



# Simone Luzzatto's Scepticism in the Context of Early Modern Thought

## Programme and Abstracts

*Update: September 18, 2019*

**Monday, September 23, 2019**

09:30	Registration
<b>10:00 – 10:30</b>	<b>Welcoming Remarks</b> <i>Anna Lissa (Université Paris 8) and Michela Torbidoni (Universität Hamburg)</i>
<b>10:30 – 11:50</b>	<b>Panel 1: Liberty, Religion, and Scientific Thought</b> <i>Chair: Gadi Luzzatto Voghera</i>
10:30 – 11:10	Practices of Critical Thought: The Rise of New Science, the Bible, and Jewish Thought <i>Cristiana Facchini (Università di Bologna)</i>
11:10 – 11:50	A Rabbi's Marks in Early Modern Subversive Literature. Simone Luzzatto and his <i>Nachleben</i> <i>Evelien Chayes (Radboud Universiteit)</i>
<b>11:50 – 12:10</b>	<b>Coffee Break (Room 5050)</b>

<b>12:10 – 13:30</b>	<b>Panel 2: Scepticism and Religion</b> <i>Chair: Guido Bartolucci (Università della Calabria)</i>
12:10 – 12:50	The Scepticism of Simone Luzzatto and his Appraisal of the <i>Book of Job</i> <i>Anna Lissa (Université Paris 8)</i>
12:50 – 13:30	The Concepts of Religion in Simone Luzzatto's <i>Discorso</i> <i>Mina Lee (University of Tokyo)</i>
<b>13:30 – 14:30</b>	<b>Lunch Break (Room 5050)</b>
<b>14:50 – 15:50</b>	<b>Panel 3: Sceptical Philosophy</b> <i>Chair: José María Sánchez de León Serrano (Universität Hamburg)</i>
14:30 – 15:10	Simone Luzzatto's Concept of Nature as a Source of Morality and Religiosity <i>Michela Torbidoni (Universität Hamburg)</i>
15:10 – 15:50	What Kind of a (Sceptical) work is Simone Luzzatto's <i>Socrate</i> ? <i>Josef Stern (University of Chicago)</i>
<b>17:00 – 19:00</b>	<b>Evening Session</b>
	Musical Interlude: Sacred and Profane Polyphony by Salomone Rossi and Luca Marenzio <i>Ensemble Accademia dei Carpiti</i> <i>(Anna Tarca, Silvia Valenti, Paolo Davolio, Lorenzo Ziller)</i>
	Introduction <i>Giuseppe Veltri (Universität Hamburg)</i>
	Keynote Lecture: The Image of King Solomon in Simone Luzzatto's Writings <i>Zev Harvey (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)</i>
	Musical Interlude: Sacred and Profane Polyphony by Salomone Rossi and Luca Marenzio <i>Ensemble Accademia dei Carpiti</i> <i>(Anna Tarca, Silvia Valenti, Paolo Davolio, Lorenzo Ziller)</i>
<b>19:00</b>	<b>Reception (Room 5050)</b>

**Tuesday, September 24, 2019**

<b>10:00 – 11:20</b>	<b>Panel 4: Ancient and Medieval Sources</b> <i>Chair: Giuseppe Veltri (Universität Hamburg)</i>
10:00 – 10:40	The Jewish Debate over Philo in Early Modern Italy <i>Joanna Weinberg (University of Oxford)</i>
10:40 – 11:20	Simone Luzzatto's Scepticism in Light of Medieval Jewish Apologetics <i>Fabrizio Lelli (Università del Salento)</i>
<b>11:20 – 11:40</b>	<b>Coffee Break (Room 5050)</b>
<b>11:40 – 13:00</b>	<b>Panel 5: Politics and Economics</b> <i>Chair: Anna Lissa (Université Paris 8)</i>
11:40 – 12:20	A Venetian Rabbi and a Baroness from the Low Countries on the Condition of the Jews <i>Vasileios Syros (University of Jyväskylä)</i>
12:20 – 13:00	Simone Luzzatto's Political Thought: Between Scepticism and Reason of State <i>Guido Bartolucci (Università della Calabria)</i>
<b>13:00 – 14:30</b>	<b>Lunch Break (Room 5050)</b>
<b>14:30 – 15:50</b>	<b>Panel 6: Politics and Economics</b> <i>Chair: Asher Salah (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)</i>
14:30 – 15:10	Simone Luzzatto and the Debate on the Economical Role of the Jews in Eighteenth Century Italy <i>Luca Andreoni (Istituto Comprensivo "Caio Giulio Cesare")</i>
15:10 – 15:50	"Seek the Peace and Prosperity of the City...": The Political Use of Jer 29:7 by Simone Luzzatto and Other Jewish Sources <i>Myriam Silvera (Università degli Studi di Roma "Tor Vergata")</i>
<b>15:50 – 16:10</b>	<b>Coffee Break (Room 5050)</b>
<b>16:10 – 16:50</b>	<b>Panel 7: Anthropology, Society, and Tolerance</b> <i>Chair: Zev Harvey (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)</i>
16:10 – 16:50	Self-Love, Blood-Ties, and Amity in Simone Luzzatto's Philosophy <i>Giuseppe Veltri (Universität Hamburg)</i>

**16:50 – 17:45**      **Final Discussion**

**19:00**              **Dinner**

**Wednesday, September 25, 2019**

**10:00 – 12:30**      **Book Launch**  
**Scepticism and Tolerance: New Perspectives for the Jewish Intellectual History**  
*Chair: Yoav Meyrav (Universität Hamburg)*

Intellectual Life and Literature  
*Evelien Chayes (Radboud Universiteit)*

History  
*Cristiana Facchini (Università di Bologna)*

History of Political Thought  
*Guido Bartolucci (Università della Calabria)*

Philosophy  
*Josef Stern (University of Chicago)*

**Final Discussion**

**12:30**              **Lunch (Room 5050)**

**15:00**              **Guided Tour: Jewish Cemetery Hamburg-Altona (Michael Studemund-Halévy)**

## Abstracts

Monday, September 23, 2019

### Panel 1: Liberty, Religion, and Scientific Thought

#### **Practices of Critical Thought: The Rise of New Science, the Bible, and Jewish Thought**

*Cristiana Facchini (Università di Bologna)*

The aim of this paper is to analyse the results engendered by scepticism both as a form of investigation and as a cultural practice towards matters of religion and science within Jewish culture, while paying due attention both to cultural context and to strategies of cultural transfer. I will concentrate on the context of the Republic of Venice at the onset of the seventeenth century, focusing on the period of great turmoil which revolves around the *Interdetto*, during which Venice was placed under the influence of and pressure from Protestant states. This period also represents a critical moment with regard to questions related to Galileo and the status of Copernicus's theories as a possible source of heretical thought. During these years, Galileo started to compose his *Letter to Cristina of Lorena*, which is a short and complex tract on biblical exegesis. In this text, he offered an interesting perspective, an "epistemological project" based upon the separation of theology and natural science (Pesce 2005). The cultural and religious debate which took shape around this work indicates at least four different ways of dealing with science and religion in the first decades of the seventeenth century. The first is based on the claim that religion is superior to science; the second, developed by Galileo's letter, offers the idea of a separation between cognitive fields, both holding their own truths; the third stresses that the Bible has to be interpreted according to scientific results (Campanella); the fourth, advanced by the Jesuits, suggests that any scientific result may be treated as a hypothesis and therefore that it should not be conceived as wholly true (Bellarmine). The paper will try to investigate how the work of Luzzatto and other Jewish scholars of his time relates to these questions.

#### **A Rabbi's Marks in Early Modern Subversive Literature. Simone Luzzatto and his *Nachleben***

*Evelien Chayes (Radboud Universiteit)*

In this contribution, I propose to build on my observations in *Oltre le mura* (2016). Through comparative close readings, the paper will lay out a set of themes, topics, and discourse strategies that Luzzatto's texts have in common with the libertine literary productions of his circle. This will allow us to resituate them in their in vivo context. In considering Luzzatto's works as responses to stereotypes of different sorts, perennial and ever-present, this analysis will help us to better understand his work as part of the political-cum-intellectual culture of his times, wherein politics, juridical and economic realities, philosophy, and rhetorical literary challenges meet. Should we believe that Luzzatto's writings exclusively consist of combining quotations from the classics and the Christian canon with Jewish lore and history, or can we consider them as serious efforts to "dialogue" with the literary productions of his times, where the paradoxical and the impossible occasionally become figures of revelation? Were his texts achieving goals that contemporary scholarship has not yet recognised? In answering these questions, this paper will revise more recent interpretations of Luzzatto's work. Moreover, in an

attempt to obtain a clearer idea of the reception and dissemination of the *Discorso* and the *Socrate*, it will offer a brief survey of their presence in libraries after Luzzatto's death.

## Panel 2: Scepticism and Religion

### The Scepticism of Simone Luzzatto and his Appraisal of the *Book of Job*

Anna Lissa (Université Paris 8)

The development and coherence of Simone Luzzatto's thought in his Italian works (*Discourse on the State of the Jews*, 1638, and *Socrates, Or On Human Knowledge*, 1651) has been the object of scholarship which has shown that scepticism informs both his philosophical and his political thought.

In 1656, Luzzatto published his last surviving text. This text happens to be written in Hebrew: it is a four-page introduction (*Haqdamah*) to Shmuel ha-Cohen di Pisa Lusitano's *Şafnat Pa'neah—Be'ur Ketuvim zarim she-ba-sefer Qohelet we-ken be'ur kolel ba-sefer Iyov* (Venezia: Vedramina, 1656), pages 2a–4b. Starting from a Talmudic discussion (Talmud Bavli, Baba Batra 16a) in which Raba affirms that Job denied the resurrection of the dead, Luzzatto goes back to re-examine the question and to absolve Job from a sin that would make him an epicurean.

In my presentation, I will examine Luzzatto's introduction and ask whether it uses the same sceptical strategies that he used in his Italian works and how he employs them. In so doing, I will extend the search for the development and coherence of Luzzatto's thought to an all-encompassing level, considering both the religious issue at stake and the Hebrew-reading public he was addressing.

### The Concepts of Religion in Simone Luzzatto's *Discorso*

Mina Lee (University of Tokyo)

This paper aims to elucidate how Simone Luzzatto explained religions and Judaism in his *Discorso*. Luzzatto described Judaism as consisting of two parts: universal inner aspects of morality that should be taught to all humans and specific aspects of histories and rituals shared only by the Jewish people. He held that Jews were commanded to observe their particular customs according to universal human reason, which seeks to maintain harmony in human society. With their moral precepts, Jews should not be accused only because they have different religious customs from others.

The term "religion," according to Luzzatto, has a similar meaning in the *Discorso*. He used this word in distinction from rituals and customs; however, it only refers to the different forms of religions observed among particular nations, without indicating any commonality between them. Therefore, a religion of inner faith should be differentiated from its practice, which may also be distinguished from universal human reason. Moreover, he condemned the sense of enthusiasm seen in individual religions which contributed to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and helped lead to the breakout of wars throughout the whole of Europe.

Luzzatto believed his idea of religions and Judaism to be suitable for the multi-religious society of Venice. There were many minority groups with different religions and customs in the city which played roles in its economy, commerce, and maintaining its order. While he stressed the importance of keeping each particular religious custom which connects individuals within each national group, he also argued that these differences should not interfere in each group's affairs in society as a whole. Rather, the various faiths should accord with human reason and moralities and have a similar aim of

maintaining harmony in society. In light of this understanding, Luzzatto needed to separate the two aspects of Judaism in order to preserve Jewish traditions that serve to constitute part of Venetian society.

### Panel 3: Sceptical Philosophy

#### Simone Luzzatto's Concept of Nature as a Source of Morality and Religiosity

*Michela Torbidoni (Universität Hamburg)*

In Luzzatto's *Socrates, Or On Human Knowledge*, Nature plays a significant role, as it is the second most important figure after that of God. It is praised because of its neutrality towards human beings and for its equal treatment of all people in every time period; most of all, it is presented as the "mother of the probable." This overview of the concept of Nature will be helpful in exploring the origin of Luzzatto's scepticism and to what extent this philosophical stance may be harmonised with the natural morality and theology emerging from his *Socrates*. This inquiry will ultimately allow us to build a new bridge between this text and libertine thinking and specifically to Montaigne's defence of Raymond Sebond's *Natural Theology*. This will be relevant for acknowledging Luzzatto's debt to the libertine tradition and how this exchange of knowledge with the Christian side of this concern may have contributed to his plea in favour of Judaism.

#### What Kind of a (Sceptical) work is Simone Luzzatto's *Socrate*?

*Josef Stern (University of Chicago)*

This paper will explore the structure and themes of Luzzatto's *Socrate*, the degree to which it is a work of scepticism, and, if so, what kind of scepticism: an anthology, or a clever parody of scepticism?

### Keynote

#### The Image of King Solomon in Simone Luzzatto's Writings

*Zev Harvey (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)*

The biblical figure cited most often by Simone Luzzatto in both his *Discorso* and his *Socrate* is King Solomon. He is cited more than Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, or any other prophet or king. He is often quoted as a source of political wisdom, and his views are sometimes said to concur with those of Plato, Aristotle, Tacitus, and other classical authors. On occasion, the views cited in his name seem to be in dialogue with those of Machiavelli and other Italian thinkers.

Like Socrates (*Apology* 20e21a), Solomon was called "the wisest of all human beings" (I Kings 5:9–11). In Luzzatto's writings, both Solomon and Socrates represent wisdom, but the two are not identical. There are differences between them. For example, Solomon's wisdom is more political or pragmatic, and Socrates's is more sceptical. In Luzzatto's eyes, who is the wisest of all human beings?

## Panel 4: Ancient and Medieval Sources

### **The Jewish Debate over Philo in Early Modern Italy**

Joanna Weinberg (University of Oxford)

My paper will consider why and how sixteenth-century Jewish scholars reading Philo in Sigismund Gelenius's Latin translation debated the Hellenistic Jew's connection with their own rabbinic legacy. I will discuss how Simone Luzzatto used Philo in his *Discorso* and how his approach to him may have been influenced by earlier debates regarding Philo's identity.

### **Simone Luzzatto's Scepticism in Light of Medieval Jewish Apologetics**

Fabrizio Lelli (Università del Salento)

Seventeenth-century Italian scholarly milieus show an extensive use and appraisal of the most common authoritative sources that were highly esteemed in the previous centuries. A major break with the past was represented by new interpretations of the traditional texts that were now reread against the background of contemporary speculative trends. The paper will discuss the way in which the main character of Luzzatto's *Socrate* adheres to the Socrates mentioned by Judah ha-Levi in his *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, another work that enjoyed a surprising reappraisal in seventeenth-century Italy. In his philosophical/apologetic work (structured, like Luzzatto's, as a dialogue), the twelfth-century author portrays Socrates as a representative of the *prisca philosophia* tradition, as a mystic, and as a scholar who is charged by both the lower and the upper intellectual classes with being incapable of correctly addressing his students. These various interpretations of Socrates perfectly match with the various interpretations of the ancient philosopher offered by Luzzatto; they should all be studied in the context of the medieval Arabic interpretations of ancient Greek philosophy. It is possible that in this wide array of sources, a sort of "oriental" scepticism was born, a reading of rational thought that stressed the fallacies of human reasoning in the context of adhesion to traditional religion.

## Panel 5: Politics and Economics

### **A Venetian Rabbi and a Baroness from the Low Countries on the Condition of the Jews**

Vasileios Syros (University of Jyväskylä)

The goal of this presentation is to explore Simone Luzzatto's political ideas within the broader context of European debates on the condition of the Jews. In particular, I will undertake a comparative examination of Luzzatto's *Discorso* and a memorandum produced by Cornélie Wouters, baroness de Vasse, in the aftermath of the French Revolution in 1790. I will demonstrate that Wouter's plea to the French Assembly to recognise the Jews as equal citizens displays striking similarities to Luzzatto's argumentation in favour of the Jewish presence in seventeenth-century Venice, especially in terms of how they treat the phenomenon of usury and the possibility of a symbiosis of the Christian and Jewish religions. Finally, the paper will address some broader questions regarding the influence of Luzzatto's writings in early modern France.



## **Simone Luzzatto's Political Thought: Between Scepticism and Reason of State**

*Guido Bartolucci (Università della Calabria)*

Simone Luzzatto's political thought has been interpreted by several scholars as being linked to the tradition of the reason of state, to which the Venetian rabbi makes constant reference in his work, particularly in the *Discorso*. On an in-depth analysis of Luzzatto's works, however, it is possible to recognise other fragments of a political reflection that cannot be traced back to the tradition of reason of state and which in some cases is contrary to it. Through a comparison of the different political positions Luzzatto expressed in his works, a new political thought emerges, transformed through the use of the sceptical tradition. In fact, in both the *Discorso* and the *Socrates*, Luzzatto recognises the impossibility of formulating a "universal" political theory and identifies the sceptical concept of "the probable" as the only guide that man has for living in a social community.

The paper aims to compare Luzzatto's different positions and to acknowledge the sources of his most radical interpretation, the politics of the probable, which may be useful for a more general understanding of the influence of scepticism on Jewish and Christian political thought in seventeenth-century Europe.

### **Panel 6: Politics and Economics**

## **Simone Luzzatto and the Debate on the Economical Role of the Jews in Eighteenth Century Italy**

*Luca Andreoni (Istituto Comprensivo "Caio Giulio Cesare")*

This paper aims to investigate the link between economic prosperity and the distribution of wealth, both within the Jewish community and in the broader city. It will take into account both the *Discorso* and the *Socrate* in order to underline the main aspect of Simone Luzzatto's economic thought. This ongoing research attempts to explore the circulation of his arguments about prosperity, wealth circulation, and equilibrium in the political debate on the economic role of the Jews in Italy. Special attention is paid to the debates emerging from archival documentation (and from one quarrel in particular).

## **"Seek the Peace and Prosperity of the City...": The Political Use of Jer 29:7 by Simone Luzzatto and Other Jewish Sources**

*Myriam Silvera (Università degli Studi di Roma "Tor Vergata")*

The leaders of the Jewish community of London, writing to the Chamber of Commons in 1689, apologised for not having the money to pay the extraordinary tax that was requested of them. While they were not as rich as the English authorities supposed, the Jewish leaders said, they had many other merits on their side. For instance, to prove their "economic" loyalty to the country in which they lived, they emphasised the fact that they would keep their monetary gains in the same place that they had obtained them. They added that this practice was not usual for foreigners only temporarily resident in England, who, at a certain point in their lives, could decide to go back to their countries of origin, taking their wealth with them.

This apologetic argumentation has its source in Simone Luzzatto's *Discourse on the State of the Jews of Venice* (1638), where the Jews' loyalty to their country is often underlined, and is enriched through a

resort to a quotation from Jeremiah 29:7: “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” My paper will deal with the popularity of this quotation, which was used both in rabbinical literature and also by authors who were contemporaries of Luzzatto such as Menasseh ben Israel and Isaac Cardoso.

## **Panel 7: Anthropology, Society, and Tolerance**

### **Self-Love, Blood-Ties, and Amity in Simone Luzzatto’s Philosophy**

*Giuseppe Veltri (Universität Hamburg)*

In *Discourse 52r*, Simone Luzzatto wrote: “For the [Jews] believe that there are different degrees of connections among men. To the same extent, [they also believe] that within one nation the obligations of compassion must be subordinated among them: the love of self obtains first place, followed by blood-ties, and last by the amity between citizens. They [the Jews] believe that foreigners and aliens belonging to a different religion share the common ground of humanity that hence binds them to observing the precepts of natural morality and to having some cognition of a superior cause.” My lecture focuses on the background of Luzzatto’s philosophical statement in the context of early modern discussions of society, religion, nature, natural morality, and the philosophy of tolerance.