

# Shabbatai Donnolo's *Sefer Hakhmoni*

Introduction, Critical Text,  
and Annotated English Translation

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*Shabbatai Donnolo: Biographical Details*

The most important source for Shabbatai Donnolo's life is his preface to SH which, although primarily aimed at providing his readership with an explanation for his interest in the sciences of the Gentiles, offers a detailed and reliable account of the author's early youth. Additional information comes from the biography of Saint Nilus of Rossano, a Calabrian monk and one of the most important leaders of southern Italian Byzantine Christianity in the 10th century.

Shabbatai Donnolo, son of Abraham, was a native of the city of Oria,<sup>47</sup> an Apulian city which lies a few miles south-west of Brindisi, and one of the most important outposts of the Byzantine empire in the south of Italy. He was born in 912–913 CE,<sup>48</sup> twelve years before the city fell to the Muslim armies led by Ja'far ibn 'Ubayd, the emir and army chief of the Fatimid caliph 'Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī.<sup>49</sup> Together with the rest of the population, Shabbatai was enslaved at that time but he was subsequently ransomed and freed by his relatives in Taranto. He remained in the lands under Byzantine rule while his family was deported to Palermo, the capital of Fatimid Sicily, and to North Africa: "Oria, the land of my birth

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<sup>47</sup> According to Herodotus, Oria was founded in the 5th century BCE by Greek settlers from Crete who called it Hyria (Ὠρία in Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, VI, 282), after the name of a pagan deity of the sea. The Hebrew colony there was established probably between the 7th and 9th centuries and remained until the 11th, long after the invasion by the Saracens in 925. In Oria, a few decades later, Aḥima'aṣ ben Palṭi'el composed his *Sefer Yuḥasin*, the genealogical history of his family and one of the most important sources of information on Jewish life in southern Italy in the early Middle Ages. The city remained under Byzantine rule until 1055, when it was conquered by the Normans headed by Count Unfred of Altavilla. For the history of Oria, see Delli Santi and di Summa, *Guida di Oria*, 7–16; Marsella, *Da Oria viene la parola di Dio*, 20–22; Mangia, *Breve guida*, 59 and D'Amico, *La comunità ebraica oritana*, 1–10.

<sup>48</sup> This can be inferred from the introductory section to SH in which Donnolo states that when Oria was occupied by the Saracens (in 925), he was ransomed, presumably not long after the event, in Taranto at the age of twelve. See below, English Translation, 226.

<sup>49</sup> 'Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī (literally, "the divinely guided" [909–934]) was the founder and first caliph of the Fatimid dynasty which ruled over North Africa, Egypt and Syria from 909 until 1171. See Gay, *L'Italie méridionale*, 206–208; Cozza-Luzi, ed., *La cronaca siculo-saracena*, 73. One of his courtiers was Iṣḥāq ibn Sulaymān al-Isra'īlī, also known as Isaac Israeli, the first Jewish Neo-Platonist and teacher of Dunash ibn Tamim. See below 61–67. The first clash between the Fatimids and Byzantium took place in 911, in the Sicilian city of Demona. Fatimid armies conquered important Byzantine lands in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean. On the Muslim encroachment on the Byzantine empire, see *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Kazhdan et al. eds., II, 780, III, 1891; Kaegi, *Byzantium*, 14, 30; Starr, "Byzantine Jewry," 280–293 and Sharf, "Byzantine Jewry," 103–115.

was conquered, by Muslim soldiers ... in the year 4685 ... I, Shabbatai, was ransomed in Taranto with my parents' money, at the age of twelve.<sup>50</sup> My parents and my relatives were deported to Palermo and to Africa, while I remained in the lands that are under the Romans' rule."<sup>51</sup>

Donnolo provides a fairly clear and accurate account of the events that befell Oria, but he does not offer any additional information on the fate of his family after they were captured and enslaved by the invading Muslims. He does, however, seem to suggest that the family's departure from the region was final, and that he alone remained in the Byzantine territories. His unquenchable thirst for knowledge prompted him to move beyond the boundaries of traditional Jewish learning in order to acquire knowledge of the celestial bodies. This was a science in which, he claimed, no Jew was adequately grounded, even though, at its origin, it was the product of the Jewish genius: "I did not find [even] one Jewish scholar who understood them [i.e. astronomical books]. Rather, some of them would say of the astronomical books written by Jews that there is no substance in them ..."<sup>52</sup> Donnolo emphasises that learning science from non Jewish-scholars does not constitute a departure from Jewish norms but rather the recovery of an intellectual tradition which Israel had lost. He reports that he had studied under the guidance of a certain

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<sup>50</sup> The ransoming of captives was one of the many duties of Jewish religious organisations in the Middle Ages; see Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, I, 327–330; II, 137–138; idem, "Contemporary Letters," 162–177.

<sup>51</sup> See below, English Translation, 224–227. At the time when Donnolo was writing, Byzantium's dominions in southern Italy had been reduced to the regions of Apulia and Calabria. Donnolo was probably living in Otranto, an Apulian city not far from Taranto, in which he was ransomed. He may well be mentioned by name in a letter discovered in the Cairo Genizah (ms. Adler 2156<sup>r</sup> of the Cairo Genizah collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York), sent by the Jewish community of Bari, headed by Abraham ben Sasson, to the renowned Andalusian doctor, Ḥasday ibn Shaprut, courtier of the Umayyad 'Abd ar-Rahman III. The letter refers to some important Jews who escaped an anti-Jewish persecution (which probably followed the anti-Jewish measures introduced by Romanus I Lecapenus [920–944] in 943–944). Among those mentioned is a certain *rabbi Shabbatai bar Abraham bar 'Ezra* or—according to an alternative reading of the blurred parchment—'El'azar. See Adler, "Un document," 40–43; Mann, *Texts and Studies*, I, 25; Colafemmina, "Gli Ebrei di Bari," 247–256. It should also be noted that if the correct reading is El'azar, this would give support to the hypothesis that Donnolo's father was the son of 'El'azar son of Amittay I, primogenitor of the family whose vicissitudes were narrated in *Sefer Yuhasin*, written in 1054 by Aḥima'az ben Parti'el. See Colafemmina, ed., *Sefer Yuhasin*, 35. The elimination of the leadership of the Jewish community did not bring the Jewish presence in Oria to an end. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that only a few decades later Aḥima'az composed his *Sefer Yuhasin* there.

<sup>52</sup> See below, English Translation, 228.

Babylonian scholar, whose knowledge matched and corroborated the *Barayta di-Sh'e mu'el*,<sup>53</sup> an anonymous 8th–9th century Midrash, which Donnolo sees as the origin of Israel's astrological knowledge: "... they [i.e. the books of non-Jewish scholars] were the same in every respect as the books of the Jews ... I realised that the whole of the science of the planets and constellations was based on the Barayta of Samuel ... I encountered a Gentile scholar from Babylon by the name of B-g-d-ṭ<sup>54</sup> ... His wisdom entirely agreed with the Barayta of Samuel ..."<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> On which see more below 23, 35–36.

<sup>54</sup> The identity of this Babylonian scholar is uncertain. He was identified by Fried, *Sefer ha-yesodot*, lvii–lviii n. 5, with Abu Ja'far ibn Ahmad ibn Ibrahim ibn Khalid al-Jazzar (ca. 929–1009), a Tunisian physician who was the author of medical treatises translated into Latin and Greek by Constantine of Reggio and Constantine the African, and enjoying wide circulation in the medical school of Salerno. See also Sharf, *The Universe*, 130 n. 45. As noted by Fiaccadori, "Donnolo," 213, two substantial objections can be raised against this identification. First, *B-g-d-ṭ* is described by Donnolo as a Babylonian, while Abu Ja'far was north African; secondly, Abu Ja'far never left Africa, and there is no evidence of any sojourn of his in Italy. See also Nutton *et al.* eds., *The Western Medical Tradition*, 140–141. The figure of *B-g-d-ṭ* is reminiscent of that of Abu Aharon, the Babylonian mystic who came to Italy in the 9th century according to Aḥima'as's *Sefer Yuḥasin*. See Weinstock, "Discovered Legacy," 153–159; Scholem, "Has a Legacy been discovered," 252–265; Neubauer, "Abu Ahron," 230–237; idem, "The Early Settlement," 606–625. The etymology of the name is uncertain. It is attested in the manuscript tradition of SH in two forms: *b-g-d-ṭ* (ms. Heb.e.26 of the Bodleian Library in Oxford; ms. heb. 770 of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris) and *b-g-d-sh*, probably due to the misreading of *ṭ* for *ṣ*. As observed by Lacerenza, "Donnolo e la sua formazione," 60 n. 65, the variant does not affect the etymological origin of the name, which derives from *bag* or *baga*, a Persian root which, since the 8th century, means "given" or "created by God" (e.g. Baghdad). I have chosen the first variant, which is attested in the oldest witness of the manuscript tradition (ms. Heb.e.26 of the Bodleian Library in Oxford) and which resembles more closely the name of the city of Baghdad. Donnolo probably used *b-g-d-ṭ* as a toponomastic designation (probably *Bagdadi*, "from Baghdad," as the well-known Abu Aharon was nicknamed). See "Baghdad" in *EI*, I, 894 and Neubauer, "Abu Ahron," 230–237; Weinstock, "Discovered Legacy," 153–159 and Scholem, "Has a Legacy been discovered," 252–265. Founded in 762 by the caliph Harun al-Rashid (786–809), Baghdad became one of the leading centres of astronomical and astrological studies under the caliphate of al-Ma'mun (813–833), who had fostered the studies of classical scientific texts, and established two observatories where astronomers were charged to ascertain the veracity of the Ptolemaic tradition. See O'Leary, *How Greek Science*, 151–155 ff.; Sayili, *The observatory*, 56. The earliest known documents testifying to the penetration of Muslim astronomy in Byzantium are the scolia of ms. Vat Gr. 1594 (and its copy, ms. Vat. Gr. 2326) dated 1032, where the Muslim scholars, whose method was based on the empirical verification of astronomical data, are called νεώτεροι—"the moderns"—in opposition to the Byzantine scholars, whose investigation of the celestial bodies mostly relied on purely mathematical calculations. See Mogenet, "Une scolie inédite," 198–221. From this point of view, Donnolo's Babylonian scholar "who also knew how to make calculations ... as well as how to observe the constellations and the planets" (see below, English Translation, 230) was "a modern."

<sup>55</sup> See below, English Translation, 230.

The account of Donnolo's encounter with the Babylonian scholar, which marks the beginning of his intellectual journey, is the last autobiographical detail he offers in the introductory section of SH. He does not state when and precisely where he first met B-g-d-t,<sup>56</sup> how long his period of apprenticeship lasted, or where he spent the rest of his life. We know that he was still alive in the year 982, which he mentions in the introduction,<sup>57</sup> and this date can be taken as a *terminus post quem* of his death.<sup>58</sup>

An important and complementary source of information on Donnolo's life is the *Life of Saint Nilus of Rossano*, a hagiographical work written around the year 1020 by Saint Bartholomew, a monk and one of Saint Nilus's disciples.<sup>59</sup> Modern scholarship has credited this *Life* with considerable reliability.<sup>60</sup> It mentions Donnolo in two passages which are markedly free of the hostile attitude normally employed by Christian hagiographers in reference to the Jews.<sup>61</sup> Donnolo is portrayed as

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<sup>56</sup> It is most unlikely that this was soon after the fall of Oria and the ransoming of Donnolo. The meeting must have taken place a few years later ( $12 + 12 = 24$  at least), when Donnolo had already acquired "a considerable sum of money" and could offer his teacher "lavish gifts". This suggests that Donnolo had already earned for himself a sufficiently lucrative position, in all likelihood as a physician.

<sup>57</sup> "... in the year 4742 since the Creation of the world, which is the eleventh year of the 250th cycle." See below, English Translation, 241.

<sup>58</sup> See Fiaccadori, "Donnolo," 216. A tombstone bearing Donnolo's name and dated from 28 October 959 was allegedly found by Abraham Firkovich (1786–1874), leader of the Crimean Karaite Jewish community, together with many others that he claimed to have discovered in the Karaite cemetery of Crimea. See Firkovich, *'Avnei Zikaron*, xx. Donnolo's alleged tombstone is in all likelihood one of Firkovich's many forgeries. See Schur, *The Karaite Encyclopedia*, 105–107; Szysman, "Les inscriptions funéraires," 231–264; Shapira, "Yitsaq Sangan, Sangarit," 223–260 and Harviainen, "Abraham Firkovich," 875–892.

<sup>59</sup> The Greek text was published, together with a Latin translation, by Migne, ed. "Βίος και πολιτεία," 9–166. The question of its authorship is unresolved: the work was traditionally attributed to Saint Bartholomew, who was a pupil of Nilus. Serious doubts about this attribution were raised by Halkin, "S. Barthélemy," 204–206, who observed that at the time of the composition of the work, Nilus's disciple was only twelve years old. See also Giovanelli, "L'encómio in onore di s. Bartolomeo," 172 and Mancini, *Per la critica*, 4–5. A new edition of the Greek text, as well as an Italian translation, was published by Giovanelli, ed. *S. Nilo da Rossano* and idem, ed. *Βίος και πολιτεία*. On the history of Saint Nilus's biography and its sources, see also Follieri, "Niccolò Calducci," 263–290 and idem, "Per una nuova edizione," 71–92; Sansterre, "Les coryphées des apôtres," 517–520 and idem, "S. Nil," 341–343.

<sup>60</sup> See von Falkenhäusen, "La Vita di San Nilo," 271–305; idem, "L'Ebraismo dell'Italia meridionale," 25–46.

<sup>61</sup> See Luzzati Laganà, "Catechesi e spiritualità" and Falkenhäusen, "La Vita di San Nilo," 284.

occupying a prominent position in the social hierarchy, being one of the few individuals—Christians or Jews—who were personally acquainted with the local religious and political elite:

On the next day the saint came down from that place,<sup>62</sup> and when he entered the city [Rossano], there came up to him a certain Jew, Domnulus by name,<sup>63</sup> who had been known to him from his boyhood [ἐκ νεότητος αὐτοῦ, my addition. P.M.] because he was studious to a very high degree, and was learned in the medical art in no common way. He therefore began to speak to the father thus: “I have heard of your severe mode of life in which you train yourself, and of your great abstinence, and I was surprised, knowing the habit of your body, that you have not fallen into epilepsy. Therefore if you are willing, I shall give you a drug befitting your temperament, so that after that your whole life you may fear no sickness. And the great father said: “One of your Hebrews has said to us: It is better to trust in God than to trust in man. We, therefore, trusting in our God as our physician, and in our Lord Jesus Christ, do not need any drugs made by you. You indeed would not otherwise have been better able to make sport of the more simple Christians than if you had boasted that you had given Nilus some of your drugs.” The physician, hearing this, answered nothing.”<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> i.e. his monastic hermitage.

<sup>63</sup> Δόμνουλος (*Domnulus* in the Latin version), a hypocoristic name, meaning “little Lord” which Shabbatai probably gained in recognition of his professional expertise. On Donnolo as a proper name, see below, English Translation 226 n. 34. The use of *Domnus* and *Domnulus* as proper names in the Roman empire was quite common. See Treves, “I termini italiani di Donnolo,” 65 n. 3 and Wissowa, ed., *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie*, 5.1, col. 1526. Due to his fame as a doctor, Shabbatai Donnolo was included by the anonymous author of the Latin *Chronica Elini* in the legendary group of four doctors who founded the first medical school of the Middle Ages in Salerno. They were a Latin Christian, a Greek (Orthodox) Christian, a Muslim and a Jew, Shabbatai Donnolo. The legend became part of the more comprehensive *Urbis Salernitanae Historia* written in Naples in 1681 by Antonio Mazza. As shown first by De Renzi and Steinschneider, and reiterated by Kristeller, there is neither any historical evidence to support this legend nor any documents relating Donnolo to the medical centre of Salerno. Nevertheless, the legend is indicative of Donnolo’s fame, making him a paradigmatic figure of the Jewish doctor in southern Italy. See de Renzi, *Collectio Salernitana*, 106–109; Steinschneider, “Donnolo. Pharmakologische Fragmente,” 80–89; Kristeller, “La Scuola di Salerno,” 11–96; Muntner, “Donnolo et la part des Juifs,” 1100; idem, “Donnolo et la contributions des Juifs.”

<sup>64</sup> Τῇ ἐπαύριον κατελθόντος τοῦ ὁσίου ἐκεῖθεν, καὶ ἐν τῷ κάστρῳ εἰσεληλυθότος, ἔρχεται πρὸς αὐτὸν Ἰουδαῖός τις ὀνόματι Δῶμνουλος, ὅς ἦν αὐτῷ γνωστός ἐκ νεότητος αὐτοῦ, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν σφόδρα φιλομαθῆ καὶ ἱκανόν περὶ τὴν ἰατρικὴν ἐπιστήμην. “Ἦκουσα περὶ τῆς ἀσκήσεώς σου, καὶ πολλῆς ἐγκρατείας, καὶ γινώσκων τὴν κρᾶσιν τοῦ σώματός σου ἐθαύμαζον πῶς οὐ περιπέπτωκας ἐπιλήψει: ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπό

From this passage we learn that Nilus knew Donnolo ἐκ νεότητος αὐτοῦ, from his boyhood.<sup>65</sup> This suggests that their acquaintance began soon after the fall of Oria in 925, when the twelve years old Donnolo was ransomed in Taranto. They may well have remained in touch until 940,

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τοῦτὰ νῦν, εἰ κελεύεις, ἐγὼ σοι δώσω φάρμακον πρὸς τὴν σὴν κρᾶσιν, ἵνα ἔχῃς αὐτὸ πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς σου, καὶ μηδεμίαν ἀσθένειαν φοβηθῆσιν.” Εφη αὐτῷ ὁ μέγας: Εἶπε πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἐξ ὑμῶν εἷς Ἑβραῖος: “Αγαθὸν πεποιθῆναι ἐπὶ Κῶριον, ἢ πεποιθῆναι ἐπὶ ἄνθρωπον.” Πεπειθότες οὖν ἡμεῖς ἐπὶ τὸν ἱατρὸν ἡμῶν Θεὸν καὶ Κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν, χρεῖαν ἔχομεν τῶν ὑπὸ σοῦ γενομένων φαρμάκων. Σὺ δὲ ἄλλως δύννησι ἐμπαῖξαι τοὺς τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀκεραίους, εἰ μὴ ἐν τῷ καυχᾶσθαι σε τῶν φαρμάκων μεταδοῦναι τῷ Νείλω. Τούτων οὖν ὁ ἱατρὸς ἐπακούσα, οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸν ἅγιον ἀπεκρίνατο (Migne, ed., “Βίος καὶ πολιτεία,” 91–94). English translation in Friedenwald, “Jewish Physicians in Italy,” 140–141 and also in Starr, *The Jews*, 162. The rejection by Nilus of the medical assistance proffered by Donnolo was meant, according to Luzzatti-Laganà (“La figura di Donnolo,” 98) to set a clear distance between him and the Jew with whom he had shared intellectual interests in his youth. However, her assumption that Nilus’s familiarity with Donnolo might have aroused suspicion finds no support in the sources. The depiction of Nilus’s attitude towards Donnolo, as underlined by von Falkenhausen, “L’Ebraismo dell’Italia meridionale,” 25–46 and idem, “La Vita di San Nilo,” 271–305, was clearly inspired by the hagiographical need to create an *exemplum*, that is to say, a demonstration of the superiority of the Christian faith.

<sup>65</sup> According to the first part of the Life, Nilus’ youth was marked by intellectual vivacity and an “insatiable thirst for knowledge.” This included an interest even in so-called amulets and exorcisms: “Ἦγάπα γὰρ αἶε τῶν ἁγίων Πατέρων τοὺς Βίους, ἐκ νεότητος αὐτοῦ, Ἄντωνιον φημί δὴ, Σάββα τε καὶ Ἰλαρίωνος, καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τῇ καθολικῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ· καὶ μετὰ πολλοῦ πόθου καὶ συνέσεως αὐτοὺς αἶε διεξήρχετο. Ὅθεν καὶ αὐτῷ τὸ μισοπύνηρον εἶναι, καὶ ἀποστρέφεσθαι τὰς ἐν τοῖς οἴκοις τῶν ἀρχόντων διατριβὰς μωσίν τε καὶ ἀποβδελύττεσθαι πᾶσαν περιεργίαν, καὶ ἐξουθενεῖν[!] τὰ λεγόμενα φυλακτὰ, καὶ τοὺς λεγομένους ἐξορκισμοὺς· καίτοι γε οὐδέ τῶν τοιούτων ἀπορήσας βίβλων διὰ νοδὸς ὀξύτητα καὶ σπουδὴν τὴν ἐν ᾧπαισι (Migne, ed., “Βίος καὶ πολιτεία,” 19). [“Since his youth he liked reading the Vitae of the holy fathers such as Anthony, Saba, Hilarion and others, whose images were painted in the Cathedral, which he always read with eagerness and attention. This is how he began to dislike wickedness, to stay away from the houses of the leaders, to deal irreverently with the powerful, to loathe every superstition and to despise the [books of] so-called amulets and exorcisms. Because of his brilliance and his insatiable hunger for knowledge, however, he had those books with him”] (my translation. P.M). The text does not provide any further comment on the contents of “those books,” nor are we told why they remained in Nilus’s possession in spite of their evidently unorthodox nature. There is little doubt, however, that they were books of magic, and it seems that at a certain stage of his life, Nilus was interested in apotropaic practices. With the probable intention of upholding his good reputation, Johannes Cleus (Jean Clé), an 18th century commentator of the Life, insisted that Nilus’s books of magic were, in fact, astronomical treatises: “Si recte ex adjunctis co[n]jicio, non de typis quibusdam magicis aut tabulis diabolicis, sed de observationibus tabulisve astronomicis aut mathematicis, quae tum temporis non solebant forte sine aliqua superstitione esse, hic loquitur biographus[sic]” [“If I correctly infer from the circumstances, the biographer does not refer in this passage to magical or diabolical tables but to observation tables, astronomical or mathematical, which at that time were not entirely free of some

when Nilus, aged thirty, left the secular life to take his monastic vows.<sup>66</sup> Since Nilus belonged to one of the most prominent and well-to-do native families of Rossano, and since he lived in Rossano for the entire period prior to his adoption of the monastic vocation, his acquaintance with Donnolo could only have been made in Rossano, where we must assume that Donnolo arrived in the aftermath of the invasion of Oria in 925.

Situated on the eastern coast of Calabria, in the heart of the Mercurion—a mountainous region wherein the Byzantines had established one of their most important military strongholds in southern Italy—Rossano remained relatively unscathed by the periodic Fatimid raids on the Byzantine cities of Calabria and Apulia from the neighbouring island of Sicily and from North Africa.<sup>67</sup> It maintained a prominent cultural

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superstitious character”] (my translation. P.M.). See Migne, ed., “Βίος καὶ πολιτεία,” 20 n. 3. If there is any substance to this claim, then a common interest in astronomy [and astrology] may have brought Donnolo and Nilus together in their youth and sustained their acquaintance in subsequent years.

<sup>66</sup> According to Luzzatti Laganà (“La figura di Donnolo,” 83–84) once he became a monk, Saint Nilus was precluded from having any relations with non-Christians, especially Jews, by the 11th canon issued at the Council of Trullano in 692, which expressly forbade all contacts with the Jews. However, Nilus clearly did not observe this prohibition; not only does it seem likely that he maintained some contacts with Donnolo (on which see directly below), but as the Life explicitly says, he invited a group of Jews, which probably included Donnolo, to join his monastic hermitage. See Migne, ed., “Βίος καὶ πολιτεία,” 94.

<sup>67</sup> Sharf, *The Universe*, 115 observes that “Rossano was a focal point of Byzantine strategy against Muslim raiders. Like Oria fifty years earlier, it was thought easily defensible, with its citadel towering a thousand feet above the plain ... This is why it had become the seat of the imperial governor ... Rossano, however, was not only a political bulwark and a formidable citadel. For centuries it was remembered as the intellectual centre upon which the literature, the art and the theology of Byzantine Italy converged.” See also Gay, “St-Adrien de Calabre,” 291–305 and idem, *L'Italie méridionale*, 343–346; Pepe, *Da S. Nilo*, 11. Rossano hosted an important Byzantine scriptorial school: three manuscripts copied by Nilus survive in the monastery of Grottaferrata; see Follieri, “Niceforo ‘il nudo,” 5–12; idem, “Attività scrittoria calabrese,” 103–142, particularly 125–128. See also Canart, “Introduzione,” 17–34. An important testimony to the important role played by Rossano in Byzantine southern Italy is provided by Bartholomew in his Life of Saint Nilus: Τὸ Ῥουσιάνον οἶδ’ ὅτι πάντες γινώσκουσιν, οὐ μόνον διὰ τὸ προκαθῆσθαι τοῖς τῆς Καλαβρίας τέρασσι, μέγιστόν τε τευγχάνειν ὁμοῦ καὶ ἀνεπιβούλευτον, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὸ καὶ πάσης τῆς χώρας ἐρημωθείσης, καὶ πασῶν τῶν πόλεων ἔργον γεγενημένων τῆς τῶν Σαδδρακηνῶν πολυπληθείας, μόνον διαφυγεῖν μέχρι καὶ νῦν τῆς αὐτῶν ἀπωλείας τὸν νόμον (Migne, ed., “Βίος καὶ πολιτεία,” 17) [“I know that Rossano is well known to everybody, and not only by name, since the city is the largest one which guards the Calabrian borders, and also the only one which eluded the danger of the Saracens who had devastated the entire region and taken all the cities under their control”]. (my translation. P.M.). About Rossano as a Byzantine military stronghold, see Panebianco, “Osservazioni sull’Eparchia,” 189–193. Some doubts about the presence of defensive walls and the capac-



and political position in the broader context of Byzantine southern Italy. Although there exists no conclusive evidence on Donnolo's whereabouts after the fall of Oria, it is perfectly plausible that Rossano was indeed the place, or at least one of the places, in which he lived for either part or the whole of his mature life. As we have seen, Rossano was one of the few Byzantine cities which was well defended against attacks from the sea. This, together with the thriving cultural life of the city, would have attracted Donnolo whose need for security was as great as his desire for knowledge. The assumption that after being ransomed in Taranto, Donnolo settled in Rossano, where he cultivated scientific interests and finally gained fame as an expert physician, is further corroborated by the Life of Saint Nilus.

A second episode in this Life provides clearer and historically reliable evidence to the effect that Donnolo was still in Rossano some forty years later, in 965. This episode concerns the repentance and death of Euprassius, the imperial judge [ὁ βασιλικὸς] and commander of the Byzantine province of Apulia.<sup>68</sup>

Both Nilus and Donnolo are described as attending to Euprassius on his deathbed. While the Christian monk attempts to bring about his wholehearted repentance from worldly life, the Jewish physician is entrusted with the task of healing his physical afflictions. Tonsured by Nilus as a mark of his religious conversion, Euprassius turns his heart to the "true faith," while Donnolo expresses his admiration for the spiritual powers of his Christian friend, whom he calls the new "Daniel taming the lions" (Daniel 6:22, according to the Greek and Latin versions):

He [Euprassius] was then struck by the disease called gangrene of the genitals, which was unresponsive to treatment and which punished the organs of profligacy by which he had broken the laws of nature ... Moved by his tears and by his supplications, with his own hands, the Father [Nilus] cut his hair and clothed him—a man who had been delicate for so long, clothed in long and luxurious garments—in very humble wool

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ity of Rossano to resist external attacks have been raised, on the basis of the extant archaeological remains, by Coscarella, *Insemediamenti bizantini*, 103.

<sup>68</sup> The two Byzantine *themes* of Italia [Longobardy] and Calabria could temporarily be merged into a single *theme* controlled by a single judge. See von Falkenhausen, *La dominazione bizantina*, 124 ff.; Guillou, *La Théotokos de Hagia Agathè*, 68 n. 9, 71 n. 10, 144 n. 34, 148 n. 36. See also Gay, *L'Italie méridionale*, 347–348. The name Euprassius, which is scarcely attested in the Byzantine sources, was commonplace in Calabria. Euprassius was in all likelihood a functionary of Calabrian origin. See von Falkenhausen, "La Vita di San Nilo," 282.

made glorious by (monastic) humility. He did this in the presence of the metropolitan Stephan and the bishop of the locality [Rossano], as well as a considerable number of abbots and priests. Also present was a Jew, Donnolo, the doctor whom I have mentioned before, who watched the proceedings and, after admiring what had been done, came up and addressed those present in the following way: “Today I saw wonderful things which, as we have heard, had been done before. Now have I seen Daniel, the prophet, taming the lion. For who [else] was ever able to lay his hand on that lion? Yet this new Daniel has both shaved his hair and put on him a monk’s hood. (my translation. P.M.).<sup>69</sup>

It clearly emerges from this account that in 965—the year of Euprassius’s death, when command of the province was transferred to Nicephoros Hexakionites<sup>70</sup>—Donnolo was in Rossano, where his reputation as a physician was such that he was called, together with Saint Nilus, the leading local Christian authority, to assist in the treatment of the most prominent Byzantine political figure in the city.

The image of the Jew Donnolo as it emerges from this hagiographical source is historically credible and, above all, surprisingly positive. It is markedly devoid of the anti-Jewish slant that characterises most of the

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<sup>69</sup> Πάθος γάρ τὸ λεγόμενον γάγγραινα περὶ τὴν βάλανον τοῦ παδόγονου μορίου αὐτοῦ ἐκφνέν, τῶν μὲν ἰατρῶν ἀπρακτον διήλεγε τὴν περιοδείαν, δίκας δὲ εἰσπεράττειν τὸ τῆς ἀσωτίας ὄργανον, δι’ ὧν ἀκρατῶς τὸν τῆς φύσεως νόμον ἐξύβρισεν ... Καμφθεις οὖν ὁ Πατήρ τοῖς δάκρυσι καὶ ταῖς ἰκεσίας αὐτοῦ, ταῖς οἰκείαις χερσὶν αὐτὸν ἀπεκείρατο, καὶ τὰ τῆ σεμνῆ ταπεινώσει δεδοξασμένα ῥάκη περιεβάλετο, τῇ ἀπαλῇ καὶ περιῶρεούσῃ ἐσθῆτι πρῶην μαλακίζόμενον, παρόντος τοῦ μητροπολίτου Στεφάνου σὺν τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ τοῦ Κάστρου ἡγουμένοις τε οὐκ ὀλίγοις, καὶ ἄλλοις ἱερεῦσι, Παρειστίκει δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἰουδαῖος Δῶμνουλος ὧς ἰατρῶν οὐ καὶ πρῶην ἐμνήσθη, θεωρῶν ἅπαντα τὰ τελούμενα· ὅς ἐξελθὼν ἔξω, καὶ τὰ γενημένα θαυμάσας, ἔφη πρὸς τοὺς παρόντας· Σήμερον ἐθεασάμην θαυμάσια, ἅπερ πάλοι γενέσθαι ἀκηκόαμεν. Νῦν εἶδον τὸν προφήτην Δανιὴλ ἡμεροῦντα τοῦς λέοντας. Τίς γὰρ ἠδυνήθη ποτὲ χεῖρα ἐπιβαλέσθαι τούτῳ τῷ λέοντι; Ὁ δὲ νέος οὗτος Δανιὴλ καὶ τὴν κόμην ἀπέτεμε, καὶ κουκούλιον ἐπιτέθεικεν (Migne, ed., “Βίος καὶ πολιτεία,” 95, 99).

<sup>70</sup> At around that time, Emperor Nicephoros Phocas (963–969) embarked on a new campaign to reconquer the Byzantine territories under Muslim rule. The appointment of Nicephoros Hexakionites as μάγιστρος of the two southern Italian themes of Longobardy (Apulia) and Calabria was an innovation suggested by the need to strengthen Byzantine rule over the zones neighbouring the occupied territories (such as Sicily). Hexakionites remained in office from 965 until the beginning of the reign of Constantine VIII (1025–1028). The new policy inaugurated by Phocas was extremely unpopular with the southern Italians who feared retaliation by the Muslims: in Rossano, for instance, the Byzantine ships docking in the city harbour were burnt down and their commanders killed by the local population; see von Falkenhausen, “La Vita di San Nilo,” 280; Schlumberger, *Lépopée byzantine*, 456; Giovanelli, ed. *S. Nilo da Rossano*, 75; Pertusi, “Contributi alla storia dei temi,” 16. See also Guillard, “Études sur l’histoire administrative,” 14–28 and Guillou, “Geografia amministrativa,” 113–133.

author's references to the Jews. A good example of this is his account of an episode concerning the Jews of Bisignano, a small town under the jurisdiction of Rossano. The judges of that city had condemned a certain Christian to death for killing a Jew. Nilus, having been begged by the family of the killer to plead with the magistrates for his pardon, appealed against the sentence, citing an unknown legal clause whereby the death of every Christian must be countered by the death of seven Jews.<sup>71</sup>

As observed by Sharf,<sup>72</sup> the attitude of Nilus's hagiographer toward the Jews does not generally differ from that detectable in other, both earlier and later, Christian hagiographical texts, in which the figure of the Jew serves primarily to demonstrate Christian truth: Nilus's refusal to accept the remedies proffered to him by the Jewish doctor, and the subsequent declaration of the moral superiority of healing by the Christian faith, are part of the standard repertoire of literary and theological *topoi* to which Christian hagiography often resorted, but "on the other hand Nilus casts no doubt on the propriety of the treatment offered to him. Quite the contrary. His fear is that Donnolo might delude Christians into becoming his patients not beguiled by useless fancies or by demons, but because he has been treating a monk: presumably, therefore, with some success."<sup>73</sup>

The last chronological detail of the life of Shabbatai Donnolo is the reference to the year 982 in his introduction to SH, wherein he criticises his Jewish contemporaries for being a "contemptible, and unwise generation of our time."<sup>74</sup> The reasons for such a critical outburst are not entirely clear. Sharf suggests that it might have been a reaction to failure of Donnolo's work to be understood and appreciated by his fellow Jews, a work on which he had spent "many years of toil."<sup>75</sup> The exhortations to his brethren to observe the traditional commandments of Judaism, and the emphasis which in the same section he places on affirming the legitimate character of the scientific investigation of the principles of nature,<sup>76</sup> are probably expressions of Donnolo's wish, at the end of his long career

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<sup>71</sup> See Colafemmina, "San Nilo di Rossano," 128, republished in idem, *Per la storia degli ebrei*, 1–10.

<sup>72</sup> Sharf, *The Universe*, 114–115.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 114. See also Kazhdan, "The Image of the Medical Doctor," 48.

<sup>74</sup> See below, English Translation, 241.

<sup>75</sup> See Sharf, *The Universe*, 121. On the other hand, it seems that Donnolo's works, and particularly SH, soon became known in southern Italy where only a few decades later it was quoted by the author of *Sefer Yosippon*, as well as in the biblical commentary *Sefer Rossina*, and eventually also by northern European exegetes.

<sup>76</sup> See below, English Translation, 243.

spent in pursuit of Greek-Byzantine learning, to establish his work within the framework of traditional Judaism.

### *Shabbatai Donnolo's Works*

The literary production of Shabbatai Donnolo ranges in subject matter from pharmacopoeia through human pathology to astrology and astronomy.<sup>77</sup> In addition to שׁ, it consists of *Sefer ha-mirqaḥot*, *Sefer ha-mazzalot*, *Barayta de-mazzalot*, *Practica* and *Antidotarium*, although not all of these works can be attributed to him with certainty:

1. *Sefer ha-mirqaḥot* (The Book of Mixtures), also known as *Sefer ha-yaqar* (The Precious Book), is a pharmaceutical text consisting of twenty short chapters devoted to the preparation of medical remedies and herbal compounds. Donnolo wrote this text, the oldest known medical text written in Hebrew in Medieval Europe, about the year 970, some 40 years after he began his study of medicine.<sup>78</sup>

The Hebrew used is both syntactically and terminologically close to that of Rabbinic literature. It is rich in Greek and Latin names, as well as vernacular synonyms transliterated into Hebrew characters, by which the author identifies plants and herbs. Names of Arabic origin are absent.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Astrology is the study of the supposed influences of the celestial bodies on the sub-lunar world, which effectively amounts to the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm (see Gettings, *The Arkana Dictionary*, 52–54), while astronomy is the study of the physical phenomena taking place in the Earth's upper atmosphere and the physical properties of the celestial bodies (see Ridpath, *Dictionary of Astronomy*, 34). As pointed out by Pines ("The Semantic Distinction," 344), until the 14th century astrology and astronomy were regarded as synonymous, even though some important distinctions between the two terms are attested in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (III, xxvii), and the works of the 12th century Latin Hugh of Saint Victor [d. 1141] (see *Eruditio didascalica*, Migne, ed., col. 756) and the Byzantine Michael Glycas (see CCAG, V, I, 140). Donnolo does not distinguish between astrology and astronomy, which he conceives as part of a unique discipline to which he refers as הכמת הכוכבים. See below, English Translation, 231 n. 57. In the present study, I distinguish between astrology and astronomy, only when such a distinction, according to the two definitions above, is clearly discernable in Donnolo's works. When, however, the distinction is not discernable, I refer to the sources as astrological-astronomical.

<sup>78</sup> See Ferre, "Donnolo's *Sefer ha-yaqar*," 12.

<sup>79</sup> The absence of terms derived from Arabic is peculiar to Donnolo's work, since the majority of medieval pharmaceutical treatises—either Hebrew, Latin or Romance, both earlier and later than Donnolo's—were subject to the influence of Arabic pharmacopoeia. See Ferre, *ibid.* 2–3 and Friedenwald, *The Jews and Medicine*, I, 152.

## DONNOLO'S "LIBRARY"

Donnolo's linguistic range comprised Hebrew and Aramaic, Greek and Latin as well as Italian vernacular, but probably not Arabic, which appears no more than four times throughout his body of works.<sup>1</sup> An awareness of this allows us to limit the range of literary sources which might have been available to him. The intellectual traditions to which he had direct access were the Jewish and the Greco-Roman, especially in its Byzantine form, while those elements of his thought that might be deemed to be of Arabic origin were probably mediated to him by other sources, which may not have been literary, such as his notion of the Dragon, and the roles of the two lunar nodes (see below 72, and English Translation, 346 n. 162), which he may have acquired by oral instruction from his teacher B-g-d-ṭ.

Donnolo clearly drew his knowledge of medicine, astrology and astronomy from the standard scientific texts available to Byzantine scholars,<sup>2</sup> while the origin of his philosophical ideas—a form of Neo-Platonism informed by traditional Jewish notions of Creation and perhaps some awareness of Patristic sources—is far more difficult to ascertain.

The main source of Donnolo's astronomical and astrological knowledge is Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, one of the most influential texts of late antiquity.<sup>3</sup> As he explicitly states in the introductory section to SH,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arabic terms occur three times in the *Practica*, as the names of two medical compounds (see Sharf, *The Universe*, 96) and once in *Sefer ha-mazzalot*, where Donnolo refers to the Arabic name of the constellation of the Great Bear as בנתנש (*Benetnash* or according to an alternative spelling, *Benetnash*). This is indeed a name of Arabic origin (deriving from a contraction of *al-qā'id al-banat al-nash* ["the leader of the daughters of the bier"]) but it was already known to Ptolemy, who listed it as the  $\eta$  star [namely, the seventh star of the constellation of the Great Bear] in his *Catalogue of the Stars*. See Gettings, *The Arkana Dictionary*, 67. None of these offers cogent proof that Donnolo knew Arabic.

<sup>2</sup> Namely, the text of the Hippocratic-Galenic medical tradition, the pharmaceutical works of Dioscorides, and the tradition of Ptolemaic astrology, particularly his *Tetrabiblos*. See Sharf, *The Universe*, 14–15, 94–97; Scarborough, "Symposium on Byzantine Medicine," xi–xiv and Riddle, "Byzantine Commentaries."

<sup>3</sup> See Tester, *A History*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> See below, English Translation, 230.