

Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto, eds. *Rabbi Judah Moscato and the Jewish Intellectual World of Mantua in 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> Century*.

Studies in Jewish History and Culture 35. Leiden: Brill, 2012. xiv + 317 pp. \$166. ISBN: 978-90-04-22225-0.

This fascinating conference volume is the latest publication of the remarkable Italian-German scholars Veltri and Miletto. It reflects the strong trend in Renaissance interests among European Jewish studies scholars, of whom this pair are leading lights. The book is part of a larger project to study the sixteenth-century Mantua Jewish preacher Judah Moscato (ca. 1530–ca. 1593) and translate his works. Moscato's sermons, published in Hebrew as *Nefutzot Yehudah* in Venice in 1589, are being translated into English and annotated by Veltri and Miletto as well, and several articles have appeared as part of the project. Moscato was also the author of a commentary on one of medieval Judaism's great philosophical works, the *Kuzari* of Rabbi Judah ha-Levi, *Qol Yehudah* (Venice, 1594), which receives attention in this volume as well.

The book is divided into two sections, the first treating Moscato specifically and the second treating the unique Jewish intellectual world of Mantua in his period. Essays in the first section deal with Moscato's life, including episodes revealed only recently in archival research (Miletto); Moscato's skeptical views,

compared with those of the seventeenth-century Venetian Rabbi Simone Luzzatto (Veltri); Moscato's style of eulogizing (Marc Saperstein); his kabbalistic commitments (Moshe Idel); the paratext and other features of the organization and printing of Moscato's works (Bernard Dov Cooperman); Moscato's thoughts on biblical incense, compared with those of his neighbor, Abraham Portaleone (Andrew Berns); and Moscato's library of sources (Adam Shear).

The essays on the Jews in Mantua examine the Gonzaga archives and the material there dealing with Jews (Daniela Ferrari); a family of Mantuan Jewish musicians (Don Harrán); painted images of the Norsa family and their background (Dana E. Katz); Yiddish literature from Renaissance Northern Italy (Claudia Rosenzweig); new archival finds about Moscato's neighbor, Abraham Jagel Gallico and his associates (Daniel Jütte); the early printing of the *Book of Creation* (*Sefer Yetzirah*) and other mystical works in Northern Italy (Saverio Campanini); translations of the Psalms from Hebrew into Italian by Renaissance Jews (Alessandro Guetta); and an overview of recent research by the senior scholar of the field, Shlomo Simonsohn, whose work reverberates throughout the book.

Moscato himself proves to be a fascinating character. He was resolute in his Jewish convictions, as we learn from Miletto's archival finds. These indicate that Moscato was held captive by Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga, who attempted by every means to convince him to convert. Moscato held fast even as he heard his fellow Jewish prisoners being tortured nearby. He was a preacher with depth, talent, and popularity, a rare combination. He was a philosopher and participant (not a follower) in late-Renaissance Italian culture, who had access to far more literature of all types than had his predecessors, as Shear shows. He used it to good effect. Moscato is, in many ways, an excellent exemplar of the late Renaissance or Baroque Jewish scholar of Northern Italy: a communal leader, an intellectual with broad erudition, and an innovator in his encounter with new political, cultural, and religious conditions.

The book overall is a fine example of what a conference volume should be. While there is some variation in the quality of the essays, and some fit more smoothly than others, they are all good; several rise to the level of excellence. It is a shame that Brill, which publishes so many important works in this field, cannot imagine a market model by which such a significant book can be published for less than \$166 (the Moscato sermons are about \$100 more per volume.)

I would like to point out several of the essays that stood out for their depth and quality (perhaps because of my interest in the subjects.) Giuseppe Veltri's paper on skeptical thought is fascinating, but I was surprised that he does not place Moscato and Luzzatto more in the context of contemporary skeptical debates. While he discusses Galileo briefly, the topic appears to come to Veltri's attention only because Luzzatto brings up the subject of the telescope. Idel's essay uses the study of Moscato to make important and much larger arguments about Kabbalah and its adherents in sixteenth-century Italy. Andrew Berns's study, while very focused on a somewhat esoteric topic, and dealing more with Portaleone than with Moscato, is very learned and interesting. Campanini's paper on the publication of kabbalistic works is very

enlightening. Don Harrán's essay was, for me, perhaps the pinnacle of the volume in its scope, depth, and interest.

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