DAVID MALKIEL

THE REGGIOS OF GORIZIA: MODERNIZATION IN MICRO

I

Isach Samuel Reggio, an affluent Italian-Jewish intellectual, was a devoted follower of Moses Mendelssohn and the Haskalah. Born in 1784, his early achievements were well received. In 1820 Reggio proposed the establishment of a rabbinical seminary that would train students in the humanities, as well as according to the traditional curriculum. The following year he published an Italian translation of the Bible, with a commentary, modeled after the German Bi’ur. His Ha-Torah veha-Philosophia appeared in 1827, proclaiming the compatibility of rationalism and religion. Reggio was now 43 years old and a respected Maskil.

During the remaining years of his life, Isach fell out of favor in intellectual circles because his name became increasingly linked with Reform. Criticism reached a crescendo after 1852, when, in Behinat ha-Kabbalah, Isach attributed the heretical Kol Sakal to Leone Modena, Venice’s colorful

* To my mother, Ann Kupfermann, on her seventieth birthday.


...the relationship between these two thinkers, father and son, affords a rare opportunity to probe the genesis of modern Jewish thought, and to watch the torch pass from the traditional to the modern intellectual leader. Upon examination, the distinction between tradition and modernity is not clear-cut. This point will be elaborated at length, but can be briefly illustrated here: Isach attended a Catholic grammar school, which was obviously Abram Vita’s decision. Furthermore, in 1818, Abram Vita appended a letter of praise to Isach’s first works, *Torat min-Shamayim* and *Torat Elohim*.

This essay will compare the thought of these two thinkers by focusing on their attitudes towards Kabbalah and Reform, considered by both to be key to Isach’s first works, *Behinat ha-Kabbalah*, replete with arguments against those of the Talmud, revealing the villainy that had always been concealed within him. There has never been a denier of the Oral Law like him.... He is a hater of Israel.4

Isach’s father, Abram Vita, was one of Italy’s leading rabbinic authorities. The relationship between these two thinkers, father and son, affords a rare opportunity to probe the genesis of modern Jewish thought, and to watch the torch pass from the traditional to the modern intellectual leader. Upon examination, the distinction between tradition and modernity is not clear-cut. This point will be elaborated at length, but can be briefly illustrated here: Isach attended a Catholic grammar school, which was obviously Abram Vita’s decision. Furthermore, in 1818, Abram Vita appended a letter of praise to Isach’s first works, *Torat min-Shamayim* and *Torat Elohim*.

This essay will compare the thought of these two thinkers by focusing on their attitudes towards Kabbalah and Reform, considered by both to be key issues in determining the nature of modern Judaism. It will show that father and son disagreed, but not absolutely — and not at all times. Moreover,

3. *Behinat ha-Kabbalah* (Gorizia, 1852), pp. 73-86. This work begins with *Kol Sakal*, a lengthy polemic against rabbinic tradition. Allegedly composed in 1500, it is attributed to one Amiha Ibn Raz of Spain. A very brief rebuttal follows, entitled *Sha’agat Arayeh*, attributed to Leone Modena. These two works are followed by an extensive series of comments by Isach. See Talya Fishman, “*Kol Sakal’s* Critique of Rabbinic Tradition” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1986);


SHIR was not the first to accuse Isach of penning a pseudopigraphic medieval attack on traditional Judaism. Moritz Steinmesdier attributed the heretical road *Allot Devorim* to Isach. See *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1931), vol. 2, cols. 2135-36. Isach did copy *Allot Devorim*, in 1831, hoping to publish it: see Oxford-Bodleian MS. 2222/4. However, he only published selections, in Letter 19 of *Igros Joschur*, vol. 1 (Vienna, 1834), pp. 122-32.

5. Ishach’s name appears in a government memorandum on the subject of Abram and Isach did not differ on the basic question of the place of Halakhah in modern life.

II

Our story begins with Abram Vita Reggio’s biography, recorded by Mordecai Samuel Ghirondi, his disciple and friend from Padua.6 Born in Ferrara in 1755, Abram Vita studied with R. Isach Lampronti, author of the monumental *Pahad Yisahk*. Beginning in 1773, aged 18, Reggio spent eight years as a children’s tutor in the Friuli district, first in Cormons and later in Chivaris. During these years he traveled frequently to Gradisca to study Kabbalah with Abram Morpurgo, whose daughter he later married.

In 1781 Abram Vita was hired by the officials of the Jewish community of Gorizia, near Gradisca, to serve as the teacher of their newly-opened school. He taught Hebrew and grammar, rhetoric and poetics, Bible and Bible commentary, homiletical literature, and the first book of Maimonides’ Code.

Up to this point in his career, Abram Vita had acquired and exercised the full gamut of Hebrew disciplines. He had acquired training in Bible and grammar at Lampronti’s yeshiva. In 1786 he wrote *Mashal u-Melizah*, a collection of occasional verse and didactic riddles,7 which display his wit, as well as his erudition and linguistic skills.

Abram Vita’s training and activities justify labeling him a Maskil. This classification is supported by the fact that *Mashal u-Melizah* contains a poem Abram Vita wrote in 1790, on the occasion of the marriage of Herz Homberg, Jewish education, dated November 19, 1800. See Chiara Lesizza, “Scuola e cultura ebraiche a Gorizia nel XVIII secolo: istanze tradizionali e fermenti di rinnovamento,” *Studi Goriziani* 68 (1988): 64-65. Isach also appears in the Piarist school’s published list of students: in September 1797 he was in the highest class of the lowest level in grammar. In April and September of 1800 Isach was in the top class in Rhetoric and Greek. He is not listed among the students of poetry. See Quod feliq faustumque Sit. nomina ivventum in Caes. Reg. Goritniensi scholam piarum gymnasio humanioribus litteris studentum ex ordine classium in quas facto ... cursu referri mseruerunt (Gorizia, 1797, 1800 [April and September]).

6. Ghirondi wrote the first biographical sketch of Abram Vita in a letter to David Zacut Modena, dated 1836. This document belongs to Professor Meir Benayahu, who kindly brought it to my attention. In 1844, after Abram’s death, Ghirondi published another biography in the first issue of *Yerushalayim ha-Benuyah*, pp. 74-83.

whom he calls a dear friend (ff. 42r-43r). Homberg stood at the forefront of
the Berlin Haskalah, serving as tutor to Mendelssohn’s son and later writing
the Deuteronomy section of the Bi’ur. He and Abram Vita must have met and
become closely acquainted in 1783-84, when Homberg taught at the Jewish
school in Trieste.8

The year Abram Vita wrote his poem for Homberg was also the year he
enrolled little Isach at the local Catholic school. Abram Vita’s concern for
Isach’s general education fits in well with this stage of his career: it was the
apogee and twilight of his early Maskilic phase, when he was still teaching
Hebrew and Bible, writing prose and poetry.

In 1798 Abram Vita was offered the post of Rabbi of Gorizia, following
the death of Moses Hefez Gentili. He held the position until his death in 1842.
During these years Abram Vita composed his masterpiece, Eshel Avraham,
an encyclopedic guide to Jewish culture, spanning Bible, grammar, Talmud,
Midrash, homily, and Kabbalah. The disciplines are graded according to age
groups, following the structure set down in Avot (5:21): “At five — Bible, at
ten — Mishnah, and so on.”

This structure, and particularly the space devoted to each field, reflects the
relative importance of the various disciplines in Abram Vita’s eyes at this later
stage of his life. Bible and Hebrew are included — as they were in Lampronti’s
yeshiva — but are dispensed with in the first of the book’s 13 parts. The rest
of the disciplines are treated in parts 2-7, except for Kabbalah. Parts 8-12 deal
with Kabbalah, while the final part deals with prayer, specifically kabbalistic
prayer. Abram Vita had clearly moved out of his early Maskilic stage into
his mature identity as a kabbalist. Henceforth, he bore the standard of Moses
Hayyim Luzzatto alongside that of Isach Lampronti.9

Abram Vita produced a small number of other works, including an
autobiography, a volume of responsa, and another of sermons.10 None of these
writings was published, and none has survived. Discussion will, therefore,

8 Homberg went on to champion the cause of Haskalah in Galicia, where he adopted
extremely untraditional views — with which Abram Vita would certainly not have
9 See Meir Benayahu, Kabbalistic Writings of R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto (Hebrew)
(Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 92-94 and passim. Eshel Avraham does not purport to
present a new interpretation of any field, and if in fact it does contain innovative
contributions, these will be uncovered only through careful and minute analysis
of the entire work.
10 Ghirondi, letter to David Zacut Modena, op. cit., verso.
focus on his correspondence with Mordecai Samuel Ghirondi of Padua, his student and friend. This material has survived in Ghirondi’s manuscript collection of his own responsa, *Kevuza Kesef.* Ghirondi is a particularly valuable source because he straddled both Abram Vita and Isach’s generations, and corresponded with both.

III

One of Abram Vita’s letters to Ghirondi is about the significance of Kabbalah. Ghirondi had asked Abram Vita whether a God-fearing and observant Jew, who studies Torah on the literal level but does not believe in the science of Kabbalah — or perhaps believes in it but does not want to study it — would be considered to have sinned. Abram Vita answered that study of Kabbalah is incumbent upon everyone, claiming that there is no other path to eternal bliss, which he states as the human goal. At the heart of Abram Vita’s presentation is the argument that the Torah makes no sense on the literal level. What is the point, he asks, of recounting stories from the past, such as that of Laban’s livestock, or that of Hudah and Tamar, which “adds no honor to us?”

Abram Vita makes the same argument for the commandments. He repeatedly points out that some of them are intended simply to commemorate past events, a purpose which ostensibly could be accomplished by means of a mental act. In Abram Vita’s view, the literal understanding of these commandments leaves them “lacking taste and salt.” Abram Vita concludes that the Torah and commandments must have an internal quality which grants them meaning and value, by which he means Kabbalah.

These arguments are not new; Yair Hayyim Bacharach made a similar case in the 17th century, citing even earlier sources. Moreover, discussion of the apparent meaninglessness of commandments dates back to medieval arguments over the authenticity of rabbinic tradition. Still, Abram Vita penned these lines against the backdrop of his own historical context: he was a child of the Enlightenment, when formalized religion was on the decline among Jews and Christians. Viewed in the context of the prevalent apathy and skepticism, the problems Abram Vita raised take on a contemporary air alongside their medieval roots.

Abram Vita attacks the enemy camp, defined as literalists and sympathizers of philosophy, which, despite the destruction of Aristotelianism, is still identified as Greek. Abram Vita has this group claim that knowledge of Bible, Talmud and halakhic literature is sufficient for proper observation of the commandments. The enemy and its arguments are familiar from medieval sources. Similarly, Abram Vita’s principal claim — that because philosophy undergoes constant change, it is without foundation — resonates back to the Karaite-rabbinitic polemics of an earlier age. But Abram Vita adds a contemporary touch:

The great scholar Kant, who was an extremely wise man, wrote at the beginning of his book that he read the works of all ages — Plato, Aristotle and all the earlier philosophers — and prepared proofs to overturn all their words, and to prove that all their proofs are erroneous. And so he did. And then came a great philosopher, author of *Giv’at ha-Moreh,* and attempted to defend the early philosophers and save them from Kant’s approach (f. 49r). Abram Vita is referring to Solomon Maimon’s *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie,* a critique of Kant published in 1790. But Abram

11 Ghirondi separated the substantive, main body of his letters (as well as those of his correspondents) from the opening and closing pleasantries and personal remarks. The latter are collected in manuscripts entitled *Dover Shalom,* also in the Montefiore collection.
12 Montefiore MS. 162, #289, ff. 45r ff. Though Ghirondi may have asked the question theoretically, he wrote a number of letters that express the difficulties he was having with his own study of Kabbalah. In one letter, Ghirondi is perplexed by disagreements between kabbalists, especially the discrediting of pre-Lurianic Kabbalah by Hayyim Vital (Montefiore MS. 161, #63-4, ff. 47v-49v). Abram Vita replied to the letter without answering the question. Elsewhere, Ghirondi asked Reggio which kabbalistic authorities he himself followed, especially with regard to the choice between Cordovero and Luria; again Abram Vita evaded the question (Montefiore MS. 163, #488, ff. 108v-109r.). Ghirondi received no reply at all to a series of specific questions on matters of kabbalistic doctrine, which he raised after reading Abram Vita’s *Eshel Avraham* (Montefiore MS. 162, #392). Therefore, it may be that Ghirondi’s question about Kabbalah’s indispensability expressed his own ambivalence towards the discipline.
the Torah has an inner stratum (penimiyut) which is known to the pious of each generation. How, I wonder, did you transform yourself all at once into a different person?17

Actually, Torah min ha-Shamayim does not talk about Kabbalah at all, but makes the central point that there is a divine lesson in every letter of the Torah, indeed, in every written character. In this sense, the sermon can be interpreted as sympathetic to the kabbalist's sensibilities.

Part one, Chapter five of Ha-Torah veha-Philosophia is also not about Kabbalah. However, elsewhere in this book Isach does speak favorably of Kabbalah; he notes that even famous kabbalists saw merit in the study of philosophy, citing first Abraham Cohen Herrera and then Abraham b. Isaac of Granada, the alleged author of Berit Menuhah (p. 49). Isach does seem to view this kind of philosophical Kabbalah as a respectable discipline.18 Later in the work Isach cites the Zohar in support of remarks on the eschatological legend of the Leviathan, and he cites it before Sa’adia Gaon, implying the antiquity of the Zohar.19 Finally, Isach waxes eloquent on the subject of the esoteric meaning of aggadah, and even uses the term penimiyut, providing yet another intellectual contact point between Isach and Kabbalah sympathizers.20

Letter 13, the stimulus for Ghirondi’s rebuke, is a refutation of the claim that, before dying, Leone Modena abandoned his rejection of metempsychosis. Isach finds it inconceivable that Modena would “suddenly turn into another person” (p. 84), the phrase Ghirondi later turned against him. But Isach’s main point is that the story does not vitiate the intellectual force of Ari

17 Montefiore MS. 164, #439, f. 78r.
18 P. 76. Isaac Baer Levinsohn contrasted this with Isach’s later view of the Zohar’s authenticity. See his Yehoshafat (Warsaw, 1883), pp. 46-47.
Nohem, Modena’s anti-kabbalistic treatise. Once again, Kabbalah per se is not Isach’s target.21

Ari Nohem seems to have affected Isach profoundly, causing him to abandon his earlier attitude, which combined respect for Kabbalah per se with a restrained criticism of what he perceived as latter-day distortions and perversions. This is the shift to which Ghirondi referred in his letter, and Ghirondi appears to have bottled up his resentment of Isach’s critical remarks until he was invited to comment on Igers Joscher.

Isach’s writings on Ari Nohem reveal the gradual shift in his attitude and tone. In 1816 he presented Moses Kunitz of Budapest with a series of questions on the authenticity of the Zohar, following the appearance of the latter’s Ben Yohai. Isach tells Kunitz that he has acquired a manuscript of Ari Nohem, and that it contains falsehoods about Kabbalah in general, and the Zohar in particular. Isach quotes a few acerbic sentences, and, after expressing shame at having repeated Modena’s calumnies, humbly asks Kunitz to decide whether or not they merit a reply.

Given the care Isach takes to present himself as a believer, as well as his obsequious tone, it is hardly surprising that Isach signs the letter as the son of his father. But, significantly, Abram Vita subscribed to the letter, indicating

21 In addition to these references, there is a chapter from Ha-Torah veha-Philosophia on Kabbalah that was stricken by the censor, and appeared anonymously in 1840. There Isach argues at length that Kabbalah should not be studied. He notes that though the kabbalists stress that the terminology used to refer to the Godhead is figurative, the actual, spiritual truth to which the terms allude is generally too nebulous to be grasped and, indeed, the distinction between expression and reality is often lost on Kabbalah’s adherents. This pitfall is tantamount to heresy, because of the principles of God’s unity and incorporeality.

To discourage the study of Kabbalah, Isach lists the many medieval scholars who discouraged pursuit of Kabbalah because of its inherent danger. Then he argues that the multiplicity of doctrines makes it impossible to know what the true Kabbalah is. Finally, Isach attributes the Sabbatian debacle to Kabbalah: “all this came about because of the love of wonders and mysteries, and the search for wonder and mystery.”

The view that Kabbalah is dangerous was hardly in dispute, even among Kabbalists. Neither this argument nor the preceding ones could be called an attack on the legitimacy of Kabbalah per se. At no point does Isach state or imply that Kabbalah is fundamentally false, and thus Ghirondi might have taken Isach for a closet sympathizer. See Leone Modena, Ari Nohem, ed. Julius Fuerst (Leipzig, 1880), pp. 91-97. The attribution to Reggio is mentioned by Isaac Baer Levinsohn (Yeḥoshua, p. 46). See Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. “Regejo, Isaac Samuel,” p. 361.

that he stood behind his son’s enquiry, even if had not read Ari Nohem or doubted the Zohar’s authenticity. Father and son stood together, and Ari Nohem, which Isach had only just acquired, had yet to undermine his faith in the legitimacy of Kabbalah.22

The change in Isach’s views and tone is evident in his edition of Delmedigo’s Behinat ha-Dat, published in 1833. Delmedigo’s text is followed by a series of lengthy notes by Reggio, and note 10 includes a full chapter from Ari Nohem, attacking the kabbalistic view of prayer (pp. 103-107). Note 12 is an attack on the attribution of the Zohar to Bar Yohai, and note 13 is a response to Kunitz’s defense of the attribution. Modena had clearly persuaded Isach, and Isach’s sympathy for the work is also evident from the fact that he prepared Ari Nohem for publication. It is this change of heart to which Ghirondi refers in his letter of 1834, one year later.23

From the subject of Isach’s change of heart, Ghirondi shifts to a personal tack:

Bear in mind, my beloved friend, that you have an elderly father, elderly in the wisdom of the divine Kabbalah, who is an absolute master of the revealed and the mysterious, who has a firm grasp of the Torah’s secrets, and who has written numerous and weighty books on the subject. You cannot suspect him — as the sect of the BESHTians was suspected — of anything ignoble. For you and I know him to be Godfearing, privately as well as publicly ... and God forbid that "the seed of Abraham," his son, would rise up and dispute his words, denouncing the science of truth!24

22 M. Kunitz, Ha-Megaref, pt. 1 (Vienna, 1820), pp. 41-47.
23 Samuele David Luzzatto (Shadal), Isach’s colleague and friend from Padua, was also interested in the question of the authenticity of the Zohar. In 1836 Luzzatto published an anonymous letter on the matter in Kerem Hemed. His lengthy treatment of the subject, Vikkuah al hakmat ha-Kabbalah ve-al kadmut ha-Zohar, was published in Gorizia in 1852 by Graziadio Isas Ascoli. Isach’s role in the composition and publication of this work is unclear.
24 Montefiore MS. 163, #439, ff. 78r-v. The personal-pleasantries segment of this letter dates it to the eve of Rosh HaShanah, 5595, i.e. 1834: see Montefiore MS. 176, #1075, f. 38r. The reference to the “BESHTians” alludes to the charges of heresy made by Hasidism’s opponents. In addition to the well-known critique of Zaddikism in Solomon Maimon’s autobiography, see Mordecai L. Wileszny, “Hasidic-Mitnaggedic Polemics in the Jewish Communities of Eastern Europe: The Hostile Phase,” in Essential Papers on Hasidism, ed. Gershon D. Hundert (New York, 1991), pp. 244-71; Allan Nadler, “Meir b. Elijah of Vilna’s Milhamot
Ghirondi’s reference to Abram Vita suggests that he saw a connection between blood and belief, between Isach’s convictions and his relationship with his father. Ghirondi’s letter highlights the rebellious aspect of Isach’s agitation against Kabbalah. He saw Isach’s letter as signaling a downturn in the relationship between father and son.

Isach’s switch from an early traditionalism to a more radical stance, and the change in his relationship with his father, are reflected in sources on the issues of tefillin and shaving on hol ha-mo’ed (the intermediate days of festivals). In the spring of 1825 Isach petitioned the communal leaders (Capi) of Gorizia to allow into the synagogue those Jews choosing not to put on tefillin during hol ha-mo’ed.25

Tefillin on hol ha-mo’ed was not a new issue. Ashkenazic tradition required that they be worn, but a Zoharic prohibition dictated Sephardic practice, and ultimately determined the position of R. Joseph Karo (Shulhan Arukh, pt. 1, sec. 31). BEShTian Hasidism aligned itself with the Zoharic dictate, and the Gaon R. Elijah of Vilna agreed. Around the turn of the 19th century, R. Jacob b. Aaron of Karlin issued a last-ditch defense of the inviolability of Ashkenazic tradition.26


Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), IT-GO, AII-22, 1.IV.1825.

On this controversy, see Jacob Katz, “Tefillin on Hol ha-Mo’ed: Differences of Opinion and Public Controversies of Kabballistic Origin” (Hebrew), in Halakhah ve-Kabbalah (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 102-24. The Jews of Gorizia had confronted this issue on a previous occasion. In 1716 Raphael Emanuel Hai Ricchi, a kabbalist who settled in Gorizia and supported himself by teaching the local Jewish children, exhorted the community’s members to abandon their tradition of wearing tefillin on hol ha-mo’ed. Gorizia, unlike Ferrara for example, was such a small community that sustaining more than one synagogue was not an option. The result was a new situation, in which members of a single synagogue split into two camps with different practices. To this there arose fierce opposition. Various rabbinic responsa affirmed the continued legitimacy of the traditional practice, and demanded that Ricchi’s campaign for change be stopped. See Isach Lampronti, Pahad Yizhak, s.v. Tefillin, 1, 99v, ff.

Isach’s exchange with the Capi suggests that some members of the Gorizia community adhered strictly to their Ashkenazic legacy, while others followed the kabbalists’ practice. Isach’s petition implies that he himself refrained from donning the tefillin, though he may have acted out of concern for the religious freedom of others. Isach’s own policy is clarified by a separate document from the archive of Gorizia’s Jewish community, which was attached to Isach’s petition. It tells the following story, providing neither the name of the protagonist nor the date of the incident.27

At one time everyone was allowed into the synagogue on Hoshanah Rabba, even those worshipers who did not put on tefillin during hol ha-mo’ed. Apart from the narrator of the incident, this last group included such distinguished congregants as Abram Vita Reggio and Ventura (b. R. Menasheh Hefez) Gentili. No objection was made by the communal Rabbi, R. Moses Hefez Gentili, but the Capi eventually prevailed upon him to issue a declaration against the practice.28

This year, on the morning of Hoshanah Rabba, the narrator responded promptly to the sexton’s call to prayer, and was soon followed by Isach Reggio. Within a few minutes, Abram Vita Morpurgo approached the narrator, and began abusing him and loudly ordering both men out of the synagogue. The narrator and others tried to calm Morpurgo, but he continued to shout, while kicking and banging on the narrator’s bench. Another congregant shouted in support of Morpurgo’s outburst, and prayer could not proceed until the two complied with Morpurgo’s demand.29

It is clear from this story that Isach’s 1825 appeal to the Capi stemmed

27 The juxtaposition in the Gorizian community archive of Isach’s appeal and the narrative suggests that they were chronologically proximate, though April Ist and Hoshanah Rabba are separated by half a year. However, this remains uncertain, as the narrative is undated.

28 Hefez died in 1798, so the following incident took place some time thereafter. See Mordecai Samuel Ghirondi, “Toledot Avraham,” Yerushalayim ha-Benuyah (1844), p. 78.

29 The question of entering the synagogue came up during the controversy with Ricchi. At that time a number of possibilities were suggested that would have defused the tension created by the proposed change, but Ricchi rejected them all. One of the compromises, also rejected, was that community members abstaining from tefillin not enter the synagogue until the recitation of Hallel, when everyone removes their tefillin in any case. This compromise may have been the measure that Abram Vita Morpurgo sought to implement in the latest Gorizian struggle. See Katz, “Tefillin,” pp. 114 20, 123.
from religious conviction rather than from an ideal of religious toleration or pluralism. Thus it appears that in 1825 Isach adhered to his father's custom, and practiced — as well as preaching — respect for Kabbalah.30 Ten years later, in 1835, the year of Ghirondi's letter, Isach's attitude towards tradition seems to have changed. The issue is Reform, not Kabbalah, but by coincidence hol ha-mo'ed is again the focus of debate.

That year, 1835, Isach published Ma'amor ha-Tiglaha, calling for abrogation of the halakhic taboo on shaving during hol ha-mo'ed. This was a classic issue in the struggle over Reform, and Isach's main arguments had already been aired by other scholars.31 The heart of the matter, to which Isach devotes half of the book, is the right to institute halakhic reform. Isach writes: "Everything depends on temporal and geographical change, on changes in people's needs and customs, on the obsolence of the old rationales, and on fear of the greater ills that would stem from the custom's perpetuation" (p. 48).

Abram Vita objected to the treatise, and his critical notes were published after his death, under the title Tiglaha ha-Ma'amor.32 He, too, addressed broad considerations, as well as the legal particulars of the issue at hand. Abram Vita characterized those favoring the change as "pampered handsome young fellows (Ezek. 23:6), whose only aim is to appear nice and handsome for the prostitutes" (6r). His practical suggestion was that these "fellows" grow their beard throughout the year, and he cited other "handsome young fellows" who do so. "and say that this is their beauty" (4v, 7t).

Abram Vita explains that ceding on the matter of hol ha-mo'ed would open the door to shaving on festival days, or even on the Sabbath (5v). He shows no willingness to compromise with those who refuse to obey rabbinic law. This is characteristic of the general attitude Abram Vita expresses towards Reform in Tiglaha ha-Ma'amor: "It is true that the fences of Judaism are breached in many places, and we are unable to repair them, but we shall

not, on that account, lend the sinners our support, adding satiety to thirst and causing them to transgress further, for the troubles of the present are of sufficient difficulty" (5r).

Tiglaha ha-Ma'amor reveals how wide a breach had opened between Abram Vita and his son by 1835. Abram Vita assumed the same militant stance in 1837, in letters he exchanged with Ghirondi concerning the Reformist publications of Aaron Chorin of Arad.33 Ghirondi accompanies every mention of Chorin's name with strings of curses, but he wrote to Abram Vita because some of Chorin's arguments appeared to make sense, a realization he found quite unsettling.

One of these letters concerns the question of whether a Jew may sell medicine to a non-Jew on the Sabbath. Ghirondi uses the issue to ask Abram Vita to look for ways to remove halakhic restrictions that do not endanger the basic Written and Oral Law. He cites Chorin's point that many Jews will turn their backs on Judaism, leave the fold, and even become enemies of the Jewish people. Deploving Chorin's point of view, Ghirondi asks Abram Vita whether, nevertheless, the problem is real. He has imaginary supplicants complain that the distinctive lifestyle enjoined by Halakhah makes them the subject of ridicule among non-Jews, and causes government officials to deny positions to Jews.34

Abram Vita could not be budged: "Times may have changed, but our Torah has not changed. God forbid!" Abram Vita refers to the Reformers as "the new philosophers, who lead people astray through scientific investigation, an alien wisdom ... which seeks to destroy the roots of the holy Torah and its basic contents." He continues: "One should not be surprised at those that are drawn after her — namely science — because 'they abound in customs of the aliens' (Isa. 2:6) that did not know God's mystery, and refused to walk in the way of his Torah, and thus they threw truth away."35

This is Abram Vita's most extreme rejection of modern thought, which he equates with the abandonment of "truth" — perhaps Kabbalah — and religious observance. Abram Vita's language seems less severe when placed in its specific setting, as a reaction to the writings of Aaron Chorin, a particularly radical Reformer. Abram Vita devoted a separate letter, written

30 The tefillin story also shows that the pressures of modernization failed to temper the passionate commitment of Gorizia's synagogue regulars to meticulous ritual observance, a point that merits further examination.
32 Livorno, 1844. See also Jacob Ezekiel Halevi, Tiporei Lulavit (Berlin, 1839).
33 See also Jacob Ezekiel Halevi, Tiporei Lulavit (Berlin, 1839).

in 1837, to refuting Chorin’s heretical views. The letter addresses specific points, leaving no doubt that Abram Vita had read Chorin’s works. In fact, Abram Vita says so explicitly: "I did not wish to read them, but [people] implored me and I read, until I was disgusted, and I threw them to the ground" (f. 165v). It is unclear who implored Abram Vita to read Chorin; could it have been Isach?

VI

The image of Abram Vita and Isach as holding polarized views on Reform is not entirely accurate for either. Abram Vita’s responsum on music in the synagogue expresses a large measure of flexibility.

Ghirondi asked Abram Vita whether it was permissible to have non-Jews play musical instruments on the final day of Sukkot, "to honor God and the Torah — the Torah having been completed on that holy day — on the grounds that this performance evokes Simhat Be’it ha-Sho’evah." Abram Vita permitted the practice, on condition that the congregants ‘accompanied the music with songs honoring God, stating that this would truly evoke the holiday.

The issue of music in the synagogue first appeared in Italy in the early 17th century. With the introduction of the organ into the Hamburg Temple in 1619, the issue became a bone of contention between traditional and Reform rabbis. Italian rabbis could be found in both camps, and the fact that Abram Vita ruled leniently is one of the reasons why he was seen as a liberal. On the other hand, Isach was a traditionalist who opposed the introduction of the organ into the local synagogue, expressing a large measure of flexibility.

Isach’s position on halakhic reform is also more complex than one might suppose: he opposed radical reform as vehemently as he opposed rigid orthodoxy. Among the listed advantages of the rabbinical college he proposed were "the spirit of the rabbinical college" (op. cit., p. 89), the "rabbinic mantle" (op. cit., p. 89), and the "life of the rabbi" (op. cit., p. 89). While I believe these sources are representative of Reggio’s attitude towards Reform, a detailed study remains a desideratum.

VII

For most of his life Isach was merely a taxpaying member of the Gorizia community. In 1842, at the age of 58, following his father’s death, he assumed the position of acting rabbi. However, in 1850 he was dismissed from the position. This incident is of particular significance because it was motivated by a struggle over Reform. Isach was ousted for blocking a program of halakhic reforms initiated by the Capi. Outmaneuvered in the field of communal politics, Reggio did manage to have the last word on Reform. In 1852 he published Behinat ha-Kabbalah, which contains the following indictment of
the proponents of Reform: "... not only do they oppose this commandment [tefillin], they rebel against all the others, with malice and contempt. The spirit of the times ... seduces them to destroy every commandment that distinguishes the Israelite from his fellow man, as if our only purpose were to resemble others, even in their follies."\(^{42}\)

SHIR's stigmatization of Reggio as a heretic might have been based entirely on his attribution of Kol Sakal to Leone Modena; it hardly emerges from his ringing condemnation of Reform.\(^{43}\)