooks.org/740 vol. 1 39bL-41aL

to propose solutions which leave some possibility of error, but he cannot propose a solution which is not a solution, insofar as it clearly violates his view, however stringent, of halakha.

Significantly, Aboab's writings reflect his efforts to reconcile and define the role of the seventeenth-century rabbi. He upholds unwavering commitment to halakha as the rabbi's foremost responsibility, yet he is acutely aware of the practical realities his community faces. His *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* reveals an ongoing attempt to construct a rabbinic model that fulfills all the

roles he envisions: halakhic *posek*, caring leader, spiritual guide, and teacher. In this way, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* is not merely a book of halakhic "memoranda," but a portal into Aboab's emerging vision of rabbinic leadership.

VI. Rabbi Aboab's Dream: Systemized Community-Wide and Intercommunal Institutions: The Tension Between Religious and Lay Leadership in EarlyModern Italy.

Aboab's systematic approach to rabbinic authority is the most notable feature of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*—distinguishing him as the quintessential "community rabbi" and the culmination of the sixteenth-century shift toward greater communal organization and cohesion. While his ad hoc solutions for small-scale issues offer insight into his image of the ideal rabbi and his efforts to embody that role, his proposals for broader "institutional" reforms reveal a more ambitious vision—one that seeks to establish a structured and coordinated rabbinate capable of addressing wide-ranging halakhic and communal challenges. Aboab was not content merely to preserve

halakhic “orthodoxy”, nor was *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* intended as memoranda written exclusively for himself. Rather, in publishing the *Sefer haZikhronot*, Aboab was demanding the collaboration of his rabbinic contemporaries of the early modern world, in the concerted effort to create and disseminate religious and ritual “orthodoxy”.

Aboab identifies three areas of Jewish practice where his vision of “institutional” reform would be most necessary and productive, *sheḥita* (ritual slaughter), *brit mila* (circumcision), and *safrut* (ritual scribal writing). His approach to the challenges in *safrut* offers a particularly illustrative example of his proposed program. To understand his recommended solution, it is first necessary to examine the problems he sought to address.

Aboab wastes no time outlining the issues, offering only an uncharacteristically brief introduction before launching into a sharp critique:

And behold, due to our great sins, from what we have seen and heard, ritually invalid (pasul) scrolls have greatly multiplied... Instead of scribes who are meticulous in the work of Heaven, ensuring that it remains free of all errors... without the smallest blemish... the opposite has occurred. It has become almost impossible to find a scribe upon whom one can rely without checking [his work]...⁵⁵⁰

Aboab then itemizes some of the invalidations he has personally encountered:

I have also seen tefillin that have no separation between the parshiyot [refers to the four Biblical selections that are written on parchment and placed inside the batim (tefillin boxes)] at all... and all kinds of irregularities regarding the formation of letters—such as replacing the letter kaf with bet and vice versa, or where the letter tet lacks its tip and is not drawn inward properly. This invalidates [the tefillin] according to all opinions, with no disagreement whatsoever... and most of the Ashkenazi [scrolls] have this invalidation...⁵⁵¹

⁵⁵⁰ *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 164.

⁵⁵¹ , 166.

S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*

Aboab's critique of scribal errors extends beyond technical mistakes to reveal a deeper issue—popular ignorance and misunderstanding among both scribes and their clients:

I have also seen among the scribes, and I have heard from them on numerous occasions, that they have fallen into another kind of error—one that may have stemmed from sheer ignorance. [It appears] that they do not understand the meaning of Chazal's dictate that tefillin must be written *lishma*. I have heard repeatedly from many scribes who tell their clients, 'Buy my tefillin, and I will write them in your name,' and I have also heard that those who purchase tefillin present themselves as meticulous and pious, [yet in] absurdity insisting, 'Write the tefillin in my name, and I will purchase them.'⁵⁵²

Aboab attributes this confusion to a fundamental misinterpretation of the halakhic requirement of *lishma*. He explains:

It appears to me from their words that they misunderstand the term "*lishma*"—[which in the context of tefillin refers to writing them with proper intent, as a sacred act devoted to God—literally 'for the name [of God]']. [Instead, they confuse it] with "*lishma*" in the context of a divorce writ (*get*), where it refers to the requirement that the entire document be written for the specific names of the husband and

⁵⁵², 168.

S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*

S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*

wife...¹¹⁹

Finally, Aboab exposes a troubling development in the world of *safrut* that reaches beyond the scribes themselves to the merchants who trade in *tefillin*. He introduces this shift by stating:

Until now, we have spoken about the scribes and their practices. Now we must also address those who engage in the commerce of tefillin, purchasing and selling

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S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*
S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*

119 them... Some among them commit a terrible wrongdoing: they enter the genizot
120 (repositories for sacred texts that can no longer be used), extract parshiyot (tefillin
121 scrolls) that appear[somewhat] newer and better [preserved]..., and then attach them
122 one to another...then they travel through villages and towns selling them... And
123 [yet] it is a well-known and obvious fact that anything placed in the geniza is
124 pasul."¹²⁰

125 This revelation reinforces Aboab's broader concerns about negligence and ignorance in the field
126 of *safrut*. The sale of repurposed *parshiyot* not only constitutes fraud but also exposes a deeper
127 problem—lay people who lack the knowledge to distinguish between valid and invalid *tefillin*.
128 Aboab circles back to this critical issue, lamenting: "And this brings us back to what we have
129 said before: what is one to do who has never learned and is not knowledgeable, and cannot
130 distinguish between them [valid and invalid tefillin]?"¹²¹

131 Here, Aboab highlights the broader implications of these corrupt practices. Beyond individual
132 violations of halakha, they create a systemic failure, leaving well-intentioned but uninformed
133 consumers vulnerable to using invalid *tefillin*. His critique is not only of the unscrupulous
134 merchants but of a religious infrastructure that lacks sufficient safeguards to protect communal
135 religious integrity.

136 Thus, after posing his final question, Aboab seamlessly transitions into a discussion regarding the
137 necessity of rabbinic education for the masses to recognize and avoid these pitfalls. More
138 significantly, however, he advocates for an overhaul of the *safrut* system. His proposed reforms

S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*
S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*

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140 169.
141 , 169.
142 aim to restore integrity and oversight to the field by addressing both the frequent errors of scribes
143 and the fraudulent practices of tefillin merchants,

144 To rectify the widespread scribal errors, Aboab insists that no one should be permitted to write
145 sacred texts without first obtaining formal approval from the *Beit Din*. (Notably, Aboab appears
146 to take for granted that each community has an institution—whether permanent or ad hoc—with the
147 authority and capability to implement these suggestions.) This “licensing process” would
148 involve repeated examinations on the laws of *safrut*, instruction and correction of errors, and
149 verification that the candidate's scribal writing meets halakhic standards. Additionally, the *Beit*
150 *Din* would assess the individual's moral integrity to ensure he is honest and trustworthy. Only
151 after passing these assessments would he receive public endorsement:¹²²

152 The Beit Din should announce in the synagogue that one is permitted to purchase
153 tefillin, mezuzot, and other scribal materials from this individual. Not only that, by
154 extension, ‘any sacred text that is written by any scribe, greater or lesser, before he
155 receives permission from Beit Din, will hereby be considered pasul, even if it is
156 written properly and in accordance with all the ordinances of Chazal... and in this
157 way, we will return things to the proper order.’¹²³

158 This communal ordinance, Aboab explains, would naturally address the second problem as well
159 since *tefillin* merchants would be obliged to source their scrolls exclusively from recognized
160 scribes in order to resell them. However,

S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*
S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*

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S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*
S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*

Since great is the corruption that has befallen this matter, it appears we need an extra level of oversight, such that anyone who comes from another city with the intent to sell tefillin or mezuzot shall not be permitted to do so until he receives permission from the resident Beit Din.

This local *Beit Din*, in turn, would only grant authorization based on signed “affidavits” from the seller’s home *Beit Din*, certifying that the tefillin he carries have been checked, and that they were written by a certified *sofer*, noting the name of the *sofer* along with any other relevant details.⁵⁵³

Through these reforms, Aboab envisions a *safrut* system with rigorous oversight, ensuring that only qualified scribes produce sacred texts and that tefillin merchants can no longer exploit the ignorance of their customers. His approach reflects a broad-based commitment to strengthening rabbinic authority, maintaining halakhic integrity, and ensuring consumer protection through communal regulation supported by appropriate enforcement and oversight institutions.

Aboab’s proposed reforms in *safrut* reflect his broader vision for organized rabbinic oversight. While one might argue that *safrut*, as well as *mila* and *sheḥita* by their very essence already require technical training subject to rabbinic supervision, making Aboab’s proposals a natural extension of the prevailing conditions, his vision is far more ambitious. First, he proposes

⁵⁵³ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 170.

standardized “training” and “licensing” for these professions to ensure consistency.⁵⁵⁴ Secondly, he advocates for periodic re-testing or surprise inspections.⁵⁵⁵ Thirdly, he looks to each

community or *Beit Din* to enforce these requirements among its practitioners.⁵⁵⁶ Finally, specifically with regards to *Safrut*, he envisions cooperation and interaction among communities in enforcing and establishing his program.

Aboab's proposals to “systemize” circumcision and ritual slaughter share all major elements with his reforms in scribal writing. In all three cases, he identifies glaring deficiencies in the existing system, where a lack of supervision allows individuals to practice without sufficient training or accountability.

In the fields of circumcision and ritual slaughter, Aboab’s primary concern is the absence—or inadequacy—of rabbinic supervision. While both professions traditionally require some level of rabbinic instruction, Aboab asserts that many practitioners undertake them with minimal training, and there are no standardized criteria for what constitutes proper education or who is authorized to provide it. Moreover, once trained, practitioners operate without continued oversight, leading to serious halakhic and practical risks.¹²⁸

Aboab describes how young men, often just fifteen or sixteen years old, assume they are competent to perform circumcisions without realizing the limitations of their knowledge and

⁵⁵⁴ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 56-57, 163, 169

⁵⁵⁵ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 57, 163-164

⁵⁵⁶ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 55-57, 163, 169

¹²⁸ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 55, 162-163 ¹²⁹

S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 162-163..

experience. Lacking the expertise to identify halakhic or medical complications, they perform invalid circumcision or may unknowingly endanger the babies.¹²⁹ A similar problem exists in ritual slaughter, where Aboab asserts “almost no home exists without a ritual slaughterer” despite many lacking the requisite skill and halakhic acumen.⁵⁵⁷

To address these systemic failures, Aboab advocates for rigorous oversight in all three fields. He proposes that practitioners undergo periodic examinations to ensure both theoretical knowledge and practical competency. Additionally, he calls for a licensing system overseen by local *batei din* (Jewish courts), without which individuals would be prohibited from practicing. While the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* makes it clear that a basic form of “licensing” already existed for ritual slaughterers, Aboab sought to tighten and standardize qualifications and demand license renewal at regular intervals. He also aimed to expand these stringent standards to *sheḥita* and *safrut*.

His commitment to “institutionalizing” these professions is evident in his insistence on stringent and standard licensing criteria, the appointment of designated communal *shoḥtim* responsible for all *sheḥita*, and ongoing evaluations to ensure the maintenance of professional skills and halakhic integrity. Through these measures, Aboab envisions a structured and regulated framework that ensures halakhic precision and engenders communal confidence in the practitioners of these essential religious functions.

While we have thus far lumped together these three professions Aboab was discriminate in his recommendations, being careful not to cause harm to honest and qualified practitioners or to the

⁵⁵⁷ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 55. For comparison, see Bonfil, *Jewish Life*, 133, where he attributes this phenomenon in Italy to the widespread dispersion of Jews there, and the necessity of ensuring that an isolated family could obtain kosher meat.

consumers. For example, in the case of *mila* and *sheḥita*, he advocates limiting the number of practitioners serving each community which he does not do in the case of *safrut*. Furthermore, in the two former professions, he makes no mention of intercommunal cooperation, an important plank in his platform for the regulation of *safrut*. These distinctions are related and reflect the meticulous planning and forethought Aboab invested in his proposals.

Safrut, by nature, is a tedious, lonely, and demanding trade. It is tedious because the practitioner is doing the same thing day in and day out. It is lonely, because the practitioner frequently works alone, in a closed space. It is demanding because the work often causes cramps, pains and eye strain which need to be alleviated by rest. Thus, limiting the number of practitioners or curtailing imports of *mezuzot* and *tefillin* from other locales would put more production pressure on each local *sofer* and merely result in sloppiness and errors. On the other hand, an abundance of skilled, halakhically proficient scribes is beneficial, ensuring a steady output of properly written *mezuzot*, *tefillin*, and other sacred texts. This likely explains why neither in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* nor in *Devar Shemuel*, does Aboab ever express concern over an excess of scribes. Rather than limiting their numbers, he focuses on addressing unscrupulous practices through education—both for scribes and the public—emphasizing the importance of maintaining rigorous halakhic standards. The increased supply resulting from importation of sacred scrolls would necessitate coordinated oversight and inter-communal cooperation. In this way, Aboab seeks to create a system that both upholds religious integrity and meets the community's ongoing need for properly prepared sacred texts.

Mila by contrast is generally accompanied by much fanfare and ceremony, with the *mohel* as the center of attention. Furthermore, even in a large early-modern Jewish community like Venice,

there would be no more than three *Milot* a day for each of two *mohalim*.⁵⁵⁸ *Sheḥita* of large animals, (cows, sheep, or goats), requires a team to immobilize it, and to check the areas most susceptible to *treifa* (blemishes rendering the animal not kosher). *Sheḥita* of fowl too, requires a team. Both professions are anything but lonely, as they involve much contact with community members. Furthermore, both *Mila* and *Sheḥita* are highly technical professions which require

skill and dexterity, which can be developed only over a period of practice. *Mila*, when performed improperly, can result in tragedy, and *sheḥita* can result in significant loss. A *mohel* or a *shoḥet* who performs infrequently, is much more likely to err. Thus, concentrating these two professions in the hands of one or two highly trained, skilled, and experienced professionals in each city,⁵⁵⁹ would benefit the community and result in a higher standard of *kashrut*.¹³³ As Aboab stresses:

For there is no comparison between one who slaughters constantly for the needs of a large population, and for whom slaughtering is his profession, to one who slaughters once a week for himself or his neighbor.¹³⁴

Another possible motivation for promoting intercommunal cooperation in *safrut*, may have stemmed from Aboab's intimate knowledge of the practical and halakhic realities on the ground. In several places in his essay, he alludes to the expense of buying *tefillin*. For many, the high cost of these items may have led to buying only the bare minimum and placing only one *mezuzah*

⁵⁵⁸ According to Donatella Calabi, The population of the Venetian ghetto in the early 17th century was between 3000 and 5000 individuals “The ‘City of the Jews’” in Robert C. Davis and Benjamin Ravid, *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 38.. Even if we assume a live birth each year to each of the families, Assuming 20% of families beyond child-bearing age, yields 2800 births or 1400 males. Assuming that they were evenly spread over the year, that means 4 *milot* per day or two *milot* per *mohel* per day.

⁵⁵⁹ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 56

¹³³ *Ibid*, 55, 163 ¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 57.

at the main entrance to the house, rather than the required one on each doorway.⁵⁶⁰ Others searched for alternative ways to cut costs,⁵⁶¹ which opened the door for scribes and merchants to resort to various unscrupulous means described earlier. Aboab's awareness of these realities may have prompted his proposals expanding the available supply, and thereby requiring intercommunal cooperation.

While Aboab's call for intercommunal cooperation to regulate scribal work was both novel and bold, it was also highly unlikely to succeed. This was primarily due to a fundamental tension between the Jewish councils and the rabbinate in early modern Italy that we turn to below.

Throughout the seventeenth century, Jewish Community councils sought to consolidate power not only by limiting external involvement but also by absorbing authority from other communal institutions, including the rabbinate.⁵⁶² Rabbis, in turn, worked to preserve their standing by maintaining what they viewed as their traditional prerogatives—issuing *semikha* and responsa, activities that frequently crossed local boundaries. Closer examination of these struggles between communal cohesion and governance and rabbinic independence and authority, reveals how they played out in practice and shaped the dynamics of rabbinic lives and careers in seventeenthcentury Jewish life.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 171

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 168-169

⁵⁶² Bonfil, *Rabbis*, 100-101, 111-115.

Simonsohn's analysis of the Jewish council in Mantua during the seventeenth century offers an excellent example of the efforts undertaken by communal bodies to consolidate power and reinforce their autonomy during this period. In Mantua, these efforts were particularly effective due to the support of the ruling Duke, who regarded a well-regulated Jewish community as essential to maintaining civic stability. Persuaded—largely by Jewish leaders seeking to maximize communal self-governance—that the absence of permanent judicial regulations impeded proper procedure, exacerbated unresolved disputes, and ultimately destabilized families, the Duke endorsed measures to formalize and centralize Jewish legal authority. This culminated

in the enactment of the *Shuda de-Dayyanei*, a landmark statute that codified judicial oversight within the community.⁵⁶³

Although formally ratified only in November 1677 under Rabbi Moshe Zacut and the Minor Council, the agreement codified earlier aspects of legal and communal governance. Among other things, the statute established procedures for arbitration, the appointment of arbitrators, trial conduct, and the certification of documents.¹³⁹ A particularly consequential clause, and relevant to our discussion, is one prohibiting any member of the community, even rabbinic scholars, from seeking legal rulings from external *yeshivot* or issuing judgments without the explicit approval of the Minor Council. Likewise, no one in Mantua could respond to civil law queries from abroad

⁵⁶³ Simonsohn, *Mantua*, 361-366. ¹³⁹ Simonsohn, *Mantua*, 362

unless the question was posed by both litigants or formally referred by a recognized court or council.⁵⁶⁴

Simonsohn additionally details a series of communal ordinances, beginning in the late sixteenth century, that further concentrated authority in the hands of communal institutions and reinforced the council's jurisdiction. With the endorsement of the governing authorities, these ordinances covered a wide range of prohibitions—from coin clipping to the sale of cooked food, attendance at gentile theaters, and mixed dancing (with rare exceptions for wedding dances)—all punishable by excommunication and publicly proclaimed in Mantuan synagogues.⁵⁶⁵

While we lack a comparably detailed record of rabbinic-council interactions in Venice, available sources indicate that similar tensions and negotiations took place. Aboab, for instance, frequently

reaffirms a rule akin to the one enacted in Mantua, which prohibited the *yeshiva* from ruling on financial matters unless both parties had agreed in advance. This regulation existed in the *yeshivot* of both of Verona⁵⁶⁶ and Venice¹⁴³ and served a dual purpose: to expedite the resolution of disputes—particularly financial ones, which were likely the most common cases brought before the *Beit Din*—and to safeguard communal autonomy by preventing external intervention.

Rabbi Isaac min ha-Levi'im, Aboab's contemporary and rabbi of the Italiani *kehilla* in Venice, offers further insight into the dynamics of communal autonomy and external rabbinic

⁵⁶⁴ Simonsohn, *Mantua*, 363.

⁵⁶⁵ Simonsohn, *Mantua*, 373-374.

⁵⁶⁶ S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 11 ¹⁴³
S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel*, 336.

intervention. He describes a dispute between the Venetian *Va'ad*⁵⁶⁷ and its own rabbis over their involvement in the religious affairs of the Ancona community. Although he provides few details about the specific case, his emphasis lies on the *Va'ad*'s firm opposition to what it perceived as an inappropriate extension of rabbinic authority beyond Venice. Just as the *Va'ad* forbade external interference in its own affairs, it insisted that its own rabbis refrain from intervening elsewhere, declaring that they should not be “found in others’ homes”.¹⁴⁵

The autobiography of R. Isaac Min Ha-Levi'im provides additional valuable—if at times polemical—insight into the tensions between the *Va'ad* and the rabbinate. Despite his contentious perspective, his account remains a significant source for understanding these conflicts.

In the opening pages of his autobiography, R. Isaac Min Ha-Levi'im, grandson of R. Leon Modena, recounts the tumultuous process of his rabbinic ordination.⁵⁶⁸ He writes that at age

⁵⁶⁷ A/K/A the Small Council or *va'ad ha-katan* ¹⁴⁵ Carpi, *Medaber Tahapukhot*, 17-18.

⁵⁶⁸ Carpi, *Medaber Tahapukhot*, 28-33.

eighteen, upon his marriage, he received the honorary title of *ḥaver*, a prerequisite for ordination, and was permitted to serve as *Darshan* (Preacher) to assist his aging grandfather. Twelve years later, in the year 1650, as he reached the age of thirty and became a candidate for *semikha*, (rabbinic ordination), tensions began to escalate.

R. Isaac Min Ha-Levi'im recounts that the Venetian Small Council sought to "honor me [with *semikha*]." Many of its members were friends or colleagues of his grandfather and wished to support his ordination. However, they were well aware that R. Simḥa Luzzatto, the influential rabbi of the Ashkenazi community, would never "propose him [*propenermi*]" to the council [for *semikha*], as was customary, due to personal animosity between Min Ha-Levi'im and Luzzatto's nephew, Moshe Luzzatto, as well as multiple instances where "he [R. Simḥa Luzzatto] opposed me." To bypass this obstacle, the Small Council circumvented both Luzzatto and the Venetian *yeshiva*, instead "making their good intentions [regarding my ordination] known" to the rabbis of Ferrara. The Ferrara rabbis issued his *semikha*, and the rabbis in Rome confirmed it. It was then swiftly ratified by six out of seven votes of the Venetian Small Council.

Min Ha-Levi'im justifies these actions by emphasizing the widespread practice of cross-regional ordination, interjecting that "such is done throughout all the places of our exile. A rabbi from a certain city can send *semikha* to another city." He further reinforces this point by noting that his grandfather, R. Leon Modena, frequently ordained rabbis beyond the boundaries of Venice.⁵⁶⁹

The intervention of the Small Council in what the Venetian rabbinate, led by R. Simḥa Luzzatto, considered a rabbinic matter, provoked fierce and prolonged resistance. While Luzzatto framed

⁵⁶⁹ 147 *Medaber Tahapukhot*, 30.

Carpi,

his objection as a matter of rabbinic dignity—indignantly asking, “Are there no rabbis in Venice who know how to ordain?”—the intensity and persistence of his efforts suggest deeper concerns. His numerous and vigorous attempts to annul the *semikha*, including private meetings with influential figures and convening the *yeshiva* to pressure the council to rescind the ordination, reveal the extent of his disquiet.

The *Va’ad*, however, refused to overturn the decision, asserting that “what is done is done” and that only the Large Council had the authority to revoke a ruling of the Small Council—an unlikely prospect. Ultimately, a compromise was reached: R. Isaac Min Ha-Levi’im would retain his *semikha* but would not be addressed by the honorary title *Moreinu* until he turned thirty-five. The basis for this was an old, (mostly forgotten) council ordinance that forbade issuing the title *Moreinu* to anyone under thirty-five. Furthermore, in what Min Ha-Levi’im resentfully describes as an unprecedented move, he would not receive the highest title, *Moreinu Rav*, at the age of Forty unless he was tested and approved by two rabbis of the *yeshiva*.

This episode highlights a broader transformation in the balance of power between rabbinic and lay communal authorities in mid-seventeenth-century Venice. By 1650, the *semikha* process rested largely in the hands of the Small Council. While candidates were typically nominated through rabbinic agreement, the Small Council held decisive authority over approval.

Alternatively, the council could initiate the process, but final ordination still required rabbinic endorsement.⁵⁷⁰ Either way, the council’s involvement in the *semikha* process—and the rabbinic perception of its encroachment—emphasized the council’s expanding control over matters

⁵⁷⁰ *Medaber Tahpukhot*, 17.
Carpi,

traditionally reserved for rabbinic hegemony.

The saga does not end here, however, for in response to the tensions surrounding min- ha-Levi'im's ordination, the Small Council issued a new ordinance that formally codified its role in rabbinic appointments:

They [the members of the council] issued a parte [ordinance] that henceforth none of the rabbis (alufim) is permitted to bestow the title Rav or Haver on anyone, whoever he may be, if there is no aprovido [approval] **first** (my emphasis) from the members of the small council. And regarding those who have been named until now [rabbis or haverim], as a matter of the importance of respect, once they have been made great, they shall not be reduced⁵⁷¹

The new ordinance marked an important shift in communal jurisdiction, moving beyond the mere approval of ordination to the requirement that the process be *initiated* by the council. This was a clear attempt to further consolidate power and reinforce communal cohesion under a single authoritative governing body.

With this broader context in mind, we return to Aboab's advocacy for intercommunal rabbinic cooperation regarding *safrut*, with a deeper understanding of the tensions at play. Was Aboab's initiative, advocating for rabbinic agency and cohesion, merely a strategic response, a

⁵⁷¹ *Medaber Tahpukhot*, 40-41.
Carpi,

counterpoise, to growing lay control over rabbinic and ritual matters? While this interpretation holds merit, it is ultimately too narrow.

Resistance to lay encroachment may have been one factor, but I argue that Aboab's primary motivation stemmed from the combination of the halakhic rigor, even zealotry, evident in his writings combined with his unique persona as a rabbi from a powerful Portuguese merchant

family. In his discussion of the necessity for oversight of *safrut*, he identified pressing halakhic concerns with which he was intimately familiar and that transcended individual communities. Seeking a viable solution, he naturally turned to the tools and methods instilled within him by both his wealthy Portuguese merchant background and his rabbinic education and practice. Accordingly, he devised a solution that fused these two defining elements—networking, in the form of intercommunal cooperation for mutual benefit, and decisive action—with the mechanisms of rabbinic collaboration, all in the service of his overarching goal of maintaining halakhic rigor and reinforcing rabbinic authority in matters of religion and ritual.

VII. The Printing Press and the Changing Nature of Knowledge:

Aboab constructs his vision of rabbinic authority and communal responsibilities within the specific context of the early modern Mediterranean basin. Beyond the overtly religious challenges he vividly describes in *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, the book also reflects some of the broader realities, pressures, and expectations that shaped the rabbinate in this period. Aboab and his contemporaries had to navigate shifting communal dynamics and rabbinic responsibilities while also contending with new intellectual and technological developments, most notably, the rise of the printing press, which altered the transmission of rabbinic knowledge and posed questions about maintaining relevance and authority.

The advent of the printing press in the early modern period marked a transformative shift in the nature of knowledge.⁵⁷² Prior to this technological advancement, knowledge was primarily

⁵⁷² See Elisabeth Eisenstein's seminal work, *The Printing Press as an agent of change*. Eisenstein, *Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, as well as her other works which employ similar arguments: *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 1983, "Some Conjectures about the Impact of Printing on Western Society and Thought: A Preliminary Report." *Journal of Modern History* 40, no. 1 (1968): 1–56. In a similar vein, see Marshall McLuhan, Gordon W. Terrence, Elena Lamberti, and Dominique Scheffel- Dunand, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962); Peter Burke, A

restricted to a privileged few who carefully chose the individuals with whom they shared it. The meticulous selection of knowledge recipients, coupled with the reliance on oral transmission, served to minimize the risks of misinterpretation or error.⁵⁷³ Additionally, information was exchanged primarily with like-minded individuals who shared proficiency in the same language, books, and materials. For example, in rabbinic responsa, rabbis like Aboab would frequently refer to halakhic or Talmudic works without resorting to verbatim quotations or even specific locations, assuming a fluency and depth of knowledge on the correspondent's part.

With the introduction of the printing press, however, the landscape of knowledge underwent a significant change. An exemplar of this transformation in the Jewish world, is reflected in the publication and popularity of Rabbi Josef Karo's monumental work, the *Shulḥan Arukh*.⁵⁷⁴

Tamarah Morsel-Eisenberg observes: “The historical narrative presents *Shulḥan Arukh* as the preeminent early modern halakhic work and ascribes its growing dominion to being the product of print married to codification, an impeccable match of technology and genre.”⁵⁷⁵ This comprehensive compilation condensed and organized the vast body of Halakha, which had

Jean Martin, *L'apparition du Livre* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1958); discussion of the impact of print socially, culturally, and technologically. There are scholars such as Joseph A. Dane, *The Myth of Print Culture: Essays on Evidence, Textuality, and Bibliographical Method* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 10–32 and Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book*, who challenge Eisenstein's attributions of sweeping cultural, social, and political changes to the impact of the book. They argue for contextualizing the acceptance of “the book” within the periods' material and social history. Margaret J. M. Ezell, in “Social Authorship and the Advent of Print,” asserts the continued efficacy and popularity of manuscript culture alongside print well into the nineteenth century, revealing the unique contributions and advantages offered by manuscripts compared to print. See also David McKitterick, *Print*,

Social History of Knowledge from Gutenberg to Diderot (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Lucien Febvre and Henri-⁵⁷³ Ruderman, David, *Early Modern Jewry*, 103

⁵⁷⁴ For additional insight on the relationship between the *Shulḥan Arukh*, print, and the knowledge consolidation see Tamara Morsel-Eisenberg's “*Anxieties of Transmission*” 385–386.

⁵⁷⁵ Tamara Morsel-Eisenberg, *Anxieties*, 384.

Manuscript and the Search for Order 1450–1830 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

For discussions on the impact of print on the Jewish world, see Ruderman, David *Early Modern Jewry*, Chapter 3. Also see Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin “Print and Jewish Cultural development,” *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance* New York, 1999) 3:344–46. Malachi Beit-Arie, “The Connection between Early Hebrew Print and Manuscripts,” (Hebrew) in *Essays and Studies in Librarianship Presented to Curt David Wormann on his Seventy- fifth Birthday* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975).

traditionally been the exclusive domain of rabbis, into a handbook accessible to a wider audience.

Drawing on early publications of the *Shulḥan Arukh*, Morsel-Eisenberg highlights not only the impact of print in fostering accessibility, but also the heuristic friendliness of the *Shulḥan Arukh*’s early⁵⁷⁶ format—its concise, almost bullet-point structure—deliberately designed to facilitate both the dissemination and the curation of halakhic knowledge. This editorial approach sought to make halakha more accessible and comprehensible to a broader audience while simultaneously deciding which knowledge needed to be democratized.⁵⁷⁷ Notably, the *Shulḥan Arukh* was so successful in this endeavor, that portions of it were eventually translated into Ladino, allowing even returned conversos—many of whom had significant gaps in their halakhic education—to engage with this foundational text.⁵⁷⁸

The increased availability and diversity of knowledge in the seventeenth century, as exemplified by the *Shulḥan Arukh*, presented significant challenges for Aboab and his rabbinic contemporaries. Specifically, the very nature of published material imbued it with an inherent aura of authority and authenticity, simply by virtue of its fixed printed form and widespread

⁵⁷⁶ Today the *Shulḥan Arukh* is an imposing tome due to the inclusion of commentaries and super-commentaries. In its first printing it was a concise handbook of Jewish Law.

⁵⁷⁷ see Tamara Morsel-Eisenberg’s “*Anxieties*” who demonstrates the heuristic ease of the *Shulḥan Arukh* print, which in addition to the print itself, clearly intended to assist in the democratization of knowledge while also deciding precisely which knowledge would be democratized. 389.

⁵⁷⁸ Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, *The re-Education of Marranoes*. Aboab too expresses concern about extensive halakhic ignorance among conversos in his *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 203.

dissemination. As a result, many were quick to adopt its rulings without deeper inquiry or reliance on rabbinic interpretation.

Elhanan Reiner maintains that the authoritative nature of print played a crucial role in democratizing halakhic knowledge and ultimately led to the acceptance of the *Shulḥan Arukh*,

with the accompanying *Mappah* glosses in Ashkenaz by R. Moshe Isserles, and overcoming resistance from traditionalists.⁵⁷⁹ Extrapolating from Reiner's hypothesis, David Ruderman identifies an important ramification of this widespread availability of halakhic works. He writes: "The text—not the teacher—became the ultimate word, and thus diminished the teacher's authoritative capacity for interpreting the law. The text, now available in multiple copies and purchased by larger numbers of students, could no longer be easily regulated and controlled by an overseeing rabbinic elite."⁵⁸⁰ Aboab articulates his concerns regarding this shift at length, at two points in the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*.

The first instance is in his third essay on the subject of "Halakhot Concerning Clothing" he questions a famous leniency of R. Judah Mintz that permitted cross-dressing on Purim as part of the festivities. After advocating against the practice, despite the renowned leniency, Aboab takes the opportunity to exhort:

For if a prominent rabbi with his great wisdom and knowledge ascertains for himself [in his studies]...a leniency (*heter*) it appears [to me] that it becomes him to hide it in his heart...**For once he writes them (the leniencies) in a book, they (his lenient rulings) will inevitably proliferate**⁵⁸¹...and when one [who reads the

⁵⁷⁹ Elhanan Reiner, "The Attitude of Ashkenazi Society to the New Science in the Sixteenth Century," in *Science in Context* 10, no. 4 (1997): 589–603.

⁵⁸⁰ Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry* 101–102.

⁵⁸¹ my own emphasis

S. Aboab, *Sefer ha*

book] sees that, heaven forbid, the issue [will become] ‘light (of little consequence) in his eyes’, they will add [further leniencies] to them...⁵⁸²

The second instance appears in Aboab’s famous essay on *Stam Yeinam*,⁵⁸³ In the third section,⁵⁸⁴ Aboab examines eight well-known and oft-cited leniencies on the subject, including one attributed to Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi.⁵⁸⁵ Concerning a specific question relating to *Stam Yeinam*, R. Mizrahi writes:

“The prohibition on yayin nesech [forbidden wine] is very marginal, relying on a fragile reed for support... and on this I rely. However, one who is stringent shall be blessed. Nonetheless, financial loss must be taken into consideration.”⁵⁸⁶

Prior to addressing the specific leniency and responsum in question, Aboab utilizes the opportunity to admonish:

How difficult it is... for those who search from corner to corner, pulling a word from here and a word from there... skipping over the issues at hand and disregarding the [Talmudic] discussions and halakhot as if they never existed, [and] as if they were never written... And they cite without context a great rabbi like Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi and his peers. And all who hear them do not verify their words, for

⁵⁸² -*Zikhronot*, 38

⁵⁸³ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 70-100.

⁵⁸⁴ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 75-100.

⁵⁸⁵ *Shu"t Rav Eliyahu Mizrahi*, responsum 56, hebrewbooks.org/1233, 165-175.

⁵⁸⁶ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 84.

S. Aboab, *Sefer ha*

[what they say] may be presumed as verified.... For it is natural to run after leniencies... to seek halakha from one who is permissive... **Therefore, one [rabbi] must be exceedingly cautious to examine any leniency before he permits it to issue forth from his mouth or from his pen.**⁵⁸⁷

After thoroughly analyzing the responsum and demonstrating that the leniency was not referring to regular *Stam Yeinam*,⁵⁸⁸ Aboab takes particular issue with its underlying tone and message, arguing that it treats the prohibition of *yayin neseekh* (and by extension, the age-old ordinance of *Stam Yeinam*) too lightly. This, he contends, contradicts the long-established rabbinic consensus on the severity of the prohibition against *yayin neseekh*, which was consistently regarded with great halakhic weight. Aboab's deep concern over this perceived misrepresentation leads him to issue an impassioned plea:

And I cannot restrain myself from addressing this to all the rabbis throughout the diaspora. God knows that my intent is not to seek prominence or to sow discord, but to act for the sake of Heaven, so that there should not arise one [rabbi] to disagree with all the torah scholars using any challenge that arises in his heart. For if so, the whole Torah will be overturned God forbid. *For who is the man who understands [how to learn Torah] who cannot find [points of] distinction or*

⁵⁸⁷ -*Zikhronot* 84. emphasis mine.

⁵⁸⁸ Aboab proves that Rav Eliyahu Mizrahi was referring to the case of a gentile who touched Jewish wine by accident and did not intend to permit purchasing wine produced by gentiles.

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disagreement... And henceforth [shall] we will leave, God forbid, all the poskim and the commentaries and each one will explain as arises in his mind?!⁵⁸⁹

Aboab reinforces his argument by citing a case in which the *Hakhamim* of Lunel censured Maimonides for prohibiting consuming animals with a particular blemish in contravention of a long-standing tradition of leniency in that regard. If even Rambam—a figure of unparalleled stature—faced resistance for introducing a *stringency*, Aboab argues, how much more so should one refrain from advancing a *leniency* in opposition to the established rulings of the great rabbis

of Israel. He emphatically warns, “It should not enter one’s heart today to disagree with all the great sages of Israel, our esteemed rabbis, and follow his [own] leniency.”⁵⁹⁰

Before concluding this intriguing section, Aboab offers yet another fascinating insight—this time on the significance and fallibility of print—by challenging the authorship of the contested leniency, asserting that it was mistakenly attributed to R. Elijah Mizrahi and inadvertently included in his works. He declares:

Finally, the truth shall lead the way, and it should be publicly known that this responsum (containing the leniency) is not even from the words of R. Elijah Mizrahi, but rather from one of those who disagree with him. It [the questionable responsum] was found among the Rabbi’s responsa and printed along with them, and the printer mistakenly attributed it to him. And do not be surprised [that such

⁵⁸⁹ -*Zikhronot* 85.

⁵⁹⁰ S. Aboab, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, 85.

S. Aboab, *Sefer ha*

an error could occur], for there are very few printed lines upon which some mistake has not fallen...⁵⁹¹

Aboab supports his contention by citing another situation of misattribution by the printers. He concludes his argument by exonerating R. Elijah Mizrahi from any association with the contested leniency, reaffirming that it was never his position. He declares:

Now, with God's help, our rabbi [Elijah Mizrahi] has emerged clean from the words that were falsely attributed to him, for they never entered his heart. May their Master forgive he **who rushes to issue halakhic rulings with only a fleeting**

glance at the text.⁵⁹² For much analysis is required, and [one must] review the essential elements [of the halakhic issues at hand] and their roots twice or three times prior to issuing [a ruling] to avoid a stumbling block, heaven forbid.

Aboab's words demonstrate the significant challenges that print—particularly the publication of responsa—posed for him and for halakhic and rabbinic authority. While Morsel-Eisenberg identifies the sheer volume of printed responsa as a source of anxiety for rabbis, given the lack of clear criteria for prioritizing one work over another,⁵⁹³ Aboab's concerns center on a slightly different issue. His impassioned plea reveals his fear that the accessibility of printed responsa

⁵⁹¹ -*Zikhronot*, 87.

⁵⁹² my own emphasis

⁵⁹³ Morsel-Eisenberg, "Anxieties" 385-386, 399.

S. Aboab, *Sefer ha*

texts would allow individuals to find leniencies or halakhic distinctions to justify any position they desired, regardless of proper legal reasoning.

Although he does not explicitly articulate the distinction, Aboab recognized a crucial difference between the great halakhic codes, such as the *Shulḥan Arukh* and *Mappah*, and responsa literature. While the former were designed for broad accessibility and report only the final rulings, as they assume a non-rabbinic audience,⁵⁹⁴ responsa were traditionally composed by rabbis for rabbis.⁵⁹⁵ These legal exchanges replete with an exhaustive review and analysis of all the relevant sources and precedents, presupposed a learned and discerning readership—one that, as Aboab emphasizes, would “research and question the halakhot, the premises, and the implications of each responsum twice or three times.”⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁴ see Morsel Eisenberg “anxieties”,

⁵⁹⁵ see our discussion of rabbinic writing in the beginning of this chapter and in Chapter II. For an example of rabbinic writing see Appendix 4.

⁵⁹⁶ -*Zikhronot*, 88.

S. Aboab, *Sefer ha*

With the advent of print, however, Aboab feared that responsa would be treated like halakhic codes, read and applied indiscriminately by those lacking the necessary background to engage in proper legal reasoning. This shift, he warned, risked undermining the traditional process of halakhic interpretation, where rulings were carefully analyzed and scrutinized within a rabbinic framework rather than accepted at face value.

In addition to these explicit challenges to rabbinic authority, there were implicit concerns as well. Aboab and his peers feared the rigidity and permanence assumed and imposed so rapidly by print culture.⁵⁹⁷ This would have been a matter of particular concern to Aboab in the realm of *Halakha*. Prior to the advent of printing, *halakhic* decisions, particularly regarding ritual law, fell almost exclusively within the rabbinic purview. A rabbi would review relevant Talmudic and *halakhic* sources and weigh them against the specifics of the situation before rendering a tailored response—a process Aboab alludes to in the afore-cited quotes. Similarly, when studying a manuscript or orally reviewing a Talmudic passage, a rabbi was encouraged to engage with the text, presenting counter-arguments or citing corroborative proofs.⁵⁹⁸ This methodology ensured that the world of *Halakha* and Talmudic study remained dynamic, vibrant, and pertinent, with the rabbi occupying a critical and central role as its practitioner.

The rigidity introduced by printed works challenged this dynamic engagement with *Halakha* that had characterized rabbinic practice, and threatened the individual rabbi's central role in the

⁵⁹⁷ Numerous studies have demonstrated that even after the advent of print, manuscript continued to be employed alongside print for a period of over two-hundred years, as it was perceived to offer advantages over, or complement, the printed form. Manuscripts, for example, were much more “malleable” and people were more forgiving of change in manuscript form. For an extensive study of this subject, see David McKitterick *Print, manuscript and the search for order, 1450-1830*. (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵⁹⁸ see my discussions of this process in Chapter II.

Halakhic world. As printed Halakha became more "petrified," it began to assume a certain

authority, somewhat distinct from and even independent of the traditional practitioners of *halakha*—the rabbis. This phenomenon is epitomized by the *Shulhan Arukh* which achieved a Canonized status in Jewish law, owing primarily to its importance as a comprehensive and “updated” halakhic code, but in no small part to its widespread dissemination as well. Print and accessibility enabled the *Halakhot* of the *Shulkhan Aruckh* and other works like it, to be disseminated and embedded in wide swaths of Jewish society in a manner that did not exist prior to the printing press.⁵⁹⁹ Additionally, Tamara Morsel-Eisenberg explains, “the work’s printed state [referring to *Shulhan Arukh*], to some extent enhanced its codificatory authority.”⁶⁰⁰ Aboab may have perceived that the widespread printing of halakhic works, posed a threat to the central role and authority wielded by the individual rabbi within his community. Additionally, the rigidity of printed *Halakha*, had the potential to hinder the ongoing dynamism and relevance of Halakha.⁶⁰¹⁶⁰²

The advent of the printing press and the evolving landscape of knowledge thus constituted a tangible threat to rabbinic authority, particularly concerning their individual prerogative in

⁵⁹⁹ See Edward Fram’s analysis of the specific popularity of the *i* even in comparison to Rabbi Moses Isserles and Rabbi Solomon Luria in *The codification of Jewish law on the cusp of modernity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

⁶⁰⁰ Tamara Morsel-Eisenberg, "Print and the Codification of Jewish Law." *Routledge*, 2022. 1.

⁶⁰¹ See for example Joseph Davis, *Yom Tov Lipmann Heller: Portrait of a Seventeenth-Century Rabbi, who discusses similar reasons for long-time opposition to the Shulhan Arukh in Germany and Prague*. (Liverpool University Press, 2005), 125-126

⁶⁰² Interestingly, Solomon Schechter *Studies in Judaism, First series*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, PA 1911, 212 makes the same point: “however great the literary value of a code may be, it does not invest it with infallibility, nor does it exempt it from the student or the rabbi who makes use of it from the duty of examining each paragraph on its own merits, and subjecting it to the same rules of interpretation that were always applied to Tradition.”

determining Halakha. In response to these significant challenges, Aboab felt the need to unwaveringly champion the enduring role and significance of the rabbi in upholding authority and in shaping the future of Halakha. These threats, which posed the greatest danger to the

authority of the individual rabbi, also shed light on Aboab's persistent endeavors to foster unity, cooperation and coordination among rabbis and to institutionalize certain central ritual professions.

VIII. Conclusion:

In its totality, the *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* stands as an exemplary artifact of the early modern Jewish Italian rabbinate. It reflects and responds to the movements toward communal cohesion, systematization, and consolidation of authority that characterized the period. Written from the perspective of Rabbi Samuel Aboab, a practicing Italian rabbi addressing his colleagues, it offers unparalleled insight into the realities, tensions, and challenges confronting a rabbi in seventeenth-century Italy. At the same time, it reveals Aboab's vision for early modern religious leadership which would adapt systematization and organization to guide and shape communities that were halakhic rigorous and religious "orthodox."

Chapter V Samuel Aboab as an Eastern Mediterranean Correspondent

I. Introduction:

Samuel Aboab's literary footprint encompasses three distinct genres, two of which we have already explored. In Chapter Two, I explored how his responsa illuminated his role as a halakhist, the centrality of responsa in the Mediterranean rabbinic world, and the intellectual caliber and religious commitment of his correspondents—many of whom shared a converso background similar to Aboab's own. The previous chapter turned to *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, which presents a different genre and style, offering a prescriptive vision for rabbinic leadership, blending halakha, ethics, and communal education to define Aboab's idealized model of religious and halakhic "orthodoxy."

We now turn to a third dimension of Aboab's written legacy: His personal correspondence. In addition to what will be learned by examining the distinct style of this type of writing and some of its features, these non-halakhic letters reveal new facets of his character and activities beyond the rabbinate. His correspondence highlights his role as a “doer”,⁶⁰³ aiding emissaries (*Shadarim*)⁶⁰⁴ from the Holy Land, distributing financial support to individuals, yeshivot, and communal representatives, and overseeing the *Beit Midrash* his father established in Safed.

⁶⁰³ I use this term to describe a man of action and initiative in a similar way as Peter Miller uses “man of action” to describe Pieresc the antiquarian in his book, Peter Miller, *Pieresc's Mediterranean World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 7.

⁶⁰⁴ The term *shadarim* is an acronym for the Hebrew Sheluhei de-Rabbanan, which translates to emissaries of the rabbis or rabbinic emissaries.

II. Increased migration to the land of Israel:

Most notably, Aboab's rich epistolary exchange with correspondents in the Holy Land illuminates a broader and compelling phenomenon that characterized this era: The intensification of religious attachment to the land of Israel. This devotional enthusiasm, which emerged in the early sixteenth century—catalyzed by the Ottoman conquest of 1517—and which persisted well into the eighteenth century, found its most tangible expression in the increasing migration, often of large groups, to the region. Distinguished rabbinic figures undertook these sacred journeys with retinues of twenty to forty family members, disciples, and colleagues. The Ashkenazic world produced perhaps the most dramatic example in R. Judah he-Ḥasid, who, as the seventeenth century drew to a close, led an extraordinary “*aliyah*” of over 1,000 pilgrims from Polish and German lands to establish a community in Jerusalem.⁶⁰⁵

While such large-scale migrations were exceptional, group relocations were not, with several notable examples among both Ashkenazi and Portuguese Jews. One famous case is the entourage that accompanied the Italian Ashkenazi rabbi Abraham Rovigo, who, in 1701, moved with his household and students to Jerusalem to establish a yeshiva together with none other than R. Judah Hasid's son Isaiah.⁶⁰⁶ Although Isaiah was forced to return to Mannheim, Rovigo remained determinedly in the Yeshiva he established in the land of Israel for “In the land of Israel they will be called (become) learned; there, and not in the diaspora”⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁵ Matthias B. Lehmann, *Emissaries from the Holy Land: The Sephardic Diaspora and the Practice of Pan-Judaism in the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 26-27.

⁶⁰⁶ Elisheva Carlebach, “Rabbinic Circles as Messianic Pathways in the Post-Expulsion Era,” *Judaism* 41, no. 3 (1992): 209–210.

⁶⁰⁷ Carlebach, “Rabbinic Circles,” 210.

Among Portuguese Jews, this trend was even more prevalent. R. Immanuel Aboab, author of the *Nomologia*, along with thirty-six of his family members relocated from Amsterdam

to the land of Israel in 1628 with the intention of establishing yeshivot in Jerusalem and Safed.

While Immanuel sadly passed away shortly after his arrival, his daughter Gracia, who came to the Holy Land herself, carried on his legacy, and supported multiple yeshivot in the land of Israel for the next twenty-eight years!⁶

The religious, intellectual, spiritual, and economic allure of the Holy Land⁷ during this period attracted scholars from diverse backgrounds, particularly those of Portuguese heritage. The Portuguese former converso Refael Mordekahi Malki,⁶⁰⁸ a colorful and fascinating figure, relocated from Livorno to Jerusalem in 1677. As a prominent and wealthy physician, Malki wielded considerable influence within Jerusalem's Jewish community.⁶⁰⁹ Malki envisioned a yeshiva of his own, guided by a distinctive philosophy, and while his plans never fully materialized, elements of his vision ultimately took shape in the Yeshiva of R. Jacob Hagiz in

⁶⁰⁸ Raphael Mordekhai Malki is a fascinating individual who moved in the "aristocratic" circles of Jerusalem scholars—he was the father-in-law of both R. Moshe Hagiz and the renowned R. Hezkiah da Silva. He was also a member of the "Vega Yeshiva" in Jerusalem for eighteen years. His wealth and prominence allowed him to serve as a social and even religious critic of the Jerusalem community. Some early work on him was conducted by Minna Rozen, *Jewish Identity and Society in the Seventeenth Century: Reflections on the Life and Work of Refael Mordekhai Malki*. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), Minna Rozen and Eliezer Witztum, "The Dark Mirror of the Soul: Dreams of a Jewish Physician in Jerusalem at the End of the 17th Century," *Revue des études juives* 151, no. 1–2 (1992): 5–42. Although he deserves more attention. Also see Meir Benayahu, "Le-toledot Batei ha-Midrash biYerushalayim ba-me'i'a ha-17," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 21 (1948): 1–28, for some discussion of him, 4, 9. Havlin also did some preliminary work on Malki in his "Le-toledot Yeshivot Yerushalyim ve-ḥakhameiha beshalhei ha-me'a ha-17 ve-reshit ha-me'a ha-18," *Shalem* 2 (1976): 127, 130.

⁶⁰⁹ Rozen and Witztum, "The Dark Mirror," 7–11.

¹⁰ Havlin, "Le-toledot Yeshivot," 127.

Jerusalem, known as *Beit Yaakov*,¹⁰ and in the yeshiva founded by his distinguished son-in-law, R. Hezkiya da Silva,⁶¹⁰ author of *Pri Ḥadash*. Rabbi Jacob Ḥagiz was a Sephardi rabbi who immigrated to Jerusalem and founded a yeshiva there with the financial backing of the affluent

⁶ Bernard Cooperman, “Identities Constructed: Immanuel Aboab before the Inquisition in Pisa,” forthcoming, 27-28.

⁷ See my discussion below.

Vega family, a distinguished Portuguese lineage based in Livorno.¹² The journey to the Holy

Land also drew the renowned Portuguese converso physician-turned-kabbalist R. Zemaḥ Cohen.

He relocated to Jerusalem, accompanying members of Immanuel Aboab’s family, including his sister and nephews.¹³ Though initially drawn to R. Jacob Hagiz’s scholarly circle, Cohen and he soon parted ways, driven by Cohen’s conviction that Kabbalah—not Talmud and Halakha—should form the heart of yeshiva learning.¹⁴

A. Kabbalah, piety and messianic aspirations in the land of Israel

Scholarly interpretations of the extraordinary fervor centered on the land of Israel during this period have evolved significantly, moving from Gershom Scholem’s famous emphasis on Kabbalah and the traumatic displacement of the Spanish expulsion¹⁵ to a vast and nuanced body of literature encompassing mystical, pietistic, and messianic currents.¹⁶ Scholars such as Lawrence Fine, Roni Weinstein, Elliot Horowitz, and Zeev Greis have studied subjects ranging

¹² Havlin, “Le-toledot yeshivot,” 119-20.

¹³ Cooperman, “Identities Constructed,” 27-28.

⁶¹⁰ Minna Rozen suggests that the yeshiva, founded by Malki’s son-in-law R. Hezkiyah da Silva in 1692, incorporated many of Malki’s innovations and philosophy. She demonstrates that it had long-lasting success. “The Dark Mirror,” 9-10.

- ¹⁴ Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 26–27. And Carlebach, “Rabbinic Circles,” 209.
- ¹⁵ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), 244–86, and along similar lines, see H. H. Ben Sasson, “Exile and Redemption in the Eyes of Spanish Exiles,” in *Y. F. Baer Jubilee Volume*, ed. S. W. Baron, B. Dinur, S. Ettinger, and I. Halpern (Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel, 1960), 216–27.
- ¹⁶ Though by no means a comprehensive Bibliography, to get a sense of the diversity of related subjects, see the two anthologies edited by Frederick E. Greenspahn, *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah: New Insights and Scholarship* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), and Lawrence Fine, *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Even after more than a century, Schechter’s article is still important: Solomon Schechter, “Safed in the Sixteenth Century: A City of Legists and Mystics,” in *Studies in Judaism*, second series, ed. Solomon Schechter (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1908), 202–306, 317–328. Then see, Elliot R. Wolfson, “Asceticism, Mysticism, and Messianism: A Reappraisal of Schechter’s Portrait of Sixteenth-Century Safed,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 106, no. 2 (2016): 165–77. Roni Weinstein, “Law and Mysticism: An Inevitable Encounter,” in *Joseph Karo and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Law: The Early Modern Ottoman and Global Settings* (London: Anthem Press, 2022), 141–80. Also see Weinstein’s recent book *Kabbalah and Jewish Modernity* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016).

from the impact of printed *hanhagot* (devotional practices) literature to the intersection of

Halakha and Kabbalah.⁶¹¹

In his latest book, *Kabbalah and Jewish Modernity*, Ronni Weinstein has synthesized many of the studies on sixteenth and seventeenth century Kabbalah, while highlighting the avid interest of diaspora Jewry in Safed Kabbalah. In this work, Weinstein presents sixteenth-century Safed Kabbalah as a deliberate and systematic “missionary movement,” describing its transformation from “a highly secretive and esoteric tradition” into a far-reaching campaign

⁶¹¹ On the spread of pietistic and devotional practice and literature, especially in conjunction with the rise of print, see Zeev Gries, “The Fashioning of Hanhagot (Regimen Vitae) Literature at the End of the Sixteenth Century and during the Seventeenth Century and Its Historical Significance / Izuv sifrut ha-hanhagot ha-ivrit be-mifne ha-mei’a ha-16 u-va-mei’a ha-17 u-mashma’uto ha-historit,” *Tarbiz* 56 (1987): 527–81. For more on mystical practices and confraternities, see Elliot Horowitz’s dissertation, “Jewish Confraternities in Seventeenth-Century Verona: A Study in the Social History of Piety” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1982). And Elliot Horowitz, “Coffee, Coffeehouses, and the Nocturnal Rituals of Early Modern Jewry,” *AJS Review* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 17–46. On the intersection between Halakha and Kabbalistic practice, see for example, Moshe Halamish, *Ha-Kabbalah bi-tefillah u-va-minhag* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2000), who builds upon the works of Jacob Katz and Yisrael Ta-Shma on this subject.

“spreading its doctrines throughout the Jewish world... The goal was ambitious... a wholesale reformation of Judaism.”⁶¹²

In partial support of his argument, Weinstein examines the proliferation of Kabbalistic confraternities, particularly in Italy, which were directly inspired by Safed teachings. He also emphasizes the powerful ties that directly linked Italian and Safed Kabbalists. Italian Kabbalists such as R. Menahem Azaria de Fano, R. Moses Zacut, and Rabbi Aaron Berechya of Modena actively engaged with Safed luminaries, including R. Benjamin ha-Levi—teacher of R. Moses Zacut⁶¹³—and R. Moses Cordovero, who mentored de Fano.⁶¹⁴

Concerning our specific discussion of relocation to the holy land, Elisheva Carlebach, in her article “Rabbinic Circles as Messianic Pathways in the Post Expulsion Era” highlights the redemptive and messianic elements at play in the immigrations to the Holy Land and establishment of Yeshivot. She argues that many of the yeshivot founded by immigrants to the Holy Land, including the aforementioned Rovigo and R. Zemah Cohen, were intended to hasten the redemption through the study of Torah, and in some instances, Kabbalah, in the Holy Land.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹² Weinstein, *Kabbalah*, 3.

⁶¹³ Meir Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 148.

⁶¹⁴ Weinstein, *Kabbalah*, 94-96.

⁶¹⁵ Carlebach, “Rabbinic Circles,” 209.

Jacob Katz integrates the intense fervor surrounding the sixteenth-century land of Israel with the profound intellectual, halakhic, and religious efflorescence of Safed in particular.⁶¹⁶ In his article *Maḥloket ha-Semikha*,⁶¹⁷ which examines the great *semikha* controversy that began in 1538, Katz vividly illustrates the excitement and anticipation generated by the prospect of renewing the ancient form of rabbinic ordination, a practice lost since the third century.

Katz demonstrates how the controversy positioned Safed, and the land of Israel, as a focal point of religious and intellectual aspiration, as it encompassed multiple dimensions that resonated deeply with the broader Jewish world. These included the halakhic authority of a potential *Sanhedrin*, the profound religious and spiritual implications of atonement for conversos which the *Sanhedrin* would have the authority to ensure, and the unmistakable messianic overtones associated with the revival of *semikha* and the reestablishment of the “Great Court”

which had not convened since the Second Temple period. Moreover, its significance was further amplified by the avid participation of some of the era’s most prominent figures, including R. Joseph Karo, author of *Shulḥan Arukh*, and the great Kabbalist, R. Moses Cordovero, as well as, in the next generation, Rabbi Isaac Luria, R. Ḥayim Vital, and R. Moshe Alshikh.

B. Emissaries: Agents of messianic and religious enthusiasm and immigration

⁶¹⁶ There is extensive literature on Safed and the individuals who lived there. For a (non-updated) bibliography on Safed, see Naftali Ben-Menachem, “Publications on Safed: Bibliography” [in Hebrew], *Sefunot* 6 (1962): 475–503. More recently, see the broad and comprehensive scholarship concentrated in Eyal Davidson, “Safed’s Sages between 1540–1615, Their Religious and Social Status” [in Hebrew] (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2009).

⁶¹⁷ Jacob Katz, “The Controversy on the Semikha [Ordination] between R. Jacob Beirav and Ralbah” [Hebrew], *Zion* (1951): 28–45. For more on this intriguing subject, see Hayim Zalman Dimitrovsky, “New Documents Regarding the ‘Semicha’ Controversy in Safed” [Hebrew], *Sefunot* (1966): 113–92 and Dimitrovsky, “Rabbi Yaakov Berab’s Academy” [Hebrew], *Sefunot* (1963): 41–102.

Historians of the land of Israel, such as Aaron Ya'ari in his *Shluhei Eretz Yisrael* and Mathias Lehmann in his *Emissaries from the Holy Land: The Sephardic Diaspora and the Practice of Pan-Judaism in the Eighteenth Century*, emphasize what might be called "proto-Zionist" elements of this phenomenon of messianic and religious enthusiasm. Ya'ari, for example, highlights the importance of the emissaries in cultivating this enthusiasm, maintaining that the emissaries personified the ancient affinity and sense of "national" responsibility which bound the Jews in the land of Israel with their counterparts in the diaspora.⁶¹⁸ Matthias Lehmann, although he argues against any form of "pan-zionism" before the twentieth century,⁶¹⁹ nonetheless also believes that the emissaries were instrumental in consolidating and intensifying the diaspora's sense of responsibility toward Jews in the Holy Land.⁶²⁰ He cites the eighteenth-century R. Moses Hagiz who expressed the obligation for international support: "For the residents of the land of Israel are called the poor of *your city* and not the poor of a different city...and especially since they [residents of the land of Israel] are *shomrei mishmeret mishkan Hashem* (guardians of God's sacred abode)."⁶²¹

Whatever their precise motivations—whether religious, messianic, intellectual, or kabbalistic—Portuguese Jews in particular, exhibited a powerful desire to resettle in the land of Israel. At the very least, influential and wealthy families like the Vega family and the Aboabs translated their spiritual fervor into substantial material support. This commitment is evident in

⁶¹⁸ Avraham Ya'ari, *Sheluhei Eretz Yisra'el: Toledot ha-sheliḥut mei-ha-aretz la-golah mei-hurban bayit sheini ad ha-mei'a ha-19* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1950).

⁶¹⁹ Lehmann, *Emissaries*, 7.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 146-48, 166-67.

⁶²¹ M. Hagiz, *Sfat Emet*: (Jerusalem, 1881) <https://hebrewbooks.org/35757>, 28.

Abraham Aboab's actions following the death of his brother Jacob (Andre Faliero), his longtime business partner and a prominent communal leader. In 1632, Abraham established and endowed a *Beit Midrash* in Safed in his brother's memory. The institution's charter, along with extensive correspondence between its leadership in the land of Israel and the Aboab family—particularly with Rabbi Samuel Aboab—offers an irresistible opportunity to examine this phenomenon of religious enthusiasm and Samuel Aboab's participation in it.

III. *Beit Midrash* Aboab: The commitment to the land of Israel, a Tangible Manifestation:

The original charter⁶²² for the *Beit Midrash* was discovered by Meir Benayahu among Cecil Roth's manuscripts, now housed at Leeds University. He subsequently transcribed it in *Dor Ehad ba-Arez*.⁶²³ Noting that the document is neither specifically addressed nor signed, Benayahu suggests that multiple copies were likely produced and distributed to each member of the Yeshiva.⁶²⁴

At the opening of the charter, Abraham Aboab—possibly guided by his son Samuel⁶²⁵—articulates the Yeshiva's "mission statement", offering a glimpse into the fervent religious

enthusiasm that underpinned such initiatives. The Yeshiva was established "*To expand and glorify Torah, to increase its study, and to gather disciples to it.*" Following this declaration, is a

⁶²² See appendix 5 for a full translation of the charter.

⁶²³ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 183 n. 1 and 183-86.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶²⁵ I suggest this, since the charter is written in Hebrew, and there are indications that will be examined further in this chapter, that Abraham Aboab and R. Samuel Aboab's brothers were not proficient in Hebrew.

prayer composed on behalf of Abraham Aboab, the institution's primary benefactor, which further illuminates the powerful motivations and expectations driving these institutions:

God has chosen Israel... and they defied Him... and were sentenced to persecution... in exile... In order to maintain His nation, God left them a relic—that is, in engaging in Your Torah. [In order to ensure Torah study], You placed it into the hearts of benefactors, generous and wealthy, to establish yeshivot and schools of Torah and to maintain their students. And now arose R. Abraham Aboab, whose heart is keen to seek God with all his strength, to sustain us in this place (Safed) in the study of Your Torah.

The prayer, intended to be recited each morning after prayers and on special occasions such as the eve of *Rosh Hodesh* (the new month), is followed by a detailed curriculum—specifying not only the texts to be studied, but also the exact schedule, duration, and study framework—whether undertaken collectively by the entire yeshiva or with younger students learning under the guidance of a resident scholar.

A. The Curriculum:

The daily curriculum of *Midrash Aboab* was carefully structured: The day began with the entire yeshiva—both students and scholars (*haverim*)—engaging in an intensive analysis of a single *sugya* (Talmudic segment) from the designated tractate for that season. In *Beit Midrash Aboab*, this study cycle commenced with tractate *Kiddushin*. The participants would immerse themselves in the discussion, engaging in the dialectical method of *nose'im ve-notnim* (“thrusting and parrying, lit. give and take”) until the passage was fully elucidated.

Following this intensive session, the group recited a series of short prayers, beginning with a memorial prayer for the deceased—specifically for R. Jacob Aboab, in whose name the *Beit Midrash* was founded. They also recited a *Mi she-Berakh* prayer for the well-being of the yeshiva’s benefactors, particularly Abraham Aboab and his sons, followed by the *Kaddish* prayer, study of a chapter of *Mishnayot*, and concluding with a final *kaddish* prayer.

After these communal activities, the students and scholars dispersed to study in smaller groups. Each rabbi withdrew to his designated study room, where he worked closely with his students throughout the day, in accordance with the structured curriculum. The majority of the day was devoted to the study of *Gemarah*. Before sunset, however, they transitioned to a chapter of *Mishnayot*, after which the focus shifted to ethical instruction, studying the popular sixteenth-century work *Reishit Hokmah* by Rabbi Elijah de Vidas (1518–1587) in order “to instill awe of God” in the students of the *Beit Midrash*.

As evening approached, the Yeshiva members gathered once more for prayers—again reciting memorial prayers for the deceased and benefactors—before engaging in *bekiut* (discursive) study of the tractate *Shabbat*. The day concluded with the recitation of *Kaddish*, followed by the *Minḥa* (afternoon prayer) and *Arbit* (evening prayer) services. Before dispersing for the night, the students would review a brief section of *Aggadah* (non-halakhic portion of Talmud) from *Ein Yaakov* (a collection of *Aggadot*), after which each would “leave in peace for their homes.”

The final section of the charter sets forth a series of ordinances—a codified set of regulations and practices governing life within the Yeshiva. Some applied to all members, such as the expectation of maintaining peace and harmony within the institution, with an explicit

prohibition against discord or animosity among its members. Others were directed specifically at the *hakhamim*, including a strict prohibition against borrowing books from the Yeshiva's library. These ordinances will be examined in greater depth as they intersect with various themes explored throughout this chapter.

B. Structure: Finances and Endowments

The charter's articulated expectations for both the benefactors and the members of the Aboab *Beit Midrash* represent an important model of yeshiva patronage in the land of Israel. By examining these responsibilities in greater depths, and comparing them to those in other yeshivot in the region, we can uncover broader patterns of foreign institutional support and accountability, mechanisms that sustained Torah study in the Holy Land. This comparative analysis will also illuminate the distinctive organizational and intellectual structures of the yeshivot in the land of Israel during this period, and provide insight into the social relationships and economic challenges that shaped their development.

Beit Midrash Aboab was an academic institution singularly devoted to Torah study, as evidenced by its rigorous curriculum and the expectation that its members would engage in studying Torah throughout the day. From its inception, it was funded through an endowment designed to ensure financial sustainability. The principal was to remain inviolate, while the generated profits provided sufficient income to fully subsidize the living expenses of the yeshiva's initial seven members -- two *Roshei Yeshiva* (rabbinic leaders), Rabbi Judah Krispin and Rabbi Benjamin ha-Levi, along with five *hakhamim* (scholars), and stipends for some of the

students.⁶²⁶ Over time, the yeshiva expanded to accommodate up to ten *hakhamim*, all of whom continued to be supported by the original Aboab endowment. Following Abraham Aboab's death, the fund was managed by Samuel Aboab and Abraham's other children.⁶²⁷

Beit Midrash Aboab exemplifies a phenomenon first identified by Shlomo Zalman Havlin, and which extended far beyond this specific institution. As Havlin details in his study of Jerusalem yeshivot in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, *Beit Midrash Aboab* embodied the defining characteristics of a "classic Sephardi yeshiva" in the early modern land of Israel. In his work, Havlin contrasts these institutions with their Ashkenazi counterparts, which primarily served young men (*baḥurim*) and intermittent participants. In contrast, the Sephardi yeshivot were designed exclusively for recognized Torah scholars engaged in full-time study, while deeply dedicated young men (*baḥurim*) sat at their feet, absorbing their teachings.³⁴ The Aboab charter does indeed stress the all-encompassing nature of the *Beit Midrash*, mandating that students remain fully immersed in their studies without interruption even for meals, which were brought to them, rather than taken outside the institution.

Similar to Havlin's descriptions of the "Vega Yeshiva," the Yeshiva established by Rabbi Jacob Hagiz in Jerusalem, also known as *Beit Yaakov*, which was endowed by the wealthy Vega

⁶²⁶ The last ordinance in the charter states, "students who succeed in intensive study and diligence and the fear of Gd, they will increase his stipend as they see fit."

⁶²⁷ "None of these specific financial ordinances appear in the charter, as shown in Appendix 5. Instead, they are revealed in a letter written after Abraham Aboab's death in 1642, in which Samuel Aboab recalls these arrangements. This letter, along with the broader significance of these financial provisions, will be examined in detail in this chapter. ³⁴ Shlomo Zalman Havlin, "Le-toledot yeshivot," 2. Havlin's work is integral to understanding life in the land of Israel during the early modern period, and specifically the multifaceted roles played by the Yeshivot in this arena. He is the first to clearly identify and define the "Sephardi Yeshiva" as a distinct intellectual, social, and economic construct in the land of Israel, and explain its significance there.

family of Livorno, the Aboab *Beit Midrash* was not a Talmud Torah for youth. It was a hub of rigorous and scholarly Torah study, often doubling as a Beit Din.⁶²⁸ While non-member scholars and younger students were permitted to join in the study, financial support was strictly reserved for the full-time members. These stipends fully covered living expenses, allowing members to immerse themselves completely in Torah study. The expectation of full-time study, as specified in the Aboab charter, was standard, making comprehensive financial support essential.

“Classic Sephardi Yeshivot” in the early modern land of Israel shared several essential traits: they were founded on primary endowments, just like the *Beit Midrash* Aboab, and their sustainability relied on the continued profits generated by these endowments and their effective management.⁶²⁹ The principle of the inviolability of the endowment was paramount to them all, as its loss could jeopardize the entire venture and the livelihoods it supported.⁶³⁰ In case of additional financial needs, the Aboab charter required the heads of the Yeshiva to appeal directly and immediately to Abraham or his family, who would then provide or raise the necessary funds.⁶³¹

Upon Abraham Aboab’s death in 1642, Samuel immediately wrote to the *Roshei Yeshiva*, R. Judah Crispin and R. Benjamin ha-Levi, informing them of his father’s passing and assuring

⁶²⁸ See Havlin’s description of the Vega Yeshiva in “Le-toledot yeshivot,” 122-25.

⁶²⁹ See Havlin “Le-toledot yeshivot,” 115-16, and Benayahu’s discussion of the extensive and varied efforts of R. Jacob Hagiz, and R. Moshe Hagiz to secure an endowment and continued funds for their Yeshivot in “Le-toledot batei ha-midrash,” 1-28.

⁶³⁰ See Havlin, “Le-toledot yeshivot,” 136, regarding the closure of the “Vega Yeshiva” in Jerusalem, and Aboab’s letter to Rabbi Moshe Sagiz which will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁶³¹ This clause, like the other financial arrangements, does not appear in the official Charter for the Yeshiva (see appendix 5), it is referred to only later in R. Samuel Aboab’s letter to Rabbi Moshe Sagiz.

them that he, along with his brothers and uncles, would continue to support the yeshiva financially.⁶³² He recognized that such continuity could not be taken for granted, as most

endowments of this kind did not survive intact into the second generation, and were frequently contested after the benefactor's death by his heirs.

Indeed, we shall demonstrate that Samuel Aboab was well acquainted with the challenges of contested endowments, having witnessed them through the experience of his close friend, the emissary R. Joseph de-Leiria, and later, in his own dealings, as well.

IV. Contested Endowments:

The endowment intended for the Yeshiva of R. Joseph de-Leiria was established in April 1634 "before the ḥakhamim of Safed" by a childless scholar from Istanbul who had arrived in the city along with his wife in that same year. In his will, he stipulated, that upon his wife's passing, "all the assets that remain will be designated [as the principal] for the [support of] scholars of Torah whom she chooses [before her death]." Later in that year, she selected R. Joseph de-Leiria to lead the yeshiva and appointed R. Moshe ben Shimshon as executor. Together, R. Moshe and R. Joseph were entrusted with inviting four additional scholars to join the institution.⁶³³

The principal assets for this endowment, located in both Istanbul and Safed, were designated to fund the yeshiva following the benefactor's death. However, the endowment was soon contested by the deceased's brother in Istanbul, and the case came before Rabbi Yeshaya,

⁶³² Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 195-96. This letter will be examined at some length below

⁶³³ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 116-17.

son of the *Maharimat* (Rabbi Joseph ben Moses Trani). He ruled that the assets should be divided: Those in Safed would form the principal for the endowment of the Yeshiva in keeping with the deceased's wishes, while those in Istanbul would revert to the deceased's brother.⁶³⁴ The funds that remained for the Yeshiva as a result of the ruling were likely insufficient, as evidenced

by Aboab's ongoing financial support and Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria 's continuous fundraising efforts to supplement the reduced endowment.⁶³⁵

Rabbi Samuel Aboab himself encountered a similar challenge when attempting to revitalize *Beit Midrash Aboab* in 1660. Following years of local unrest and persecutions,⁶³⁶ the yeshiva had either disbanded or significantly weakened beginning in 1655. By 1660, however, conditions had improved, and Aboab sought new financial backing to restore the institution—though it remains unclear why the Aboab family could not sustain it on their own.

In a letter to Rabbi Abraham Adigis and Rabbi Moshe Faridis, who headed the Yeshiva during that period, Aboab writes with evident excitement about securing a new benefactor. He describes this individual, very possibly a former converso, since Aboab refers to him as “a man whose heart rose in the ways of repentance,” and notes that he has agreed to invest in *Beit Midrash Aboab* and adhere to all the ordinances stipulated by Abraham Aboab in the original

⁶³⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁶³⁵ Ibid., 202, for example.

⁶³⁶ Meir Benayahu, “Documents from Italy Relating to the Temporary Abandonment of Safed by the Jews / teudot mei-Italia mi-zman ḥurbanah shel kehillat Zefat /1655-1658),” *Erez-Yisrael: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* 3 (1954): 244-48.

charter. The new funding, continues Samuel Aboab, would provide enough support for six *ḥakhamim* and twelve students.⁶³⁷

Aboab is soon disappointed however, as in a subsequent letter written two years later to R. Solomon Algazi of Izmir, Aboab laments that the funds had lasted only six months before the benefactor's death. His heirs, he writes, "made themselves deaf to all the commands and requests of their benefactor"—disregarding his explicit wishes regarding the endowment. Aboab concludes with a poignant lament: "there is no voice and no response, and no money" (*ein*

kesef), an alliteration of the word *ein* emphasizing both the heirs' silence and the financial ruin of the endeavor.⁶³⁸

Contested bequests were the rule rather than the exception,⁶³⁹ as heirs often resented the loss of their expected inheritance to institutions in the Holy Land. As these cases illustrate, such endowments frequently sparked protracted disputes over their validity and constrained their execution. At other times, competing needs and demands obstructed endowments from reaching their intended recipients in the yeshivot of the land of Israel. Such was the fate of another significant endowment in Safed, known as the Adarbi Yeshiva.

In 1623, the Adarbi bequest was established in the city of Tyre.⁶⁴⁰ Prior to his passing, the benefactor, Abraham Adarbi, entrusted the principal of the endowment to three trusted agents in his hometown, tasking them with investing the funds and utilizing the interest to endow and

⁶³⁷ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 250-51.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, 121 and 128 for more examples.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 118-20.

support a yeshiva in Safed. Crucially, the founding charter of the endowment included explicit instructions prohibiting the use of its resources for any other charitable endeavor, including *Pidyon Shevuyim* (the redemption of captives).

Several years after Adarbi's passing, his home community in Tyre suffered severe financial difficulties. In this context, the designated agents entrusted with the management of the Adarbi endowment, along with prominent members of the community, appealed to Rabbi Ḥayim Benveniste for a halakhic ruling. They sought permission to divert the endowment's funds to help assuage the desperate needs of their own local population. Their argument hinged on the

assertion that "everyone knows that in Safed the *talmidei ḥakhamim* (Torah scholars) can turn for support elsewhere."

Ultimately, Rabbi Ḥayim Benveniste ruled in favor of the community's request, effectively sanctioning the reallocation of the Adarbi endowment's resources. His underlying rationale was that had Adarbi himself been witness to the dire straits afflicting his own people, he would have certainly chosen to utilize his funds to assist them, rather than directing them in perpetuity towards the support of scholars in a distant locale.

In contrast to the many contested endowments, the steadfast dedication of Samuel Aboab and his brothers to sustaining *Beit Midrash Aboab* stands as an important exception. Given the challenges of such a commitment, the letter in which Samuel formally assumes this responsibility warrants closer examination.

V. *Beit Midrash Aboab*: Rabbi Samuel Aboab assumes responsibility.

Samuel's letter to R. Judah Crispin and R. Benjamin ha-Levi heads of the Yeshiva⁶⁴¹ reflects Samuel's fresh mourning, as he devotes nearly forty lines to eulogizing and lamenting his father.

For comfort remains far from me... The sun has set in the middle of the day, and in the blink of an eye, its [the world's] radiance, splendor, and majesty have departed... The ark of the covenant [a reference to his father] has been taken from us... The man of God, our father, my teacher, the crown of my head—on the twenty-sixth of Adar I (February 26, 1642). It is a day of distress and rebuke, and there is nothing left to do but raise our voices in bitter cries...

Aboab continues to mourn the loss of his father, reflecting on his profound influence and unparalleled virtues.

From my youth, he raised me as a merciful father. How much effort he exerted, how tirelessly he toiled to benefit me and to teach me the paths of life. And I am always with him, bound by his love... What would I give to be like him? I possess only a mere drop of his exalted character and *middot* (positive traits)... Who was like him, assisting so many, and guiding them with both his heart and his wisdom? And who can compare to him, one who performed countless acts of kindness—with his person or his wealth—for both the poor and the affluent, for the living and the dead...

⁶⁴¹ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 196-98.

Above all, his piety, humility, and fear of sin stood supreme... He would rise at midnight and again in the early morning to go to the synagogue, pleading before God, shedding tears for the destruction of the Temple. Even in his old age, he fasted—at times for forty consecutive days. At his passing, the entire community wept.⁶⁴²

Following this heartfelt tribute, Aboab turns to the primary focus of the letter—continued support for the *Beit Midrash*, as this was “most precious to his father in life”.

He always took special care to attend to every matter [in Safed], and his heart and mind remained there all his days, devoted to elevating and glorifying Torah [at the Beit Midrash], for this was his sole desire... Even then [in the

final days of his life] he placed this concern [the continuation of the Beit Midrash] above all else. Before any other commandments, words, or bequests, he charged us with ensuring that our hands never falter in upholding its strength [that of the Beit Midrash] and that his name should always be remembered among those who study [there]... And we [speaking for himself and the Aboab family], with God’s help, will hasten to follow the righteous path of our crown of glory [our father] and will not stray from it.

Aboab concludes with an intriguing and rather cryptically worded paragraph in which he informs his correspondents, the *Rashei Yeshiva*, of a decision regarding the language of future

⁶⁴² It is interesting that Samuel Aboab remarks at great lengths about his father’s piety and generosity, but does not mention him engaging in Torah study or say that he was a scholar.

communications. He explains that now that the full responsibility for supporting the Yeshiva rests on him—whereas previously he had shared this duty with his father—he had considered conducting all correspondence, including financial and administrative matters, in *ketav ivri* (Hebrew writing).⁶⁴³ This would have marked a shift from prior practice, in which such documents had been written in a "foreign language"—likely Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese. In deference to his brothers and relatives, however, continues Aboab, he will maintain the existing custom, ensuring that administrative and financial matters continue to be conducted in the vernacular.

To clarify, this letter was originally written in Hebrew, not translated from a foreign language, as one might mistakenly infer from an initial reading of the paragraph. Its primary purpose was to mourn the passing of the benefactor and to reassure the *Roshei Yeshiva* of the family's continued commitment to the institution. However, Aboab makes it clear that while this

letter is in Hebrew, future correspondence concerning the Yeshiva's financial and administrative affairs will revert to the customary "foreign language".

It appears that this remained the policy throughout the Yeshiva's existence. This is confirmed by a letter written eighteen years later, in 1660,⁶⁴⁴ when Aboab was corresponding with two new *Roshei Yeshiva* as he sought to reinstate the *Beit Midrash*. In that letter, he once again notes that the primary administrative and financial details were sent separately in *La'az* (a general term for a non-Hebrew language), while the Hebrew letter was solely meant to inform

⁶⁴³ An interesting appellation for Hebrew, as opposed to the more common *Lashon Kodesh*. Perhaps the latter form of Hebrew is reserved for more sacred purposes.

⁶⁴⁴ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 250-51.

them of key developments. This distinction explains why the financial arrangements of the Yeshiva were not recorded in Samuel's notebooks,⁶⁴⁵ which were dedicated exclusively to Hebrew writings. It also means, however, that our understanding of the Yeshiva's internal operations remains limited."

While the paragraph concerning the language of his correspondence does not directly shed light on the endowment process or the Yeshivot in the Holy Land, it draws attention to an important aspect of Aboab's correspondence that we have not previously encountered, and is therefore worth a brief digression. This is the first time we see Aboab explicitly address the possibility of writing in a language other than Hebrew. The significance extends beyond merely confirming his multilingual abilities; This linguistic choice, to continue to converse regarding financial matters in the vernacular, while preserving only Hebrew records in his notebooks, serves as a valuable lens through which to understand his scholarly identity, and the religious, cultural, and intellectual expectations of the world he inhabited.

Aboab's preservation of exclusively Hebrew records in his personal notebooks suggests that the language held profound significance for him, intricately bound with his identity as a rabbi, halakhist, and scholar. The rich, nuanced Hebrew evident in his rabbinic responsa⁶⁴⁶—a characteristic he shared with many Mediterranean contemporaries—served not merely as a demonstration of rabbinic erudition, but as a meaningful, almost tangible, connection to textual and halakhic tradition. Perhaps this explains why Aboab suggests that correspondence conducted

⁶⁴⁵ Referring to the four notebooks that comprise the Montefiore collection, of which only two remain. See Introduction, pg 7.

⁶⁴⁶ See our discussion in chapter II and Appendix 4 for an example of Aboab's rich Hebrew.

between rabbis, concerning the *Beit Midrash*—an institution dedicated to Torah learning and scholarship—should naturally be conducted in Hebrew? For Aboab, Hebrew was the appropriate, even expected, language of Torah scholarship and inter-rabbinic correspondence.

Nevertheless, Aboab's concession that financial and administrative correspondence would continue in the vernacular to accommodate his uncles and brothers reveals an important aspect of his position in the early modern world. His linguistic versatility⁶⁴⁷ mirrors his broader capacity to operate across the boundaries of lands and empires. As a rabbi and a member of a prominent Portuguese merchant family stationed in Italy, a commercial and cultural hub, Aboab navigated between different spheres—political, cultural, commercial, and geographic. Understanding Aboab in this light, offers unique insight into his role as a rabbi within the interconnected rabbinic and mercantile Mediterranean world of his time.

Finally, this intriguing paragraph raises a crucial point that will serve to return us to our earlier discussion concerning the Aboab endowment itself. When referring to the continued involvement of his brothers in the administration of the *Beit Midrash*, Samuel Aboab indicates that, while he serves as the primary representative, the endowment was and would remain a

⁶⁴⁷ This was not unusual for Aboab and his peers. Rabbis of converso and Portuguese communities sometimes corresponded even for purposes of halakhic responsa in “foreign languages”. For example, Bernard Cooperman, “Defining Deviance, Negotiating Norms: Raphael Meldola in Livorno, Pisa, and Bayonne,” in *Religious Changes and Cultural Transformations in the Early Modern Western Sephardic Communities*, ed. Yosef Kaplan (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 166, showed that Raphael Meldola’s son, David, said he had to translate many of his father’s responsa into Hebrew. Similarly, Julia Lieberman in “Sermons” has translated some of Samuel Ibn Yahya’s sermons—all of which were written in Portuguese as well. This was their world—a very fluid one.

family endeavor. As previously indicated, this assumption of responsibility and commitment by a second generation of benefactors, set the Aboab endowment apart.

What motivated this unusual course of action? Perhaps Samuel's reverence for his father played a role in his commitment to preserving his legacy as he understood it? This deep respect is evident not only in the aforementioned letter, but also in two others from the same year, one addressed to his close friend, Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria,⁶⁴⁸ and another to Rabbi Moses Yona of Cassale.⁶⁴⁹ In each, Aboab devotes no fewer than fifteen lines to mourning his father before addressing the main purpose of the letter.

Beyond personal devotion, Aboab himself testifies that Abraham Aboab had “commanded above all else” that the family continue the legacy of the Safed *Beit Midrash*—an obligation Samuel would have taken with the utmost seriousness. While we lack letters explicitly expressing his brothers' or uncles' sentiments regarding financial support for the land of Israel or the *Beit Midrash*, evidence suggests their active involvement. Samuel's letter confirms that they had been engaged in the administration of the *Beit Midrash* for some time, and additional records show their contributions to other causes in the land of Israel even during Abraham Aboab's lifetime.

For example, in a letter to the emissary R. Betzalel Vilacid written in 1640, Samuel states that he is responding on behalf of his father and uncle, Solomon Shana Tova, and notes that “the money you require is already in the hands of my brother Joseph Aboab [in Venice], who is

⁶⁴⁸ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 199.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

authorized by my father and uncle to give it to you.”⁶⁵⁰ This demonstrates that financial support for the land of Israel was not just Samuel’s personal commitment but an important family endeavor.

Indeed, In the years that followed Abraham’s death, nearly all correspondence between Samuel Aboab and the leaders of the *Beit Midrash*, as well as letters offering financial assistance to individuals and institutions in the land of Israel, were written in his name alongside those of his brothers and uncles.⁶⁵¹ The consistent references to his family are more than just evidence of their financial involvement—it is a clear expression of the family's enthusiastic dedication to the broader endeavors it undertook involving the land of Israel that we are exploring in this chapter.

VI. International Funding for institutions in the land of Israel:

A. The Reliance on External Funding:

Aboab’s undertaking was no simple task, and the challenges he faced help explain why most endowments and yeshivot in the Holy Land were short-lived. Contextualizing the need within the land of Israel for diaspora support provides crucial perspective on the obstacles Aboab confronted: In the sixteenth century, the land of Israel—particularly Safed—was economically viable, with a largely self-sufficient Jewish population. The city experienced significant growth,

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 193.

⁶⁵¹ See for example his letter to Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria in 1643, Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 202, and to R. David Havilio, one of the heads of the *Beit Midrash* Aboab, Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 204.

not only in population but also in economic prosperity,⁵⁹ while simultaneously emerging as a center of religious and intellectual efflorescence.⁶⁰

This prosperity was largely a result of Palestine and Egypt coming under Ottoman rule in 1517. The introduction of a powerful centralized Ottoman administration provided stability and security, fostering an environment conducive to resettlement and economic expansion.⁶¹ Moreover, the integration of the land of Israel—especially the northern Galilee, home to the cities of Safed and Tiberias—into major Ottoman trade networks created new economic opportunities.

Even beyond the Galilee, the other *Holy Cities*—Jerusalem,⁶² and Hebron⁶³—experienced a rise in Jewish population, economic self-sufficiency, intellectual activity, and spiritual growth. Under these conditions, Jewish communities grew, establishing institutions and fostering a vibrant cultural and religious life.

⁵⁹ For more on the growth of the population and demographics during this period see: Bernard Lewis and Amnon Cohen, *Population and Revenue in the Towns of Palestine in the Sixteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 159–61; Joseph Hacker, “Romaniote Jews in Sixteenth-Century Safed: A Chapter in the History of Support for the Jews of Eretz Israel by Communities in the Ottoman Empire” [Hebrew], *Shalem* 7 (2002): 133–35; Hacker, “The Payment of Djizya by Scholars in Palestine in the Sixteenth Century” [Hebrew], *Shalem* 4 (1984): 92–98. Abraham David, “Demographic Changes in the Safed Jewish Community of the 16th Century,” in *Occident and Orient* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 83–93. David Tamar, “The Beginnings of Jewish Safed” [Hebrew], *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 2 (1965): 181–87.

⁶⁰ See our discussion in the beginning of the chapter.

⁶¹ There are several studies on the subject of the settlement of the land of Israel as well as of the “four holy cities” during the sixteenth century. See for example, Abraham David, *To Come to the Land: Immigration and Settlement in Sixteenth-Century Eretz-Israel* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999); Amnon Cohen, *Jewish Life under Islam: Jerusalem in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Shlomo Zalman Havlin, “Rabbi Avraham ha-Levi, meḥaber shu”t Ginat Veradim u-vene’i doro” (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 1983), 1–17.

⁶² See, for example, Havlin, “Rabbi Avraham ha-Levi,” 78-167.

⁶³ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 331-58.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century, conditions in the land of Israel—particularly in the North—began to deteriorate.⁶⁵² Beginning in the 1570s, Safed faced a series of natural disasters, political instability, and economic downturns that ultimately brought an end to the “golden age” it had enjoyed for much of the previous century.

One of the most destabilizing factors was the weakening of centralized Ottoman authority, which allowed local rulers to impose arbitrary taxes and fines,⁶⁵³ and even arrest and imprison individuals with little oversight or accountability.⁶⁵⁴ Compounding these challenges was the decline of the textile industry across the Ottoman Empire—a blow felt acutely in Safed, where that industry had long served as the cornerstone of the local economy.⁶⁵⁵

By the first quarter of the seventeenth century, conditions had deteriorated more rapidly and on multiple fronts. Benayahu ascribes the decline to “heavy taxes, persecutions, wars, and rebellions.”⁶⁵⁶ by 1625, the infamous persecutions of Muhammad ibn Farukh in Jerusalem

⁶⁵² Shmuel Avitsur, “Safed — Center of the Manufacture of Woven Woolens in the Fifteenth Century,” *Sefunot: Studies and Sources on the History of the Jewish Communities in the East*, 41–69, 67–69.

⁶⁵³ Yoel Marciano, “A Sage of the Golden Age of Safed: Rabbi Moses Najara,” *Jewish History* 35 (2021): 382. On the taxation crisis and its consequences for the community in general and for the scholars in particular, see Joseph Hacker, “The Payment of Djizya by Scholars in Palestine in the Sixteenth Century,” *Shalem* 4 (1978): 63–117; Davidson, “Safed’s Sages,” 7–12, quotes many descriptions of this crisis, and describes the resultant decline in the population of Safed, and the departure of Torah scholars. For example, he cites R. Samuel de Uçeda’s lament, “In our times, we have seen that in every place under the rule of his majesty the Sultan, there is no country with as many taxes and levies on the Jews as the Land of Israel.... Despite coins being sent from all districts to pay off their taxes and levies, the Jews were not able to reside there because of the tax burden.” *Leḥem Dim’ah* (Venice, 1600) Lam. 1:1

⁶⁵⁴ For example, Rabbi Benjamin ha-Levi’s family was imprisoned until he raised all the outstanding tax debt for the community of Tiberius. Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 142-43.

⁶⁵⁵ Marciano, “A Sage of the Golden Age,” 382. Also see n. 10. Avitsur. “Safed—Center of the Manufacture,” 67-69.

⁶⁵⁶ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 93-100

plunged residents into such severe debt that they doubted they could ever recover.⁶⁵⁷ In 1635, the

emissary, Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria described the “great afflictions” that befell Safed Jewry, including two years of drought and harsh rulers imposing even harsher taxes.⁶⁵⁸

As the seventeenth century progressed, the Holy Land endured a relentless cycle of localized persecutions, rising rents and taxes, mounting debts,⁶⁵⁹ and recurring natural disasters—most notably outbreaks of plague—specifically the epidemics of 1643 and 1644 in Sidon, Acco, and Safed—all of which magnified the need for financial aid.⁷² Throughout the remainder of the century, emissaries regularly carried testimonies, letters and accounts to communities in the diaspora detailing the persistent hardships and containing ongoing appeals for support.⁶⁶⁰

Thus, by the seventeenth century, diaspora Jewry found itself intricately bound to the land of Israel not only intellectually and religiously but, most significantly, financially. The economic viability and well-being of the Jews in the Holy Land now rested heavily upon the shoulders of diaspora Jewry.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 100., For a more extensive discussion of the persecutions endured under ibn Farukh see the Jewish and Christian sources explored by Jacob Barnay in *The Jews in Palestine in the Eighteenth Century: Under the Patronage of the Istanbul Committee of Officials for Palestine* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 3.

⁶⁵⁸ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 94.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., 201.

⁷² Ibid., 94.

⁶⁶⁰ See for example, *ibid.*, 241-42.

As we demonstrated with the fragility of the endowments, the systems and logistics of overseas funding for the holy land were tenuous. Aboab's correspondence with the *Roshei Yeshiva* of the *Beit Midrash* Aboab as well as with numerous emissaries he assisted, enable us to appreciate some of the realities and intricacies of those challenges.

B. The Challenges of External Funding: Extreme Poverty and Intense Competition in the land of Israel:

The near-total dependence on external aid for survival⁶⁶¹ fueled intense competition, even for the smallest sums. The economic infrastructure of the land of Israel was effectively nonexistent, precluding any viable capacity for self-sufficiency. Consequently, anyone electing to relocate there either arrived with pre-accumulated funds, or intended to subsist on charitable donations, primarily from foreign sources.⁶⁶² Thus, even in peaceful times, communities in the land of Israel depended heavily, if not exclusively, on these external financial inflows. When faced with persecution, increased taxes, government demands, or natural disasters, the need for money increased dramatically.

The sheer number of competing elements in the land of Israel exacerbated an already difficult situation. At the broadest level, the holy cities themselves vied against one another, each striving to secure a greater share of the available funds. Aboab documents the detrimental consequences of this fierce competition in a letter to the emissary from Safed, R. David Habbilo

⁶⁶¹ Barnay, *The Jews in Palestine*, 179. See also responsum 128 in Leon Modena and Shlomo Simonsohn, *She-elot u-teshuvot Ziknei Yehuda* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1955), where the questioner asks whether he is permitted to return to Italy after having taken an oath to live in the land of Israel. He explains that he has attempted the move three times and brought his family to the "brink of hunger" on all three occasions due to his inability to earn a living there.

⁶⁶² Barnay, *The Jews in Palestine*, 179.

in 1644,⁶⁶³ who had served previously as one of the *Roshei Yeshiva* of the *Beit Midrash Aboab* before embarking on his mission on behalf of the community of Safed:

Regarding the donations being made on behalf of the esteemed emissary, I have already written to Livorno that no funds have yet reached us from anywhere, as even the contributions from those donating here [Verona] have not yet been fully collected. To Ferrara, I sent another epistle **urging them and**

reminding⁶⁶⁴ them of their obligation. I also intended to write again this week to Rabbi Manoaḥ Corcos in Rome and will send the letter to my brother [Joseph in Venice] so that he, too, can write a separate letter in his own name, expressing great surprise at the delay and postponement of that city's donation... **I certainly fear that the Tiberias mission we discussed here together was the cause of all these setbacks.**⁷⁸

While our primary interest in this letter concerns the final line, where Aboab references a competing emissary from Tiberias—a point to which we will return—the correspondence also offers remarkable insight into Aboab's pragmatic character. It underscores his identity as a "doer," as we characterized him earlier, who combines acute situational awareness with decisive implementation. Aboab's concern for R. David Habbillo's mission and his commitment to its success manifests in the actions he takes on his behalf, and his persistent follow-up with the

⁶⁶³ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 209.

⁶⁶⁴ My own emphasis. Here, once again, Aboab uses a version of his signature phrase "mazkir u-mazhir"

⁷⁸ Emphasis my own.

communities and Habbillo himself. Indeed, during Habbillo's fundraising mission to Italy, Aboab maintained an extensive correspondence comprising no fewer than nine letters. As demonstrated in this letter, and within the accompanying sustained exchange, he provided strategic guidance regarding optimal communities to approach and appropriate timing for those approaches, facilitated introductions through letters of recommendation, conducted follow-up communications, and furnished regular updates concerning the status of anticipated contributions.

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The letter also reveals Aboab as a shrewd strategist. This is wonderfully evidenced in the nuanced fundraising tactic he employs involving his brother Joseph. Aboab orchestrates a form of what could be called "staged social accountability," encouraging his brother to apply pressure while simultaneously feigning surprise at the delayed response of the recipient. This calculated approach serves a dual purpose: It harnesses additional social influence through his brother's intervention while also creating a subtle form of social tension for the recipient, who now faces the uncomfortable prospect of Joseph forming a negative impression of him.

This letter, representative of Aboab's typical correspondence with and regarding emissaries, illuminates a crucial dimension of his character often overshadowed by his rabbinic status and religious reputation. While his contemporaries celebrated him as a Hassid, a man of exceptional piety, as well as a stringent halakhist, and his responsa and halakhic essays certainly

⁶⁶⁵ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 204-11.

substantiate this portrayal, his correspondence, the subject of our current discussion, reveals that he was far from naive. He cared enough for the financial wellbeing of the land of Israel to translate his feelings into concrete actions—actions that reflected his Portuguese mercantile acumen, marked by shrewd judgment, assertiveness, and pragmatism.

For now, let us return to the final sentence in the letter wherein Aboab attributes the delay in assistance to the presence of an emissary collecting on behalf of Tiberias. Was Aboab suggesting that Italian communities had already exhausted their charitable funds by contributing to the Tiberias emissary? Had donations originally intended for Safed (and R. David Habillo) been redirected to Tiberias, forcing communities to raise new funds and thereby causing the delays to which Aboab refers? Or was it simply a matter of consecutive collections occurring too closely together and overwhelming donors? Any of these possibilities would have been legitimate concerns, as we will soon demonstrate, and they reveal the fierce competition for financial support in the region.

This rivalry manifested along ethnic and sectarian lines as well, with the native *Mustarabim* (Jews of the region) competing against the predominantly Sephardic newcomers in the sixteenth century.⁶⁶⁶ Later, the Ashkenazi migrations of the late 17th and 18th centuries sparked contentious rivalries with the (by then) established Sephardic centers.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁶ Minna Rozen, “Ma’amad ha-musta’aravim ve-yaḥasim bein ha-eidot ba-yishuv ha-yehudi be-Erez Yisrael mishilhei ha-me’ah ha-16 ad shilhei ha-me’ah ha-17,” *Cathedra* 17 (1980).

⁶⁶⁷ Yaron ben-Naeh, “‘Are We Not Brothers’? Relations between Ashkenazim and Sephardim in Late 17th-Century Jerusalem / ve-khi lo aḥim anāhnu? Yaḥasei ashkenazim u-sefaradim bi-Yerushalayim be-sof ha-me’ah ha-17,” *Cathedra* (2022): 33-52. Matthias B. Lehmann, “Rethinking Sephardi Identity: Jews and Other Jews in Ottoman Palestine,” *Jewish Social Studies* (2008): 87.

Even within the individual *Holy Cities*, competition for resources was relentless. Yeshivot vied for bequests and endowments to sustain their students, while community members struggled against one another—at times for their very survival. Aboab’s correspondence, for instance, includes several letters from emissaries collecting not on behalf of a community or yeshiva but out of personal necessity.⁶⁶⁸ Remarkably, this competition even extended across gender lines, with women contending alongside men for desperately needed funds.⁶⁶⁹

A letter from the rabbis (*hakhamim*) of Jerusalem to their counterparts in Safed powerfully conveys the dire circumstances prevalent in the land of Israel at the time.⁶⁷⁰

The *hakhamim* of Jerusalem had received word that a sum of One-Hundred and Fifty-Three *reales*,⁶⁷¹ designated for them, had been sent by the “esteemed Aboab family”. However,

the Safed scholars had “borrowed” these funds, promising to return them within fifteen days, as they found themselves in particularly challenging financial straits. Yet a year had elapsed with no sign of the money’s return, leaving the poor of Jerusalem “wailing, naked and lacking all...waiting and hoping for the crumbs of their brothers’ charity.”

The letter from Jerusalem conveyed “deep surprise” and dismay at the actions of the *hakhamim* of Safed, questioning how they could “behave in such a manner, especially regarding the money [designated] for the poor who are mired in hunger.” It concluded with an unequivocal

⁶⁶⁸ See, for example, in Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 193, the letter to R. Betzalel Vilacid mentioned above.

⁶⁶⁹ Debra Kaplan, *The Patrons and Their Poor: Jewish Community and Public Charity in Early Modern Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 157, 160–162. Kaplan cites letters addressed from women in Jerusalem to their counterparts in Europe requesting dowry money coupled with a plea that the money be designated specifically so as not be comingled with general donations which went to the men.

⁶⁷⁰ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 233.

⁶⁷¹ See appendix 6 for an analysis of the value of money and the cost of living in Safed.

threat: If the funds were not immediately returned with the bearer of the letter, Rabbi Samuel, the *hakhamim* of Jerusalem would report the loss to the Venetian committee, potentially leading to severe consequences. The committee, they warned, might “seal the conduits” of financial support to the Safed community in retaliation.

This threat testifies to the desperation felt within the Jerusalem community, while the very act of "borrowing" the money attests to the dire needs of the Safed community. Frequent warnings, requests, and demands from figures like Aboab and his contemporaries regarding the proper and accurate distribution of funds within and among the designated holy cities,⁶⁷² further demonstrate the desperate need and intense competition for financial support in the land of Israel during this period.

The competition between Yeshivot to secure funding and maintain endowments was similarly intense. Yeshivot that failed to secure adequate funding were forced to close, leaving their students to fend for themselves or return overseas.⁶⁷³ Within the yeshivot, the rivalry among

students vying for permanent spots and the attendant coveted stipends could unfortunately turn ugly. The numerous warnings, criticisms, and exhortations against *sinat hinam*, which literally translates as “baseless hatred,” but may well be understood in our context as referring to the tension and conflicts that arose from desperate poverty and intense competition in the Yeshiva, is highly revealing.

⁶⁷² See for example Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 201.

⁶⁷³ Havlin, “Le-toledot yeshivot,” 130.

In the Aboab charter, the ordinance mandating “peace and love between members of the Yeshiva” ranked first, a priority similarly reflected in the charter of R. Meir ha-Rofe’s Yeshiva in Hebron which instructed the students to “gather in harmonious and pleasant fellowship”.⁶⁷⁴ The weight given to this directive was not mere formality. Rabbi Raphael Mordechai Malki of Jerusalem lamented the pervasive “*sinat ḥinam*, jealousy, and flattery” among both scholars and students in the “Vega Yeshiva” of R Jacob Ḥagiz in Jerusalem—tensions that spilled over into the broader Jerusalem community.⁸⁹

Given the financial realities of the yeshivot, these ordinances were neither symbolic nor exaggerated. In one instance, reports of rampant “*Sinat ḥinam*” and internal strife in ha-Rofe’s Hebron Yeshiva reached the benefactor Raphael Ferrara resulting in his threat to withdraw all funding.⁶⁷⁵ Such discord was likely fueled by the pressing anxieties of students who depended on the yeshiva stipend for their very survival. The intensity of these emotions reflected the harsh conditions under which they lived, where financial insecurity heightened competition and strained communal unity.

C. The Challenges of External Funding: Opposition to the *Shadarut* [Emissary] “System”.

One of the principal channels for transmitting financial aid to the Holy Land was through *shadarim* (emissaries). These envoys traveled to the diaspora to solicit funds, whether to address

⁶⁷⁴ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 337. ⁸⁹

Havlin, “Le-toledot yeshivot,” 130.

⁶⁷⁵ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 337.

communal crises such as famine or persecution, to support their yeshiva, or to sustain themselves.

While Avraham Ya'ari traces the practice of dispatching emissaries from the Holy Land to the diaspora for financial support back to the Second Temple period, his work demonstrates a pronounced intensification of emissary presence and activity throughout Europe and the Ottoman Empire during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In addition to this being evidenced in Aboab's own extensive correspondence with several emissaries, other scholarly works on that period corroborate this is well.⁶⁷⁶

These emissaries, and their frequent and prolonged fundraising ventures, encountered opposition from multiple fronts, compounding the already formidable challenge of sustaining adequate external support for communities and individuals in the land of Israel. Some opposed the emissary "system" on ideological grounds, arguing against settlement in the land of Israel during a period of divinely decreed exile.⁹² Rabbi Moshe Hagiz, who spent much of his own life endeavoring to collect money to establish his own Yeshiva,⁶⁷⁷ offers a distinctly unconventional perspective. In his work *Sfat Emet*,⁶⁷⁸ he insists that the virulent opposition to the *Shadarim* is

⁶⁷⁶ See, for example, Lehmann, *Emissaries*, which is dedicated to the 18th century emissaries, but explores aspects of the seventeenth century *Shadarut* "system" as well. For *Shadarut* activity in Italy specifically, see Isaiah Sonne, "Teudot al shadarim ahadim be-Italia," *Kovetz al yad* 5 (1951): 204; and Shlomo Simonsohn, "Emissaries from Safed to Mantua in the 17th and 18th Centuries" [Hebrew], *Sefunot* (1962): 327–54. ⁹² Lehmann, *Emissaries*, 85–86.

⁶⁷⁷ Carlebach, *Pursuit of Heresy*, 45–50.

⁶⁷⁸ R. Moshe Hagiz, *Sfat Emet*.

emblematic of the diaspora Jews' deep-seated resistance to the rabbinic teachings⁶⁷⁹ and *mussar* (moral instruction) imparted by the emissaries to the diverse communities.⁶⁸⁰ This peculiar and contentious interpretation stands in contrast to the more obvious and compelling reason for opposing the continued deployment of emissaries--that these unrelenting fundraising efforts exerted a constant drain on communal resources and imposed an onerous financial burden on communities that may have been beyond their means to sustain.⁶⁸¹ Aboab himself alludes to this strain in his aforementioned letter to R. David Habillo, implying that supporting two emissaries in succession was simply beyond the community's means.

Opposition to the "*Shadarut* system" also stemmed from concerns over its inefficiency and expense. The *Shadarim* often remained abroad for years at a time,⁶⁸² incurring substantial costs in the process.⁶⁸³ Even when a *Shadar* successfully raised funds, only a third of the revenue would actually reach its intended community or designated beneficiary.¹⁰⁰ The inefficiencies and high costs associated with the *Shadarim* had long been a source of contention, and diaspora communities developed several strategies to address these challenges.

⁶⁷⁹ Specifically, the oral torah

⁶⁸⁰ Lehmann, *Emissaries*, 169, R. Moshe Hagiz, *Sfat Emet*. For more on Hagiz' perception of Western European communities and their opposition to rabbinic teachings and rabbinic authority, see Carlebach, *Pursuit of Heresy*, 4, 11-12.

⁶⁸¹ See Ya'ari, *Sheluhei Eretz Yisra'el*, 181-86; Lehmann, *Emissaries*, 129.

⁶⁸² See, for example, Havlin, "Le-toledot yeshivot," 145-46, The *Shadar* R. Meir Barzilay remained in Modena, after coming there to collect money for Safed, from 1661 until his death in 1664. Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 157.

⁶⁸³ Lehmann explains that 30% of what they collected went towards expenses, *Emissaries*, 71.

⁶⁸⁴ % for his own expenses and 30% for himself. *Emissaries*, 71-74.

Several communities attempted to negotiate agreements with the holy cities in the land of Israel, pledging fixed annual contributions in exchange for assurances that *Shadarim* would not be sent to solicit further donations.⁶⁸⁵ These arrangements, however, proved unreliable.

Communities might occasionally fail to meet their financial commitments due to oversight or resource constraints.⁶⁸⁶ Furthermore, *Shadarim* might still arrive despite these agreements—whether because they were unaware of their existence, or because they represented other cities or yeshivot which were not included in the arrangement, or because they sought support for personal needs—thus compromising the intended effectiveness of these arrangements.¹⁰³

Many seventeenth-century communities sought to address the inefficiencies and widespread dissatisfaction with the *Shadarut* “system” and established more consistent and reliable fundraising mechanisms which were capable of collecting and delivering larger sums to the land of Israel. While Aboab and others continued to document individual donations—often given in exchange for merits such as prayers for healing,⁶⁸⁷—the seventeenth century saw the emergence of organized and regulated program for communal charity, marking a shift toward more structured financial support.

These programs took various forms. Communities like Rome and Frankfurt established confraternities that levied a fee upon their members specifically designated for the land of Israel.

⁶⁸⁵ As an example, such an agreement was reached between the rabbis of Jerusalem and the community in Izmir when they sent R. David Havilio. They promised not to send an additional emissary for three years. Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 152. For additional examples, see Lehmann, *Emissaries*, 99.

⁶⁸⁶ See Lehmann, *Emissaries*, 26-28, 94. Barnay, *The Jews in Palestine*, 85. ¹⁰³ Lehmann, *Emissaries*, 99.

⁶⁸⁷ See for example Aboab’s 1643 letter to Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria wherein he sends money in gratitude for God having cured his son. Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 202. ¹⁰⁵ Isaac S. Emmanuel, “The Assistance of the Sephardic Communities of Amsterdam and Curaçao to the Holy Land and Safed” [Hebrew], *Sefunot* (1962): 398–99.

In Amsterdam, ordinances mandated that a predetermined percentage of funds collected during significant occasions such as circumcision ceremonies and *Shabbat Naḥamu* be allocated for the land of Israel.¹⁰⁵ Venice notably pioneered⁶⁸⁸ the mandatory *maḥatzit ha-Shekel* "tax," compelling individuals to contribute the equivalent of half a shekel on Purim for the

impoverished of the land of Israel.⁶⁸⁹ Debra Kaplan notes that the transition from privately motivated charitable giving to publicly mandated and regulated "taxation" in Jewish charities aligned with the broader trend of institutionalization characterizing seventeenth century charities.¹⁰⁸

By the eighteenth century, the establishment of the Istanbul office on behalf of the land of Israel represented another significant step toward a more centralized and efficient system of support for the Holy Land. Jacob Barnay's work on this Istanbul office demonstrates how it reduced dependence on *Shadarim* and their often lengthy and costly fundraising missions⁶⁹⁰ while streamlining much of the collection of funds from across the diaspora and their distribution. This institutional framework also facilitated more accurate forecasting of anticipated financial support from abroad, further enhancing the stability and sustainability of charitable contributions.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸⁸ Padua followed shortly thereafter as noted in Daniel Carpi, *Pinkas Va'ad K. k. Italiani be-Yivitsiah* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2003), 28.

⁶⁸⁹ Daniel Carpi, "On the Redemption of Captives in Venice" [Hebrew], *Zion* 51, no. 4 (1986): 502. ¹⁰⁸ Kaplan, *Patrons*, 165.

⁶⁹⁰ See Barnay, *The Jews in Palestine*, 27-28, 85, 184-85, for some details on the establishment of the office, its method for tax collecting, fund raising, and allocation, as well as the political machinations employed to ensure consistent support for the land of Israel and thereby limit the need for desperate fund raising attempts.

⁶⁹¹ See Moshe Hagiz general breakdown of necessary funds, how much is collected and allocated in *Sfat Emet*, 79. Also see an example of Amsterdam's detailed records and administrative procedures concerning the land of Israel funds in Emmanuel, "The Assistance of the Sephardic Communities," 402.

D. The Challenges of External Funding: Loss, Neglect, Misappropriation, and Malfeasance⁶⁹²

Fundraising was only the first step in the intricate process of diaspora support; the proper allocation of funds was equally crucial and often even more complex. A 1644 letter from R.

Samuel Aboab to R. Moshe Sagiz,⁶⁹³ the newly appointed *Rosh Yeshiva* of the *Beit Midrash Aboab*, highlights the formidable logistical and financial challenges involved in sustaining such an institution. Beyond these practical concerns, the letter also reveals deeper dimensions of diaspora support—profound emotional ties, filial devotion, and the fervent enthusiasm directed towards fostering the intellectual, religious, and spiritual flourishing of the land of Israel.

Aboab's letter was likely written in response to correspondence from R. Moshe Sagiz upon his appointment as Rosh Yeshiva, informing Aboab that the *Beit Midrash* was 'operating in the red.' While no record of such a letter survives, Aboab's response implies its existence, as it presumes Sagiz's significant familiarity with the *Beit Midrash*'s current financial realities.

Ever courteous and socially attuned, Aboab opens with an expression of profound joy at Rabbi Moshe Sagiz's appointment, writing, "For this news, our ears have yearned." He extols Sagiz's virtues, particularly his humility, yet abruptly shifts tone, lamenting that he cannot fully rejoice, as his mind is consumed "with dread and trembling" due to the dire financial state of the Beit

⁶⁹² See, for example, Debra Kaplan's *Patrons*, 156-57, regarding a fraudulent rabbinic emissary in Worms and Frankfurt.

⁶⁹³ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 212-13.

Midrash. Treading carefully, Aboab acknowledges the delicacy of his criticism, stating,

Woe is me if I speak, lest I sin by casting blame or questioning the ways of the righteous.” Yet he goes on to lament that “these very righteous men”—presumably the previous and current heads of the yeshiva, Rabbi Judah Crispin, Rabbi Benjamin ha-Levi, and Rabbi David Habbillo all of whom he leaves unnamed—had

“brought down the exalted pillars (the principle of the endowment upon which the Beit Midrash relies) of the Beit Midrash established by my father and teacher (Abraham Aboab), of blessed memory.” Aboab emphasizes his father’s meticulous

efforts to secure the institution’s stability and longevity, writing that Abraham Aboab “examined, investigated, and instituted [financial] ordinances, establishing firm foundations....” He then invokes his father’s own words:

My children, do not stray; behold, I have commanded you not to transgress even a minor commandment I instituted to safeguard my [financial] mandates concerning the permanent study halls, both in the land of Israel and in the Diaspora. For I have established financial endowments to ensure their sustainability and permanence, so that their pillars should not crumble....

How many times did he (my father) warn them (the heads of the Yeshiva) in his letters...that they must not add a penny more (take out any funds from the principle) than what has been allotted to them for the Beit Midrash. And in this he was exacting with his followers [that they not deviate even] like a hair’s breadth...lest it result in the collapse of the institution, for

they understood the dangers of overextending and depleting the principal [of the endowment]. Rather, if the need [for more funds] arose, they should write to him and he would respond in accordance with the extent of God's generosity to him...

And I cannot fathom how they could willfully turn a blind eye to this fundamental principle upon which everything depends... They put it to the test, only to bring grief upon themselves and upon us, failing to recognize that they were not repeatedly warned in vain....

Even more shocking to me is the fact that they concealed this (their withdrawal from the principal of the endowment) for so many years, without offering us (the Aboab family) even the slightest hint... On what basis did they assume the responsibility of accumulating additional debts and the compounding interest that accrues year after year, until the total has reached a sum nearly impossible to repay, God forbid? Perhaps they relied on annual contributions [to replenish the principal]... but I cannot fathom their reasoning... for all those contributions are explicitly designated, and what led them to believe they could divert these funds to settle their debts?

The letter underscores the fragility and precariousness of the financial relationship between the diaspora and the endowments in the Holy Land, while also revealing the deep emotional, social, and religious ties that were frequently interwoven into this dynamic. The language and tone are unusually harsh for Aboab, conveying a shock and dismay that are almost

palpable. The circumstances described in the letter seem almost tailor-made to provoke Aboab, as they touch on several issues of deep significance to him.

First, the deliberate defiance of Abraham Aboab's explicit instructions by the heads of the yeshiva was a significant affront. Aboab, who revered his father, held immense respect for his financial acumen and foresight,⁶⁹⁴ and he saw this transgression as a direct insult to his father's legacy. Beyond the personal slight, it also undermined both his father's vision and his own lifelong commitment to building and sustaining Torah in the land of Israel. The mismanagement of funds was regarded by Aboab as a deeply personal betrayal, as it jeopardized

the legacy of his father, himself, and the entire Aboab family in the land of Israel by threatening the very existence of the Yeshiva.

The letter not only conveys Aboab's personal outrage but also exposes the broader vulnerability of financial systems supporting the Holy Land. His harsh tone emphasizes the high stakes involved, as any mismanagement could threaten the very institutions these funds were meant to sustain. But how did these funds move through the complex web of diaspora contributions? What obstacles did Aboab and his contemporaries encounter in ensuring they reached their intended destination, and how did they attempt to navigate these challenges?

E. "Following the Money:"

To follow the "money trail" from the diaspora to the land of Israel, we begin in Venice—a key collection hub for donations in the seventeenth century. For reasons of efficiency and

⁶⁹⁴ As demonstrated in his earlier letter to R. Benjamin haLevi and R. Judah Crispin, pg 16-17.

security, money destined for the land of Israel was rarely sent directly with the emissaries.⁶⁹⁵

Instead, collections from across Europe would be funneled or deposited directly into the central funds of Venice, Livorno, or Frankfurt am-Main where they were meticulously recorded.⁶⁹⁶

Samuel Aboab served as *Gizbar* (treasurer) of funds designated for the Holy Land for several terms.¹¹⁶ During his tenure, he not only managed the finances of the *Beit Midrash* Aboab, but also the panoply of funds channeled through Venice from across Europe. In addition to regular contributions and communal “taxes”⁶⁹⁷ earmarked for the land of Israel, Aboab

received donations from rabbis and merchants with whom he had scholarly, familial, and financial ties, such as Rabbi Pinḥas Nieto of Rome⁶⁹⁸ and Isaac Milano of Hamburg, whose daughter married Aboab’s cousin Raphael Shana Tova. Once deposited in the *Gizbar*’s office, the funds were entrusted to insured Christian agents traveling along established shipping routes to Tyre or Egypt.⁶⁹⁹ Upon arrival, the agents delivered the money, obtained a receipt, and transmitted the precise allocation instructions they had received from the *gizbar*. Jewish intermediaries, such as the Venetian merchant Baruch Uziel⁷⁰⁰ and Rabbi Jacob ben Danan

⁶⁹⁵ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 171-74. See also Minna Rozen, “Kehilat Algiers: Merkaz le-Isuf Ksapei Erets-Yisrael biTsfon Afrikah ba-Meah ha-17,” *Michael* 5 (1978): 243–51, regarding the collection and allocation protocols in nonEuropean communities.

⁶⁹⁶ Joshua Teplitsky, “A ‘Prince of the Land of Israel’ in Prague: Jewish Philanthropy, Patronage, and Power in Early Modern Europe and Beyond,” *Jewish History* 29 (2015): 260. ¹¹⁶ Barnay, *The Jews in Palestine*, 65.

⁶⁹⁷ See above regarding these new taxation practices such as the maḥazit ha-shekel in Italian communities.

⁶⁹⁸ See S. Aboab, *Devar Shemuel* responsa 180 and 192.

⁶⁹⁹ There were many occasions where money was sent via alternate routes (e.g, via Damascus) if that was more expedient or secure. Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 171-74.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

(Abendana),⁷⁰¹ whom Aboab designated by name, oversaw its distribution in the land of Israel according to the instructions sent from Venice.

The following letter to Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria in 1643¹²² concerning the delayed receipt of sixty *reales*, demonstrates that things did not always go as planned:

And I will not deny from my master (R. Joseph de-Leiria) that we endured great sadness because of the delay of the funds in the sum of sixty *reales* that we sent to him in the hands of the trusted scholars Rabbi Judah Crispin and Rabbi Benjamin ha-Levi. It has been close to a year, we have sent multiple letters to them (Rabbis Crispin and ha-Levi) concerning this matter...and perhaps some of them (the letters) were lost along the way, but we are sure that at least one of the missives must have reached them. [We are sure] that they made efforts to ensure the money was put to its proper use (to be sent to R.

Joseph de-Leiria), as we had pleaded with them. Our eyes remain fixed, awaiting news of what has been done regarding this matter.

Please do not hold us accountable for any wrongdoing, for nothing escapes your wisdom regarding the many factors that hinder the swift transfer of funds through numerous intermediaries along a distant route. I have carefully considered this matter, taking into account urgency (need for funds) and the means available to us (to transmit the funds), [and] making every effort to

⁷⁰¹ See *ibid.*, 175-82, for a more complete list of agents, donors, and their relationship to Aboab. ¹²² *Ibid.*, 202.

collect and send the money from here to there. Now, I stand in prolonged anticipation until a messenger arrives and informs us in writing that the funds have been received in full, so that my heart may be relieved from the distress caused by this uncertainty.

Although a secondary point to the immediate discussion, it is worth noting that this form of Aboab's writing—his correspondence with Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria, much like his letter to Rabbi Moshe Sagiz—reveals a markedly more expressive and emotionally candid style, one that stands in stark contrast to the measured tone of his halakhic responsa. Does this suggest that he felt personally invested in supporting the land of Israel? Was he simply adopting a rhetorical style characteristic of correspondence with a trusted friend? Or is this appropriate given the commercial (non-scholarly) nature of the correspondence?

More pertinently, this letter exposes some of “the many factors that hinder the swift transfer of funds.” Under less-than-optimal conditions—such as war or crisis, both frequent occurrences in interactions with the land of Israel—*gizbarim* like Aboab, along with intermediaries and local agents, were often forced to rely on less secure methods of transmission.⁷⁰² They turned to lesser-known agents, more vulnerable shipping routes, and

⁷⁰² See Aboab's letter to R Josef de-Leiria describing some of the difficulties posed by war on sending funds to the land of Israel and his attempts to circumvent them by routing through Livorno. Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 227. Carpi, *Pinkas Va'ad Kehillat Kodesh Italiani be-Vnitsiah*, 30. ¹²⁴ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 161-64.

readily available but unreliable vessels¹²⁴ to hasten the funds towards their destination.⁷⁰³ As we have seen, such adjustments frequently led to significant delays or financial losses.⁷⁰⁴

In this particular case, Aboab writes to Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria several months later,⁷⁰⁵ in 1644, informing him that he has finally received word from Rabbis Crispin and ha-Levi confirming that they will ensure the funds reach de-Leiria as soon as feasible. However, Aboab remains cautious, reminding de-Leiria to send a written receipt as soon as he receives the funds, thus ensuring proper documentation that the transaction has been successfully completed.

Just as he does in this correspondence with Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria, Aboab frequently expressed concern over the proper allocation of charitable donations—emphasizing that funds should be distributed in strict accordance with the donor’s original intent. He repeatedly urged benefactors and contributors in the diaspora to specify their designated recipients explicitly, ensuring no room for dispute.⁷⁰⁶ Given the extreme poverty and fierce competition for funds in the land of Israel at the time, Aboab sought to minimize potential conflicts as much as possible.

⁷⁰³ See *ibid.*, 261-62- Aboab and the *gizbarim* preferred to send money with designated agents using designated routes- where both the agent and ship were insured, “and to pay the insurance fees, and the ship and agent fees...as is the custom/protocol.” In situations where this was not possible, Samuel Aboab was meticulous in recording the names of the agents and repeating the precise amounts of money, their origin and intended allocation as in his letter transcribed in Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 340. To Rabbi Eliezer Ibn Arkha in Hevron where he awaits news of the receipt of the sum of sixty-six reales *and three quarters of a real* (my emphasis) via Syria in the hands of the merchants Andre Bonamin and Allesandro Milliari.

⁷⁰⁴ See for example Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 340, where Aboab sends “double and triple” requests for confirmation of receipt of funds after being forced to use “alternate routes.”

⁷⁰⁵ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 203. The letter is dated 1644 while the previous one was dated 1643, and Aboab states that it has been several months since the last letter concerning these funds.

⁷⁰⁶ Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 201, for example.

His preoccupation with this issue was so pervasive that it even surfaced in his otherwise more dispassionate halakhic responsa.

Responsum 156 in *Devar Shemuel* was written as counsel to a “certain scholar”⁷⁰⁷ planning to emigrate to the land of Israel. In what Aboab describes as a miniature *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*,¹³⁰ he sets out a series of fourteen “mini-zichronot” in which he advises this scholar on the potential pitfalls, appropriate activities, and proper conduct necessary for establishing oneself in the Holy Land.

Aboab’s opening exhortation is particularly telling:

One who walks with truth and acts with righteousness [this verse¹³¹ pertains to] the meticulous allocation of funds that they [diaspora Jews] send for the poor through him [the recipient of the responsa]. [He must ensure] not to change [the allocation] from the intent of the benefactors, and not to distribute them [the funds] except with utmost honesty and faithfulness [according to the intent of the benefactor] to each according to what he deserves and what has been designated generally or specifically. Aboab follows with four additional finance-related “zichronot” relevant specifically to the land of Israel. Of all the

⁷⁰⁷ There is no mention of a specific name. Perhaps this responsa was intended to function in a manner similar to Aboab's actual *Sefer ha-Zikhronot*, which addressed what he perceived to be public issues in a more anonymous way, or perhaps the name of the recipient was redacted prior to publication in order to maintain his anonymity. ¹³⁰ Aboab introduces this responsum as, “the writing of a *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* given to one scholar who was intending to relocate to the land of Israel, to encourage him... regarding several prohibitions which some people transgress over there (in the land of Israel) in our times” ¹³¹ Ps. 15:2

possible halakhot, rituals, or mitzvot concerning the Holy Land, Aboab chose to begin with a detailed recording of the potential pitfalls in the allocation and

use of finances in the land of Israel—demonstrating its significance in his eyes, and his awareness that malfeasance was a formidable temptation.

Although the case of R. Joseph's sixty *reales* seems to have reached a satisfactory resolution, we have seen Aboab's writings—both his correspondence and halakhic responsa, reveal deeper, systemic vulnerabilities within the diaspora support networks, to wit: mismanagement, negligence, and even outright malfeasance. These remained persistent threats, despite efforts to impose stricter oversight and improve record-keeping⁷⁰⁸ such as Aboab endeavors as we saw earlier in his letter to Rabbi Joseph de-Leiria where he repeatedly requests confirmation of receipt of funds. The volume of correspondence addressing lost or misappropriated funds emphasizes the ongoing struggle to safeguard charitable contributions and ensure their proper distribution.⁷⁰⁹

Neglect often began “at home”, where communities forgot about or delayed remitting the promised funds.⁷¹⁰ Daniel Carpi describes a 1650 incident where an audit by the Italiani community of Venice revealed that the missing funds for the land of Israel were owed by none other than the Venetian Italiani community itself. Evidently, the *parnassim* had borrowed 343

⁷⁰⁸ Carpi notes that the Italiani community increased oversight of the record keeping for the fund intended for the land of Israel during this period. *Pinkas Va'ad Kehillat Kodesh Italiani be-Vinitiah*, 36-37.

⁷⁰⁹ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 164 and Havelin, “Le-toledot yeshivot,” 131.

⁷¹⁰ See for example, Barnay, *The Jews in Palestine*, 85, who cites an incident which took place during the first decade of the eighteenth century in which communities pledged ten years of consistent funding in the effort to stave off severe crises in Jerusalem. Already by the second year, many of them neglected to send the funds. Also see for example R. Hezkiya da Silva's letter to R Yehuda Barial of Mantua regarding the promised funds from his community that were three years overdue. Havelin, “Le-toledot yeshivot,” 147.

litrin and 9 soldi seven years earlier to pay synagogue rent and had simply forgotten to return the funds. Additionally, the *parnassim* appointed to collect pledges for the land of Israel, had similarly neglected to collect the funds. In this case, the community resolved to rectify the

situation as promptly as possible, and, over a period of several years, returned the promised sum to the fund dedicated for that purpose.⁷¹¹ This incident illustrates that even without intentional malfeasance, a lack of oversight and neglect were not infrequent. Consequently, substantial amounts of money intended for the land of Israel may have never reached their destination or were significantly delayed.

Responsa from the period, however, highlight more prevalent forms of neglect and malfeasance, those that occurred between the point of collection and the intended destination of the funds. One illustrative example involves the merchant Samuel Shalom, who was entrusted with administering finances for the Yeshiva of Rabbi Gabriel Esperenza in Safed. When faced with personal fiscal difficulties, Shalom diverted funds intended for the Yeshiva to his own business venture, which ultimately failed. Shalom then absconded, fleeing first to Sidon and then Egypt, where the Safed representatives finally tracked him down. After protracted negotiations, Rabbi Moshe Galanti of the Jerusalem Yeshiva crafted a partial repayment plan, but the Safed sages were never fully reimbursed for the misappropriated funds, nor compensated for the expenses incurred in pursuing Shalom.¹³⁶

⁷¹¹ Carpi, *Pinkas Va'ad Kehillat Kodesh Italiani be-Vinitsiah*, 36, 37.

¹³⁶ Benayahu, *Dor Ehad*, 122. ¹³⁷ Ibid., 152.

Accusations of financial misconduct were not uncommon in the administration of funds for the Holy Land, even against prominent individuals. One such case involved the *parnassim* of Jerusalem, represented by Rabbi Shemuel Premo, who brought charges against their own *shadar*, Rabbi David Habbillo¹³⁷—a distinguished kabbalist⁷¹² already familiar to us from Aboab's

assistance to him when Habbillo served as emissary for Safed, and from his role as one of the *Roshei Yeshiva* of the Aboab *Beit Midrash*.

R. Habbillo died in Izmir in 1661 while serving as an emissary for the community in Jerusalem. After his death, his son, Rabbi Judah Habbillo, presented his father's notebooks, in which he was obligated to preserve a record of all financial transactions, to the *parnassim* of Jerusalem. They, however, alleged discrepancies, claiming that certain funds were unaccounted for:

It is possible that there was another source of income that was not recorded... and that he [Rabbi David Habbillo] either forgot to write it down or the record was lost.”⁷¹³

Rabbi Judah Habbillo adamantly defended his father's integrity, and both parties agreed to adjudicate the case before Rabbi Ḥayim Benveniste in Izmir. Benveniste ruled unequivocally in favor of Rabbi David (and Judah) Habbillo, basing his decision on evidence that Habbillo had always been “faithful” in

⁷¹² Gershom Scholem, “Regarding the Attitude of Jewish Rabbis to Sabbatianism,” *Zion* 13/14 (1948-49): 51.

⁷¹³ Cited in Benayahu, *Dor Eḥad*, 152 n. 118.

meticulously recording all funds, and distinguishing between his personal funds and those belonging to others, such that his integrity in this case was beyond question. Nonetheless, perhaps to appease the Jerusalem representatives, Benveniste required Rabbi Judah to take an oath affirming that he had turned over all of his father's records and had not "burned or discarded" any documents.

Even after the oath was taken, Benveniste offered one final, striking suggestion: in order to "save his father from any lingering suspicion of theft", Rabbi Judah should seek a compromise with the Jerusalem representatives.

This case highlights the prevalence of financial misconduct and reveals how suspicion of malfeasance was ever-present, readily directed even at the most prominent figures, whether rabbis or merchants. At the same time, it underscores how easily funds could be diverted without immediate detection, making financial accountability a persistent challenge.

VII. Conclusion:

What makes Aboab's letters so valuable is how they add layers of nuance to our appreciation of Aboab's multifaceted personality. In contrast to the rich, yet objective and disinterested tone of his halakhic essays and responsa, Aboab's unusually emotive and expressive language in some of his correspondence with representatives of the land of Israel, captures some of the religious and intellectual fervor that it inspired across diaspora communities. Beyond sentiment, these exchanges provide rare practical insights, detailing the financial and logistical strategies Aboab deployed to navigate the complex challenges of relations between the residents

of the land of Israel and the diaspora. What emerges most vividly is Aboab himself: a man of action and commitment whose confidence, wealth, and intellect allowed him to move fluidly between worlds, adapting both his language and his actions to meet the important needs and expectations of his correspondents in the Mediterranean Jewish communities of his time.

Conclusion:

Rabbi Samuel Aboab: A Rabbi in Letters

If this dissertation can hardly claim to be the final word on Rabbi Samuel Aboab, much less the changing world of rabbinic scholarship in his time, it has nevertheless opened new avenues for understanding both the author and his religious and intellectual environment. By examining the particularities of Aboab's Portuguese background and his family's converso origins, and situating him firmly within communities composed of similar families across Hamburg, Verona, and Venice, we have nuanced the scholarly conversation surrounding converso experience by offering a more affirmative perspective on converso identity with, and integration into, the halakhic Judaism of Jewish communities. This research explores a converso identity—exemplified by Samuel Aboab's father, Abraham, and his extended family—characterized by robust and committed identification with Jewish halakha and talmudic study. Such commitment manifested not only through significant engagement with the yeshivot in the land of Israel and Safed in particular but also, more immediately, through dedicated efforts to build and shape communities which would maintain the desired religious character by founding and overseeing synagogues and schools. This evidence invites a recalibration of our understanding of post-converso religious identity, highlighting patterns of profound religious investment rather than tentative or fractured connections to Jewish tradition and practice.

From this vantage point, Rabbi Samuel Aboab appears not as an anomaly, but as part of a distinct “cohort” of rabbinic figures who shared comparable Portuguese backgrounds and similar religious commitments. Scholars such as Rabbi Azaria Picho, Rabbi Moshe Zacut, and Rabbi Joseph Alkelai exemplified not only a sophisticated Jewish identity, but also a pronounced

religious "orthodoxy." They lead communities defined by strict adherence to halakha and religious observance. Furthermore, their erudite exchanges in responsa demonstrate remarkable fluency and familiarity with an extensive range of rabbinic discussions, talmudic texts, and halakhic methodologies, revealing both their capacity and their eagerness to engage deeply with these sources. Their intellectual network attests to a remarkable and wide-spread post-converso religious identity. Further study of individual rabbis and their intellectual pursuits will enrich the field of converso studies and that of the early modern rabbinate.

Our analysis of Aboab's rabbinic network in particular, has highlighted the multifaceted significance of responsa literature in rabbinic life. Additionally, it has allowed us to identify important intersections between major early modern phenomena, particularly print culture and intellectual networks, and their profound influence on rabbinic scholarship and halakhic development. The relationship between emerging print technologies and the rapidly growing corpus of responsa literature offers promising insights into broader questions of developing halakhic discourse and methodologies, textual transmission, and rabbinic authority, during this transformative period.

While Aboab did not leave explicit traces of a theological or philosophical journey that brought him to his position of halakhic stringency—even, on occasion, to the point of zealotry—our examination of his responsa revealed a commitment to halakha and religious "orthodoxy" that was fundamental and unquestionable. This observation only deepens our inquiry into the formative influences that shaped his worldview. Additionally, this commitment extended beyond personal practice into his vision for the early modern rabbinate as evidenced in his *Sefer ha-*

Zikhronot. In this, his guide for community rabbis, Aboab articulated his comprehensive prescription for implementing halakhic rigor throughout Jewish communities.

Our study of *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* also offered an important contribution to the growing discourse on the early modern rabbinate by exploring some of the communal, socio-religious, and of course, rabbinic changes of the period from the firsthand perspective of a Portuguese rabbi in Italy addressing his rabbinic colleagues.

As Aboab himself might observe, "The work is not mine to complete, nor am I free to absolve myself of it."⁷¹⁴ While this dissertation represents a significant step forward in our understanding of Aboab, his legacy as a rabbi "in letters" presents numerous opportunities for future scholarship. The missing notebooks from his later years may yet emerge, potentially illuminating both dimensions of his life and career as well as areas of his rabbinic interest or influence. Research into archival sources—governmental, communal, and notarial—may help us explore and fill in the significant gaps that remain in our understanding of Aboab and the communities he led and influenced. It is my hope that the work presented here will serve as a foundation for future investigations into Aboab's intellectual legacy and communal impact and make a meaningful contribution to scholarship on Jewish history of the early modern period.

⁷¹⁴ Based on the famous phrase in tractate *Avot* 2:16.

Aboab Family Tree

Manuel Teixeira

Francisca de Solis

Jacob Aboab
(Andre Faliero)

Abraham Aboab
(Antonio Faliero)
married to Ana (Sara) Dinis (Yahya)

Wife of
Raphael
ben Yakar

Wife of Joseph
Señor

Wife of Solomon
Shana Tova

Wife of
Joshua
Jeshurin

Rebecca (Rivka)
wife of Solomon
da Silva

Jacob Aboab

Rabbi Samuel Aboab-see
separate Family tree

Joseph
Aboab

Isaac Aboab

Abraham
Shana
Tova

Raphael
Shana
Tova

Jacob
Shana
Tova

Rebeoca
(Rivka)
Jeshurin-
married to
Raphael da
Silva

three
sons

three
daughters

Esther-married to
Abraham Monion

Rachel-
married to
Abraham
Aboab (son
of R. Samuel)

Sara-married
to Isaac Kuzi

Leah-
married to
Jacob ben
Yakar (her
second
cousin)

Jacob Aboab

Child who
died in
childhood

Abraham
Aboab

Jacob ben
Yakar-
married to
Leah

Abraham
ha-Rofe (a
physician)

Raphael da Silva-married
to Rebecca (Rivka)
Jeshurin (his cousin)

Rabbi Samuel
Aboab

Mazal Tov (daughter
of Rabbi David
Franco)

David Aboab (died
in 1639)

Daughter (died in
childhood)

Jacob Aboab (died
in 1647)

Daughter (died in
infancy)

Abraham Aboab-
married to Rachel
Aboab (his first
cousin)

David Aboab

Jacob Aboab

Joseph Aboab-
married his niece-
Abraham's
daughter

Samuel Aboab

Aboab's Rabbinic

Aboab's Rabbinic

Italy



numbers beneath each city signify the quantity **Network** of letters directed to Aboab from that location. The map demonstrates that Aboab corresponded most frequently with Italian rabbis. He also maintained less frequent but consistent communication with Palestinian rabbis, whereas his interaction with rabbis in Europe and Turkey was sporadic.

Palestine Israel

Europe



Appendix 3a

Rabbi Samuel Aboab Correspondents:

Count by Cities

City	Count
Alessandria Della	
Phulia	10
Amsterdam	2
Ancona	3
Barolo	1
Belgrade	1
Candia (Heraklion)	1
Casale	9
Cinto	4
Cittadella	3
Corfu	16
Ferrara	13
Florence	18
Frankfurt A/M	8
Genoa	5
Gorizia	13
Gradisca	4
Hamburg	4
Izmir	4
Janina	2
Jerusalem	3
Cuneo (Conian)	1
Livorno	21
Lodi	1
London	2
Maniago	1
City	Count

Mantua	97
Marseilles	1
Modena	16
Ostroh, Poland (Ukraine)	1
Padua	2
Pisa	1
Pesaro	1
Prague	2
Ragusa (Dubrovnik)	8
Reggio	12
Rome	10
Rotterdam	1
Rovigo	6
Safed	15
Senigallia	2
Split	7
UNKNOWN	7
Venice	66
Verona	39
Vienna	2
Zante (Zakynthos)	2

Total 448 **Appendix 3b**

**Rabbi Samuel Aboab Correspondents:
Count by Rabbis and Cities**

Name of Rabbi	Count	Cities
Abba Mari Avitov	4	Genoa
Aharon Ashkenazi	2	Florence
Aharon Hacoen	3	Ragusa
Aharon Halevi Horowitz	1	Jerusalem
Aharon Romanin	1	Padua
Avraham ben Baruch		
Uziel	2	Ragusa

Avraham ben Meir	2 Gradisca
Avraham ben Yakar	1 Venice
Avraham Cohen	1 Verona
Avraham del Vinia	1 Mantua
Avraham Gedilia Avraham Michael	1 Livorno
Malach	2 Mantua, Rome
Avraham Sarfati	1 Genoa
Avraham Shalit	1 Verona
Avraham Yerek	1 Casale
Azaria Picho	45 Venice
Benjamin Simija	1 Venice
Ber Oppenheim	6 Frankfurt A/M
Benjamin Hacohen	8 Reggio, Alessandria della Paglia
Daniel Ashkenazi	4 Livorno
Daniel Dayan	1 Livorno
Elia ben Aharon	1 Belgrade
Elia Pessach	1 Split, Croatia
Eliezer Sofino	1 Livorno
Emmanuel Ergas	1 Livorno

Name of Rabbi	Count Cities
Emmanuel Senor	6 Split, Croatia
Ephraim ben avraham	1 Ostroh, Poland
Ezra Alhadib	2 Venice
Gur Aryeh Halevi	44 Mantua
Haim Norci	1 Mantua
Hezkiah	1 UNKNOWN
Isaac Aboab	1 Amsterdam
Isaac Jeshurin	2 Hamburg
Jacob Hagiz	6 Jerusalem
Joel Pinkerli	3 Verona
Joseph Alkelai	15 Verona, Mantua
Joseph de-Leiria	22 Safed
Joshua Menagen	3 Rome
Judah Crispin	6 Safed
Judah Picho	1 Safed
Leib Lonigo	8 Ferrara
Menahem Cazis	1 Ferrara
Menahem Nieto	1 Rome
Menahem Zioni (Zioani)	1 Unknown
Menahem Shimshon Basila	Alessandria della 2 Paglia
Menashe Haim Padua	13 Corfu, Greece
Meshulam Levi	8 Modena
Mordekhai Basan	16 Verona
Mordechai Rovigo	1 Verona
Moshe Capsuto	1 Venice

Name of Rabbi	Count Cities
Moshe Foa	2 Verona
Moshe ibn Arroyo	1 Hamburg
Moshe Lombrozo	2 Ragusa
Moshe Norci	3 Mantua
Moshe Pizato	1 Rovigo
Moshe Trevis	1 Venice Mantua, Venice,
Moshe Zacut	19 Padua
Moshe Zion	4 Izmir
Nahman Hanin	1 Venice
Netanel Sagri	3 Cinto
Rephael Cofino	1 Zante
Rephael DeLatis	1 Rome
Rephael Sofino	1 Livorno
Senor Abendana (ibn Danan)	7 Venice
Shabbetai Elchanan Recanati	1 Ferrara
Shabbetai Fancieri (Pancir)	5 Rome, Senigallia
Shaul Merari	1 Verona
Shelomo Baruch Fano	2 Mantua
Shelomo Eliezer Girondi	3 Cittadella
Shelomo Ibn Atar	1 Reggio
Shelomo Lingo	2 Reggio
Shimon Hacoen	2 Verona
Shimon Yona	1 Casale
Shimshon Baki	4 Casale
Shmuel Meldola	3 Mantua, Verona

Name of Rabbi	Count Cities
Simha Katzigin	1 Casale
Solomon Ailion	6 Livorno, London
Solomon Ashkenazi	1 Safed
Tzemah Porto	1 Mantua
Tzvi	3 UNKNOWN
Yaakov Heifets	1 Gorizia
Yaakov ibn Attar	1 Reggio
Yaakov Levi	1 Venice
Yaakov Marguliot	1 Janina
Yaakov Shalom	4 Venice
Yaakov Yisrael	1 UNKNOWN
Yehiel Norci	1 Mantua
Yehoshua Aharon	
Cohen	1 Verona
Yehoshua Haim Yona	1 Casale
Yehuda Briel	13 Mantua
Yehuda Cordovero	1 Livorno
Yehuda Leib Ashkenazi	5 Verona
	Alessandria della Paglia, Prague,
Yehuda Leib ben Haim	5 Ferrara
Yisrael Hezkiah Basan	1 Verona
Yisrael Lingo	3 Reggio
Yisrael Yaakov Forti	1 Mantua
Yitzhak Levi (Leib) Vali	7 Verona, Modena
Yitzhak Malripa	1 Senigallia
Yitzhak Rovigo	2 Modena
Yohanan Ghiron	16 Florence
Yosef Albalnes	1 UNKNOWN
Yosef Del Medigo	1 Candia
Yosef Ezriel Cohen	1 Casale

Name of Rabbi	Count Cities
Yosef Hacoen	2 Gradisca
Yosef Romanin	1 Maniago
Yoshiyahu Pardo	1 Rotterdam
Zalman ben Avraham	
Berach	11 Gorizia
Zanvil Haas	2 Frankfurt A/M
	430

Appendix 4

“A Memorial for the People of Israel”

Venice, 1668

This “Memorial for the People of Israel” was authored by Rabbi Samuel Aboab in the aftermath of Nathan of Gaza's visit to Venice in 1668. The text is pertinent to this dissertation for three reasons: First, the title emphasizes Aboab's commitment to “record” and “memorialize”—establishing not merely personal records but communal and historical ones as well. Secondly, the document exemplifies Aboab's extraordinary command of the Hebrew language and rabbinic discourse. Richly interwoven with biblical allusions, midrashic interpretations, and Talmudic references, it attests to both his erudition and the intellectual sophistication of his correspondents, who engaged with him in similarly intricate responsa. Finally, this public responsum positions Aboab as a decisive leader during a time of communal volatility and existential uncertainty. It illuminates the important attributes of his leadership—intellectual self-assurance, diplomatic acuity, and strategic crisis management—qualities we explored throughout this dissertation.

A Memorial for people of Israel⁷¹⁵

The copy of the document that he (Rabbi Samuel Aboab) wrote in the name of the Yeshiva ha-

⁷¹⁵ Numbers. 17:5 The full verse is: A memorial to the children of Israel lest no strange man, not of the descendants of Aaron, come near to offer incense before God, and let him not be like Korah and his multitude.... This verse is exceptionally appropriate, as it refers to a “strange man” who is usurping a holy ritual (in the original the incense offering, in this situation, the Kabbalah) for his own ends. The end of the verse, “and let him not be etc” though not explicitly cited in the document, is also significant. According to the Talmud Bavli (henceforth TB) *Sanhedrin* 110a), it is an express prohibition forbidding fomenting discord among Jews.

Kelalit regarding the matter of Sabbetai Zevi and Nathan of Gaza:

My brethren, all the house of Israel, listen:² The time [has come] to be active for the sake of God.³ The time has come to speak and not be silent.⁴

Were we⁵ to forget our words of anguish and the bitterness of our hearts, forsake our anger and fortify ourselves [to endure] ⁶ the cries of the multitudes which have passed, our city has been again visited⁷¹⁶ by baseless rumors⁷¹⁷ some old ones from last year and some aged from three years ago,⁷¹⁸ with vapid dreams containing vapor which has substance and which causes many sins,⁷¹⁹ and signs and miracles have been presented to entice and mislead people with false prophecies.⁷²⁰ Causing them minor and major transgressions, (thus resulting in) painful punishments and grave persecutions.

We thank God who granted us life, and placed us among those who reside in the houses of (Torah) study.⁷²¹ (Whose) knowledge accords with Torah and (with) the fundamental beliefs

⁷¹⁶ Jeremiah 5:6. Refers to a city which has been visited by multiple tragedies. The prophet used a metaphor of a city devastated by a succession of lions, wolves and tigers. Here too Aboab bemoans the succession of false prophecies which have been promulgated in Venice.

⁷¹⁷ “kol ve-shovaro immo” is a phrase Aboab borrows from TB *Gittin* 89a, which refers to a rumor that is called into question and disregarded due to subsequent contradictory rumors. In this case, the rumors surrounding Sabbetai Zevi’s messianic claims were disproved by the subsequent reports of his conversion to Islam.

⁷¹⁸ TB *Bava Batra*, 98a distinguishes between “old” products which may be a year old and “aged” products which must be 3 years old. Here Aboab is referring to Nathan’s two visits to Venice. The first, three years previously in 1665 and the second, the recent one.

⁷¹⁹ This is in contrast to the vapor emanating from the mouths of children studying Torah which is considered pure and without blemish, since children are not capable of sin. TB *Shabbat* 119b

⁷²⁰ *Lamentations* 1:14

⁷²¹ TB *Berakhot* 28b Prayer upon leaving the house of study, thanking God for having placed us among those who frequent the house of study and not among those who frequent houses of revelry.

² TB *Ketubot*, 28b. This is a classic preamble to a public announcement and in the reference it is used to denounce a *Kohen* (priest) who married a woman who is prohibited to him. In the Sephardic rite, this preamble is also used in the synagogue on the Sabbath preceding fast days to announce the forthcoming fasts.

³ Psalms. 119:126. This verse is used in the Talmud to permit minor transgressions when necessary for public welfare

⁴ Play off the words in Ecclesiastes. 3:7 “A time to be silent, and a time to speak”

⁵ Kings II 7:4 This is the story of the four starving lepers who were outside the walls of Samaria. The city was besieged. They said, “were we to enter the city, we would starve there, and were we to surrender to the Arameans, they may kill us” Thus these words are the prelude to a classic conundrum expressed by people who were “between a rock and a hard place”. ⁶ Job 9:27

passed down by our predecessors, and not among those who follow their own whims.¹³ Blessed

is He Who has long¹⁴ separated us from those who err¹⁵ and Who has demonstrated his prowess

⁷²² so as to protect the holiness of His awesome Name [from being sullied] and his beleaguered

nation.⁷²³ In the exalted ways of His goodness and in the paths of His deep and inscrutable

mindfulness, He has performed outstanding miracles⁷²⁴ such that the one for whom the miracles

were performed does not even acknowledge the miracle⁷²⁵

If, as a result of all these [miracles] the former travails⁷²⁶ are forgotten and we will be silent⁷²⁷

regarding them, despite this, we cannot forget their original fundamental idea⁷²⁸ which impinges

upon the honor of our Creator and His Torah. How can we pain⁷²⁹ of sadness and sighing when

⁷²² Lit. mighty hand

⁷²³ Mich. 4:7

⁷²⁴ Ps. 136:4

⁷²⁵ “*Ein ba'al ha-ness makir be-niso*”. TB *Nidda* 31a.

⁷²⁶ Aboab cites the Talmudic observation (TB *Berakhot* 13a) regarding someone who undergoes several successive travails. The new tsuris (Yep! It's a legitimate word in Webster's dictionary) cause the old ones to be forgotten. Nathan's first visit in 1665 represents the “old tsuris”

⁷²⁷ *Isaiah*. 42:17

⁷²⁸ The word Aboab uses, אֲוִתְנִיטָא, is extremely rare, and demonstrates his impressive familiarity even with esoteric rabbinic Literature. This one is used in *Shir Hashirim Rabba* I:10. (Jastrow translates origin, Aruch offers an alternative, royalty, Kohut (*Arukh ha-Shalem* Pardes, New York, 5715 (1955) vol. 1 48-49) uses both.)

⁷²⁹ The original, is Ps. 137:4 “*eikh na-shir et shir Hashem*”. In a play on words Aboab converts to “*eich nasir et zir*” how can we remove the pain. (the painful contractions while giving birth are called *zirim*.)

we see G-d's nation declining precipitously, straying like wayward sheep, each in his own direction,⁷³⁰ with shepherds not to be seen.⁷³¹ There is no reproach. No one listens to the sages

¹³ TB *Shabbat* 149 offers a homiletical midrash on the words of the Biblical prohibition of idol worship in *Leviticus*. 19:4 “do not turn to the idols” and explains that it should be read as “*al tifnu, al mi-da'atkhem*” which means do not remove God from your thoughts. It is this phrase which Aboab uses.

¹⁴ This indicates that Aboab was opposed to Sabbetai Zevi and Nathan from the inception of their movement. ¹⁵ Daily prayer Yitzchak Behr *Siddur Avodat Israel*, (Rodelheim, 1901) 128. who speak pleasantly.²⁶ The zealotry of the scholars²⁷ who are able to neutralize him,²⁸ is

absent from among us, because they too fear even the slightest sounds like those of falling leaves.²⁹

The sages hide their wisdom,³⁰ and the counsel of our wise ones has been hidden.⁷³² [It may] almost [be said that] their Torah is deemed fraudulent⁷³³ in the eyes of the ignorant populace. They (the sages) have exaggerated⁷³⁴ and fabricated untruths³⁴ to ingratiate [themselves] with them. I am ashamed for their sake because of the verse “He lights a pathway for the great ones”⁷³⁵ and it says “and their blame is upon you (the leaders).⁷³⁶ (Indeed,) Every righteous

⁷³⁰ Is 53:6

⁷³¹ He uses the phrase “*ro'im einam nirim*” to express this idea. In its original form the expression is spelled with two Alefs *ro'eh ve-eino nireh*” referring to God who sees but cannot be seen. Here, Aboab exchanges one of the *Alefs* for an *Ayin*, thus changing the meaning to shepherd. Thus, the shepherds are not overseeing their flock (properly) and they cannot be seen – their effectiveness is not evident.

⁷³² Is. 29:14

⁷³³ TB *Berakhot* 31b

⁷³⁴ “*hifrizu al midoteihem*” is a Talmudic expression of one who takes a questionable position on an issue and then carries it to an extreme conclusion (TB *Nidda* 4b). ³⁴ Kings II 17:9

⁷³⁵ Job 41:24. The original verse reads, after him a pathway is lit, and it refers to the mythical behemoth which, when it swims, leaves a wake which is like a lighted pathway. In this case, Aboab expects the leaders to lead the way and leave a lighted pathway for their flock to follow in their wake, and not to shy away from leadership.

⁷³⁶ The original verse (Deut. 1:13) refers to the judges Moses chose to lead the Jewish people. However, *Sifra* 13 (Louis Finkelstein, New York, 1969 p23) plays on the words “*va-a-simeim be-rasheikhem*” which in the original is spelled with the letter Sin, and thus means and I shall place them at your head, and substitutes a Shin and different vocalization to form “*va-ashamam*” which means and their culpability is upon your head. *Sifra* comments that when

person must pray about this matter, lest at the time of the exacting final accounting,⁷³⁷ an error

²⁶ The original is in Ecc. 9:17, *divrei ḥakhamim be-naḥat nisma'im*. The words of the wise are expressed pleasantly. Here it is used as a criticism of the sages of his time whom he believes did not express themselves forcefully enough.

²⁷ The original verse (Is. 11:13) is "*ve-sara kin'at Ephraim*" the jealousy of Ephraim will disappear. Aboab here converts this to the alliterative "*ve-sara kin'at Sofrim*", the zealotry of scholars disappears. While "jealousy between scholars" is viewed positively in rabbinic literature (TB *Bava Batra*. 21a) as competition sharpens the mind and prevents errors, Aboab uses it as the zealotry of scholars to oppose wrongdoing.

²⁸ Play off the words "*kana'im pog'im bo*". The Mishna (*Sanhedrin* 9:6) refers to a situation where someone commits a wrongful act and a righteous true zealot (the classic case is that of Phineas, Num 25:7-8) is permitted to extra-legally harm him. Here Aboab changes it around so that if there is no righteous zealotry, the righteous are harmed by the non-righteous zealots.

²⁹ Lev. 26:36 describes the circumstances awaiting the Jewish people in exile. "They will grow fearful at the slightest sound of a falling leaf" ³⁰ Pr. 10:14

in law, such as this, may be considered a willful sin,³⁸ and, in the case of the [sin of the]

desecration of God's name, even unwitting sin is considered equivalent to willful sin and

therefore he will be judged for both his words and his silence^{738 739}

This too is a rebuke to us, which has stood as a recollection of tragedy,⁷⁴⁰ as no one of us⁷⁴¹ has

been able to withstand all those, from the four major classifications of damages and their

subordinates,⁷⁴² who overwhelm him⁴⁴ until this day and whose filth and anguish – all that pain

which has commenced from the time their aforementioned movement was initiated -- has not

leaders fail to lead and provide proper guidance, blame for the iniquities of their congregation is placed upon the Judges who are the leaders.

⁷³⁷ Ps. 32:6 In a play on words, Aboab substitutes "*le-et mezo*" in the original (which means at such time when it is appropriate) with "*le-et mizuy heshbon*" which means when the exacting final accounting is made, which is after one's death. (This double entendre, "*mezo-mizuy*", is not Aboab's invention. It originated with *Tanhuma* (Mikketz 10) which similarly exegetes "*ad mizuy ha-nefesh*" until the time when the soul departs.) The expression "*mizuy*"

⁷³⁸ Here Aboab criticizes not only the sycophantic pronouncements of the rabbis, noted in the previous sentence, but their silence as well.

⁷³⁹ Aboab demonstrates his attention to form. The rhymes of *nativ*" with "*ketiv*" in the previous sentence and "*zadon*" with "*nadon*" in this one, are not fortuitous.

⁷⁴⁰ Originates in TB (*Rosh Hashanah* 32b). It is mandatory to mention verses of remembrance in the *mussaf* prayer on Rosh Hashana. However, one should not use verses which recall tragedy or punishment.

⁷⁴¹ Clearly, Aboab intends to include himself, and is chastising himself for his relative reticence, and inaction after Nathan's first visit to Venice.

⁷⁴² TB and TY (Tractate *BavaKama*. Ch. 1, 2) list four major ways a person or his property can damage another's property. Each of these has "offspring", other forms of damage, which are similar and generally follow the same rules as the four major categories. ⁴⁴ Gen 45:1

dissipated.⁷⁴³ Who (that observes these persecutions) can deny the works of God? His judgments are forthright and righteous when taken together,⁷⁴⁴ and he repays measure for measure.⁷⁴⁵ Since

heshbon” originates in the Talmud (Talmud Yerushalmi, Henceforth TY, *Sota* 1:7) where it is actually used in a benevolent context. If a person deserves a severe punishment such as death, God accomplishes the exacting final accounting by aggregating a series of relatively minor tragedies and mishaps ranging from the death of a cow to the breaking of a jar. The final judgment at the time of death is considered “the exacting accounting” because at that time, God no longer allows a person time to correct his actions.

³⁸ Ethics 4:13. A judge who errs in a matter of law is considered as if he willfully sinned because he was lax in his studies.

we have erred in failing to uphold the vow of not hastening the redemption,⁴⁸ we have merited the terrible anger of the nations towards us, which is presently emerging.⁷⁴⁶

God has placed us in conflict with all our neighbors and made us a laughingstock for those who surround us.⁷⁴⁷ They say (about us) “is this the holy congregation, the paradigm of beautiful wisdom, great in ideas, and exemplary in faithfulness⁷⁴⁸ who, from its very inception has rendered unsuccessful all schemes directed at it by Kings and Princes, including forced

⁷⁴³ “Filth which has not dissipated” originates in TB (*Shabbat*. 146a). When the people of Israel received the Torah the filth (of idolatry) which they bore, dissipated.

⁷⁴⁴ Ps. 19:10.

⁷⁴⁵ A well known rabbinic observation (TB *Sotah* 11a) is that when God meets out punishments, they exactly fit the crime. For example the Egyptians threw the Jewish boys into the water, and they themselves drowned in the Red Sea.

⁷⁴⁶ Play off the rabbinic comment “*ba li-khelal ka’as ba li-khelal ta’ut*” (Sifri Num. 31:21) which means that one who gets angry is liable to err in his Halakhic ruling. In this case, Aboab flips the phrase around and says the Jewish people **erred** in attempting to hasten the redemption, and this resulted in arousing the **anger** of the nations against them.

⁷⁴⁷ A combination of two verses Ps. 80:7 and Ps 44:14

⁷⁴⁸ Lam. Rab. 1

conversions and expulsions, and overcome all tongues which spoke against her⁷⁴⁹? Even the most powerful winds could not sway her⁷⁵⁰ from her steadfast loyalty to her covenant with God and His Torah, and who has continued to observe the dictates of her sages and scribes?

Yet now she has collapsed⁷⁵¹ from within,⁷⁵² and been overturned⁷⁵³ in one brief moment⁷⁵⁴ so as to believe idle,⁷⁵⁵ chatter⁷⁵⁶ and easily harken and pay attention to false rumors⁷⁵⁷ which belie logic and established tradition. Woe to the generation in whose time such has befallen it. They have

⁴⁸ Referring to the “3 oaths” the verse *השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלים בצבאות או באיילות השדה אם תעירו ואם תעוררו את* appears three times in *Song of Songs* (2:7, 3:, 8:) A famous rabbinic interpretation appears in TB *Ketubot* (111a) takes the verses as an oath whereby Jews are enjoined from revolting against the nations or hastening the redemption.

not stood fast against even the easiest of tests,⁶¹ and truth has eluded them.⁷⁵⁸ (As a result,) the subject of the Anointed of God (Messiah) which is supposed to be a lofty topic,⁷⁵⁹ is bandied about in the idle conversations of people as a matter of mirth and derision, as if he (Messiah) were one of them, their leader and their acquaintance.⁷⁶⁰ (Indeed), their leader (this false

⁷⁴⁹ Aboab recalls that the Jews had never lost any disputation.

⁷⁵⁰ Ethics 3:22

⁷⁵¹ Is. 24:19

⁷⁵² As opposed to the previously mentioned difficulties which were imposed on the Jewish people, this one was *sui generis*.

⁷⁵³ From staunch and unwavering faith to belief in specious prophecies.

⁷⁵⁴ Lam. 4:6

⁷⁵⁵ TB *Tamid* 29a meaning gross exaggerations.

⁷⁵⁶ Kohut *Arukh Hashalem* vol. 4 311 posits that the word originates with the Syriac word for the sounds coming from a duck.

⁷⁵⁷ Ex. 23:1 in the original, false testimony.

⁷⁵⁸ Is. 59:15. TB 97a foresees that this will occur during the time that “the son of David appears” i.e. the Messiah will be revealed.

⁷⁵⁹ Lam 4:20 according to rabbinic tradition (Lam. R. 4:1) Jeremiah originally wrote this chapter of Lamentations as a dirge over the death of King Josiah. The original reads, Our soul, the Anointed of God was ensnared by their misdeeds. Aboab plays on the last word, “*bi-shehitotam*” as “*be-sihatam*” in their chatter.

⁷⁶⁰ Ps. 55:14

Messiah) is a reflection upon the people⁷⁶¹

They (the people) have forgotten how many travails⁷⁶² we have endured at the hands of those who attempt to calculate the coming of the Messiah,⁷⁶³ and of those who are lured by their words. They have also forgotten the advice for future generations that was given to them [regarding these matters] by our wise sages,⁷⁶⁴ who understand the times⁷⁶⁵ and are sentient of new events as may transpire,⁷⁶⁶ such as Maimonides⁷⁶⁷ and Rashba (Rabbi Solomon ben Aderet) Of blessed memory, in their books, so that, based on their experiences, the House of Israel shall be securely established (without fear of the inevitable reprisals caused by such episodes). And we must learn from our elders⁷⁶⁸

⁶¹ Aboab uses the term “*nisayon kal ka-zevi*” which translates literally as a “test that is fleet as a deer” in order to express the idea that the test was “light” or not challenging. The expression is also an obvious play on the name Sabbetai Zevi as *zevi* in Hebrew means deer.

Nonetheless, among all those calling themselves Messiah or Prophet not one had the audacity [to act] in this terrible manner and transgress severe prohibitions and arrogantly and publicly cause the nation to stumble [by desecrating] the fundamental edicts of our sages who are like the angels on high.⁷³ We are truly pained by this⁷⁴

⁷⁶¹ TB (*Arachin* 17a) cites a rabbinic debate as to whether the leaders reflect the (spiritual level) of the generation or vice versa

⁷⁶² A rabbinic expression (TB *Kiddushin* 33a) denoting travails and vicissitudes which transpire over the life of an elderly person.

⁷⁶³ Lit. Those who calculate the end (TB *Sanhedrin* 97b).

⁷⁶⁴ Is.3:3

⁷⁶⁵ Ch I 12:33

⁷⁶⁶ Is. 47:13

⁷⁶⁷ See Maimonides in his epistle to Yemenite Jewry regarding this matter. Aboab will rely heavily on this letter later in this responsum.

⁷⁶⁸ Ps. 119:9. In its original form in the phrase Aboab quotes means “I will be more learned than the elders (since I have learned your Torah). Aboab employs it here to mean that we must learn **from** our elders (ie. Listen to the

And while we were still suffering⁷⁵ from the first⁷⁶ wave of troubles (caused by Sabbetai Zevi's apostasy)⁷⁶⁹ and offering thanks for the past⁷⁷⁰ to the Rock⁷⁷¹ who redeems and rescues – Were it not for God who helped us, sayeth Israel⁷⁷² -- we suddenly heard trembling voices and the entire city was rowdy⁸¹ heralding the arrival of the “leader of the way”⁷⁷³, and none of us knew for

advice of Maimonides and Rashba on the subject of false Messiahs) This is also a common rabbinic interpretation of this verse. See *Bereishit Rabba*. 100:12

⁷³ Daniel 4:14. Apparently a reference to the abolition of the fast of the Ninth of Ab, which has the status of a Prophetic Law (similar to that of the holiday of Purim) because it is specifically mentioned in Zekharia 7:3 and indirectly in Esther 9:31.

⁷⁴ The term “*yidvu kol ha-davim*” derives from TB *Kiddushin* 81b and means “those who are hurting (already) should feel (further) pain about this. The Talmud uses the expression in reference to one who commits a grave sin accidentally, yet is still held accountable.

⁷⁵ “*Zir*” denotes the painful contractions felt during childbirth, but it is used as a general term for suffering.

⁷⁶ “*al ha-rishonim anu mizta'arim*” (we suffer as a result of the first one) is an expression apocryphally attributed to Aaron by *Mekhilta* (Yitro 1). Moses wanted to bring his wife and children with him to Egypt and Aaron dissuaded him saying, “We suffer over those first ones (who are presently enslaved in Egypt) and you are coming to add to them?”

what purpose he comes.⁸³ We are speaking of the bachelor⁸⁴ Nathan of Gaza who caused

upheaval throughout the world⁸⁵ -- or others caused upheaval regarding him -- during the year

⁷⁶⁹ Aboab coins the triple entendre “*zir shel pega'im*”. Since “*zir*” also means hinge, which is a straight axis about which a door (or a planet) revolves, this phrase now translates literally as “axis of troubles” to describe the surge of persecutions the Jews faced as result of the apostasy. This term is a reference to Psalm 91 which is often referred to as “*shir shel pega'im*” or “Song of troubles” since it lists all the afflictions the wicked will be subject to, and from which the righteous will be saved. Aboab's use of the word “axis” reflects his perception that his people were threatened by a unique set of persecutions which continuously “revolved” around the issue of Sabbetai Zevi and his apostasy. This phrase is an Aboab original. A search of the Bar Ilan database confirms that this double entendre does not appear anywhere in rabbinic literature.

⁷⁷⁰ TB. *Berakhot* 9:4

⁷⁷¹ He calls God by the appellation, “*zur*” Rock, as an alliteration to “*zir*” above.

⁷⁷² Ps. 124:1 This psalm describes the misfortunes which may have befallen the Jews had God not saved them.

⁸¹ Similar to Is. 22:2.

⁷⁷³ Uses the phrase “*ki yarat ba'al ha-derekh le-negdeinu*” “the leader of the twisted way came towards us.” This is a play off the words in Nu. 22:32 where the Angel tells Bilaam that his ass veered off course since “*the path (or the way) has been twisting before me*”. Here, Aboab manipulates the words to say “The leader of the convoluted way (ie Nathan of Gaza) has been mislead (twisted) so that he is (unfortunately) coming here.

when he was referred to by his followers as “Prophet”. When he arrived, we hastened and did not tarry⁸⁶ to defend the honor of heaven, which is of primary importance in all matters, that it not be further desecrated among the nations on his account, and to ensure the safety⁷⁷⁴ of those who were in danger – both the community and the individual, by hiding him – protecting and rescuing⁸⁸ – from conspiracies and verbal disputes⁷⁷⁵ – and to hasten his departure and escape⁷⁷⁶ directly or indirectly,⁷⁷⁷ according to the plan which is, in our opinion, most efficacious. Nor did we see him and let him leave without escort.⁹²

⁸³ Play off the words in Psalms 74:9 describing the losses suffered by the Jewish people in exile who no longer witness daily miracles or hear the words of the prophets, and “*ein itanu yodei’a ad mah*” “none of us know until when (the Jewish people will be in exile). Aboab changes the word “*ad*” which means *until* to “*al*” which means *about* as if to say “we don’t know what he is here *about*” while still managing to retain the context of the Psalm and the message that the Jewish nation is still in exile despite Nathan of Gaza’s efforts or allegations to the contrary. ⁸⁴ A mildly derogatory term for one who is unmarried.

⁸⁵ *Sifri* (Finkelstein, 397).

⁸⁶ Ps. 119:60

⁷⁷⁴ Aboab uses the term “*le-fake’ah al iskeri nefashot*” when referring to protecting those whose lives were perceived to be in danger. His wording is a citation of a concept in TB *Shabbat* 150 permitting violation of the Sabbath to examine matters of life and death or matters crucial to the viability of the community or the life of an individual.

“*le-fake’ah*” is thus a shortened version of “*li-fko’ah einayim*” (Is. 42:7) to open one’s eyes, or examine. ⁸⁸ Is.31:5 referring to God’s miraculous deliverance of the Jewish people under King Hezekiah from the threat of Sennaherib.

⁷⁷⁵ Ps 31:21 Aboab uses multiple veiled references to Nathan’s endangerment.

⁷⁷⁶ Ps. 55:9

⁷⁷⁷ Lit. in a short and long manner. This is a reference to the wisdom of the children of Jerusalem (TB *Eruvin* 53b). Rabbi Joshua asked directions of a child, who told him there’s a short which is long or a long road which is short. The “short” road was difficult to navigate so it took a long time, while the “long” road was easy and therefore short. Here Aboab says that he and the council planned to get Nathan out of town by whatever path was most efficacious.

⁹² Plays off the famous case in Dt. 21:7 where an unidentified corpse is discovered between two cities. The leaders of the city closest to the corpse must declare “our hands did not spill this blood.” Rashi, following Mishna *Sotah* 9:6, explains that while no one truly believes that the leaders actually murdered the victim, they must declare that they “did not see him (in their city), and fail to feed or escort him out properly.” Aboab is covering his bases here saying “we gave him a proper escort (thereby indicating that the rabbinic establishment protected Nathan), and did so with due dispatch (thereby indicating that they desired to shorten his stay).”

Indeed, once the opportunity presented itself to investigate and elucidate the matters,⁹³ with an eye that sees and an ear that hears⁹⁴ so as to mollify⁹⁵ the multitude and to reproach the poor souls of the land⁹⁶ -- who stray in their ideas and cause others to err with them -- and set them upon the straight path, the obligation falls upon us to entirely eradicate⁷⁷⁸ the evil and erroneous ideas, so that they dissipate like smoke,⁹⁸ and to elucidate⁷⁷⁹ the light of the truth so that it sprouts forth and rises from the earth^{100 780}

So before this man departed from us, on this past Monday, on the eve of the 13th day of the counting of the Omer,⁷⁸¹ we met here together – all the members of the Yeshiva with the (lay?) heads and the leaders of the communities of the city, may God preserve them and give them life – and we called him and he came before us. And after the investigations and examinations⁷⁸²

⁹³ Aboab does not specify which “issues” he is referring to although the continuation of the letter indicates that these were questions regarding Nathan’s claims to prophecy and the nature of his prophecies.

⁹⁴ Ethics 2:1. In the original it refers to God who sees all and understands all clearly. Here Aboab is referring to a thorough investigation which will reveal the truth. He is also alluding to the latter part of that sentence, “**and all your deeds are recorded in a book**”, as a segue to his intention to record and promulgate the proceedings of the investigative court.

⁹⁵ TB *Bava Metziah* 35b cites a case of custodian who is required to take an oath solely to “mollify the owner” of the damaged object. Similarly here, while this investigation is not really necessary, as the truth is already apparent, it is important to quell the questions and objections still harbored by the multitude.

⁹⁶ Is. 11:4. Messiah will reproach the powerful people and set them on the proper path, so as to protect the modest folk. While the verse in Isaiah spells “*anvei*” (modest) as it is read, often there is a biblical tradition to read

⁷⁷⁸ A phrase borrowed from the obligation to eradicate leaven before Passover. The first to use this expression is Rashi TB, *Pesahim* 6a, but thereafter it was commonly and extensively used. ⁹⁸ High holiday service (Behr *Avodat Israel* p386)

⁷⁷⁹ Alliteration of “*bi’ur*” (incineration) with “*bi’ur*” (elucidation).

¹⁰⁰ Ps. 85:12

⁷⁸⁰ Another rhyme, “*tikhleh*” with “*ve-ta’aleh*”.

⁷⁸¹ Aboab used an acrostic LMBY which means “*LeMinyan Benei Yisra’el*”, literally, according to the counting of the Jews. Indeed, on Sunday evening prior to the reading of Parshat Tazri’a-Mezora see Footnote 161. In 1668, the 13th day of the Omer was counted. It is referred to as Monday since according to the Jewish calendar, Monday begins on Sunday night.

⁷⁸² According to the Mishna (*Sanhedrin* 5:1), a court is required to thoroughly interrogate witnesses. This interrogation is divided into “*hakirot*”, investigations, and “*bedikot*”, examinations. The former refers to the time and place of the event and the latter to all other matters and circumstances regarding the event.

“*ani'im*” (meaning poor) despite the spelling “*anavim*” (meaning unassuming). See for example Ps. 9:19. Here Aboab is referring to (and reinterpreting) the Talmudic (TB *Ketubot* 68a) observation, “*ani, ani be-da'at*”. The poor person is poor in his mind. Originally this meant that the person has a poor mindset, but Aboab interprets it as a person of poor (weak) intellect.

which we inquired of him regarding his dreams and words,¹⁰⁴ he was unable¹⁰⁵ to respond to us even one word of reason for any one of them, he was deeply embarrassed,⁷⁸³ and he was almost dumbstruck. The eye saw and bore witness⁷⁸⁴ regarding that which we had pronounced from inception⁷⁸⁵ and our heart saw then and foretold⁷⁸⁶⁷⁸⁷ -- that this poor man⁷⁸⁸ was afflicted with the illness of dementia and delusions as described by Maimonides Of Blessed Memory (henceforth OBM) at the end of his *Epistle to the Jews of Yemen*,¹¹² that his imagination and cognition were impaired. And this too is a hallucination⁷⁸⁹ as we have seen and heard⁷⁹⁰ that several people who in their reveries⁷⁹¹ established in their imaginations strange visions and obscure thoughts from which they were unable to depart, and they lied⁷⁹² to establish that they saw that which they had not seen.

⁷⁸³ Lit. shame covered his face Ps. 69:8

⁷⁸⁴ Job 29:11

⁷⁸⁵ Rosh Hashana liturgy, Behr *Avodat Israel* p. 400

⁷⁸⁶ Job 28:27 referring to God's planning creation.

⁷⁸⁷ Here Aboab declares that he was opposed to Nathan even during his first visit to Venice, and that he made known his opposition.

⁷⁸⁸ “*ze ani karah lo*” Play on “*ze ani kara*” Ps. 34:7 ¹¹²
At the very end of the Epistle.

⁷⁸⁹ Ecc. 1:17

⁷⁹⁰ Ps. 48:9

⁷⁹¹ Lit. waking dreams Ps. 73:20

⁷⁹² Lit. they seduced with their mouths and lied with their tongues Ps. 78:36.

Therefore⁷⁹³ we come and pronounce⁷⁹⁴ our conclusion in full view of all: [We present] the statement written and signed by him in our presence⁷⁹⁵ and which he stated orally¹²⁰ as well as the other letter, a copy of which has come before us, from the city of Opsala. And he signed that

¹⁰⁴ Gen. 37:8

¹⁰⁵ “*Heseg yad*” is a legal concept referring to a person’s financial ability to fulfill his vows (*Arachin* 4:1). Here Aboab uses it more broadly to refer to intellectual capacity.

document too with his hand¹²¹ before us. We retain both those with us and they are copied herein below verbatim, in which he admitted without reserve¹²² – and especially in that document which was entirely created in our presence – as [he] concluded from our authentic arguments and our candid admonishment that an “evil spirit” had confounded him¹²³ and a spirit of foolishness⁷⁹⁶ had misled him to imagine and to state matters which never existed and were never created.⁷⁹⁷

His ignorance of the fundamentals of *Kabbalah*, misled him, in contradistinction to the holiness of his birth and¹²⁶ upbringing⁷⁹⁸ to turn light into darkness⁷⁹⁹ and to say about the impure that it is pure.⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹³ Ps. 128:4

⁷⁹⁴ Ps. 22:32

⁷⁹⁵ According to TB *Gittin* (1:1), this is the declaration an emissary carrying a writ of divorce must make upon delivery to validate the document. ¹²⁰ Sam.II 23:2

⁷⁹⁶ Following the observation of TB *Sotah* 3a that no person sins unless a spirit of foolishness enters within him.

⁷⁹⁷ Talmudic expression (TB *Bava Batra* 15a) for something which is entirely and purely a figment of imagination.

¹²⁶ There is a well-known concept in Jewish law (e.g. TB *Bava Batra* 149a) referring to someone who was conceived while his mother was still a gentile (unholy conception), but was born after her conversion to Judaism (born holy). Here, Aboab plays on the word “*horato*” which means his conception but also means his instruction or guidance, to say that his deficient understanding of Kabbalah guided him to unholy conclusions. However, Aboab also notes the holiness of his parents and the proper upbringing which he merited.

⁷⁹⁸ See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 199 for background on Nathan of Gaza and his father in particular.

⁷⁹⁹ Is. 42:16

⁸⁰⁰ TB *Berachot*. 28b prayer upon commencing study, that one not err and declare something impure, pure.

It is for this reason we did not apply to him the most stern judgments since he was not acting out of rebelliousness or evil intent.⁸⁰¹ Rather, his delusions caused this obstacle to issue forth from him.⁸⁰² Who knows if⁸⁰³ (by taking this course of action -- interviewing Nathan, claiming that he is delusional, and securing his signature on a document stating that he experienced nothing of

¹²¹ As opposed to a signature with his signet which could be forged or misappropriated. This is the most conclusive form of verification of authenticity in Jewish law. The procedure for verification is described in TB *Ketubot* 21. ¹²² TB *Sotah* 7b notes several people (Judah, Reuben, Moses) who admitted their errors without reserve and were forgiven. It is possible that in these words Aboab is indicating to Nathan that if he abandons his erroneous ways he will be forgiven and reinstated in God's good graces.

¹²³ Reference to Sam.I 17:14 "the spirit of God departed from (King) Saul and an evil spirit from God confounded him." Rabbi David Kimchi explains the word "*bi'atathu*" as confounded or confused. Saul no longer knew who he was. This explanation fits with Aboab's usage of the word here, since he concluded that Nathan of Gaza was deluded into believing that he was someone else.

any substance), we have concurred with the Divine Wisdom (as promulgated by

Maimonides),¹³³ and thereby been an unwitting participant in the divine scheme to provide a great salvation to the Jewish people in this matter.¹³⁴ May God forgive those⁸⁰⁴ who did not avail themselves of the opportunity to speak out⁸⁰⁵ against him (Nathan of Gaza) at first (when he began to publicize his screeds), as Maimonides suggested in the aforementioned book, before our humiliation proliferated among the nations and [before] the potential danger [arose] of an immense conflagration (of a surge in persecutions). For we have not found a response to this accusation. I do not know which is the overarching commandment in this matter as delineated in the Fundamentals of the Torah,⁸⁰⁶ which supersedes *Pikuah Nefesh* and [which sanctioned] their

⁸⁰¹ Joshua. 22:22

⁸⁰² Also a quote from the above prayer.

⁸⁰³ Esther 4:14. Mordecai tells Esther, who knows whether your ascension to the throne is not fortuitous to save the Jews. Similarly, Aboab is saying who knows whether my suggestion to deal dismissively with Nathan and call him delusional, is not in fortuitous agreement with the Divine plan.

⁸⁰⁴ Talmudic expression *Berachot*, 25a

⁸⁰⁵ TB *Shabbat*. 55a. Those who have the opportunity to object and do not do so are equally as culpable as those who sinned.

⁸⁰⁶ Generally the commandment to preserve life supersedes all other Biblical and Rabbinic commandments, positive or negative. Aboab refers to Maimonides, in the 5th chapter of his Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah who identifies several exceptions, and is saying that he cannot find that one of these exceptions applies in this case. He

reliance on a miracle (to save them),⁸⁰⁷ when this was clearly a case of a situation that is fraught with danger,⁸⁰⁸ and this cannot be repaired.

¹³³I believe this passage is predicated on Maimonides *Epistle to the Jews of Yemen (Iggeret Teiman)*: 1138-1204 Budapest, 1941, <https://hebrewbooks.org/26906> in which he advises the Jews of Yemen on how to deal with a false Messiah who posed a threat to the community. He suggested that they first restrict this individual's movements, then document his strange behaviors and finally determine that he is deranged or mentally deficient.

This will serve to save his life (because the gentiles won't execute someone who is insane), and also save the Jewish community who can argue that they don't take him seriously since he is clearly deranged (and by extension, neither should the gentiles). ¹³⁴ Presumably he is referring to Sabbetai Zevi's apostasy which came about very quickly and unexpectedly and resulted in the majority of his followers recognizing the falsity of his claims, but which also had the potential of unleashing persecutions and anti-Jewish legislation.

Therefore we have decided to record this plaintiff's admission¹⁴⁰ together with our

announcement for posterity¹⁴¹ and let this be a remembrance for our grandchildren so that the

righteous and the entire holy congregation⁸⁰⁹ not stretch forth their hands and tongues for

wickedness.⁸¹⁰ For these matters are sealed and inscrutable until the time of salvation. Please do

not delay his arrival.⁸¹¹ Observe that which our forefathers have accepted in the past¹⁴⁵ as the

word of God, do not touch my Messiah and do not sin with my Prophets⁸¹² by improper

therefore takes to task those rabbis and leaders who could have prevented the Sabbatean debacle, for having recklessly endangered Jewish lives without halachic sanction.

⁸⁰⁷ A Jewish person may not rely on the occurrence of a miracle. The source is TB *Ta'anit* 20b. Nahmanides (Nu. 13:2) establishes this as a rule. Aboab is saying that if the rabbis who did not object were relying on a miracle to save the Jewish people from calamity, he does not know how they were permitted to do this.

⁸⁰⁸ TB *Pesachim* 8a. Rabbi Elazar states that in general those on a mission to perform a Mitzvah will not be harmed while on that mission. An exception to this rule is a situation fraught with danger, when even the Mitzvah mission may not provide protection, as when God commanded the prophet Samuel to go and anoint David as King, and Samuel objected fearing that King Saul will discover his mission and kill him (Sam. I 16:2). Here Aboab is arguing that even if those rabbis who did not object to Nathan and Sabbatai Zevi felt they were protected from mishap

⁸⁰⁹ Nu. 16:3

⁸¹⁰ Ps. 125:3

⁸¹¹ TB *Sanhedrin*. 97a. When people were discussing the Messiah Rabbi Zeira would plead with them to stop, saying, "please do not delay him, for he is one of those three who come unexpectedly." ¹⁴⁵ TB *Shabbat*. 88a. An expression indicating reaffirmation of accepted principles and ideas.

⁸¹² Chr. I 16:22. In the original it means not to touch the priests who were anointed by God and not to harm the Prophets. Aboab in a play on words uses this as an exhortation not to be involved with matters of Messiahs (anointed ones) like Shabbetai Zevi or prophets like Nathan.

interpretations and novella.⁸¹³ I like you will raise our hearts to God in heaven⁸¹⁴ who in his mercy will forgive all⁸¹⁵ that has passed and will implant in our hearts His love and awe¹⁵⁰ to be wise and know Him⁸¹⁶ and His Torah. Let him hasten our authentic redemption and the shame of His people will be removed from the earth for so has God spoken. Amen may it be so.⁸¹⁷

because they were performing a mitzvah, such protection is not available, since this is a situation fraught with danger.

¹⁴⁰ An admission by a plaintiff in front of a court (without coercion) is the strongest form of evidence. The Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 3a) equates this to one hundred witnesses.

¹⁴¹ Lit. until the last generation. Ps. 102:19

Venice, the 16th according to the counting of the Omer,⁸¹⁸ in the Parsha of “and you shall

separate the Sons of Israel from their impurities”⁸¹⁹ in the year “and I shall be sanctified **among** the Sons of Israel”.⁸²⁰

⁸¹³ Much of Sabbatean credibility rested upon the discovery of Biblical allusions and hints to his name or to dates or places associated with him. Aboab equates this to exegesis which is contrary to tradition. One who indulges in such practices has no share in the world to come. Ethics 3:11

⁸¹⁴ Lam. 3:41

⁸¹⁵ The phrase “*yekhaper be'ad*” is from Chr. II 30:18. It is commonly used to excuse oneself when discussing matters of Kabbala explicitly. Perhaps Aboab uses this expression here in recognition of the fact that the Sabbatean debacle was the result of explicit and inappropriate indulgence in Kabbalistic matters. ¹⁵⁰ Behr *Avodat Israel* p. 128)

⁸¹⁶ Jer. 9:23

⁸¹⁷ Is. 25:8

⁸¹⁸ This was the Thursday following the investigation of Nathan and the 16th day of the counting of the Omer. Here again the acrostic LMBY is used. Interestingly, that day was Rosh Chodesh, the New Moon of the month of Iyar and nevertheless the counting according to the Omer took precedence.

⁸¹⁹ It is customary in rabbinic writing to find some reference in the weekly Torah portion or Prophetic selection to the issue at hand and to call the week by that reference. Actually, the Torah reading of the Shabbat following this event was Tazria and Metzora and this citation is from the very end of Metzora.

⁸²⁰ In the original, the acrostic LPK appears. This means “*Le-Parsha Ketana*”, in the short presentation. The year indicated is 428, the numerical value of the word “*betokh*” which is bolded and enlarged. In reality the year was 5428. The omission of the 5 is indicated by the acrostic LPK.

These are the words of the sages and the elders of the Yeshiva of whom I am the eldest among them. I speak before you and I sign with my name on behalf of all of them:

Jacob son of Rabbi Moses haLevi.

The following are the names of the “seven shepherds” and the “eight princes”⁸²¹ who were present during the investigation and examination of Nathan of Gaza.

1. Moreinu haRav Jacob HaLevi
2. Moreinu haRav Samuel Aboab
3. Moreinu HaRav Solomon Hai Saravel (סראוואל)
4. Moreinu haRAv Moshe Treves (טריוויס)
5. Moreinu haRav Senor son of Danan 6. Moreinu haRav Moshe Zacut
7. Moreinu haRav Isaac min haLeviim
8. Moreinu haRav Joseph Alulancy (אלולאנסי)

I, Jacob son of Kevod Moreinu Rabbi Raphael of Ancona, scribe of the Venetian Jewish community, hereby sign in the name of all the leaders of the community who appear here by name:

1. Kevod Moreinu Rabbi⁸²² Baruch Alparin
2. Kevod Moreinu Rabbi Menashe Merrari

⁸²¹ Mich. 5:4

⁸²² The acrostic KMR stands for *Kevod Moreinu Rabbi* indicating a scholar of some note or a person who is a fine scholar and who has benefitted the community in a notable way. However this man may not respond to halachic questions when a rabbi is in town. This is in distinction to *Kevod Moreinu ha-Rav*. One who bears that title may respond to halachic questions at any time.

3. Kevod Moreinu Rabbi Meshulam Levi
4. Kevod Moreinu Rabbi Joseph Jeshurun
5. Kevod Moreinu Rabbi Jacob Cevdall (צוידאל)
6. Kevod Moreinu Rabbi Isaac Baruch Caravallio
7. Kevod Moreinu Rabbi Don Isaac Abravanel

These are the words of Nathan of Gaza as copied from the document he signed with his hand before the Rabbis and lay leaders of the community.

At Venice, Sunday night, the third day⁸²³ of the counting of the Omer in the year 5428 (1668).

Whereas the Rabbis of Venice have instructed that despite my affirmation that I had seen the chariot of God just as Ezekiel the prophet saw, and it (the vision) was accompanied by the prophecy that Sabbatai Zevi is the Messiah, I am mistaken and that vision was not real or

substantive. I have acceded to their words and assert that what I had prophesied regarding Sabbatai Zevi was false.

(signed) Nathan Benjamin.

⁸²³ This is an error. Earlier, Aboab stated that the investigation was performed on Sunday night the eve of the thirteenth day of the Omer. This is reasonable as the letter was written on the following Thursday, the sixteenth day of the Omer. However, it is not possible that Nathan wrote his admission on the third day of the Omer. Why would they wait almost two weeks until they promulgated the letter? Furthermore, in 1668 the third day of the Omer was on Friday (Thursday night) not Monday (Sunday night). Apparently the original was 13 (yud gimmel) LMBY and the copyist wanted to clarify and wrote Yom gimmel (Tuesday) LMBY.

We sat three as one, we the court signed hereunder, when this document and these signatures came before us, and we certified it and verified it properly, and all is firm and clear and established.⁸²⁴

Yaakov son of Kevod Moreinu Harav Moshe HaLevi, Judge

Shmuel son of Kevod Moreinu Rabbi Avraham Aboab OBM, Judge

Shelomo Hai son of my master, my father the Gaon Nehemia Saravel OBM, Judge

A copy of the Judicial decision which was consummated in Ipsala regarding the agents [who were to] examine and investigate the matter of Nathan of Gaza.

⁸²⁴ This is the standard and required language used by courts to verify and certify witnesses' signatures.

Among the people of Israel we have announced faithfully, that to our holy community⁸²⁵ came the *Haham*, Nathan of Gaza, who claimed that he was a prophet come to announce the coming of the redeemer, and several people accompanied him. When this news reached Adrianople, ministers from Constantinople who were (already) present there (in Adrianople), along with some of the elders of Adrianople sent the agents named hereinafter, the Haham, the expert physician Kevod Harav David Koriel (קוריאל) may God preserve him and give him life, and the wise and exemplary patron Kevod Harav Asher may God preserve him and give him life, son of Abraham Ashkenazy OBM, and the Haham, Kevod Harav Judah son of Meshulam, may God preserve him and give him life to investigate and examine the matters of this man in order to expose his shame before the children of Israel who believe him. [This is] especially [important] since he was nearing Adrianople, and the people there feared a tragedy would ensue heaven forfend.

And before us, witnesses hereunder signed, came these honorable agents and they investigated some of his matters and [found that] all his claims were a shabby patchwork. Among other things, they inquired of him how he could be established as a prophet without having provided any sign or miracle⁸²⁶ in any place he went.⁸²⁷ He responded to them that he did not profess to be a prophet, but rather was given this sole prophecy to declare Sabbatai Zevi as the Messiah and

⁸²⁵ The common term "*Maḥaneinu ha-Kakdash*" literally "our holy encampment" (Deut. 23:15) designates the Jewish community

⁸²⁶ Nahmanides (Deut. 13:2) explains that a sign is a prediction of a future event and a miracle is a supernatural event performed by the prophet.

⁸²⁷ Maimonides (Fundamentals of the Torah 8:5) states that God gives a prophet a sign or a miracle so he can prove that he is an authentic prophet.

that he will arrive a year and several months hence, at the very latest by the 25th day of Elul immediately forthcoming. He will not tarry more and if he does, all [my prophecy] is a lie. And whoever believes, will believe. Therefore, I am not obligated to provide any sort of sign or miracle to confirm this (prophecy), and since I am not obligated, I am not the recipient of divine assistance to perform any miraculous deed at all.

They countered that in many of the communities he had visited he had prophesized about other things as well. He responded that his sole prophecy was regarding the revelation of the said Messiah (Sabbatai Zevi, as stated earlier), while all the rest (of his prophecies) were revealed to him by [communication with] the souls of prophets and righteous and virtuous people who had died.⁸²⁸ They (the messengers) continued to insist twice and thrice, day after day morning and night [that he provide a sign or a miracle], and after much effort he responded [with the request] that they wait until the end of the holiday of Shavuot, for it had been revealed to him through the “holy spirit”⁸²⁹ that on the first day of this holiday a great light would descend upon that person in Adrianople, Sabbatai Zevi, and through the influence of that man (Sabbatai Zevi) he (Nathan of Gaza) would be able to perform a sign and a miracle. The messengers duly waited until the holiday ended and then visited Nathan of Gaza to ask that he fulfill his promise, but there was no response. And rather than a great light, a great darkness descended upon him.⁸³⁰ They said to

⁸²⁸ Lit. who are in the earth Ps. 16:3

⁸²⁹ “*Ruah ha-Kodesh*” is considered a lower level of revelation than prophecy.

⁸³⁰ From Gen. 15:12. Abraham is enveloped by an intense darkness, and God appears to him and reveals that his descendants will be exiled. Obviously, the play here is that rather than convince them of the imminent redemption, Nathan underscored the fact that they remain in exile.

him, since nothing good has been found in you,⁸³¹ write and sign for us [agreeing to] four conditions in order to mitigate some of the damage you have caused the Jewish people.

-
1. He must distance yourself from Adrianople a distance of 12 days travel, so that the Jewish people should not be “burned with your embers.”
 2. He should not communicate in writing with “that man”(Sabbatai Zevi) in Adrianople regarding any matter at all either on his own, or via messenger.
 3. He may not gather others around him to congregate wherever he goes. Rather he must live on his own and be silent, with the exclusion of his father in law and his servant⁸³²
 4. If the Messiah he has spoken of (Sabbatai Zevi) does not appear by the forthcoming 25th day of Elul (as he prophesied) then everything he had said is [hereby declared to be] lies and falsehoods.

He accepted all these conditions under oath. He signed and sealed [the declaration] and gave it to the aforementioned agents. We, who were chosen in Ipsola were involved in all the above, together with the hakham, may God preserve him, who disseminates Torah in our community. And so that these agents have testimony and proof in their hands, we have written and signed our names on Tuesday, the eighth day of Sivan⁸³³ of the year 5467 (1667) to the creation of the world, here, Ipsola, and all is firm and clear, and established.

⁸³¹ Ki. I 14:13. Aviah, son of Jeroboam, king of Israel, was the only one in the family who merited to be buried properly, “because something good was found regarding him.” There is a tradition cited by Rabbi Haim Yosef

⁸³² Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 730 identifies the servant as Samuel Gandour. Interestingly, he was one of the three who testified to Nathan’s declaration (see below).

⁸³³ This was the day after Shavuot, as soon as it became clear that Nathan was unable to provide a sign or a miracle. These people didn’t waste any time.

Shemay'a son of Kevod Rabbi Rephael Doinais

Yitzhak Rodrigo

Shmuel Zemah

Shelomo AlTsayag

David Azulai (Hid'a) that Aviah will be reincarnated as the Messiah, son of Joseph, and that was the "good thing" that was found regarding him by which he merited to be buried properly. Perhaps "nothing good" means that there is no Messianic association whatsoever with Nathan or Shabbetai Zevi.

Shelomo Romano

Shmuel Nahmias

Avraham Shalom⁸³⁴

The matters discussed in this document issued forth from my mouth

(signed) Nathan Benjamin (Nathan of Gaza)⁸³⁵

We sat three as one, we the court signed hereunder, when the signature of Nathan Benjamin was verified before us, and we have certified it and verified it properly.

And this was here, Venice, today, the 16th day of the Omer 5468 (1668)

And all is firm, and clear, and established

Yaakov son of Kevod Moreinu Rabbi Moshe haLevi (Judge)⁸³⁶

Moshe son of the elder the Haver, Rabbi Yaakov Trevis OBM (Judge)

⁸³⁴ This is the end of the decision handed down by the court in Ipsola. The seven signatories were the chosen people of Ipsola.

⁸³⁵ Apparently, the copy of the decision of the Ipsola court which was available in Venice was not signed by Nathan, as it was only a copy. The original, which was signed by Nathan, would have been retained in the archives of the Ipsola court. So the court in Venice asked Nathan to reaffirm what was done in Ipsola and to re-sign.

⁸³⁶ Interestingly, he is the only one of the three verifying the document from Ipsola who also verified the Venetian document.

Senor son of Kevod Rabbi Avraham ibn Danan OBM (Judge)

The conditions to which Nathan of Gaza agreed [and which were] to be sent to the leaders of Constantinople:

⁸³⁷[To] The ministers of Constantinople who are in Adrianople along with the Jewish community of Adrianople: Your agents have come to me, and in order to mollify you and your agents, and in order to remove your complaints from upon me,⁸³⁸ for you think that I am the cause, God

forbid, of bringing harm to the Jewish people. Therefore, I have accepted upon myself with an oath not to correspond in writing with the master whom I and the faithful of the sons of Israel⁸³⁹ seek, ¹⁷⁵ and to not gather people around me, and to remove myself from Adrianople a distance of twelve days [travel].

I hereby declare in truth that on the twenty fifth day of Elul of the year 5465 (1665) I heard a proclamation in the heavenly court that within a year and some months the kingdom of the Messiah from the house of David will be revealed. At the time of this proclamation, the name of the Messiah was not specified. Nor did they specify how many months “some months” was intended to designate. Therefore, I allotted the time through Elul of this year which is 5427 (1667) (essentially, a full two years). And if this time should pass (without the appearance of the Messiah) this means that the proclamation I heard is not substantive, and any other document

⁸³⁷ To clarify: this is a second document produced in Ipsola which reaffirms Nathan’s undertakings.

⁸³⁸ Nu. 17:25

⁸³⁹ Sam. II 20:19. The wise woman declared that she was among those who are faithful to King David. Here too Nathan is insinuating that he and his followers are those who are indeed faithful to King David, the Messiah. ¹⁷⁵ Nathan of Gaza is quoting from a verse in Mal. 3:1 which refers to the Messiah as the “Master whom you seek.” Clearly, Nathan is not withdrawing his contention that Shabbetai Zevi is the Messiah. He is simply reluctantly acceding to the conditions set by the community representatives.

except this one has no substance at all. And to give them (the agents) proof in their hand, I signed my name on Tuesday, the 8th day of Sivan⁸⁴⁰ in the year 5467 (1667) here in Ipsola

These are the words of Nathan Benjamin

Before us, the undersigned, it was written and signed all that is written above, and as absolute proof we have written and signed our names here on the aforementioned day.

Shemay'a sone of Kevod Morenu Rabbi Raphael Doinais

Yitzhak Rodrigo

Shemuel Gandour⁸⁴¹

The document written above, signed by myself, [I confirm] the words issued forth from my mouth⁸⁴²

Nathan Benjamin

We sat three as one, we the court signed hereunder, when the signature of Nathan Benjamin was verified before us, and we have certified it and verified it properly

And this was here, Venice, today, the 16th day of the Omer 5468 (1668)

And all is firm and clear and established

Yaakov son of Kevod Moreinu Rabbi Moshe haLevi (Judge)

Moshe son of the elder the Haver, Rabbi Yaakov Trevis OBM (Judge)

⁸⁴⁰ The printed version has the 5th of Sivan. This is an error, because the 5th of Sivan 1667 was on a Saturday. The date was actually the Tuesday the 8th of Sivan, 1667 as noted correctly above, p.

⁸⁴¹ This is the second document produced in Ipsola on Tuesday, the 8th of Sivan, signed by Nathan before the court.

⁸⁴² This affirmation and the signature were made in Venice on the 16th day of the Omer 5428 (1668).

Senor son of Kevod Rabbi Avraham ibn Danan OBM (Judge)

Appendix 5 Charter of the *Beit Midrash Aboab*

Covenant regarding the establishment of *Beit Midrash Aboab* and its regulations [in the year] (5)392
(1632)⁸⁴³

Let G-d's grace rest upon us and let the work of our hands be established with us, and let the work of our hands establish it;⁸⁴⁴ (acrostics) "With G-d's help shall we act and we will be successful"; "Our help is from G-d Who created heaven and earth".⁸⁴⁵ "G-d wills it for He is righteous, may He empower Torah and glorify it".¹⁸²

⁸⁴³ *Anno mundi*. Generally, the number indicating the millennium is omitted.

⁸⁴⁴ Ps. 90:17

⁸⁴⁵ Ps. 121:2

¹⁸² Is. 42:21

At an auspicious occasion and at a time of blessing and success and when our fortunes are ascendant⁸⁴⁶, today *Rosh Hodesh Iyar* in the year “may they rest forever upon it¹⁸⁴” from the creation, the holy endeavor was established here in Zefat, (acrostic) “may it be built and established speedily in our generation”, which the elevated and prominent lord, a man of action, of multiple good deeds, wise and refined, His Honor, Rabbi Abraham Aboab (acrostic) “may his light shine forth”, researched, and founded, and planned for [the merit of] the eternal repose of his brother, elderly and exalted, the lord, wise and refined, His Honor, Rabbi Jacob Aboab, (acrostic) “may he rest in Eden”, to make the Torah flourish and strong⁸⁴⁷, and to multiply and aggregate good deeds for the sake of the Torah. May G-d

lengthen his days and the days of his sons, and may the soul of the departed, his brother, rest in Eden, G-d’s paradise⁸⁴⁸, and may his soul enjoy succor¹⁸⁷, (acrostic) “so shall it be His will”.

Firstly, we offered a prayer for this place and those who maintain it, after our prayer and pleading to our G-d on the fast day, the eve of *Rosh Hodesh*, as is our custom⁸⁴⁹. Likewise, today⁸⁵⁰, at the inception of our activities, prior to our studies, we raised our eyes to Hashem, our G-d and we said:

Master of the Universe, G-d of all gods, and Master of all masters who has chosen us from all the nations and has given us a Torah of truth and has implanted in us everlasting life¹⁹⁰, Yours is righteousness and to us shame⁸⁵¹ for we have sinned before You and removed the yoke of the Torah and *mizvot*, and therefore

⁸⁴⁶ On *Rosh Hodesh* the new moon is rising, and that is considered an auspicious time for Jews.

¹⁸⁴ Ps. 37:29 The numerical value of this phrase is 392.

⁸⁴⁷ Is. 42:21

⁸⁴⁸ Ez. 28:13

¹⁸⁷ Is. 55:2

⁸⁴⁹ The custom to offer extra prayers and fast on the eve of the New Moon.

⁸⁵⁰ The following day, *Rosh Hodesh Iyar* the first formal day of study at the new *Beit Midrash* ¹⁹⁰
From the blessing recited prior to Torah study

⁸⁵¹ Dan. 9:7-8

all the curses have befallen us and they have pursued us and have overtaken us⁸⁵² and great misfortunes have enveloped us⁸⁵³ for having relinquished the work of Your Torah and the ways of Your laws. And we have served our enemies⁸⁵⁴ and they have placed their yoke upon us⁸⁵⁵. Slaves have ruled over us and there is no one to redeem us from their hand⁸⁵⁶ for we have removed Your yoke from ourselves. As it is written in Your Torah: Since you have not served Hashem Your G-d with joy and a glad heart amidst plenty. And You shall serve your enemies which G-d will send against You in hunger, thirst and nakedness and wanting of all, and he shall place a yoke of iron upon your neck⁸⁵⁷. Nevertheless, You have not forsaken us, Hashem our G-d and have left us a relic [that is] in engaging in Your Torah and a foothold in Your holy place to enlighten our eyes, G-d, and give us some sustenance in our labor⁸⁵⁸, as

You have promised us in Your Torah, for it shall never be forgotten from his progeny⁸⁵⁹ and in Your great mercy You have provided us redeemers (benefactors), generous and wealthy, to return us to Your Torah. For You have placed it in their hearts to set aside from their money a donation to establish yeshivot and to maintain students. And as our transgressions have multiplied, to the same extent have the waters of soothing rain of their donations decreased, and their hearts were weakened [which reduced their] donating to Zedaka. And it is our sins which have withheld the goodness from us, and justice has receded and righteousness stands afar and truth has stumbled in the street and has become absent.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵² Deut. 28:45

⁸⁵³ From the *Viduy* beginning *Ashamnu mi-kol am* attributed to Rav Amram Gaon.

⁸⁵⁴ Deut. 28:48

⁸⁵⁵ See footnote 193

⁸⁵⁶ Lam 5:8

⁸⁵⁷ Deut. 28:47-48

⁸⁵⁸ Ezra 9:8

⁸⁵⁹ Deut. 31:21

⁸⁶⁰ Is. 59:14

And now, for a moment G-d has granted us grace,⁸⁶¹ to place in the heart of a generous and wealthy man to sustain the fortress of Your Torah and he has worn righteousness like a coat of mail and a helmet of salvation upon his head, and he has worn like a coat zeal⁸⁶² for Your Torah which has been forsaken and forgotten. With all his heart he did prepare to seek G-d⁸⁶³ with all his efforts and to be fortunate and make others fortunate in this matter and he has begun the *mizvah* to sustain us in this place in the study of Your Torah.

There we have come before You in full repentance, with a unified heart, in love, brotherhood, peace and friendship, and we have convened together to serve You as one and to toil in Your Torah for its own sake and for our sake and for the sake of the beneficent donor who has awakened his spirit to sustain us [to ensure] the tranquility of the soul of his brother and for the sake of all Israel.

Please G-d, All powerful, great, mighty and awe-inspiring, may it be Your will to accept our repentance and let our toil be considered as if we had brought incense before Your holy throne. And let our toil in Your Torah be considered and accepted for our merit and that of all those who assisted and supported us and all of Israel for a pleasant fragrance before Your holy throne, and may Your *Shehina* return to repose

in Your holy mountain. May Your right hand be a salvation and answer us⁸⁶⁴. Please G-d save us, please G-d grant us success⁸⁶⁵ and place in our hearts wisdom, to understand and to fathom, to hear, to study and to teach, to observe, to execute and to preserve all the words of the study of Your Torah with love. Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, make our hearts cleave to Your *mizvot*, and unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name. We shall not be embarrassed and not humiliated⁸⁶⁶, and not stumble in matters of halacha

⁸⁶¹ Ezra 9:8

⁸⁶² Is. 59:17

⁸⁶³ Chr.II 30:19

⁸⁶⁴ Ps. 108:7

⁸⁶⁵ Ps. 118:25

⁸⁶⁶ From the blessing prior to the recitation of the *Shma* in the morning.

– to say regarding that which is impure, pure, and regarding that which is pure, impure⁸⁶⁷, regarding that which is permitted, prohibited, and regarding that which is permitted, prohibited, regarding that which is acceptable, unacceptable, and regarding that which is unacceptable, acceptable, regarding he who is culpable, exonerated, and regarding one who is exonerated, culpable. May there be no mishap due to us, and purify our hearts to serve You with loyalty. Open our hearts in Your Torah and Your love and Your awe to do Your will and to serve You with a complete heart and we shall observe Your laws and *mizvot* in this world and we shall merit and live and inherit goodness and blessing in the world to come²⁰⁸ – we and all those who assist us and support us. Hashem, our G-d please make the words of Your Torah sweet in our mouths and in the mouths of Your nation Israel, and we and our progeny and descendants shall be knowledgeable of Your Name and study Your Torah for its own sake. Blessed are You, Hashem, who teaches Torah to His nation Israel.²⁰⁹

Please G-d, let Your ears be attentive to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name and please grant success to Your servant who has awakened himself to support this *mizvah* and He shall find mercy before You, and grant him merit to aggrandize Torah and fortify it, as is the desire of his good heart. Help us G-d our Savior for the sake of the honor of Your Name and save us and atone for our sins for Your sake.

We instituted this prayer, based upon the prayer of the aforementioned lord who prayed to G-d prior to organizing and promulgating, in his letter, the order of the sacred work which he has sent to us. Following that we studied on halakha of tractate *Kiddushin* and we commenced [to study] in an auspicious time, from the beginning of the tractate. And we discussed it intensely according to G-d's grace which He has shown us, all the fellows together, with the students. Following that we recited a prayer for the souls of

⁸⁶⁷ A Talmudic prayer prior to entering a *Beit ha-Midrash* TB Berakhot 28b

²⁰⁸ From the conclusionary prayer of *Shaharit* ²⁰⁹ The blessing prior to studying Torah.

the departed whom those who support this *mizvah* [do so] for their merit in their repose, and especially the elder, the distinguished man the Honorable Jacob Aboab, may he rest in Eden. And following that [we offered] a prayer of blessing for the wise lord, the Honorable Rabbi Abraham Aboab, may G-d keep and sustain him, and for his sons, may G-d keep and sustain them. Following that [we recited] *Kaddish* “*Al Yisrael*”.⁸⁶⁸ Following that we studied one chapter of Mishna with the commentary and [we recited] the *Kaddish*. Following that, each one [teacher] retreated to his room with his students, and they discussed before him one halakha of Kiddushin, and they recited it before their teacher. And the teacher tarried there with his students to sharpen their minds, each one according to his abilities. Following that, they studied intensely one halakha from Tractate *Shabbat*, with *Tosafot*, and they recited it before their teacher. And in the 22nd hour⁸⁶⁹ we studied together a bit of the *Sefer Reishit Hokhma*⁸⁷⁰, so the students will hear and learn to fear Hashem, their G-d,⁸⁷¹ for the beginning of knowledge is the fear of G-d²¹⁴. Following that we recited a prayer for the deceased, and a prayer [for those supporting the yeshiva] and *Kaddish Al Yisrael*, as we did in the morning. Following that we studied discursively⁸⁷², being the halakha of *Shabbat*, *kaddish Al Yisrael*, the *Minḥa* service, and immediately thereafter came the time for the *Arbit*

prayer. And the students chanted several psalms and prayed *Arbit*. Following that [they studied] some *aggada*⁸⁷³ from *Ein Ya'akov*²¹⁷, and *Kaddish*, and they departed to their homes in peace.

⁸⁶⁸ *Kaddish* with an extra paragraph inserted, praying for Torah scholars and their students, generally recited after the study of Torah.

⁸⁶⁹ Shortly before sunset

⁸⁷⁰ A book of mussar (ethics and guidance) by Eliyahu de Vidas I the 15th century.

⁸⁷¹ Deut. 31:12

²¹⁴ Ps. 111:10

⁸⁷² Traditionally there were two didactic approaches to the study of Talmud, discursive and intense. The former was designed to give the students broad knowledge, and the latter to hone the students' minds, to enable them to use logic properly and to probe deeply. TB (*Berakhot* 64a) associates Rabba with the former approach and Rav Yosef with the latter.

⁸⁷³ Besides setting forth the principles and minutiae of *Halakha*, the Talmud also contains substantial sections relating to non-halakhic matters, including ethics, legends, and medicinal advice, called *aggada*.²¹⁷ A compilation of all the *aggadot* in the Babylonian Talmud.

And the scholar who sits with the students all day is constantly with them, each one (scholar) in his room, and he does not bestir himself from them all day, even for eating, for a servant brings each one his meal at noontime.

This is the perennial order for the service of Hashem our G-d,⁸⁷⁴ so shall it be always, shining with increasing light, like the moon existing forever⁸⁷⁵, and like the moon with increasing intensity⁸⁷⁶. May Gd assist us regarding His Holy Name and may His desire be successful in our hands, so shall it be His will.

And regarding all this we establish this covenant and write ten regulations to strengthen our service of Hashem our G-d, to sustain it and support it. Some of them were promulgated by the elder, distinguished, he is the head, the lord, His Honor Rabbi Abraham as aforementioned, may G-d keep him and sustain him, and some we added on our own, as an addition to his basic regulations, with unanimous agreement, [This covenant has] all the authority of such agreements, [is] prevailing and in effect with all their conditions and rules. They are ten holy [regulations] as follows:

- A. That we shall all be together in love and brotherhood and unified heart with each other. And if, as a result of some dispute or other cause there shall be ill feeling, Heaven forbid, let not the night pass until they confront each other and appease each other.

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- B. That the order of the honors accorded the rabbis [teachers] be according to age, and not according to wisdom, whether in [the order of] their seating, or [in the order of] their walking, or [in the order of] their signatures.

⁸⁷⁴ TB *Tamid* 33b

⁸⁷⁵ Ps. 89:38

⁸⁷⁶ Job 31:26

- C. That no unmarried person be called up to the Torah with the honorific “*Hakham*” until he is suited for that and this shall be in accordance with the judgment of the rabbis of the Yeshiva.
- D. That the appellation “*shalem*” (complete) shall not be mentioned, despite the fact that he is worthy of [that appellation] according to the general custom. He shall not be called up to the Torah in our *Beit Midrash* using that appellation, for the Name is not complete and His throne is not complete,⁸⁷⁷ and how can the name of a scholar be complete?
- E. No talking even regarding matters of sanctity during the prayers *Shaharit*, *Minḥa*, and *Arbit* until *Aleinu le-Shabei’aḥ*.⁸⁷⁸
- F. No talking regarding mundane matters from the time we begin the aforementioned order [of study] together until [the recitation of] *Kaddish Al Yisra’el*
- G. That the eyes of the rabbi shall rove about the students during the times of prayer and when they are sitting, so that they do not converse with each other, and certainly during the rest of the day.
- H. That the *beit midrash* not be devoid of the study of Torah at any time even during the *Mishmara*⁸⁷⁹. Rather, one rabbi shall remain with his students. And on the eve of the Sabbath, when all need to leave to prepare for Shabbat, it shall be closed, and the key shall be in the hands of one of the rabbis, such that the place shall be maintained holy, from any evil matter.
- I. All that which transpires in this *Beit Midrash*, whether regarding the study or whether regarding the conduct of the *Beit Midrash* in all its requirements, shall [be done] according to the rabbis who are listed in it, and according to the opinions of the majority of them.

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- J. With the help of G-d, at the end of each year, the rabbis who are listed shall test the students to ascertain who was successful who was not successful, such that any student who has not

⁸⁷⁷ Pesikta de Rav Kahana 3:17 (referring to G-d being anthropomorphically incomplete until all of the nation of *amalek* is eradicated).

⁸⁷⁸ The concluding prayer

⁸⁷⁹ The custom was that everyone went to Miron on the eve of Rosh Ḥodesh.

succeeded, Heaven forbid, whether in the intense studies or whether in the fear of G-d, be removed from the *Beit midrash* until he sits for six months, and his heart becomes humble and he returns on his own, and he accepts upon himself to study assiduously and to toil in the intensive study with great alacrity, and [to ensure] that the fear of G-d shall be upon him, and then he will return to study with his rabbi, with the consent of the aforementioned rabbis. Similarly, the students who succeeded in the intensive study and in the desire to learn and in humility and fear of G-d, they shall increase his stipend as they see fit.

The books which have been purchased for the *Beit Midrash* shall be place for safekeeping in a room among the holy rooms, locked with a key, and the key shall be in the hands of one of the rabbis. And each year, another overseer shall be appointed for this matter. And the overseer who is departing [from that office] shall give the accounting of the books which were given to him for safekeeping to the overseer who is entering [it]. No rabbi shall be permitted to remove any book from the door of the *Beit Midrash*.

Appendix 6 Economic Data for Safed area in the Middle of the 17th Century

Metin Cosgel⁸⁸⁰ explored economic data for the Ottoman Empire and posited assumptions for macroeconomic parameters during the 17th century. Using his findings, Matthew Curtis and Peter H. Lindert⁸⁸¹ produced their Global Prices and Income Database. They found that the estimated subsistence minimum for the region of the Ottoman Empire which included Safed and Jerusalem during the middle of the 17th century was 52.2 akcha²²⁶ per capita. This would buy between 172 and 200 kg of wheat per person per year with some left over for other basic needs. The poverty level income for that period and

⁸⁸⁰ Metin Cosgel, "Taxes, Efficiency, and Redistribution: Discriminatory Taxation of Villages in Ottoman Palestine, Southern Syria, and Transjordan in the Sixteenth Century," *Explorations in Economic History* 43, no. 2 (April 2006): 332–56.

⁸⁸¹ <https://gpih.ucdavis.edu/Datafilelist.htm>

²²⁶ The Ottoman currency at that time.

geographic area was 159.64 akcha. To relate that to 21st century terms, they used the US Dollar Purchase Power Parity model which imputes the buying power for a weighted basket of goods and services. The subsistence amount compares to the purchasing power of \$300, or less than \$1 per day per person.

During the 17th Century, the akcha was steadily debased. According to Paolo Malanima,⁸⁸² at the beginning of the century the silver weight of the akcha was 0.29g, and at its end it was 0.13g. Assuming the debasement was linear, the silver weight of the akcha in the middle of the 17th century was 0.21g. For comparison, from 1497 to 1686⁸⁸³ the Spanish Real which was considered the standard for international commerce, contained 3.1952g of pure silver⁸⁸⁴. Thus 1 real was worth some 15.2153 akcha. (Each Real

was 10 soldi.) Thus the 153 real sent by R. Samuel Aboab to Jerusalem was worth some 2,327.9424 akcha, and could support a subsistence level living for approximately 45 people for a year.

For comparison of the standard of living of this area of the Ottoman Empire to that of Portugal and Spain at that time, an unskilled laborer in Portugal earned 200 Portuguese Real/day or 10 grams of silver. His Spanish counterpart 3 Spanish Real or 9.6 grams of silver. The *mean* annual income in this area of the Ottoman Empire was 839 akcha per person, or 2.8 akcha per day given a 300 day year of labor.⁸⁸⁵ The table below sets out the difference in daily incomes between the Palestinian and Syrian areas of the Ottoman Empire and Spain and Portugal.

	Currency unit	Daily income	g silver/unit	Daily income in g silver.
Ottoman avg. Income	Akcha	2.8	.21	0.588
Portugal Unskilled Labor	Portuguese Real	200	.05	10

⁸⁸² Matthew Curtis and Peter H. Lindert, *Pre-Modern European Economy: One Thousand Years, 10th to 19th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 198.

⁸⁸³ Except for a brief period in 1642-1643 when the real was debased.

⁸⁸⁴ Akira Motomura, "The Best and Worst of Currencies: Seigniorage and Currency Policy in Spain, 1597–1650," *The Journal of Economic History* 54, no. 1 (March 1994): 106. and table 1. There were 67 Spanish Real in a marc (230.0465g) and the real was 93.06% pure silver.

⁸⁸⁵ Motomura, "The Best and Worst of Currencies," 106 and n. 7.

Castille laborer average	Spanish Real	3	3.1952	9.5856
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