

RAPA AND RAPAPORT FAMILIES IN NORTHERN ITALY (15th–16th Centuries)

WITH AN APPENDIX ON THE ORIGIN OF THE ROTHSCHILD MISCELLANY.

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[notes: to be fixed later: “di” = “ben”, “Moshè di Jekutiel Coen” = “Moses ben Yekuthiel Hakohen”; “fu” = “late”; change all italicized titles to quoted titles, and vice versa]

On the origin of the Rapa and Rapaport family names.

The origin of the Rapa family name is not clear. Some would like to derive Rapa from German Rabe (raven). Samuel David Luttazzo proposed this hypothesis (in 1844) on behalf of his son Filosseno, adducing two proofs:

- a. Abram Menachem Coen Rapa Porto, in his work in Hebrew *Minchà Belulà* (Verona 1594), at the end of the preface, signed as «one of the sons of the ravens », instead of Rapa (and a raven also appears on the family’s coat of arms).
- b. Menachem Immanuel Zion Coen Rapa Porto, at the end of the preface of his treatise on arithmetic, in Hebrew, *‘Over la-socher* (Venice 1627), signed as “Rabe Port”,¹ instead of Rapa Port.

In support of the above-mentioned proofs, of late date, provided by Filosseno Luzzatto, we have to add another [proof], to us convincing and determining, which dates back to the year 1520. It concerns the note that appears at the end of the *colophon* of the manuscript (an illuminated *Haggadà*) copied in

¹ S.D. Luzzatto’s *hebraische Briefe*, Krakau 1891, VI, letter n. 355, p. 854 (in Hebrew). On the figure of Abraham Menachem Coen Rapa Porto (Abraham Menachem Port, Menachem Coen Porto, Mandolin da Porto), son of Ja’akov, rabbi in Cremona and in Verona, see M. Benayahu-G. Laras, *Nomina di deputati alla sanità a Cremona nell’anno 1575 e la disputa tra Eliezer Ashkenasi e R. Avraham Menachem Porto ha-Coen*, in “Michael. On the history of the Jews in the Diaspora”, I, 1972, pp. 80-82 (in Hebrew). In a latin source from 1579 [he] is mentioned as “Abram Menachem Rappi da Porto” (V. Colorni, *Shemuel (Simone) da Spira contro fra Giovanni da Capestrano. Un curioso episodio del Quattrocento*, “La Rassegna mensile di Israel. Scritti in memoria di Paolo Nissim”, XXXVIII, 1972, p. 75, note 30).

On Menachem Immanuel Zion Coen Rapa Porto (Menachem Zion Coen Port, Emmanuel Porto), from Trieste, rabbi in Padua at the beginning of the 17th century, see M. Soave, *Illustrazione dei Rabbini Italiani della Famiglia Coen Porto, a me noti*, in *Un codice ebraico della Marciana* (“Il Corriere Israelitico”, XV, 1876, p. 152); A. Yaari, *Due lettere in ebraico indirizzate da Menachem Zion Porto a Jean Buxtorf junior*, in ID, *Studies in Hebrew booklore*, Jerusalem, 1958, pp. 303-306 (in Hebrew).

Mestre in 1470 by Elazar di Joseph Ashkenazi for the wife of Rabbi Chaim Stein (or Satan), named Freida (or Vreida) Rapa.² At the end of this note, we read (in Hebrew):

I, Izchak, Jehiel Coen's son, "of the ravens", called in Ashkenazi idiom "Rapa", coming from the location of Porto Bufolè, started on the 15th of Tevet of the Hebrew year that corresponds to the letters of my family name Rapa (=1520) ...when I was eighteen years old, my activity of circumciser...In the name "ZiPPoRA", צהרפ including the letters of my name and family name, that is "iZchak raPPa poRto cOEn" כהן פורטו רפא יצחק

From the testimony of Izchak Rapa Porto Coen, we come to learn four basic facts. First, from the mention of "Zipporà" (wife of the biblical Moses, with reference to *Exodus*, 4, 25) it is evident that the family name Rapa must be written with p and not with f (therefore Rapa or Rappa and not Rafa or Raffa);³ second, here for the first time is recorded in writing the family tradition of the origin of the family name Rapa from Rabe (=raven); third, we run into the first person known to us with the family name Rapa-porto (Rapaport); fourth, this person originated from Porto Bufolè (today Portobuffolè, village in the province of Treviso) and we think it is logical that the ending Porto (added to Rapa) is an abbreviation of Porto Bufolè.⁴

In spite of all this, in no way do we want to arrive at the conclusion that all the Rapaports descend exclusively from this family, nor that they all come from the location of Portobuffolè. In our opinion, we come, in the case of the origin of the Rapaport family name, to a phenomenon that, as we will see later, is common also to other Italian family names and that is to say that phonetically similar family names of families from different provenances and not necessarily related to each other, converge over the course of time into a single Italianized family name that, once settled, does not permit, at the distance of centuries, the reconstruction of every single genealogical branch.

So if we are convinced that the first Rapa-ports known to us belonged to that group of Rapa families that added to their own family name the ending Porto as originating from the location of Portobuffolè, we also are convinced that other members of the Rapa family will acquire the ending Porto over the years, without ever having lived in any place so called (and, at worst, even without belonging to Coen Sacerdoti).

² A. Freimann, *Haben Juedische Fluechtlinge aus Mainz im XV. Jahrhundert den Buchdruck nach Italien Gebracht?*, "Journal of Jewish Bibliography", I, 1938, pp. 9-11. Unfortunately, the *Haggadà* is currently untraceable.

³ Therefore, according to us, even the recent hypothesis of P. Jacobi, who claims that the family name Rapa derives from the Raffa region in Germany (*The Genesis of the Rapaport family*, in "Sharsheret Hadorot. Family Roots Research Periodical", VIII, 1994, p.5, (Hebrew part), fails.

⁴ We cannot demonstrate it, but Izchak Rapa Porto Coen, son of Jehiel, born in 1502, progenitor of the Rapaport family, could be identified with the Isach of the *Aronis* tribe of Rappis (Isach Porto Sacerdoti [NOTE: "SACERDOTE/I" = PRIEST(S)—WJR], Isach Sacerdote di Porto, Isach Sacerdote Rapai di Porto) son of Jehiel Rapa (Michele, Vitale), who lived in Mantua during the years 1530–1550 and founder of the Ashkenazi Oratory under the name Coen Porto (S. Simonsohn, *The Jews in the Duchy of Milan*, I, Jerusalem, 1982, sources n. 2496, 2507, 2654). Certainly, given the great number of homonyms, never as in this case, the greatest prudence must be maintained: at least five Jehiel (Michael) Coen Porto and as many Izchak Coen Porto worked in the same period and in the same area! Skimming the index of the *Toledot ha-iehudim beduchasut Mantova (History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, II, Jerusalem 1964) (in Hebrew) by S. Simonsohn, we find five Porto Coens, one Coen Porto, eleven Portos, one Porto Rapa, one Coen Rapa, one Coen Rapaport, and one Caana Rapaport cited! Even the famous German bibliographer M. Steinschneider, accustomed to easily solving the most complicated family relationships, had to admit to having difficulties in tracing the genealogy of the Rapa and Porto families (*Catalogus librorum hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana*, Berolini, 1852–1860, colonna 1982).

What is important to underline right now is that various branches of the Rapa family *tout court* will continue to be completely independent from the Rapaports⁵ and this is will happen in the same way with the Portos.⁶ In addition, it is not rare that some Rapaport families abandoned the appellation Rapa and maintained the family name Porto or vice versa.

⁵ In Busseto, in the first years of the 1600s, [there were] several Rapa families (not Rapaport): Ja'akov Rapa Coen, son of Israel Jekutiel Rapa Coen, and Mordechai, son of Israel Jekutiel Rapa Coen (B. Rivlin, *Registro della confraternita di misericordia della Comunità ebraica di Busseto*, "Asufot. Annual for Jewish studies", I, 1987, pp. 247–248) (in Hebrew); Jehiel di Jekutiel Rapa Coen was a printer in Venice in the years 1544–1547 (Steinschneider, *Catalogus Bodleiana*, op. cit., column 2933); the same Steinschneider records (*ibid.*, column 2829) a Moses di Jacob Rapa from Padua (after 1505) and a Shelomò di Menachem Coen Rapa, ca. 1550 (*ibid.*, column 2829); Shelomò Zalman di Menachem Refael Rapa Coen, rabbi in Mantua and Venice, died from the plague in 1575 (Simonsohn, *Jews in Mantua*, op. cit., pp. 522–523) (in Hebrew); in Verona, at the end of the 1500s, simultaneously assuming the function of rabbis: Abraham Menachem Rapa Porto Coen and Jacob Rappo or de Rappi (C. Boccato, *Un processo contro ebrei di Verona alla fine del Cinquecento*, "La Rassegna mensile di Israel", XL, 1974, pp. 366–367). In 1856, S.D. Luttazzo wrote to M. Steinschneider (*Epistolario italiano francese latino*, Padua 1890, p. 837): "in the book *Nahalat Jaakov* there [they?] appear (foll. 7,8) as two rabbis and two independent persons, both of them interrogated on the same subject, without the one mentioning the other: Abraham Menachem Port Coen and Moshè Menahem Coen Rapa".

The last one, also from Cremona like the preceding one, died in 1602, son of Moshè Ja'akov, had a nephew (son of a brother) named Moshè Rapa ("Michael", op. cit., p. 82, note 17 and p. 263).

Several members of the Rappa Sacerdoti family lived in Casale Monferrato towards the end of 1550: the rabbi Moise di Sacerdoti Rappa (R. Bonfil, *The Rabbinate in Renaissance Italy*, Jerusalem, 1979, pp. 80, 111, 241) (in Hebrew); Abramo Rappo (Rappus) Sacerdote (S. Foa, *Gli Ebrei nel Monferrato nei secoli XVI e XVII*, Alessandria, 1914, pp. 72–73); Isacco Rappa Sacerdoti (R. Segre, *Gli ebrei e il mercato delle carni a Casale Monferrato nel tardo cinquecento*, in *Miscellanea di Studi in memoria di Dario Disegni*, by E.M. Artom, L. Caro, S.J. Sierra, Torino 1969, pp. 230 and 236; Foa, *Gli Ebrei*, op. cit., pp. 84, 85, 92).

⁶With no pretensions to completeness, we remember [record?] among the Portos that lived in the northern Italy: a Salomone Coen Porto who commissioned a manuscript in the 15th century (A. Freimann, *Jewish Scribes in Medieval Italy*, in *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume*. English section, New York, 1950, p. 282, n.228.b), perhaps the same as Shelomo Porto owner of the Bible of Brescia of 1494 (*Gli ebrei a Castel Goffredo*, Florence 1998, p. 148). Moise de Porto lived in Udine in 1543 (*Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Itinerari ebraici*, by S. Cusin and P.C. Ioly Zorattini, Venezia 1998, p. 175); Moise da Porto appeared in Venice in 1588 (C. Boccato, *Licenze per altane concesse ad ebrei del Ghetto di Venezia (XVI–XVII–XVIII centuries)*, "La Rassegna di mensile di Israel", XLVI, 1980, p. 112); in 1551 there was [there is? we find?] in Padua a circumcisor named Shemuel Porto Ashkenasi (M. Adler, *Les Incunables hébraïques de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, in *Le livre Hébraïque*, Paris, 1962, p. 101); in 1565 in S. Vito al Tagliamento a Consilio, the died [was the?] Habraam di Porto Sacerdote (P.C. Ioly Zorattini, *I cimiteri ebraici del Friuli Veneto*, "Studi Veneziani", n.s., VIII, 1984, p. 10); Consiglio called Frizele, son of the banker Abramo de Portu (Buffoleti) *quondam* [once? formerly?] Michele da Castelfranco di Cervo, worked in Padua in 1546 (information kindly furnished by Prof. Carpi from Tel Aviv); Steinschneider (*Catalogus Bodleiana*, op. cit., columns 2829–2830) published the genealogy of one Abraham Porto, who lived in the same period, but not belonging to the family of the preceding.

This demonstrates that, even concerning the origin of some family names, caution and flexibility need to be maintained, which today is a standard procedure when we fix the correspondence between Hebrew and Italian proper names.⁷

In this note, we are going to treat at length about some Rapa families (not Rapaport) who lived in northern Italy during the 15th and 16th centuries.

In the Italian and Latin sources, the family name Rapa is indifferently transcribed as Rappi, Rappa, Rappe, Rap, Rapp, Rappo, Rappus with or without the addition of Coen or Sacerdoti. In Hebrew, it is ראָפּאַ.

Rapa families who lived in Italy in the 15th century.

One Manachem, son of Joseph Rapa, appears in Italy in 1320,⁸ but in the middle of the 1400s at least about ten Rapa families went down to northern Italy settling above all in Treviso, Venice, Mestre, Padua, Portobuffolè, and Piove di Sacco.

In chronological order:

Chaim Israel Stein (or Satan), married to Freida (or Vreida) Rapa, copied, in 1464, a Hebrew manuscript in Portobuffolè and lived in Mestre since 1467.⁹

The brothers Michele and Mandolino de Rap opened a loan bank in Lugano in 1465 and in 1470 they sent a petition to the Duke of Milan.¹⁰

Jehiel Rapa copied, in 1468, a Hebrew manuscript in the locality of Lodano (at “sixteen miles from the Jewish community” of Lugano?).¹¹

In 1469 Ja’akov Rapa Coen was kidnapped for ransom (in Mestre?).¹²

⁷ There are dozens of places named Porto in Italy and abroad, where the Porto families we are talking about could be from. Like the Portos, even other Italian families could be from not just one toponym: so the Soaves (D. Carpi, in *Studies in Jewish Culture in Honour of Chone Shmeruk*, Jerusalem 1993, pp.85–86, note 18) (in Hebrew), the Saravalles or Saravals, the Castelfrancos, the Marinis, the Cividallis, the Castelnuovos, the Lorias, the Ottolenghis, etc. About Ottolenghis, we modestly do not share the thesis according to which the family name Ottolenghi would come from only one place Ottolengo, today called Odalengo, in the province of Alessandria (Piedmont) (V. Colorni, *Judaica Minora. Nuove ricerche*, Milano 1991, p.72; ID. in *Hebraica. Miscellanea di studi in onore di Sergio J. Sierra per il suo 75 compleanno*, Torino 1998, p. 209): by the same criterion, a century before, when Graziadio Isaia Ascoli related to the scholars the discovery of a place called Ottolengo in Lombardy, they wanted to arrive at the conclusion that all the Ottolenghis would originate from that place (“Il Vessillo Israelitico”, VI, 1895, pp. 164–165).

⁸ Freiman, *Jewish scribes*, op. cit., pp. 293–294, n. 301.

⁹ Freiman, *Jewish Scribes*, op. cit., p. 262, n.129. The manuscript was in the hands of S.D. Luzzatto in 1839 (*S.D. Luzzattos hebraische Briefe*, IV, Przemysl 1882, p. 61, note 1) (in Hebrew). H. Simonsfeld, *Der Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venedig*, II, Stuttgart 1887, pp. 324–325; J. Colon, *Responsa*, n.5, 23.

¹⁰ L. Sestieri, *Prestatori ebrei a Bellinzona e a Lugano nella metà del sec. XV*, “La Rassegna mensile di Israel”, XLIV, 1978, pp. 404–405.

¹¹ M. Weisz, *Katalog der hebraischen Handschriften und Bucher des Professors Dr. David Kaufmann*, Frankfurt a. M. 1906, p. 115 (in Hebrew). He could be identical to the Michele from Lugano of the previous note.

¹² Kidnapping that, before being resolved by the payment of more than one thousand ducats in ransom, caused the death by broken heart of the wife of Ja’akov, as well as the suffering of her father and four sons, each lasting a full year (from the middle of 1469 to the middle of 1470), of which we only have a vague mention at the bottom of a manuscript (A.Z. Schwarz, *Die hebraischen Handschriften der k.k. Hofbibliothek zu Wien*, Vienna 1914, p. 53) (in Hebrew). This Ja’akov could be one with Ja’akov Coen Rapa whose signature appears in the white paper of the exemplar of the *Selichot* of Piove di Sacco (1475) belonging to the National and University Library of Jerusalem.

Elazar (Eliezer) di Joseph Aschkenazi copied, in Mestre in 1470, a Hebrew illuminated Haggadà on behalf of Freida (or Vreida) Rapa, wife of Chaim Stein (or Satan).¹³

Asher di Jehiel Coen Rapa, called Coen Rapa Anshkin, copied, in Mestre, a manuscript in 1473.¹⁴

Moshè Rap, in 1475, practiced the profession of medicine in Venice and he was exempted from bearing the Jewish sign.¹⁵

In Padua, Menachem, son of Jekutiel Rapa Coen, copied, in 1477, a little illuminated manuscript, which today is in Hamburg.¹⁶

Moshè di Jekutiel Coen Rapa bought a Pentateuch in Venice in 1482.¹⁷

Mandolino fu [who was?] Abramo Raph was a banker in Mestre in 1483–84.¹⁸

We are interested in pausing in particular over two Rapa families who lived in the 15th century, working in the same area and in the same period: that of Jekutiel Rapa Coen called Vize and that of the printer from Piove di Sacco, Meshullam Rapa Coen called Cusi. They were educated families, prestigious, of rabbis and scribes, wealthy, related to each other and to the most important German Jewish families from Veneto and from Lombardy, with whom they had in common of course not only the German mentality, rites, and culture, but also the idiom (a mix of Yiddish and local dialect). The two heads of the family must have been of a brave and combative character that we know about at least four disputes in which they were implicated in the course of about fifteen years. At the same time we have evidence of their generosity and of their constant availability in giving to charity. They were in continuous contact, directly or by letters, with the most important rabbinical authorities of the time and able to compete with anyone, in regard to profundity of knowledge. We don't know what their main source of sustenance was: we have no evidence that they were personally involved in business, in trade or in the loan banks. Even Meshullam Cusi's activity as printer, considering the amount, number and quantity of the volumes issued from his printing house, was certainly not undertaken with the purpose of realizing large profits.

Jekutiel, called Vize or Vitz)ויקי(ריבא (Rapa Coen

The name of Jekutiel (called Vize or Vitz) Coen appeared for the first time in 1465, in the divorce certificate between his son Jehiel (called Michael) and Ester, daughter of Meshullam, called Cusi.¹⁹ The place is not specified (only "in the state of Venice" is written), but we know from other sources that Vize, at that time, already lived in Mestre.²⁰ The famous dispute [debate?] between Vize and Meshullam Cusi was in 1467, a controversy that will occupy us later, which seems to have been settled by the arbitration of the famous rabbi Joseph Colon. When peace was made, the two protagonists, most probably cousins,

13 Freimann, Jewish scribes, op. cit., p. 255, n. 92; in 1481, he sold, in Lanciano, a copy of the 4th volume of *Arba' a Turim* from Piove di Sacco, today property of the National & University Library of Jerusalem (D. Nissim, *Spigolature di bibliografia ebraica*, "Annuario di Studi ebraici", X, 1984, p. 148, note 30).

14 Freimann, Jewish scribes, op. cit., p. 248, n. 45.

15 "Hebraeische Bibliographie", VI, 1863, p. 67, note.

16 M. Steinschneider, *Catalog der hebraischen Handschriften in der Stadtbibliothek zu Hamburg*, Hamburg 1878, pp. 172–173; Freimann, Jewish scribes, op. cit., p. 293, n. 299.

17 E. Carmoly, *Itinéraires de la Terre Sainte*, Brussels, 1847, p. 462. It can't be ruled out that he was the commissioner of the famous Rothschild Miscellany, illuminated in Venice between 1460 and 1480 (see the Appendix).

18 D. Jacoby, *New Evidence on Jewish Bankers in Venice and the Venetian Terraferma (c. 1450-1550)*, in *The Mediterranean and the Jews. Banking, Finance and International Trade (XVI-XVIII Centuries)*, eds. A. Toaff, S. Schwarzfuchs, Ramat Gan, 1989, p. 162, note 56.

¹⁹ I.S. Lange, *Rabbi Meir da Padova, redattore dell'Ordine del Ghittin e Chalizà di Jehudà Minz*, in *Miscellanea Disegni*, op. cit., p. 73 of the Hebrew text. Vize must have been wealthy if he could have no less than the famous rabbi Joseph Colon as preceptor (Bonfil, *The Rabbinate*, op. cit., p. 123; J. Colon, *Responsa*, n. 23).

²⁰ Moshè Minz, *Responsa*, n. 97–100.

continued to collaborate in the delivery (“from year to year or two years to two years”) of funds the poor co-religionists living in the land of Israel.²¹

In the course of the trial undergone by the Jews from Portobuffolè in 1480 (accused of ritual murder), a Michael son of Frizele²² appeared in Treviso, who, according to us, is identified as the son of Vize, Jehiel (Michael), mentioned above. How does the Hebrew nickname “Vize” correspond to the Italian “Frizele”? We arrive at this by studying a marriage contract (*Ketubà*) from Padua of 1561, in which the groom, of the name Jekutiel, called Vitz (perhaps descending from our Vitz from Mestre) signed in Hebrew “Vitzelen” or “Frizzel” and in the Latin text he is called “Frizzelle” filius q. Enselmi da Montagnana.²³ So Vitz or Vize becomes in the local German pronunciation Fitz²⁴ or Feiz²⁵ and in the Italian sources Feize,²⁶ Frittoli or Frittola or Frisoli or Frizele or Frizzere or Fricelle.²⁷

On the origin of the names Cusi and Meshullam Cusi

As regards the origin of the nickname Cusi, I managed to demonstrate, at the time, that this was also an abbreviation of the name Jekutiel (read, as in German, Jekusiel).²⁸ Evidently Meshullam Jekutiel Rapa Coen from Piove di Sacco chose the appellation Cusi to distinguish himself from homonymous cousins or relatives: Jekutiel Rapa Coen called Vize (from Mestre), on whom we focused in the preceding section, and Jekutiel Rapa Coen (from Padua), mentioned even by Rabbi Joseph Colon.²⁹

²¹ D. Nissim, *Gli ebrei a Piove di Sacco e la prima tipografia ebraica*, in “La Rassegna mensile di Israel. Scritti in memoria di Paolo Nissim”, XXXVIII, 1972, p. 172, note 17–19. The present study would like to be an updating and an amplification of the article cited in this note, written by me exactly thirty years ago and not free from imprecision.

²² S.G. Radzik, *Portobuffolè*, Firenze, 1984, p.101: “domus Michaelis filii Frizel”.

²³ I. Yoel, *Ketubot (contratti matrimoniali) italiane nella Biblioteca Nazionale e Universitaria di Gerusalemme*, “Kiriath Sefer”, XLII, 1946, pp. 271–271 [sic] (in Hebrew and in Latin). An illustration (not clear) of the *Ketubà* is quoted by Bonfil in the book *The Rabbinate*, op. cit., p. 156. A Jekutiel called Vize is working in Cremona in 1576 (Benayahu-Laras, *Nomina*, op. cit., p. 87).

²⁴ A Vitz or Fitz appears in Padua at the end of the 1500s. He could be identified with Frittoli Sacerdote, mentioned by D. Carpi, *Minutes Book of the Council of the Jewish Community of Padua*, I: 1577–1603, Jerusalem, 1973, pp. 528 and 529 (in Hebrew and Italian).

²⁵ In 1620, Ester (Sterella), daughter of Rabbi Leon Modena, marries Ja’akov, son of Jekutiel called Feiz (*Chayyè Yehuda, The Autobiography of a Venetian Rabbi*, ed. D. Carpi, Tel Aviv, 1985, p. 67) (in Hebrew).

²⁶ Simone was [formerly ?; fu] Feize lived in Pavia in 1388 (V. Colorni, *Prestito ebraico e comunità ebraiche nell’Italia centrale e settentrionale*, “Rivista di Storia del diritto italiano”, VIII, 1935, fasc. 3, p. 41 of the extract).

²⁷ To give some examples: Consiglio called Frizele, son of the banker Abramo (from Porto Buffoletto [sic; = Portobuffole ?]), is working in Padua in 1546 (fact kindly given to me by Prof. Carpi of Tel Aviv); Frittoli is a merchant in Padua in 1571 (E. Morpungo, *L’Università degli Ebrei in Padova nel XVI secolo*, « Bollettino del Museo Civico di Padova », XII, 1909, n. 1-2-3, p. 8 of the extract); Abraham fu Fricelle is a banker in Mestre in 1502 (Jacoby, *New evidence*, op. cit., p. 162, note 61); Fricino (Fricelle, Fricelo) son of Jacob Sacerdote is in Verona in 1566 (Simonsohn, *Jews in Milan*, op. cit., IV, pp. 2368-2622-2627); Frizele dal Banco is living in Venice in 1587 (Boccatto, *Licenze concesse*, op. cit., p. 112).

In spite of all that, it does not mean that the nickname Feiz must always correspond to Jekutiel or that every Frittolo becomes Vitz in Hebrew: for example, in 1516 one Asher (Enselmo) son of Moshè called Frizelle lived in Padua (D. Carpi, *Fonti ebraiche della prima metà del XVI secolo, tratte dagli archivi notarili di Padova*, in “Italia”, XIII–XV, 2001 (*In memory of Giuseppe Sermoneta*), p. 54 (in Hebrew). Even the family name Farissol is transcribed in Ferrara, as Frizoli or Frisoli (Colorni, *Judaica Minora*, op. cit., p. 98).

²⁸ Nissim, *Spigolature*, op. cit., p. 154, note 39; Colorni, *Judaica Minoria*, op. cit., pp. 75–76. I don’t think it is necessary to cite the bibliography regarding the other hypotheses on the origin of the name Cusi.

²⁹ *Responsa*, n. 73; see above, part. II below.

The children and grandchildren of Meshullam Cusi differentiate themselves from their cousins because they are mentioned in the Hebrew sources as children and grandchildren of Meshullam Cusi or of Cusi or of Meshullam Coen Rapa, but they are never mentioned with the family name Jekutiel or Vize.

According to tradition, the name Jekutiel was one of the names of Moses, “master of all the counselors of history” (then even phonetically Cusi = Consiglio [council]) and is frequently combined with Moshè and Meshullam. In Hebrew sources Meshullam Cusi is written

[...]

in the Italian sources Chusi, Cusè, Cusi.

Until the middle of the 1500s, you have tens of names Meshullam Cusi; then Cusi crystallizes as a family name and becomes common not only among the families of German origin and not only among the Coens. In the Hebrew sources, it diversifies as Kusser, Kuzer, Kozi, Kozer,

[...]

in the Italian sources as Cutti, Coti, Cuzzer, Cuser, Cussi, Cuzzi, Cuzzeri.

We are once again faced with the same phenomenon that we found among the Rapaport, Porto, Ottolenghi, etc., families and that is that Cusi became a well-received family name, of which families of very distant origin were not hesitant about using.³⁰

No surprise then if even today there are Cusi families of Sephardic origin (not Coen) and Cusi families of Ashkenazi origin.

Even the compound name Meshullam Cusi was adopted by families that had nothing to do with ours (for example, Meshullam Cusi from Castelfranco or Meshullam Cusi Soncin from Verona). An extreme case is furnished by Camilla (died as a child in 1610), daughter of that Meshullam Cusi Levi (!) who has to be identified with Salomon Levi del Banco.³¹ Witness in this case, on the one hand the rare phonetic correspondence Meshullam = Salomone and, on the other hand, the addition of the appellative Cusi to the name-family name Meshullam belonging to the del Banco family; and who knows if the intention was to honor the memory of the printer Meshullam Cusi from Piove di Sacco who (a century and a half before) certainly used to see the family of Meshullam-Salomone Levi from Camposampiero, precursor of the Levi del Bancos.³²

This shows that sometimes names and family names are chosen, not solely based on phonetic or etymological association, but also according to purely family and sentimental ties.

³⁰Abraham Cusi Levi (*sic*) died in Venice in 1555 (S. Bernstein, *Luhot Abanim*, II, “Hebrew Union College Annual”, X, 1935, p. 11 of the extract) (in Hebrew). Already at the end of the 16th century, we encounter Cusi families of Spanish origin: the doctor Izchak Cusi lives in Constantinople (see M. Benayahu, *Ha-iahasim sheben iehude Yavan le-iehude Italia (Relation between Greek and Italian Jewry)*, Tel Aviv, 1980, p. 134, n. 46) (in Hebrew). Classic is the example by the Marrano [forced convert] Manuel Peres who, introducing himself to the rabbis of the Sephardic [*ponentina*] Nation of Venice in 1618, posed as Abraham Cusi (in assonance with his ancient Hebrew family name Cosim), becoming the progenitor of the Sephardic [*sefardita*] family Cusi-Cusin (S.G. Cusin, *La “Kethubbà smarrita”. Un’istituzione marrana poco nota tra diritto pubblico e diritto privato*, in *L’identità dissimulata. Giudaizzanti iberici nell’Europa cristiana dell’età moderna*, by P.C. Ioly Zorattini, Florence, 2000, pp. 290, 294, 295).

³¹A. Berliner, *Hebraische Grabschriften in Italien*, Frankfurt a. M. 1881, p. 75 (in Hebrew). On Meshullam Cusi Levi from Venice, see Steinschneider, *Catalogus Bodleiana*, op. cit., column 2991.

³²D. Carpi has recently come upon the same equation Meshullam=Salomone in the case of Meshullam Cusi *fu* Asher (Anselmo) from Montagnana (see the family tree of Meshullam Cusi, below, at the letter m). Usually, Meshullam becomes Bonaventura in Italian.

The Family of Meshullam (called Cusi ...) Rapa Coen

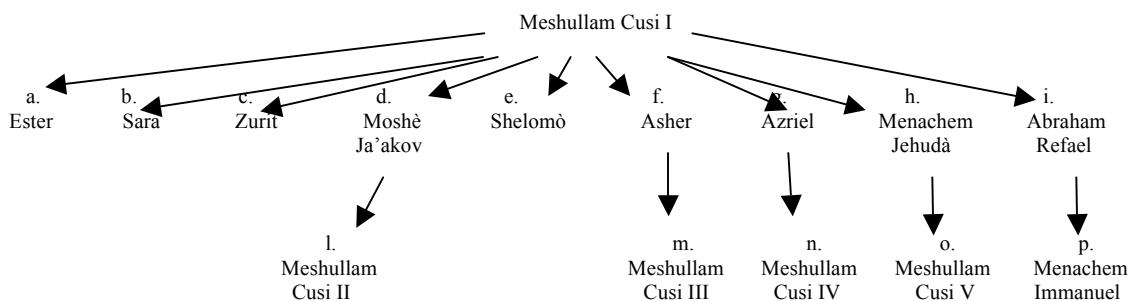
As far as we now know, Meshullam Cusi from Piove di Sacco was born at the beginning of the 1400s. He had at least six sons and three daughters and at least four of his grandchildren directly descended from him were named after their grandfather.³³

The family of Meshullam Cusi came down from Germany (Ulm?) to Italy around 1463, probably following the famous Rabbi Jehudà Minz.

The first document in which the name of Meshullam Cusi appears is the divorce certificate stipulated in 1465 between his daughter Ester and Jehiel (also called Michael), son of Jekutiel Rapa Coen Vize.³⁴

On July 6th, 1467, Meshullam Cusi, who lived in Piove di Sacco (today in the province of Padua), received the remission, by the Duke of Milan Galeazzo Maria Sforza, from the charge of having slandered

³³ I suggest the following family tree of Meshullam Cusi from Piove di Sacco



- a. 1465. Engaged to Jehiel (Michael) Rapa Coen, son of Vize from Mestre (see *infra*).
- b.c. 1492. M. Benayahu, *Rabbi Eliyahu Capsali of Crete*, Tel Aviv, 1983, p. 83 (in Hebrew).
- d. 1467. Moshè Minz, *Responsa*, n. 97–100.
- e. 1467. Moshè Minz, *Responsa*, n. 97–99; 1475. Divina, *Storia di Simone*, op. cit., pp. 87–88; 1477. Steinschneider, *Catalog Hamburg*, op. cit., pp. 57, 173.
- f. 1485–1490. B. Peyron, *Notitia Librorum manu typisque descriptorum qui illati sunt in Reg. Taurinensis Athenaei Bibliothecam*, Lipsia 1820, p.15, cod. 210; 1517. Carpi, *Fonti ebraiche*, op. cit., pp. 51, 52, 58; Orchaim David Cusi, son of the late Rabbi Asher, was the owner, in the mid-1500s, of the famous volume of the *Arba'a Turim* from Piove di Sacco, the only complete copy known to the world, today in Turin (E.S. Artom, *Gli incunaboli ebraici della Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Torino*, “Soncino-Blätter”, I, Berlin 1925, p. 50); the name of Ester, daughter of a Rabbi Asher, appears in the *recto* of the white page of the copy of *Selichot* from Piove di Sacco, belonging to the National & University Library of Jerusalem.
- g. 1515. M. Mortara, *Notizie di alcune collezioni di Consulti mss. di Rabbini Italiani*, in “Mosè”, VI, 1883, p. 52.
- h. before 1508. Jehudà Minz, *Responsa*, n. 9.
- i. 1519. Mortara, *Notizie di collezioni*, op. cit., “Mosè”, V, 1882, p. 266.
- l. 1482. Steinschneider, *Catalog Hamburg*, op. cit., pp. 56–57; 1501. R. Bonfil, *Gli ebrei in Italia nell'epoca del Rinascimento*, Florence 1991, p. 70, nota 42; A.Z. Schwarz, *Die hebraischen Handschriften der Nationalbibliothek in Wien*, Vienna-Prague-Leipzig, 1925, p. XIX.
- m. 1517–1545. Carpi, *Fonti ebraiche*, op. cit., pp. 51, 52, 58.
- n. 1515. Mortara, *Notizie di collezioni*, op. cit., “Mosè”, VI, 1883, p. 52.
- o. before 1508. Jehudà Minz, *Responsa*, n. 9; 1522. Carpi, *Fonti ebraiche*, op. cit., pp. 53, 54; Steinschneider, *Catalog Hamburg*, op. cit., p. 172.
- p. 1519. Mortara, *Notizie di collezioni*, op. cit., “Mosè”, VI, 1882, p. 266.

³⁴ Lange, *Rabbi Meir da Padova*, op. cit., p. 73. The instigator of the act of divorce is Ja'akov, son of Shimon Levi, who is, according to us, identified with the German Giacobbe, son of the late Simone da Colonia, accused in the process of Potobuffolè and hanged at the stake in the Piazza San Marco in Venice. Giacobbe had the misfortune of being in the situation (Passover eve of 1480), on a trip from Piove de Sacco (“Plebisacci” and not “Plobistreti” as is written in the book by Radzik, *Portobuffolè*, op. cit., p. 101) to Portobuffolè. I had the confirmation of the exact reading of the manuscript, that is in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Avogaria di Comun, reg. 3655/15, c. 34, by Dr. Maddalena Del Bianco, whom I sincerely thank.

and offended in public and in private the Duke's dead father. As Galeazzo's father (Francesco I Sforza) died in 1466, Meshullam Cusi lived in Piove di Sacco certainly before that year.³⁵

It is fair to suppose that in Piove di Sacco he was called by the Hebrew [name] Salomone di Marco,³⁶ in any case he was simultaneously one of the notables of the Jewish community of Padua. Indeed, the famous dispute among the three *Parnassim*, two from Mestre (Vize and Zusman) and one from Padua (Meshullam Cusi), was in 1467. The facts are the following: one of Cusi's sons, of the name Shelomò, got engaged, in 1467, to Treinlin, daughter of the *Parnas* of Mestre, Zusman. But Zusman backed off and decided to offer his same daughter to the second *Parnas* of Mestre, Vize Rapa Coen. And who was the candidate for the new wedding? That Jehiel, called Michael, who, as we saw above, had repudiated two years before Ester, daughter of Meshullam Cusi. For Cusi, the humiliation was double: he not only was humiliated by Zusman who, once his daughter's engagement to Cusi was celebrated, suddenly changed his mind and proposed his daughter to Vize, but also had to suffer the shame of the choice, as new groom, instead of his son Shelomò, of his ex-son-in-law. Cusi claimed that, once the engagement was celebrated, there had been a breach of contract. Vize and Zusman hoped to silence Cusi by offering him a large amount of money, but Cusi refused and made it a matter of principle.

The leading rabbinical authorities of the time were involved in the fact and consulted for their opinion. The Rabbis from Padua (Jahudà Minz, Zanwil Moghil and Josef Treves) declared themselves for Cusi, while the rabbinical courts of Treviso (headed by Jehudà Landa) and of Mestre (headed by Ja'akov Mestre and Jchudà Obernik) agreed with Zusman and Vize. Also defending Cusi [were] the rabbis Moshè Minz from Landau and Israel Bruna from Ratisbona.

After six months the controversy didn't seem to ease; indeed, it became red hot, because in the meanwhile the two young people had gotten married, without waiting for the rabbis' verdict. Meshullam Cusi remained for that period and even after *persona non grata* to the Jews of Mestre. On the other hand it is important to say that during the entire dispute, he was considered "of excellent reputation, a superior person, of exceptional value», and he had a great prestige among the two rabbis Jehuda and Moshè Minz, as his two involved sons, Shelomò and Moshè, also had a good reputation.³⁷

Meshullam Cusi is famous for having founded, very probably in 1473, the Hebrew printing house of Piove di Sacco which issued two works in the years 1474–75: the *Arba'a Turim* by Ja'akov ben Asher and the German rite *Selichot*.

He probably died at the beginning of 1474.

³⁵ Simonsohn, *The Jews of Milan*, op. cit., I, p. 437. Together with the Cusis, a group of Jewish lenders of German origin who lived in Alessandria, Broni, Piacenza, Pavia and Monza, were accused of defamation, and finally acquitted.

³⁶ He was the progenitor of the most influential Jewish family from the Venetian Republic in the second half of the 15th century (see my study titled: *Il legame tra i processi di Trento contro gli Ebrei a la tipografia ebraica di Piove di Sacco del 1475*, "Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento", XXV, 1999, pp. 669–678).

³⁷ For the development of the dispute, which also had consequences for Jewish regulations about marriages, we have to examine the *Responsa* of Moshè Minz (n. 97–99) and of Josef Colon (*Responsae (sic) and decisions*, ed. E. Pines, Jerusalem 1970, n. 11, 12, 20) (in Hebrew). Certainly, Cusi's character was not easy if, just after ending this dispute, he started another one, in spring 1468, with the rabbi of Padua Josef Treves, about the fund raised by Cusi for indigent Jewish children (Moshè Minz, *Responsa*, n. 100). See also Moshè Minz, *Responsa*, n. 78, which deals with the problem of a silk *Tallit* (cloak), made by Cusi and sent to Rabbi Moshè Minz: from Padua, Rabbi Jehuda Minz informed his cousin Moshè that he himself was disposed to buy the said *Tallit* for one and a half ducats.

Appendix

On the origin of the Rothschild Miscellany[]*

For more than 200 years, scholars have been puzzled trying to identify who commissioned and who illustrated the precious parchment Hebrew codex today called “Rothschild Miscellany”, preserved in the Israel Museum of Jerusalem.³⁸

L. Mortara Ottolenghi claims that he has solved the riddle, identifying the commissioner Moshè di [ben] Jekutiel Coen with Mosè di Consiglio Sacerdote [Moses of the Priestly Council?] (called “Furlano”) from Cremona and ascribing the illustrations to the schools of two important local artists (Bonifacio Bembo and Cristoforo de Predis), between 1460 and 1480.³⁹

But, using the same arguments of Mortara Ottolenghi, it is possible to arrive at different conclusions. We can, modestly, propose another hypothesis: that the commissioner of the work was that Moshè di Jekutiel Coen (Rapa) from Venice who bought, in 1482, a Hebrew Pentateuch.⁴⁰ Indeed, as was recently demonstrated, the author of the illuminations [*miniature*] didn’t work in Lombardy, but in Veneto and was the celebrated Leonardo Bellini, also active in Venice in the years 1460–1480.⁴¹

Our presumed buyer belonged to a large Jewish family, that of Rapa, come from Germany to Italy in the middle of the 1400s; well-to-do family, that distinguished itself for great learning (*cultura*) and artistic sensibility, indeed between the years 1464–1477 at least four of its members copied some manuscripts (one of them illuminated in Padua). Also part of the Rapa family was the famous scholar and typographer Meshullam called Cusi, who lived in Piove di Sacco in the second half of the 15th century, who also had notable artistic talent.⁴²

It should be noted that at least one branch of the Rapa family, toward 1480, lived in Treviso,⁴³ the Jewish center of primary importance, where the sources from which the “Rothschild Miscellany” would report the details of the liturgical usages of the German Jews of Northern Italy⁴⁴ were created, which strengthens the hypothesis of the commission of the manuscript by Moshè di Jekutiel Coen (Rapa).

And we can demonstrate as the volume remained in Veneto until the middle of the 19th century: first, property of the Morpurgo family,⁴⁵ then, from 1832, of Salomone Parente from Trieste (founder,

[* <http://www.facsimile-editions.com/en/rm/> —note added by WJR]

³⁸ It has been there since 1965.

³⁹ *The Rothschild Miscellany MS 180/51 of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem: Jewish patrons and Christian artists*, in *Hebrew Studies*, British Library Occasional Papers, 13, eds. D. Rowland Smith, and P.S. Salinger, London, 1991, pp. 149–161.

⁴⁰ E. Carmoly, *Itinéraires de la Terre Sainte*, Bruxelles, 1847, p. 462. He could be the same as that Moshè Rap who practiced the medical profession in Venice in 1475 and was excused from the sign of the Jews, enjoying some privileges (“*Hebraeische Bibliographie*”, VI, 1863, p. 67, note).

⁴¹ In accordance with the hypotheses formulated by the experts U. Bauer-Eberhardt (1984), G. Mariani Canova (1990), L. Armstrong (1994) and G. Sed-Raina (1995), see: *The Painted Page. Italian Renaissance book illumination 1450–1550*, ed. J.J.G. Alexander, London-Munich 1994, pp. 39, 181–182 and G Sed-Raina, *L’art juif*, Paris 1995, p. 235. For many reasons, based on historical documentation, we think that the manuscript was illuminated between 1472 and 1480.

⁴² See above, par. V.

⁴³ See above, par. III.

⁴⁴ I. Ta-Shema, *The literary content of the manuscript*, in *The Rothschild Miscellany*, Facsimile Edition, I, London, 1989, pp. 56–60.

⁴⁵ The Morpurgos from Trieste were disposed, in 1794, to deprive themselves of a “Hebrew codex in quarto, very well preserved and of nice character, in parchment with more than one hundred gold illuminations, very valuable, timeless; the owner asks no less than 100 *zecchini* [gold coins]”, see M. Del Bianco Cotrozzi, *Un incontro fra letterati alla fine del Settecento: il carteggio di Elia Morpurgo con Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi*, “*Annali di storia isontina*”, 4, 1991, p. 44. We have no doubt that it is the Rothschild Miscellany.

together with Morpurgo relatives, of the bank Morpurgo-Parente in 1812), to pass into the hands of the Rothschild family from Paris in 1855 (“tacit member” of the Morpurgo-Parente bank).⁴⁶

We should remember that the first, as [far as] I know, who realized that the precious manuscript belonged to the Morpurgo family was Federico Luzzatto,⁴⁷ whose it worthwhile quoting a “historical” letter written to my father, Paolo Nissim,⁴⁸ two weeks before dying unexpectedly:

Tel Aviv, 26.XII.1960

Dear Dr. Nissim,

I am currently at the Betholim Sharon for an operation [...] and during the days of waiting I am thinking about my research.

The last thing that I studied [...] was the history of the origin etc. of the famous Rothschild ms. from Bezalel⁴⁹ and I hope I found something.

Anyway, from the Hebrew letters by S.D.L. consulted in the library and from those in Italian of S.D.L. consulted tranquilly at home thanks to your kind mailing (used at once), I learned that S.D.L. consulted that ms. in 1832 in Trieste⁵⁰... Who could have been the owner? ... I would think a Jew... as e.g. the Morpurgos of whom an important branch was in Ancona and another in Trieste and Padua.

Do you have any idea about [this]? ...Yours

F. Luzzatto

⁴⁶ *Shalom Trieste. Gli itinerari ebraici*, Trieste, 1998, p. 139.

⁴⁷ Federico Luzzatto (1900–1961), man of various interests and works, arrived in Israel in 1935, was attracted in particular by the historical research on the Jews in Veneto.

⁴⁸ Paolo Nissim (1912–1969), student of the Rabbinical College of Livorno, was Chief Rabbi in Padua, Florence and Trieste. He published articles and memoirs on Jewish history and literature in Italy.

⁴⁹ The manuscript was transferred from New York to the Bezalel Museum of Jerusalem in 1957.

⁵⁰ S.D.L. is Samuel David Luzzatto who, leaving from Padua, expressly remained in Trieste the entire month of October 1832 to examine the “magnificent parchment codex” put at his disposition by Parente. He permitted S.D.L. to study the manuscript and to copy some parts, but he did not grant him permission to take the manuscript with him to Padua, considering it too precious because of the gold illuminations (*S.D. Luzzatto's hebraische Briefe*, II, Przemysl 1882, Lettera n. 79, p. 235) (in Hebrew); ID., *Epistolario italiano francese latino*, Padua 1890, Lettera n. 501, pp. 164–165). I take the opportunity to emphasize that none of the many scholars who dealt with the Rothschild Miscellany have ever reported, as [far as] I know, that the first to describe the codex as an expert was Samuel David Luzzatto himself when, in 1855, the codex passed from the hands of the noble Parente to those, no less noble, of the Rothschild family (ID., *Epistolario*, op. cit., pp. 831–833).