In 1836, Samuel David Luzzatto (Shadal) noted in his Prolegomeni ad una grammatica ragionata della lingua ebraica that Jeddiah Solomon Norzi’s introduction to his work Minhat Shai was first printed in Pisa, 1819, in the edition prepared by Samuel Vita della Volta. This first printing was issued almost eighty years after Norzi’s main work itself, Minhat Shai, had been printed by Rafa’el Hayim me-Te’alah in two volumes in Mantua, 1742-44, without the Introduction.

No actual copy of this first edition of the Introduction was known to later scholars: thus Adolf Jellinek, who published Norzi’s Introduction in Vienna in 1876, noted Luzzatto’s reference, but said that, as far as he knew, no one aside from Luzzatto had seen a copy of that edition. More recently, Z. Betzer, in an introduction to his edition of the Introduction to Minhat Shai together with other material, and again in an introduction to his edition of Minhat Shai on the Pentateuch, listed Vienna 1876 as the first printed edition of the Introduction. Betzer further noted that Jellinek’s comment on Luzzatto’s note concerning the Pisa 1819 edition, but then, somewhat surprisingly, concluded that Luzzatto was referring not to a printed edition, but rather to a manuscript. As we shall see below, Luzzatto was correct concerning the details of the first printed edition of the Introduction. Though scholars after Luzzatto had not seen a copy of the Pisa 1819 edition, it did exist.

In 1979 I purchased a copy of the first volume of MKhtav Elohim, an edition of the Pentateuch in small format, published in Pisa in 1818 (the edition also includes the Haftarot and the Megilloth). The title page notes that this edition of the Pentateuch was published according to Minhat Shai, and that the printer was Samuel Molkho. This seems to give credence, then, to Luzzatto’s report of a Pisa 1819 edition of the introduction to Minhat Shai.

A copy of the Pisa: Samuel Molkho and Sons, 1819/Introduction was listed in recent years by the Bibliography of the Hebrew Book project at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem. It notes that a copy exists in the Biblioteca comunale di Mantova. This information was then repeated by Y. Vinograd in his bibliography of Hebrew printed books, but in a somewhat garbled manner. In the section on Hebrew books printed in Pisa, he identifies no. 97 (Pisa 1819) as-Mkhtav Yah, with a copy in the Biblioteca comunale di Mantova, but describes it as a copy of Norzi’s Pentateuch commentary. Then he lists no. 98 (Pisa 1820) as Goder perets and describes it as Norzi’s Introduction, basing himself on H.B. Friedberg’s 1951 bibliography of Hebrew printed books. In fact, Friedberg’s entry is inaccurate. It lists three editions of the Introduction (Vienna 1813, Pisa 1820, and Vienna 1876), where it should list only Pisa 1819 and Vienna 1876. Similarly, Vinograd’s two entries should be corrected to one entry alone—Pisa 1819—and this should be described as the introduction to Minhat Shai. Similarly, D. Sperber (2006) who was misled by the data in the works of Friedberg and Vinograd, should be corrected. Instead of four editions of the Introduction (Pisa 1820, Vienna 1813, as well as Pisa 1819 and Vienna 1873, i.e., 1876), there should be only two: Pisa 1819 and Vienna 1876. One should also add the latest edition by Z. Betzer contained in ha-Nasofar le-Minhat Shai, as well as the seven photo reprints of Jellinek’s edition of the Introduction and the Jerusalem 1996 and Brooklyn 2000 editions, both based on Jellinek (see below).

In 1996, G. Busi published another copy of his Hlibri Elohim a Mantova, a catalog of the printed Hebrew books of the library of the Jewish community of Mantua (first established in 1676) now housed in the Biblioteca comunale di Mantova. In his catalog, Busi records two copies of the Pisa 1819 Introduction extant in the Mantuan library: a separate copy of the Introduction and a copy inserted into the Library’s copy of the 1742-44 Mantuan edition of Minhat Shai. As recently pointed out to me by Raffaella Perini, librarian at the Biblioteca comunale, Busi’s description has to be corrected slightly. The Introduction was inserted (and bound) into the second volume of the Library’s copy of Minhat Shai (Mantua, 1744, including the Latter Prophets and Hagiographa) and not into the first volume (Mantua, 1742), as Busi wrote. In addition to these two copies, I have recently identified another copy of the Pisa 1819 Introduction in The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. The above three copies are the only surviving copies of this edition of the Introduction known to me.

Contents of the Pisa 1819 edition (small folio)

The Pisa 1819 edition consists of the following elements:

1. Elaborate title page (identical in wording to the Vienna 1876 title page, except for the final lines; see fig. 1)
2. Short introduction taken from Elodi (as appearing later in the Vienna edition)
3. Long introduction by the author (as in the Vienna edition)
4. Three Indexes, by Norzi:
   a. Masoretic notes that were corrected or new Masoretic notes not included in the printed edition of the rabbinic Bible
   b. questions on various authors and solutions; disagreements with various authors
   c. substantial discussion of various topics

5. Conclusion by the author (as in the Vienna edition)

Note that nos. 2, 3, and 5 are laid out in pages of double columns. On the other hand, no. 4 is laid out with great “generosity”—only one column per page, with double spacing between the lines.

Contents of the title page vs. the actual printed text of the 1819 edition

The elaborate text of the printed title page was copied from the title page as worded by Norzi (preserved, e.g., in the autograph manuscript in the British Library and see further below). This was meant as the title page of the whole work. It says that the work contains the Pentateuch text, and indeed the whole Bible text, accurately corrected. It further notes that at the end of the work there are four indexes (in addition to the three noted above, it includes as the first index “the statements,” i.e. teachings from the literature of the Sages included in the work). The whole work is called Goder perets.

In addition, the title page states that, at the end of the introduction by the author, the copyist (i.e., of the introduction and conclusion, along with the indexes) Samuel Vita della Volta, the doctor of Mantua, has added a few notes. These, it says, were written on Friday 26 [Tisri] 5562 [25 October 1799], when della Volta read the Introduction. It then states: “First printed in the city of Pisa in the year 1819 by Samuel Molkho and sons.” This clearly refers to the Introduction, for the actual work had been printed earlier in Mantua, 1742-44.

A comparison to the actual printed text of the edition shows that the Pisa 1819 edition does not contain the work itself Goder perets / Minhat Shai, but rather the introduction to the work (as well as the short introduction taken from Elodi), the conclusion to the work, and three of the four indexes.

In short, the Pisa 1819 edition of the Introduction (in both Mantuan copies noted above, as well as in the JTS Library copy), contrary to contents listed on its title page, lacks the first of four indexes and the notes by della Volta.

As to the first of the indexes, della Volta explains that he omitted it because it was very long, would have required much work, and would not have yielded beneficial results. Furthermore, the manuscript was lent to him for only a few hours (more accurately, a short period; see below), and he did not have enough time to copy that long index (the missing index was first printed in Betzer’s 1897 edition of the Introduction noted above).

As to della Volta’s own notes, it is unclear why they were not printed. In fact, it seems that their printing was originally intended, for, in addition to what was noted on the title page, we find at the bottom of p. 12b a catchword (see photo 2), just as we find catchwords at the bottom of the previous pages. As we shall see, this catchword was the first word of the intended next page, which apparently was not printed, but which contained the notes of della Volta.

The manuscript source of the Pisa 1819 edition

We will now demonstrate that the Pisa 1819 edition of the Introduction is based upon Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, MS Kaufmann A 43, written by Samuel Vita della Volta on 25 October 1799 and completed on Saturday night, 26 October 1799.
elements we find in the Pisa 1819 edition, as well as the notes by della Volta mentioned on the title page of the 1819 edition but not printed. These notes begin in the manuscript

[28] 'hen eloh ketavar ha'aretz asher yi'adeti el ozon shomar 'atavos' (these indeed are some notes I have designated to those who will be attentive). Note that the first word is heh, the catchword on the bottom of p. 12b in the printed edition (even though 12b is the last page). In short, this shows that the publisher intended to print della Volta's notes, as indicated on the title page, but for some unknown reason did not do so.

In the manuscript, della Volta in fact copied only three of the four indexes—so, too, in the 1819 edition. In the printed edition, however, he changed the order of the indexes slightly, switching the manuscript's order of the first and third indexes. His reason for omitting the first (of the indexes mentioned on the title page) is found in the manuscript, after the index[26] in the printed edition, where the printed section appears just before the indexes[28] Similarly, at the bottom of p. 7a in the printed edition, della Volta notes that the author did not list the six factors he said he would at the end of the Introduction: This comment is note 2 in the manuscript[28].

It should also be observed that the marginal note in the printed edition, on p. 5a, bottom, is exactly the same as the marginal note in the manuscript[30]. The one difference is that in the printed edition at the end of the note one finds the following: "י"ע ה"ע הרובע ה"ע הרובע (these are the words of the humble copyist!). (see photo 3). "Humble" translates the Hebrew phrase י"ע ה"ע (based on Job 22:29); this phrase was chosen because the first word י"ע was taken as an abbreviation of the author's Hebrew name: שמע"ע ה'י, i.e. Samuel Vita (della Volta). It follows from here that della Volta was responsible for preparing the printed edition. Thus, Luzzato was correct in his description of the printed edition.

We may conclude that when preparing the 1819 edition, della Volta used his own October 1799 manuscript copy of Norzi's introduction etc. and made only minor changes. For example, he noted on the title page that the printed edition was going to include some notes by the corrector Samuel Vita della Volta, though, for some unknown reason, della Volta's notes were (with two exceptions) not printed. In any case, one can still read them today in della Volta's autograph manuscript.

There is one final difference between the printed edition and the autograph manuscript: In the manuscript, della Volta notes (p. 3) that the copying began on 25 October 1799 and was completed on Saturday night, 26 October 1799[31]. On the title page of the printed edition, however, he only records 25 October 1799 as the date when he wrote the notes[32].

In place of the completion date of 26 October 1799, he now gives a new completion date, based on the changed circumstances: "First printed in the city of Pisa in the year 1819."

Della Volta copied his 1799 manuscript of Norzi's Introduction etc. from Norzi's autograph, preserved in the British Library[33] for only in that MS are the indexes found. This also seems to be the import of della Volta's note in the printed edition[34] that he did not copy the first index, though it was found "ba-miktav ha-raishon," in the first copy, i.e. the autograph.

For the sake of bibliographic completeness, we add the following summary of the editions of the Introduction and of scholars referring to the Introduction:

1. The Introduction was completed in the hand of its author in 1626, and is found in the autograph manuscript in the British Library. This manuscript includes both a first draft and the final copy.

2. The first scholar to mention the introduction to Minhāt Ṣahā (even before it was printed) was G. de Rossi, who summarizes its contents in his Variae Lectiones Veteris Testamenti. [35] This description is based upon the manuscript copy of the Introduction in de Rossi's collection, no. 895.

3. Samuel Vita della Volta of Mantua copied the Introduction from the autograph copy on 25 and 26 March 1799, and added a few notes. He also copied the conclusion to the work, as well as three of the four indexes that Norzi compiled.

4. De Rossi notes the Introduction in his Dizionario storico di 1802, under the entry "Norzi" (this also appeared in a German translation, 1839). [36]

5. De Rossi later described his manuscript (briefly, and in Latin) in the catalog of his collection. [37] He notes that it was copied from the autograph manuscript by R. Jacob Saraval, Rabbi in Mantua from 1752. De Rossi also refers here to his own summary of the Introduction in Variae Lectiones.

6. The Introduction was first printed in Pisa in 1819; this edition was prepared by Samuel Vita della Volta based on his own 1799 manuscript copy.

7. Then followed Luzzatto's 1836 remark concerning the Pisa 1819 edition of the Introduction (see above).

8. Eleven years later, R. Kirchheim mentions de Rossi's remarks in the above three sources (2, 4, 5) in a note to Azulai's Shem ha-gedolim [38] in which he proceeds to summarize the Introduction in Hebrew based upon de Rossi's above Latin summary.

9. M. Steinschneider, in his entry on Norzi in his Bodleian catalog [39] writes that he had not seen the printed edition of the Introduction noted by Luzzatto. He also refers to the above sources, except 3 and 4.

10. Then follows Jellinek's 1876 edition of the Introduction; he notes Luzzatto's 1836 remark.

11. Jellinek's edition was reissued several times in photo editions in the second half of the twentieth century: six of these without Jellinek's notes in German (New York: Shulsinger Bros., 1950; Jerusalem 1958; 1964; 1972; 1973; 1984. See below, p.14) and one with the notes: Jerusalem: [s.n.], ca. 1969.

12. Four years after Jellinek's edition, I. Benjacob noted the remarks of Kirchheim[40] (above, 8), but did not note any of the printed editions of the Introduction.

13. In the twentieth century, the printed edition[s] of the Introduction were referred to by Friedberg (1951), the Bibliography of the Hebrew Book Project, and then by Vinograd (1994), and Buzi (1997), and in the twenty-first century by Spertus[41]. The details in several of these sources are somewhat inaccurate, as noted above. The Bibliography project was the first to comment on the whereabouts of a copy of the 1819 Pisa edition. Buzi was the first to record the two copies of the 1819 Pisa edition in the Biblioteca comunale di Mantova.

14. The Introduction was printed in Jerusalem (ha-Makhon ha-Torani Tave [okhmush she-'a-y. 'Olam ha-sefer ha-Torani, 1996) as part of תיקון korr'im ha-mefo'ar 'aimanim", folio size (but not in the large folio size entitled תיקון korr'im he-hadayash 'aimanim," at the beginning, before the text of Genesis. This copy of the Introduction is based upon Jellinek's 1876 text (with no reference to the German notes). It is laid out in two columns per page. The introduction is not mentioned on the title page. Later editions of this תיקון korr'im (2000, 2002, 2003; the latter two without the word ha-mefo'ar in the title) omitted the introduction.

15. Z. Betzer, in his introduction to the edition of the Introduction (1997), and again in the introduction to his edition of Minhāt Ṣahā on the Pentateuch, 2005/6, [41] mentioned Jellinek's 1876 edition, as well as two of the seven photo editions: 1959 [read: 1958] and 1973, and Jellinek's note concerning Luzzatto's comment. He also noted Norzi's manuscript of the Introduction, della Volta's manuscript, and de Rossi's manuscript. He was, however, unaware of the existence of a copy of the Pisa 1819 edition, and also of the Jerusalem 1996 edition (above, no. 14).

16. The Introduction was printed again in Brooklyn, 2000, as part of an edition of Minhāt Ṣahā on the Pentateuch, J.A. Gutman (ed. and publisher). This copy of the Introduction is based upon Jellinek's 1876 text (with no reference to the German notes). The editor also included in this edition the three essays Norzi wrote, which were included at the end of the 1742-1744 edition of Minhāt Ṣahā but omitted from later editions; they were republished, however, in 1964 and 1988 [42]. These essays were re-edited by Betzer in his 1997 volume. In his introduction to his 2006 edition of Minhāt Ṣahā on the Pentateuch, Betzer did not refer to Gutman's 2000 volume (nor to the other printings of the essays).

17. Penkower (2006) was the first to identify a copy of the Pisa 1819 Introduction in the JTS Library in New York. This copy had belonged to S. Z. H. Halberstam (1832-1900).

Photo reprints of Jellinek's edition of the Introduction to Minhāt Ṣahā

These photo editions appeared in the following publications:

1. Ḫatsar pe'erashim 'al ha-Ṭaroh: kerekh nosar le-Ḥakarot gedolot 'im shishim perushim ve-hosafot (New York: Shulsinger Bros., 1950). This is the sixth volume of a Pentateuch edition with commentaries.

2. Ḥakarot gedolot (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1958-1959), vol. 1 (1958). Bible edition with commentaries. Following the Bible text is the Introduction, not mentioned on the title page (the pages of the Vienna edition's introduction were reduced and rearranged, two columns to the page), and Minhāt Ṣahā on Genesis.

3. Hamesh Bet David u-Shelomoh, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Yeosef ben Aharon Hasid, 1964). At the beginning of the volume, the introduction was reduced and published as in no. 2 above: at the end of this volume, there is a photo copy of the three essays from the Mantua 1744 Minhāt Ṣahā (neither of these items is mentioned on the title page of the 1964 edition).

4. Hamsishat hrumshe Ṣahā (Jerusalem: Pe'er ha-Ṭaroh, 1972). Similar to the New York 1950 edition; at the end of vol. 1 are printed the Introduction (not mentioned on the title page) and Minhāt Ṣahā on Genesis.

5. Ḫatsar metaḥaseh ha-Ṭaroh (Jerusalem: [s.n.], 1973). A photo edition of a number of works on masorah.

6. Bible edition with commentaries (Jerusalem: Tefutsa, merkaz le-sifre kodesh, 1984), vol. 1. Following the Bible text are Minhāt Ṣahā on Genesis, and the Introduction, not mentioned
Yeshayahu Vinograd, The project's material was later released as a CD-ROM, and made available for a fee on the Internet.


Sefer Mikhvat Elohim (Pisa: S. Molkho, 1818).

The correct shelf-mark for this copy of the Exodus volume is identical to the I.A.21 copy in its length (title page and 12 pages, printed on both sides).

The library's books were transferred to the Biblioteca comunale di Mantova in 1931; see the introduction to Giulio Busi, Libri ebraici a Mantova (Fiesole: Cadmo, 1996–2003).


Ibid., vol. 2, 199, no. 112.

The introduction to the copy of the Genesis volume. The other volumes slightly change the wording of the title page, and no longer state so Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, examined at JNUL; I am unaware of a preserved copy of the Exodus volume.


Ibid., 86, no. 112.

Ibid., vol. 2, 199, no. 112.

BS1718 N671 1819 (this is the revised call number, the date corrected according to my research)

This description is based upon a photocopy of one of the Mantuan copies [I.A.21] in my possession; I thank Ms. Perini for sending me this copy. The JTS copy is identical to it in every respect.

I would like to thank Dr. Alberto Rosignoli for permission to publish a number of photos of the Pisa 1819 introduction to Minhath Shai, preserved in the Biblioteca comunale di Mantova. This volume is part of the library of the Jewish community of Mantua preserved in the Biblioteca comunale. The photos are from the copy with shelf-mark I.A.21.

London, MS British Library Add. 27,198 (Margoliouth 231).

In the Hebrew biblical phrase אָדֶּשׁ יָהִו אִם הָיִינוּ גָּדַל שָׁלוֹם (‘adonai yahu etem shelosh napat) in Genesis 21:19, the following letters are marked: ב ו ה ד ש ל מ נ. This totals 579, i.e. the year 5579 (1819).

Pisa 1819, 7a, bottom.

Betzer printed all four of the indexes, but was unaware of three of them that had already been printed in the Pisa 1819 edition.

See Budapest, MS Kaufmann A 43, p. 3.

Ibid., p. 29 = 14a in the Hebrew enumeration.

Ibid., p. 30 = 14b, note 8.

Pisa 1819, 7a, bottom.

Budapest, MS Kaufmann A 43, p. 29 = 14a.

Ibid., p. 15 = 6a.

MS Budapest, p. 3 [‘adonai yahu etem shelosh napat), i.e. the copying was finished on Saturday night, following the Friday that was previously mentioned (cf. above, no. 21, cited from the printed edition).

See above, no. 21.

See above, no. 20.

P. 7a, bottom.


Giovanni de Rossi, Dizionario storico degli autori ebrei e delle loro opere (Parma: Reale stamperia, 1802); Historisches Wörterbuch der jüdischen Schriftsteller und ihrer Werke (Leipzig: Fort, 1839).


Isaac Benjacob, Otsar ha-sefarim (Vilna, 1880), 343, no. 1558 (entry: Minhath Shai).
The work was first published under the title "Minḥat Shai" by Raphaelpayyim Basila, who added to it some notes and appended a list of 900 variations (Mantua, 1742-44). A second edition, without the grammatical treatises, appeared at Vienna in 1816; the commentary on the Pentateuch alone, with the Hebrew text, was published at Dubrovna in 1804; the commentary on the Hagiographa and the Prophets, at Wilna in 1820. Jedidiah Solomon's introduction was published by Samuel Vita della Volta in 1819, and republished by Jellinek at Vienna in 1876. A commentary on the "Minḥat Shai"... Jehiel Vidal Norzi: Rabbi at Mantua in the first half of the seventeenth century.