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Salomone Rossi, Jewish Musician in Renaissance Italy*

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The title calls for explanation. Clearly, it places Salomone Rossi¹ in the center of the discussion. Yet by having the qualifying phrase “Jewish musician,” it turns Rossi into a “species” of musician: he emerges as a prototype for a number of persons of his kind, namely, Jewish musicians functioning in a larger non-Jewish environment, in this case Renaissance society. For the prototype to work though, two questions must be answered: was Rossi regarded by others, and did he regard himself, for that matter, as a Jewish musician? and did his Jewish identity have any bearing on his activities? Without going into further detail at this stage, the answer to both questions is affirmative. The world about reminded Rossi, as it did all other Jews in sixteenth-seventeenth-century Italy, that he was a Jew.² His name appears, in the few documents linking him to the Mantuan court, as “Salomone Rossi hebreo.”³ So it appears, moreover, on the title pages of his collections.⁴ (The word *hebreo*, in Italian, refers to “Jewish” in the double sense of a religious and a cultural or ethnic affiliation.) Rossi was expected to wear a yellow badge, though due to his distinctions as a musician was exempted from doing so.⁵ As to whether his Jewishness had any effect on his activities, it might be mentioned that Rossi

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¹ 1570(?) – 1628–30(?). The major studies on Rossi’s life and works are E. BIRNBAUM, *Jüdische Musiker am Hofe von Mantua von 1542–1628* (Vienna 1893 [rev. and tr. into Ital. 1967, into Hebr. 1975]), esp. p. 16–35; J. NEWMAN, *The Madrigals of Salomon de’ Rossi* (Ph. D. diss., New York, Columbia Univ. 1962); I. ADLER, *The Rise of Art Music in the Italian Ghetto*, in: *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), esp. p. 340–47; F. PIPERNO, *I quattro libri di musica strumentale di Salomone Rossi*, in: *Nuova RMI* 13 (1979), p. 337–57; and D. HARRÁN, *Rossi as a Composer of Theater Music*, in: *Studi Musicali* (forthcoming). For other items, see the bibliographies at the end of Newman’s dissertation and of his and F. RIKKO’s *Thematic Index to the Works of Salomon Rossi* (Hackensack, New Jersey, 1972).

² For writings treating the status of Jews in 16th–17th-century Italy, see, among others, S. WITTMAYER BARON, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York 1952–83, 18 vols.), esp. Vols. IX–XIV; D. CARPI, *Hayehudim bepadova bitkufat harenesans* (“The Jews in Padua in the Period of the Renaissance”; Ph. D. diss., Hebrew Univ. 1967); U. CASSUTO, *Hayehudim befirenze bitkufat harenesans* (“The Jews in Florence in the Period of the Renaissance”; Jerusalem 1967); D. JACOBY, *Les Juifs à Venise du XIV^e au milieu du XVI^e siècle*, in: *Venezia centro di mediazione tra oriente et occidente, secoli XV–XVI* (Florence 1977, 2 vols.), I, p. 163–216; A. MILANO, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia* (Turin 1963), esp. p. 212–337, 459–551; C. ROTH, *A History of the Jews in Italy* (Philadelphia 1946), esp. Chap. V; IDEM, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia 1959), esp. Chaps. I–III; M. A. SHULVASS, *Chayei hayehudim beitalyah bitkufat harenesans* (“Jewish Life in Italy in the Period of the Renaissance”; New York 1955); S. SIMONSOHN, *Toledot hayehudim bedukasut mantova* (“The History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua”; Tel-Aviv 1962/64, 2 vols. [Engl. tr., Jerusalem 1977, 1 vol.]), esp. Chap. II; IDEM, *The Jews in the Duchy of Milan* (Jerusalem 1982–86, 4 vols.), esp. Vols. II–III.

³ Two inscriptions on salary rolls for the period 1587–92 (one of them placing Rossi and his sister under the “[Musici] Extraordinarij”: cf. I. FENLON, *Music and Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Mantua* [Cambridge 1980–82, 2 vols.], I, p. 193–95) and a third as a “sonatore ducale di viola” for 1622 (cf. A. BERLOTTI, *Musici alla corte dei Gonzaga in Mantova dal secolo XV al XVIII* [Milan 1890; repr. 1978], p. 68).

⁴ Except for his collection of Hebrew songs. In Rossi’s first two publications, the designation *hebreo* may also be found in the signature to his dedications.

⁵ For the documents concerning his exemption, see, among others, BIRNBAUM, *Jüdische Musiker*, p. 22–23.

belonged to the Jewish theater, participating, as instrumentalist and composer, in its productions;⁶ he appears to have had his own company of Jewish musicians;⁷ he prepared a collection of Hebrew works entitled "The Songs of Solomon" (*Hashirim asher lishlomo*), a collection as unique in its own time as it is today.⁸

There remains the question of "Jewish musician in Renaissance Italy." The formulation is problematic: it implies a contrast between Jews and Renaissance society, or between a small religious or ethnic group and an alien majority. One wonders how the two factors work themselves out: is the Jewish composer at odds with Renaissance society? is he obliged to fit into it, or does he willingly accommodate himself to its regulations? Another question is why "Renaissance"? Is the later sixteenth-century, early seventeenth-century Mantuan society to which Rossi belonged a "Renaissance" society? and if it is, then what are its characteristics and how do they relate to the interests and intentions of Salomone Rossi?

These and other queries implied by the title form the backdrop for the discussion, meant to draw a portrait of Rossi as a figure operating under the constraints of being a Jew within a non-Jewish culture. Such a portrait is not new: its basic lines already appeared in a number of writings, starting from Eduard Birnbaum's survey of Jewish musicians at the Mantuan court and continuing with studies by Samuel Naumbourg, Paul Nettl, Cecil Roth, Joel Newman, Shlomo Simonsohn, Chaim Schirman, Alfred Sendrey, Israel Adler and others.⁹ Much has been said, and the question is what can be added? As the source for our own discussion, we have chosen a single set of materials, coming closest, perhaps, to revealing the composer's purposes and motivations: his own writings, by which we mean the dedications Rossi prepared for his various collections. There the composer vents his doubts, his uncertainties, his inclinations, his aspirations. True, we are not the first to refer to these documents,¹⁰ but what we propose is a new reading, one based on our own perceptions, for whatever they are worth, of their content.¹¹ The order of presentation is as follows: (1) the dedications as a general source of information on the composer and his works; (2) the conclusions to be drawn from those dedications appearing in prints directed to Rossi's Christian patrons, namely, all but one of his thirteen

⁶ Cf. D. HARRÁN, *Salomone Rossi as a Composer of Theater Music*.

⁷ Discussed in the same study after the document from 1612 reported by F. I. PAPOTTI, *Annali o memorie storiche della Mirandola, I: 1500–1673*, in: *Memorie storiche della città e dell'antico ducato della Mirandola 3* (1876), p. 99.

⁸ Available in two editions, the older one by S. NAUMBOURG (*Cantiques de Salomon Rossi hebreo*; Paris 1877 [repr. New York 1954]), the more recent one by F. RIKKO (New York 1967–73, 3 vols.).

⁹ Cf. n. 1 above for the studies of BIRNBAUM, NEWMAN and ADLER; for those of the others, see S. NAUMBOURG, *Essai sur la vie et les oeuvres de Salomon Rossi*, in his edition of the *Cantiques*, 3–20; P. NETTL, *Some Early Jewish Musicians*, in: *MQ 17* (1931), p. 40–46; C. ROTH, *The Jews in the Renaissance*, p. 271–304; S. SIMONSOHN, *Toledot hayehudim bedukasut mantova*, II, p. 478–88; C. SCHIRMANN, *Hateatron vehamusika bishchunat hayehudim beitalyah* ("Theater and Music in Jewish Communities in Italy"), in: *Zion 29* (1964), p. 61–111; A. SENDREY, *Jewish Musicians in the Italian Renaissance*, [Chap.] 15 of *The Music of the Jews in the Diaspora up to 1800* (New York 1970), p. 248–305.

¹⁰ They have been mentioned, in one connection or another, by almost all other writers on Rossi, though never reviewed as a whole in a single survey.

¹¹ The writer is preparing a critical edition of Rossi's Collected Works (to be published by the American Institute of Musicology); in this connection, he thanks the Israel National Academy of Sciences for continued support, over the past several years, toward its realization.

collections; (3) the conclusions to be drawn from the extensive introductory matter to Rossi's one Hebrew collection, directed to a Jewish patron – from the remarks of the composer and his seeming *spiritus mentor* Rabbi Leone da Modena we shall trace the origins of this unprecedented collection. To close, we will consider the notion of Rossi as a so-called Renaissance musician.

I

The dedications as a general source of information: how can they best be approached? Writing on "*Art Music in the Italian Ghetto*," Israel Adler conceded that "*in spite of the many important studies devoted to Rossi, very little is known about his life.*"¹² A few scraps of information may be assembled from various documents, to which we already referred:¹³ three references to salary payments for services tendered to the Mantuan court; letters of two successive dukes releasing Rossi from the obligation to display a yellow badge; three references to his participation in the Mantuan Jewish theater; the mention, in a letter written by Alessandro Pico, Prince of Mirandola, of Rossi and "*his concerto*," i. e., a group of musicians under his leadership. Taken together, these details amount to so little as to reinforce the point just made, namely that practically nothing is known about Rossi's life. Yet we contend that from the dedications to his collections much more can be learned about Rossi than has been noted to date. The phrase "*much more*" does not refer to factual evidence. Rather it refers to evidence of a more general character, reflecting certain tendencies in the thinking and behavior of the composer. In order to evaluate this evidence, however, it is well to keep the following points in mind:

(1) Nowhere does Rossi state the hard facts of his biography, such as how many years he served one or another person, when his duties commenced, when they terminated, what happened in the course of his service, when and where his works were performed, and so on. By a word here or an innuendo there, he leads us, instead, to assume the existence of certain conditions of circumstances relevant to his activities. Whether they did, in fact, exist remains to be determined.

(2) Rossi's thoughts are often obscured by his flowery speech. To detect the "*real*" Rossi behind the façade of his formulations, one must remove their sycophantic veneer. As an example of style, here is the dedication to his collection of madrigals for four voices published in 1614. The dedicatee is Don Alfonso d'Este, Prince of Modena and of Reggio, whom Rossi addresses as his "*most serene lord and revered patron.*"¹⁴ Rossi frames his remarks in one corpulent sentence:¹⁵

¹² See there, p. 340n.

¹³ For the points mentioned here, see above, nn. 3, 5, 6, 7.

¹⁴ "*Al Sereniss[imo] Sig[nor] et Patron Mio Colendissimo Il Sig[nor] Don Alfonso d'Este Principe di Modona et di Reggio, etc.*"

¹⁵ "*L'Animo mio inclinatissimo a servir sempre V[ost]ra A[lt]ezza et l'infinita bontà, et grandezza di lei, m'hanno dato non solo ardire di dedicarle queste mie poche fatiche, ma mi fanno insieme sperar di doverle veder*

My mind most eager ever to serve Your Highness has combined with your infinite kindness and greatness not only to give me the courage to dedicate to you these few efforts of mine, but also, at the same time, to make me hope to be able to see them, by means of your most felicitous name, be consecrated to the immortality of your fame, from which I rest assured that you will not disdain granting me, in your benignity, the favor of letting me reveal to the world, as I shall meagerly demonstrate, the most ardent signs of my reverent devotion to Your Highness, whom I, in all humility, beseech, with my deepest affection, to accept these trifling musical pieces of mine, assuring you that every wearisome undertaking must be the lightest load for me, inasmuch as I am stirred by an immense desire to serve Your Highness to whom I pay my humblest respects by entreating the Lord God, in His kindness, to rain all favors upon you and your most serene household.

One must differentiate, then, between what Rossi feels obliged to say as a matter of diplomatic protocol and what he hoped to gain from his flattering remarks, or between pose and purpose. Rossi's style conforms to the conventions of laudatory rhetoric as taught, from the Middle Ages on, by the practitioners of the *ars dictaminis*. Actually, the style is of lesser interest than the ulterior motives of the author in turning to one or another figure as a dedicatee.

(3) Rossi is inclined to exaggerate to impress his remarks on the reader. Whatever he says, then, should be treated with a certain amount of skepticism. In exaggerating, Rossi, again, abides by the rhetorical practices of his time: in order to awaken a suitable reaction from the dedicatee, one must, on the one hand, address him in language that glorifies his person and makes him well disposed to you and, on the other, describe oneself in language that induces pity, understanding, consideration. Thus, once more, if we are to fathom Rossi's intentions, we must whittle down his puffed-up remarks to a more reasonable degree of credibility.

II

What do the dedications tell us about Rossi? To start with, they reveal his so-called patrons – this duke, that duchess, this count, that prince, and so on. Taken together, these worthies form a “Who’s Who” of Mantuan aristocracy. Much has been said about them, in connection with Rossi, in others’ writings.¹⁶ What has not been said, however, is that beyond Rossi’s mention of them as his “patrons,” we may glean a certain amount of information on the nature of his relations with them. We learn, in fact, what Rossi actually means when he addressed so-and-so as a “patron.” We learn why Rossi turned to his patrons, what he expected to gain from them, what they actually granted him in fulfillment of his requests. Let us discuss these various points in turn.

col mezzo del suo felicissimo nome, consecrate all'immortalità della fama, vivendo sicuro, ch'ella non sdegherà, ch'io riceva questa gratia dalla sua benignità, di palesar al Mondo con picciole dimostrazioni segni ardentissimi dell'osservante divotion mia verso l'A[ltezza] V[ostra] la quale con ogni humiltà supplico a gradire queste mie lievi note, col vivaciss[imo] affetto mio, sicura ch'ogni faticosa impresa debba essermi leggerissimo peso, rispetto all'immenso desiderio, che ho di servir a V[ostra] A[ltezza] a cui fo humilissima riverenza, con pregar il Sig[nor] Iddio che benigno sopra di lei, et della Sereniss[ima] sua Casa piova tutte le gratie."

¹⁶ Cf. ROTH, *The Jews in the Renaissance*, p. 288, 291; SENDREY, *The Music of the Jews in the Diaspora*, p. 269; etc.

Rossi's dedicatees include six members of the Gonzaga family, which, in its various branches, ruled over the duchy of Mantua, with its adjoining territories, ever since the early fifteenth century.¹⁷ Except for one of them, though, the actual duke (Vincenzo I), they seem to have been small fish in a large pond: they did not command the political power or the financial means to give Rossi what he was seeking. And what was that? Employment, support, recognition. As to his other dedicatees, Paolo Andreasi (Count of Rhodes), Federico Rossi (Count of San Secondo), Alessandro Pico (Prince of Mirandola), they were minor figures, running limited artistic establishments, hence hardly in a capacity to offer Rossi any more, if at all, than temporary employment, or a single commission, or a small reward for his efforts. One point that emerges rather sharply from a reading of Rossi's dedications is that the composer constantly strove to improve his standing in Mantuan society. As a Jew, he had little chance of receiving the favors or occupying the positions accorded to contemporary Christian musicians. And this despite the enlightened attitude of the Mantuan rulers, who seem to have recognized, here and there, the special achievements of Jews as teachers, doctors, actors, dancers, and so on.¹⁸ True, the Mantuan rulers were sufficiently impressed with Rossi as a musician to release him from wearing the yellow badge that was compulsory for all Jews resident in the duchy.¹⁹ But the fact of the matter is that not once did Rossi receive a regular appointment. The competition was too strong: Monteverdi came to the Mantuan court in 1592 and was named, in 1601, as *maestro di cappella*. His predecessors in this post were Giaches de Wert and Benedetto Pallavicino. Wert reigned supreme, moreover, as *maestro di cappella* in the ducal church of Santa Barbara, a post for which Rossi obviously could not, and would not, be candidate. So where does Rossi fit in? He seems to have been engaged *ad hoc* as a violinist or as a composer of vocal or instrumental music for one or another court event. He was paid by the court for services rendered on an individual basis, and not as a full-fledged member of the princely chapel.

Two reasons may be cited for Rossi's difficulties: one of them his being a Jew, the other his wishing to succeed in a non-Jewish environment. His Jewish origins combined with the antagonism he awakened by moving outside his own circle might explain why Rossi became an object of abuse and libel. On at least four different occasions, Rossi turned to his patrons not only to grant him their favors, but also to protect him from malevolent gossipers. Strangely enough, these references to his

¹⁷ Vincenzo Gonzaga I, Felicita Guerrera Gonzaga, Francesco Lodovico Gonzaga, Paolo Emilio Gonzaga, Don Ferrante Gonzaga, Vincenzo Gonzaga II. Their biographies may be reconstructed from P. LITTA, *Famiglie celebri italiane* (Milan 1816–96, 15 vols.), esp. Vol. IV. See also S. BRINTON, *The Gonzaga, Lords of Mantua* (London 1927); M. BELLONCI, *I segreti dei Gonzaga* (Milan 1947); *Mantova: la storia* (Mantua 1958–63, 3 vols.), esp. Vol. II; G. CONIGLIO, *I Gonzaga* (Milan 1967); *Mantua e i Gonzaga nella civiltà del Rinascimento* (Mantua 1977); etc.

¹⁸ See, for example, SIMONSOHN, *Toledot hayehudim bedukasut mantova*, Chap. 7 on "Literature, science, art" among Jews in Mantua during the Renaissance (with particular reference to music and dance on p. 488–94).

¹⁹ Vincenzo I introduced his exemption warrant with the words "*Volendo noi mostrare quanto ci sia cara la servitù che con la virtù sua di musico et del sonare ci va facendo da molti anni in qua Salomone Rossi hebreo . . .*" (see above, n. 5).

being villified have escaped the attention of the scholars. Yet they add an essential new element to his biography.

Rossi minced no words. He asked Don Ferrante Gonzaga to accept a collection of *sinfonie* (Book III) “in order to defend it [= Rossi’s show of affection] from whatever slanderous and deprecating tongues may wag.”²⁰ He asked Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga to accept his first book of five-voice madrigals “so that with [the Duke’s] felicitous name [added to the book, a name] safe from the hands of detractors, [the Duke] might give breath and life to these madrigals of [his], which, without such a great support, would either soon fall into oblivion or, among the hands of these same persons, be torn and wasted as if by raging dogs.”²¹ Felicità Guerrera Gonzaga, a minor member of the Gonzaga family, is entreated to “protect and defend” his second book of five-voice madrigals, for, according to Rossi, “no slanderer or detractor would ever dare to censure something that is protected and favored by a Lady of such great distinction.”²² In his fourth book of five-voice madrigals the composer appealed to Federico Rossi, Count of San Secondo, to bestow his name on the collection in order for it to serve as “an impenetrable shield capable of resisting the fierce darts of malevolent detractors” and of preventing the collection “from being torn to shreds by rabid teeth.”²³

As already mentioned, Rossi was determined to make a name for himself in a non-Jewish world. From his writings it is clear that Rossi tried, time and again, to secure regular employment, and except, perhaps, for occasional commissions, did not succeed. His situation seems to have been so hopeless, in fact, that he grabbed at every opportunity to win a new patron. How did Rossi choose his dedicatees? His first consideration was to remember some positive aspect of his relationship with one or another worthy; his second one was to capitalize on a previous favor, thinking that by expressing his appreciation to the person who granted it other favors would be forthcoming. The extent of these so-called favors appears to have been no more, at times, than a friendly glance, a word of commendation or the mere physical presence of the would-be patron at a performance of his music. Thus Rossi thanks Paolo Guglielmo Andreasi, Count of Rhodes, for his benevolence. “May Your Eminent Lordship accept these works [Book I of *sinfonie*] with the same affection you showed, at other times, by not despising them.”²⁴ Here affection means only that

²⁰ “...ho preso ardir di fregiarle [the le referring to his compositions] in fronte del Illustrissimo, et Eccellentissimo nome suo si per mostrargli in parte l’ineffabil affettion mia ... ma ch’anzi ... che la difenderà da qual si voglia maledica, e detratrice lingua” (1613).

²¹ “Ed’ecco che come tale [i. e., as a benefactor] io ne la supplico, azzio co’l suo felice nome possa sicuro dalle mani de detrattoni dar spirito, e vita a questi miei Madrigali, i quali senza un tanto appoggio, ovvero traboccarebbono tosto nell’oblio, o fra le mani di questi tali, come da cani arrabbiati sariano lacerati, e guasti” (1600).

²² “... questi miei Madrigali ... escon dunque fuori, e per lei son fatti, ella gli riceva, a lei son dedicati, ella gli protega, e difenda, com’ella deve fare di tutte le cose sue più care, ben ch’io mi creda che niuno già mai calunniatore o detrattore, ardisca di biasmar cosa che sia da Dama di tanto valore protetta e favorita ...” (1602).

²³ “Questo Libro de Madrigali, ch’è il quarto da me mandato alle stampe, viene in luce honorato del nome di V[ostra] S[ignoria] Illustriss[ima] non già per far di quello un’impenetrabile scudo da poter resistere a i fieri dardi de malevoli detrattoni, giovandomi di credere, ch’egli sia tale, che non possa essere da rabbioso dente lacerato ...” (1610).

²⁴ “... dedico a V[ostra] S[ignoria] Illustrissima queste mie compositioni musicali. ... Gradiscale V[ostra] S[ignoria] Illustrissima con quell’affetto, col quale altre volte, ha mostrato di non sprezzarle” (1607).

the Count condescended to listen to Rossi's works, on one or another occasion, without condemning them. The same may be said for other collections, such as the second book of *sinfonie*, dedicated to the Duke of Modena (in acknowledgment of "your usual kindness, with which I, at other times, have been favored beyond all my merits ... for you showed that you were pleased, in days gone by, with my compositions"),²⁵ or the third book of *sinfonie*, dedicated to Don Ferrante Gonzaga ("because, in days past, Your Excellency favored me, much to my pleasure, by listening to some of my compositions, and because it appeared to me at the time, so far as I could perceive, that you were somewhat satisfied with them ...").²⁶ At other times, the erstwhile favors bestowed on Rossi seem to have amounted to little more than having heard his music. Thus we learn, from the dedication of his third book of madrigals, that Don Alessandro Pico, Prince of Mirandola, "was so kind as to amuse himself, over the last few months, by hearing some of [Rossi's] rough madrigals."²⁷

Rossi's relations with Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga seem to have been more complex. In his first publication (*canzonette*, 1589), the composer thanks the Duke for his "kindness";²⁸ in his second one (Book I of madrigals *a 5*, 1600), he refers to him as his "natural lord," to whom he is "indebted for as much or as little as [he] know[s] and [is] able."²⁹ Yet what exactly Rossi means by these expressions of gratitude is not clear. In the latter publication, Rossi goes on to mention only that the Duke "has, until now, not disdained to hearken to, let alone indulge [Rossi's] many imperfections."³⁰ To all appearances, the Duke, then, was benevolent in his dealings with the composer, whom he encouraged by listening to and, perhaps, commissioning his works.

Whatever Rossi received from his patrons put him in their debt, or so at least the composer tells us ("Your Excellency bound me with such a bond of obligation ...," "your unusual kindness and infinite solicitude ... for which I find myself, for a long time, obliged to you ...," etc.).³¹ His bonds of obligation served him as a pretext for dedicating one or another collection to his "patrons." By doing so, he rendered thanks for favors received and, indirectly, though no less conspicuously, requested further assistance. Flattery, praise, gratitude: these were the means by which Rossi hoped to improve his situation, to win the good will and protection of his

²⁵ "Hora che l'istessa benignità sua (di cui mi trovo oltre ogni mio merito altre volte favorito) mi porge occasione di poter appagare questa mia inclinazione senza niun scrupolo per haver ella mostrato di compiacersi alli giorni passati delle mie compositioni ..." (1608).

²⁶ "Perche alli giorni passati fui (con molto mio gusto) gratiato dall'Eccellenza sua nel ascoltar alcune mie compositioni, e perche mi parve all'hora (per quanto potei comprendere) ch'ella ne restasse alquanto sodisfatta ..." (1613).

²⁷ "Con tanta benignità si compiacque l'Eccell[en]za V[ostra] di udire questi mesi passati alcuni miei rozi Madrigali ..." (1603).

²⁸ "La benignità di V[ostra] A[ltezza] S[erenissima] et l'obbligo infinito, ch'io le devo ..." (1589).

²⁹ "... si per esser lei mio Signor naturale, al quale io son tenuto di quel molto, o puoco ch'io so, et posso, come anco perche sotto la felice ombra della sua servitù ho imparato il tutto ..." (1600).

³⁰ "... all'A[ltezza] V[ostra] la quale non ha sdegnato sin qui di ascoltare, per non dir favorire, le tante mie imperfezzioni."

³¹ "... et in questa guisa V[ostra] E[ccellenza] mi legò con si fatto legame di obligatione ..." (Bk. III *a 5*, 1603); "... la singular bontà, et infinita amorevolezza di V[ostra] Sig[noria] Illustriss[ima] da me in diverse occasioni molto bene conosciuto, alla quale trovandomi di lunga mano obligato ..." (Bk. IV *a 5*, 1610).

benefactors, to secure their bounty. Only once did Rossi actually come out and ask for employment: in his first book of *sinfonie*, he urged Paolo Guglielmo Andreasi, Count of Rhodes, to keep in mind his declaration of being a “devoted servant” as reason enough for “employing [him] in [his] service.”³² Otherwise, the composer proceeded more discretely, hoping that the presentation of his collections together with their effusive dedications would be adequate to fulfill his wishes.

Before leaving Rossi’s secular collections, one more point should be made. Most of his dedicatees were addressed as “patrons.”³³ The question is: what is a “patron”? or better still, what does Rossi mean by “my patron” (*patron mio*)? It should be clear from the preceding that for Rossi the word patron refers not to those who regularly supported him and sponsored his works, as it ordinarily would, but rather to those who, at one time or another, showed him signs of their approbation. His sense of obligation to them, as we described it, was enough to turn them, for Rossi, into “patrons.” The composer reserved the appellation *patrono*, then, for those persons who, once having granted favors, were being solicited for further ones. Whether or not they acceded to his petition does not seem to have changed their status as patrons, which for Rossi means would-be benefactors.

III

Though one cannot be sure of Rossi’s Christian *patroni*, one can be of his Jewish ones. They were two: Moses Sullam, a man of means, of culture, a well-known figure within the Mantuan Jewish community;³⁴ and Rabbi Leone da Modena, one of the great spiritual leaders of Italian Jewry, in its more liberal strains – he combined, in his person, Jewish culture with secular Renaissance learning.³⁵ Sullam offered Rossi financial and moral support, Leone da Modena rabbinical protection. Both came to his aid in his battle with the religious authorities over the status of his Hebrew works as a vehicle of religious expression. Indeed, Rossi was as problematic a figure within the Jewish community as he was within the Christian one. He antagonized the orthodoxy by daring to introduce reforms into the customs of synagogue music. Instead of the traditional monophonic prayer melodies and formulas for intoning Scriptures, Rossi proposed a new practice based on polyphony, in which the voices were combined according to the laws of counterpoint

³² “... et a se stesso mi ricordi per quel divoto servitore che lo professo, che con tal memoria haverrà occasione d’impiegarmi in servizio suo ...” (1607).

³³ Except for Vincenzo Gonzaga II, addressed, on the title page of Bk. V a 5 (1622), as an “*Illustrissimo Signore*”; the expression “*patron mio*” might have appeared on the dedication page, which, in this particular collection, is lacking (Bk. V is extant in its basso continuo only). That Vincenzo II figured, however, among Rossi’s *patroni* is clear from Bk. IV of his *sinfonie*, where, on the title page, he is referred to as “*Illustrissimo, et Eccellentissimo Signor mio Signor, e Patron Colendissimo ...*” (1622). In Bk. I of the *sinfonie*, the dedication is directed “*All’Illustrissimo Sig[no]re Mio Sig[nor] Osservandissimo. Il Sig[nor] Paolo Guglielmo Andreasi ...*” (hence “*patron mio*” becomes “*signor mio*”).

³⁴ On the Sullam family, see index to S. SIMONSOHN, *Toledot hayehudim bedukasut mantova*, II, p. 663: it lists 22 members, among them Moshe ben Mordechai, Rossi’s benefactor (I, p. 31, 88, 93, etc.; II, p. 371, 485, etc.).

³⁵ On Modena, see, among other writings, H. E. ADELMAN, *Success and Failure in the Seventeenth-Century Ghetto of Venice: The Life and Thought of Leon Modena, 1571–1648* (Ph. D. diss., Brandeis Univ. 1985).

prevalent in Italian art music. In assuming what appeared, to the authorities, to be a militant stance toward his heritage, Rossi needed all the help he could get to clear himself of the suspicion of heresy. He found it in his two benefactors.

Rossi described Moses Sullam as "a man of valor, great in deeds, in whom Torah and greatness are met."³⁶ His connections with him seem to date back to his youth. In dedicating the "Songs of Solomon" to him, the composer spoke of being "bound by the cords of the kindness and goodness which [Sullam] and [his] noble parents (their rest be in Eden) have bestowed on [him]." Their favors were so many, in fact, as "would outnumber the sands [of the sea]." Sullam not only encouraged Rossi in his undertaking to produce new works for use in the synagogue, but he seems to have commissioned a number of them as well. "How many times," Rossi admits, "it was at your command that I labored until I found the proper form for the utterance of songful lips." It may be assumed that Sullam subsidized the publication of the Hebrew works, as he probably did the publication of Rossi's secular collections. In the controversy that surrounded the Hebrew works, Rossi could count on Sullam's protection ("you have spread the protection of your glory over me and over the work of my hands"). With Sullam rallying to his support, he had nothing to fear, "for when Moses raises his hand," and here Rossi plays on the name Moses as a reference to the prophet, "to receive it [i. e., the publication]³⁷ with affable countenance, then it will meet with praise in the gates and favor in the eyes of all who look upon it." Moses Sullam was a true patron, then, for beyond financial support, he built up Rossi's confidence, he protected him from his critics. No wonder, then, that Rossi dedicated to him his "Songs of Solomon." He recognized it as his "duty to honor those who have honored [him]." "I searched in my heart," he explains, "[to counsel me] to which noble person I should turn and upon whose altar I should place this thank-offering. Then I lifted my eyes and found that it would be good to give my token of friendship to you, oh honored and worthy man in Israel."

Let us take a closer look at the introductory material to Rossi's Hebrew collection, and by introductory material we mean not only Rossi's dedication to Sullam, but also a foreword by Leone da Modena; two poems written in Rossi's honor; and Modena's *responsum*, dating from 1605, on the legitimacy of introducing polyphony into the synagogue service. Their examination reveals three kinds of information: biographical data on Rossi; Rossi as a musician, as a composer; evidence concerning the origins and functions of the "Songs of Solomon."

Biographical data. For one thing, we learn that Rossi was connected with the Mantuan court. Our informant is Modena, who writes that Rossi "was chosen to serve the splendid and exalted Duke of Mantua [Ferdinando, 1612–26] as he did his

³⁶ All translations of texts from the introductory matter to the "Songs of Solomon" are quoted from Rikko's edition, Vol. III. Rossi's Dedication to Sullam occurs there on p. 7–9, to which the various quotations in this paragraph refer. For a critical reading of the Hebrew originals, see I. ADLER, ed., *Hebrew Writings Concerning Music . . . up to 1800* (Munich 1975), p. 212–21, 285–88.

³⁷ And, by analogy, the tablets that Moses received from the Lord as the basis of a new legal order (Exod. 34). See below for Rossi's claim that he was subject to divine inspiration in preparing his "Songs," which, in their way, were intended to inaugurate a new musical order.

predecessor [Vincenzo, 1587–1612].³⁸ There is nothing in this statement to indicate that Rossi was a regular member of the cappella. Rather, as noted before, Rossi seems to have been employed as a non-resident musician called in for special occasions. In one of the archival documents listing payments by the Mantuan court, Rossi is designated a “*musico straordinario*,” i. e., an “outside” musician.³⁹

Another interesting biographical detail concerns Rossi’s command of Hebrew. How much Hebrew did the composer know? What about the singers who performed his works – how much did they know? The questions relate to the level of proficiency in Hebrew within the Mantuan Jewish community. An answer to them seems to be included in a statement by Modena that “most of those involved in singing [the works] are well trained in reading the texts,”⁴⁰ and one might assume that Rossi, like the singers, possessed enough Hebrew to be able to parse the texts for their accents and syntax. True, Modena’s statement is about the singers, not about Rossi. Its application to Rossi, however, is suggested by another piece of biographical information: we learn, in one of the dedicatory poems,⁴¹ that Rossi “taught the singers with great gladness,” hence trained singers of the Jewish community to perform his Hebrew compositions. And it is hardly likely that the trainer of singers knew less Hebrew than the singers themselves. So, to summarize, two details should be emphasized: Rossi had enough competence in Hebrew to teach others how to perform his works; and, by implication, Rossi served as a choir director, so to speak, for whatever performances of his works were heard in the synagogue or in private gatherings.

The job of conducting or rehearsing singers probably explains another item in Rossi’s biography. Attention has been paid, by the scholars, to his remark that “God first opened [his] ears and granted [him] the power to understand and to teach the science of music” (italics ours).⁴² The question up for debate is whether Rossi was a “teacher” of music. Israel Adler writes, in this regard, that “no other source testifying to Rossi’s activity as a teacher is known to us.”⁴³ It could be, though, that much effort is being expended on verifying an activity which has a pragmatic explanation: by “to teach” (*lehorot*) Rossi seems to be saying, quite simply, that he instructed others in reading and playing music. The Hebrew verb has various meanings, from “teaching” to “showing” and “directing.” As a professional musician, as a choir director and, to judge from other evidence, as the leader of a small instrumental ensemble⁴⁴ and the person in charge of musical insertions in

³⁸ Modena omitted Francesco, who served as duke in the year 1612 only. For Modena’s Foreword, see Rikko’s edition of the “Songs,” p. 17–20.

³⁹ See above, n. 3.

⁴⁰ From Modena’s Foreword (esp. p. 20).

⁴¹ The two dedicatory poems seem to have been written by Modena. They appear, in Rikko’s edition, on p. 11–12 and 21–22 (with Modena’s Foreword intervening). The reference here is to the first poem.

⁴² From Rossi’s Dedication (p. 7). By “the science of music” (*chochmat hamusika*) Rossi does not mean *scientia*, but rather *ars*, in a practical sense; as much may be inferred from Modena’s *responsum* (p. 23–30 of Rikko’s edition), where (on p. 23) Modena writes of various men who sang part music, in the synagogue, “in accordance with the science” of its composition (see below, nn. 62, 73).

⁴³ “The Rise of Art Music in the Italian Ghetto,” p. 342.

⁴⁴ See above, n. 7.

productions of the Jewish theater,⁴⁵ Rossi, indeed, served as “teacher”: that is, he employed whatever aptitudes he possessed to explain and exemplify how music, in his opinion, should be performed.

The second kind of information contained in the introductory material to the “Songs of Solomon” concerns Rossi as a musician. It allows us to reconstruct, in part, his approach to composition. At least three points should be emphasized:

(1) Rossi described his talents as a divine gift. He tells us that God endowed him with unusual insights into music, which he utilized “to compose many songs.”⁴⁶ All his ideas derive from the Almighty, to quote him: “the Lord . . . has put new songs into my mouth” (by “new songs” he means the “Songs of Solomon”); His “spirit rested on me . . .”; “the Lord has granted that I behold pleasantness and that I send forth my voice for His purpose”; and so forth. Pure rhetoric, you might say. But the fact is that the subject of godly inspiration, of *furor divinus*, made its way, via Neoplatonism, into writings of the sixteenth-century literary critics⁴⁷ and, from there, into writings of the music theorists.⁴⁸ Rossi thus echoes a notion of considerable currency in the humanist literature.

(2) In accord with his belief in supernal influences, Rossi acknowledged a certain compositional priority whereby sacred music for voices alone ranked on a higher level than secular music for voices or instruments. Rossi approached the task of preparing works of religious content as one that demanded special motivation, special dedication. “Man has been given his voice so that he may honor the Lord, each with the blessing he was given to enjoy.”⁴⁹ In his hierarchical view of the modes of expression, Rossi may have been influenced by antique and Renaissance attitudes regarding the order of the different literary genres, from epic to comedy, and of the different styles of speech, or “genera dicendi,” from high to low.⁵⁰ For the rhetoricians, the highest level of the latter is occupied by the *stilus gravis* or

⁴⁵ See above, n. 6.

⁴⁶ For this and following quotations, see Rossi’s Dedication to the “Songs.”

⁴⁷ On the themes of inspiration and *furor poeticus* in literary tracts of the later 15th and 16th centuries, see M. FICINO, *De divino furore*, in his *Opera omnia* (Basel 1576; repr. Turin 1962), p. 612ff.; J. VADIANUS, *De poetica et carminis ratione* (1518), ed. Peter Schäffer (Munich 1973/76, 2 vols.), Chap. XIV (“*De furore poetico: et quid per eum intelligendum*”), I, p. 100–109; B. PARTHENIO, *Della imitatione poetica* (Venice 1560; repr. Munich 1969), p. 4–5; G. B. PIGNA, *Poetica Horatiana* (Venice 1561; repr. Munich 1969), p. 90; G. A. VIPERANO, *De poetica libri tres* (Antwerp 1579; repr. Munich 1967), p. 16–17; G. FRACHETTA, *Dialogo del furore poetico* (Padua 1581; repr. Munich 1969); F. PATRIZI, *Della poetica* (1586–88), ed. D. Barbagli (Florence 1969–71, 3 vols.), II, p. 7–35 (entitled “*Del furore poetico*”); etc. On the divine nature of “poetry,” as treated in writings by Ficino, Bruno, Minturno and others, see A. BUCK, *Italianische Dichtungslehre vom Mittelalter bis zum Ausgang der Renaissance* (Tübingen 1952), esp. p. 87–97; for earlier sources, see A. SPERDUTI, *The Divine Nature of Poetry in Antiquity*, in: *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 81 (1950), p. 209–40.

⁴⁸ P. ARON, *Lucidario in musica di alcune oppenioni antiche et moderne* (Venice 1545; repr. Bologna 1969), fol. xv; ADRIAN PETIT COCLICO, *Compendium musicus* (Nuremberg 1552; repr. Kassel 1954), fol. L ii; G. ZARLINO, *Istitutioni harmoniche* (Venice 1558; repr. New York 1965), p. 69; etc.

⁴⁹ From Rossi’s Dedication (esp. p. 7).

⁵⁰ On rhetorical doctrine and its relevance to early music, see W. GURLITT, *Musik und Rhetorik* (originally in: *Helicon* 5 [1944], p. 67–86), in: *Musikgeschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. H. H. Eggebrecht (Wiesbaden 1966), p. 62–81; H.-H. UNGER, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Musik und Rhetorik im 16.–18. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg 1941; repr. Hildesheim 1969), p. 3–33; G. LeCOAT, *The Rhetoric of the Arts, 1550–1650* (Bern 1975), etc.

sublimus, that is, a style weighty in its content and impressive in its presentation.⁵¹

(3) As his goal in composition, Rossi set the creation of “sweet sounds” (“I wove these [songs] into an arrangement of sweet sounds, yea, pleasantness is at their right hand . . .”).⁵² He appears to have achieved his goal, for, in the words of Leone da Modena, all “those who heard them were radiant, finding them sweet to the ear and wanting to hear more.”⁵³ Sweetness, or *dulcedo*, the pleasure of its perception, or *delectatio*: they correspond to the Horationist tendencies of the Italian Renaissance, as emphasized particularly in the reformulation of ancient literary doctrine by Pietro Bembo.⁵⁴ Rossi reveals his renascent predilections, further, in his remark that the art of composition is aimed at stating something new – “the Lord . . . has put new songs into my mouth.”⁵⁵ The process of composing music, we learn, involves a continual resifting and reshaping of materials in order for the music to win the approbation of the perceptive few. “I did not restrain my lips but ever increased my striving to enhance the psalms of David, King of Israel, until I set many of them and shaped them into proper musical form so that they would have greater stature for discriminating ears.” Rossi implies that there are two varieties of music, art music (for cultivated listeners) and the traditional synagogue music, with its repertory of hymns, prayers and cantillation formulas (for less cultivated ones).⁵⁶ Different strands come together in Rossi’s practice: the urge to say something that has not been said before, to create, that is, a *musica nova*;⁵⁷ the use of an elevated style, a *stilus gravis*; the process of refining materials, through diligent labor, to make them appeal to discerning ears; the notion of sweetness, of pleasure, which, in its way, connects with the notion that only when the offering is sweet does God take pleasure in receiving it. We read in one of the dedicatory poems that “as pleasing to God as the offering of Abel will be the singing of His melodies when you offer them to Him with great sweetness.”⁵⁸

So far we have studied the introductory matter to the “Songs of Solomon” as it relates to Rossi’s biography and his methods of composition. Let us consider still another category of information to be derived from it, namely, that pertaining to the

⁵¹ The ancient Greek orator Hermogenes regarded “gravity” as the highest of his seven “ideas” of style, describing it as “an ideal of total eloquence” to which all other ideas are subservient; after K. PATTERSON, *Hermogenes and the Renaissance: Seven Ideas of Style* (Princeton 1970), p. 8 (see Chap. VII on the Renaissance epic [p. 176–213] for an extensive treatment of gravity).

⁵² From Rossi’s Dedication (esp. p. 7).

⁵³ From Modena’s Foreword (esp. p. 18).

⁵⁴ Cf. HORACE, *Ars poetica* 99 (“it is not enough for poems to be beautiful, they must be sweet”); P. BEMBO, *Prose della volgar lingua*, II. ix (“under pleasantness I specify grace, suavity, charm, sweetness, play, games and whatever else resembles them”). On the role of *piacevolezza* in Bembo’s conceptions and its relevance (along with that of *gravità*) to the early madrigal, see D. T. MACE, *Pietro Bembo and the Literary Origins of the Italian Madrigal*, in: MQ 55 (1969), p. 65–86.

⁵⁵ This and the following quotation are taken from Rossi’s Dedication (p. 7). On “novelty” in Renaissance composition, see below.

⁵⁶ The passage recalls Vicentino’s classic differentiation between music “*ad uso delle purgate orecchie*” and that “*à uso delle vulgari*” (*L’antica musica ridotta alla moderna prattica* [Rome 1555; repr. Kassel 1959], fol. 10^v).

⁵⁷ On *musica nova* and its central position in Renaissance musical thought, see L. SCHRADER, *Renaissance: The Historical Conception of an Epoch*, in: *Kongress-Bericht, Internationale Gesellschaft für Musikwissenschaft, Utrecht 1952* (Amsterdam 1953), p. 19–32; on its relevance to *musica reservata*, see C. V. PALISCA, *A Clarification of ‘Musica Reservata’ in Jean Taisnier’s ‘Astrologiae,’ 1559*, in: AML 31 (1959), esp. p. 148–49.

⁵⁸ The first of the poems, p. 11.

“Songs” themselves: how they started, how they evolved, how they were performed, how they were prepared for publication, and more. Again it should be stressed that a careful reading of Rossi’s and Modena’s prefatory remarks discloses a number of points that, taken together, add up to a somewhat different picture of the “Songs” than has hitherto been drawn. What do we learn?

(1) We learn that, as assembled, the “Songs of Solomon” represent only a selection of the Hebrew songs composed by Rossi. “Out of the many ideas within me,” Rossi writes, “my soul has delighted to take the choicest of all as an offering of the voice wherewith to give thanks to Him, who rides upon the Heavens, with a sound of gladsome Thanksgiving.”⁵⁹ Further on, Rossi informs us that he “felt it would be proper to benefit the public by bringing to press a selection of [his] songs.” If the “Songs,” as published, constitute a selection only, then how many other “songs” did Rossi compose? what is the extent of his sacred repertory? One wonders, moreover, what his criteria were for choosing the particular items that did get published. Rossi speaks of the “choicest” items as those which he decided to offer: what does he mean by “choicest”? It is obvious that certain songs were selected, certain rejected: it would be interesting to know what got rejected and why. One never can tell – someday, perhaps, other sacred works of Rossi’s may be discovered, allowing a comparison with those in the printed collection. For the time being, it should be remembered that what we have is only a part, though, in Rossi’s opinion, the best part.

(2) We learn that the “Songs of Solomon” was not a collection prepared upon short notice, but rather that the composer gradually built it up. “Day by day,” according to Modena, “he would add to his compositions a psalm or a hymn of praise or thanksgiving until he had succeeded in gathering many of them into one collection.”⁶⁰ Though Modena’s expression is “day by day,” his meaning is probably “day by day, over the course of a number of years,” for it was no easy enterprise to compose Hebrew texts in a polyphonic style, there being few precedents for such.⁶¹ Notice that Modena says that the composer gathered together “many of them” into a single collection. Elsewhere he says that Rossi decided to publish “some of his compositions.” Modena’s remarks seem to confirm, once again, that the collection, as it stands, represents only a portion of his sacred music. Since Rossi worked on his Hebrew songs over an extended period, it might be assumed that, preceding their publication, there was, in the Mantuan synagogue, a tradition of art music going back a number of years. Though no written examples of polyphonic Hebrew music can be assembled prior to Rossi’s collection, issued in 1622/23, it is likely, on the basis

⁵⁹ This and next quotation from Rossi’s Dedication, p. 7. Another reading of the passage would be that Rossi saved his “choicest” ideas for sacred music while using those of a more conventional character, perhaps, in his secular works. Yet it seems to be denied by the composer’s mention, in the next quotation, of having made a “selection of [his Hebrew] songs” for publication.

⁶⁰ From Modena’s Foreword, p. 18.

⁶¹ For a discussion of such precedents, see ADLER, *The Rise of Art Music in the Italian Ghetto*, esp. p. 333–44, and IDEM, *La pénétration de la musique savante dans les synagogues italiennes au 17^e siècle: les cas particulier de Venise* (the writer thanks Prof. Adler for allowing him to consult a typescript of this study prior to publication in the Proceedings of the Conference *Gli Ebrei a Venezia*, Venice 1983).

of certain remarks in the rabbinical literature, that polyphonic music was occasionally performed in Ferrara, Padua, Mantua and elsewhere in Northern Italy since the end of the sixteenth century. In Mantua, art music could have been introduced into the synagogue sometime between 1605 (for which year we have a *responsum* of Leone da Modena referring to its practice by “persons learned in the science of music”)⁶² and 1622/23 (the *terminus ad quem* established by Rossi’s collection). Israel Adler suggests that it found its way into the synagogue there around 1613–14, shortly after the ghetto had been instituted. Indeed, it is his thesis that Jewish art music in Mantua corresponds to the immurement of its Jewish denizens.⁶³ Although no tangible evidence can be produced in support of the thesis, it seems only reasonable that Jewish art music formed part of an earlier tradition, within which the “Songs of Solomon” mark a high point of development.

(3) We learn about the “Songs” that, from a stylistic point of view, they represented a transfer of Rossi’s secular style to the religious domain. So much may be inferred, at any rate, from Modena’s opinion that Rossi, “offering his powers to his God, took from the profane that he might add to the holy.”⁶⁴ For better or worse, his opinion has, ever since, influenced our attitude toward the “Songs” – they are usually described, in the literature, as little different from the motets or *madrigali spirituali* by Christian composers of Rossi’s generation.⁶⁵ There is a tendency to dismiss Rossi’s works as mere imitations of Christian motets or his own madrigals without ever really examining the question whether they do, in fact, vary from them. Rossi, in our opinion, did not simply transfer the practices of sacred or secular polyphony to Hebrew songs. Nor did he translate Latin motets or Italian madrigals into Hebrew equivalents. Rather he accommodated the principles of art music composition to the peculiarities of the Hebrew language: the point is one that needs to be stressed. Rossi’s “Songs” are colored by the language in which they are sung; Hebrew, that is, becomes an essential parameter of their composition. Not only does the incisive, guttural character of Hebrew affect his works, but its accentuation as well. Where, in Latin and Italian words, stresses usually fall on the penultimate or antepenultimate syllable, in Hebrew ones they usually fall on the final syllable: Hebrew accentuation favors the oxytone (*milra*). It is only natural, then, for the accentual demands of the Hebrew language to have left their traces on the rhythmic construction of Rossi’s music. Till now, however, no one has ever undertaken a systematic comparison of Rossi’s Hebrew accentuation in the “Songs” with his Italian accentuation in his madrigals or with other composers’ Latin accentuation in

⁶² See above, n. 42.

⁶³ As clear from such statements as “nous avons pu constater le rapprochement significatif des dates d’instauration du ghetto ou du renforcement de la ségrégation consécutif au passage d’une communauté sous l’autorité du Pape, et des débuts de la musique savante à la synagogue, qui suivent de près” (*La pénétration*, p. 2 [typescript]), “il semblerait que le musicien juif, empêché à cause de la ségrégation d’exercer son art à l’extérieur, se tournait désormais vers la synagogue” (p. 3), etc.

⁶⁴ Modena’s Foreword, p. 18.

⁶⁵ The following statement by Sendrey is typical: “It is the unanimous consensus of musical experts and laymen alike that Rossi’s music lacks any traditional elements ... It is also true that Rossi’s sacred works are pure Italian Renaissance music, conceived in the style of his epoch ...” (*Jewish Musicians in the Italian Renaissance* [see above, n. 9], p. 276).

their motets.⁶⁶ The results, we predict, will be as noticeable, rhythmically, and, in a broader sense, stylistically, as, say, the difference, in the sixteenth century, between an Italian madrigal and a German Lied, or between a German Lied and a French chanson, and so forth. We know that Rossi was very concerned with accentuation, as were most other humanistically inclined composers of the Renaissance. He seems to have purposely attempted to follow the qualitative stresses of Hebrew as closely as possible in setting its words to music. Indeed, Modena writes that, for performers of Rossi's "Songs," it is important, in reading the text, "to articulate the words with precision of pronunciation and accentuation."⁶⁷ But such precision cannot be achieved unless the composer himself strove for it in his writing. Thus the requirements for the performance of Rossi's works are inseparable from their mode of composition.

From a musical and liturgical standpoint, Rossi's collection of "Songs" signalled an almost revolutionary change of course within the Jewish tradition. With all due respect to the magnitude of Rossi's achievement, however, the question must be asked: to what extent was the collection an idea of Rossi's? The incentive to write Hebrew polyphonic music does not seem to have come from Rossi, but rather from Leone da Modena. In one of the dedicatory poems to the collection, Modena said of the songs that "they have been sown, they have been planted."⁶⁸ With all his secular Italian inclinations, Modena seems to have been ashamed of his own musical tradition, of the sing-song monophony practiced in the synagogue. He conceived the idea of reforming Jewish music so as to remove anything that might be condemned as base or boorish. His model was the art music of the Christian society that surrounded him. By reforming Jewish music according to this model, he believed that, to quote him, "no longer will arrogant opponents heap scorn on the Hebrew folk."⁶⁹ On the contrary, everyone will see "that it too possesses understanding, the equal of the best endowed," and that "though it may be weak when it comes to dealing blows, it is mighty in wisdom." Modena was of the opinion that in the years of exile, the music of the Hebrews lost its ancient erudition. During the Middle Ages, the vicissitudes of dispersion, as he saw it, "caused them [the Jews] to forget all their knowledge and to be devoid of all wisdom."⁷⁰ For him, synagogue music was coarse and crude, unworthy of the great tradition of music cultivated in Biblical times. As an antithesis to the unlettered practitioners of Jewish song as it developed in a later period, Modena offers Rossi, in matters of music "wiser than any other man," a composer whose works reflect his "wisdom" and the new "understanding" of his listeners.⁷¹

⁶⁶ The "Songs" are being studied from this point of view by a doctoral student of mine, Massimo Torre Franca, preparing a dissertation on "The 'Songs of Solomon' by Salomone Rossi as an Amalgam of Different Italian and Hebrew Traditions."

⁶⁷ From Modena's Foreword, p. 20.

⁶⁸ The first of the poems, p. 11.

⁶⁹ This and next quotation from the second dedicatory poem, p. 22.

⁷⁰ From Modena's Foreword, p. 18.

⁷¹ On Rossi's "wisdom", see *ibid.*, also the second dedicatory poem (p. 22); on the heightened "understanding" of his audience, see the latter.

Modena seems to have been the architect of the new music that took shape in the "Songs of Solomon"; Rossi seems to have been its engineer. In the light of this unusual combination of talents, we should like to summarize the development of the "Songs" according to the following scenario:⁷²

(a) In 1605, Modena addressed himself, in a *responsum*, to the question put to him whether polyphonic music could be used in the prayer services of the synagogue. His answer was positive. Some seventeen years, then, before Rossi's "Songs" were printed, Modena asserted the viability of polyphonic insertions in the liturgy. The *responsum* dates from a period in which Modena served as rabbi of a congregation in Ferrara. Modena even refers to the performance of art music in the synagogue there, to quote him: "There are in our midst six or eight persons learned in the science of music, men of our community . . . who raise their voices in songs of praise and glorification, such as *Ein keloheinu*, *Aleinu leshabeach*, *Yigdal*, *Adon olam* and the like, to the glory of the Lord in an orderly relationship of the voices in accordance with this science" (italics ours).⁷³

(b) Sometime between 1605 and the years preceding the publication of the "Songs of Solomon," Modena befriended Rossi, winning him over to his ideas about creating a new music for use in the synagogue. Modena wished to dispense with the conventions of Jewish prayer melody, replacing them by a music based on the best features of the Italian art music tradition. Its earmarks, as he perceived them, would be "sweetness" and "erudition" – music pleasant to sing or hear, music artfully contrived. Such a music, Modena believed, would no longer be an embarrassment to his fellows. Rather it would show that they stood, like the Christians, in the forefront of musical developments.

(c) Rossi tried his hand at the new musical style, gradually building up a collection of works and testing them, for their effectiveness, with the singers. Yet he came up against the resistance of the religious orthodoxy.

(d) Subject to criticism, Rossi looked to his friends, Modena, Moses Sullam and others, for encouragement. Speaking of Sullam, Rossi noted that he acted as his benefactor ("you have spread the protection of your glory over me and over the work of my hands").⁷⁴ Sullam seems to have prodded him to greater achievement – "how many times," Rossi confesses, "it was at your command that I labored until I found the proper form for the utterance of songful lips."

(e) Rossi's friends were interested in having the works published, but Rossi, fearing the consequences of such an act, hesitated. They had to dissipate his reluctance to go ahead with the scheme. Modena tells us that "some individuals and especially the generous and ever praiseworthy, honored Master Moses Sullam (may God on high preserve him) pressed him and he agreed to have them printed."⁷⁵

⁷² In the paragraphs from *a* to *i*, we dispensed, in our hypothetical description, with such qualifying terms as "seemingly," "apparently," "probably," etc., though, clearly, the punctilious reader will want to add them for accuracy' sake.

⁷³ See above, nn. 42, 62. For a letter of Modena's referring to the formation of an association in Ferrara, around 1604, for practical instruction in "the science of music," see *Igrot rabi yehudah arieh mimodena* ("Letters of Rabbi Leon Modena"), ed. Jacob Boksenboim (Tel-Aviv 1984), p. 110–11.

⁷⁴ This and next quotation from Rossi's Dedication, p. 8.

⁷⁵ From Modena's Foreword, p. 18.

Speaking of himself, he notes his own influence on making Rossi reach a decision. "I, too," he says, "from the time I first became his close friend, urged him strongly with many words of persuasion until we were successful and, thanks to the Creator of all, that which I hoped for has been realized and he has agreed to fulfill his pledge and bring his music to print as he had promised."⁷⁶ The passage confirms our contention that Modena had a vested interest in the project – no wonder, it was probably his idea to start with. Rossi, at some point, committed himself to realizing the idea with the end in mind of publishing the results. Modena's words "until we were successful" imply that the plan of composition and publication derived from a concerted action.

(f) Rossi hesitated, further, because of the difficulties of supervising a publication of Hebrew music in the same way he was accustomed to supervising his secular Italian publications. Despite his reading knowledge of Hebrew, Rossi demurred at undertaking a publication in a language which, for various reasons, caused problems in aligning notes and syllables. In this connection, we might mention that Hebrew is written from right to left and that its basic characters are consonants, not vowels (signs for vocalization can be added, yet are not essential to reading the script).

(g) Modena overcame Rossi's objections by pledging to take on the responsibility of preparing the music for publication and proofreading the printed copy. He tells us that Rossi instructed him "to stand guard so that no mishap might befall the work [in its preparation] and so that all might be in good order and of beautiful appearance, and also to keep a watchful eye to prevent any printer's errors."⁷⁷ Even Modena, with all his Hebrew learning, did not deny the obstacles that stood in his way: "I declare publicly that it is not easy, since nothing like this first step has ever been taken before."

(h) Moses Sullam subsidized the publication. According to Modena, "the merits [of Sullam] are as great as those of the creator of the music [Rossi] because he has dealt lavishly."⁷⁸

(i) It was only natural, then, for Rossi to dedicate the collection to Sullam as a token of gratitude. In so doing, he sought "to give some repayment to one who had helped him to reach this point."⁷⁹

Using the introductory matter of the "Songs" as source and stimulus, we have tried to retrace the origins and development of one of the most remarkable collections in the history of Hebrew music, if not in the history of Western music at large. The "Songs of Solomon," it should be clear, is a combined enterprise, planned and nurtured by others, yet executed by Rossi, who drew on whatever talents and forces of learning he could muster to bring it to fruition. But is the collection to be considered an anachronistic example of musical Hebraicism in its time or does it fall within the limits of the Renaissance?

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷⁷ This and next quotation from *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷⁸ From the second dedicatory poem, p. 22.

⁷⁹ From Modena's Foreword, p. 19.

IV

Let us return to the question of Rossi as a “Renaissance” composer. The term Renaissance already appeared in the title, and in the course of the discussion an attempt was made to outline a picture of Rossi and his relations with the secular Renaissance society in which he moved. To what extent do his activities as a secular composer correspond to those of his as a Jewish composer? According to Modena, they correspond very closely. Indeed, the image that Modena projected of Rossi is one of a composer responsible for the Renaissance of Jewish music. He is described by him as having “reached great heights in the sciences,”⁸⁰ as “having restored [Jewish music] to its ancient estate in the days of the Levites on their dais [in the Temple].” With Rossi, music flourishes again as in the heyday of its development in Biblical times. Just as nearly 150 years earlier Johannes Tinctoris saw the composer John Dunstable as marking the beginning of a new era in art music,⁸¹ often designated as the Northern Renaissance in music, so Modena saw Rossi as marking the beginning of a new era in Jewish music. “He has made a beginning which will not cease, the like of which has never been known in Israel.”⁸² Modena was convinced that starting with the collection of Rossi’s “Songs,” a new tradition of Jewish music would be established. From now on, he thought, people would know what music really is, how it really should be composed; from now on, Jewish music would be taught by teacher to student and so transmitted to later generations in an uninterrupted line of development. “Teach them [= Rossi’s songs],” Modena says, “to your children so that they may understand the art of making music. Let the learned man teach the student as did the [elder] Levites. I am sure that from the time this work sees the light of day, an increasing number of Israelites will study music in order to sing these and other compositions to the glory of our God.”

Rossi heads the publication of his “Songs” with the words “something new in the land,”⁸³ and it is precisely this preoccupation with novelty that so often typifies the Renaissance in its various phases. “New” is a watchword for the Renaissance – it signals an art of innovative composition building on the past, be it antiquity or a more recent past, to strike out, on a new road, into the future. Rossi wrote that “the Lord... has put new songs into my mouth.”⁸⁴ His “Songs” are, without doubt, entirely new: as a collection, they inaugurate a reform in Jewish music. The composer found the courage to execute an original idea, though it meant breaking with an established tradition. In pitting himself against the religious conservatives Rossi, like his mentor Modena, asserted the rights of the individual to hearken to his own lights. Like many other Renaissance figures, Rossi was endowed with a true “spark.” It was this spark – call it a “scintilla” or a “disegno interno,” call it *furor*

⁸⁰ This and following statements from Modena’s Foreword, pp. 18, 21.

⁸¹ See the Dedication to his *Proportionale musices* (c. 1476), also that to his *Liber de arte contrapuncti* (1477).

⁸² This and following quotation from Modena’s Foreword, p. 19, 20.

⁸³ “The Songs of Solomon ... by the honored Master Salomon Rossi ... to give thanks to the Lord and to sing to His most exalted name on all sacred occasions. A new thing in the land ...” (see Rikko’s edition, III, 1).

⁸⁴ From Rossi’s Dedication, p. 7.

poeticus or *furor divinus*, terms well known from Renaissance literature – that lighted Rossi's path, helping him to penetrate the darkness spread by his adversaries, who remain entrenched in the folds of orthodoxy. Just as the Renaissance was seen as a period of light after darkness, so Rossi's "Songs of Solomon" were seen, by Modena and other reformers within the Jewish community, as a new radiance "after the splendor of the people [of Israel in Biblical times] had been dimmed by the passage of days and years [in the Diaspora]."⁸⁵ "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2).

⁸⁵ From the second dedicatory poem, p. 21.