Rabbi Yehuda Moscato (1530-1593) and the Cuzary

Rabbi Yehuda Moscato was born in Osimo, Italy in 1530. He was a rabbi a poet, and a philosopher. He left Osimo in 1555 and went to Mantua (Montova) when the situation of the Jews there worsened under the pope Paul IV. In Mantua he had the instruction of the foremost Jews of his time, the brothers Moshe, David, and Yehuda Provençal and Azaria de Rossi. In 1587 he became chief rabbi of Mantua.

Rabbi Moscato was educated in all areas of knowledge. As many of his contemporaries, he believed that Jews should learn liberal arts and sciences because all knowledge derives from Tora knowledge. In terms of Jewish thought he followed the greatest Jewish Philosophers, rabbi Yehuda haLevy and Maimonides.

Rabbi Moscato also wrote poetry. Especially "elegies" (funerary poetry) on the deaths of friends and scholars, including one poem on the death of Rabbi Yosef Caro (1585).

We know of two books published by rabbi Moscato. The first one is **Nefutsot Yehuda**. This book was composed in Mantua and published in Venice in 1589. It is a collection of fifty-two sermons which takes the subject of Jewish festivals as a platform for addressing issues in philosophy, theology, ethics, history, and other subjects that were relevant for the speaker and for his audience. These sermons were delivered in Hebrew and Italian.

Illustration: Sermon eleven is entitled: "What should a man do to live rightly in this world and to inherit the world to come?" (□□□□ □□□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□□□ □□). The sermon is build around the Psalm 15 of the book of Tehilim. Rabbi Moscato explains that this Psalm could be divided thematically into three subjects: the obligations of man toward God, the obligations of man toward men, and the obligations of man toward himself.

Rabbi Moscato shows that also the Ten commandments are divided into these three categories, as expressed in man's actions, speech and thoughts.

The book Nefutsot Yehuda was translated into English by

Gianfraco Milet and Giusepe Veltri and it can be found in Google books, see here

The Second important book Rabbi moscato wrote is **Qol Yehuda**, the first and the most popular commentary of the book "The Cuzari" , by rabbi Yehuda haLevi.

One interesting point brought by rabbi Moscato is the historicity of the Cuzari, in other words, the assertion that the dialogues and debates between a Jewish sage, the "haber" Rabbi Yitshak haSangari, and the King of the Khazars was a real and historical event, and not a literary fiction of Rabbi Yehuda haLevi.

" *Should it not be believed that the great and awe-inspiring story which is the basis and essence of this book [The Cuzari by Yehuda HaLevi] is true and really happened? If that were not so, why would the author of the book lie? For he wrote in the beginning of his book: 'As it has been recorded and known from historical works.' He repeated that in the introduction to the second part of his book: 'This is what happened afterwards with regard to the Kuzari, as it is known in the books of Khazaria."*

Today is accepted even by secular historians that the events narrated in the Cuzari took place in the eight century, in the times of the King Bulan. And that the Khazars, or at least a notable segments of its aristocracy, converted to Judaism.

Rabbi Yehuda Moscato died in Montova Italy in 1593.To download the book Nefutsot Yehuda follow this link