



— A JOURNEY THROUGH THE —  
**VENETIAN GHETTO**



**500** YEARS  
COMMEMORATION

SPECIAL EDITION



Foreword by

# Prof. Shaul Bassi

UNIVERSITY OF VENICE



In 1516 the Republic of Venice decreed that all the Jews had to be confined in a peripheral area of the city called 'Geto', after its long abandoned foundry. Half a millenium later, the word Ghetto has taken a life of its own and very few people among the millions who use it on a daily basis in a profoundly unequal and divided world know that its origin lies here, in this small quarter in Cannaregio. Today we, the Jews of Venice, continue to cherish our traditions, rich and mutable, always remembering the tragedies that befell our ancestors and still proud of their achievements. They were locked up but they made substantial contributions to the world; they were persecuted but they fought and survived. Their legacy is an inspiration. Their example

also shows that we cannot take the Ghetto for granted, and every generation, in the best Jewish mode, has to reinvent it so that its values do not become ossified. The Quincentennial of the Ghetto is, in this light, less a point of arrival than a point of departure for us. We can restore the best spirit of this place, the historic vocation of the Ghetto as a meeting point and as a cultural center; we can generate a new, vibrant, plural, international Jewish life in the ancient Ghetto. For that we need artists, writers, scholars, students, curious individuals--dedicated visitors who are willing to experience this place not as simple tourists but as fellow explorers. We look forward to welcoming them.



*The key ghetto stories remain hidden and unexplored, buried under a layer of seductive and powerful clichés prompted by the now globalised word 'ghetto'*



My favorite Jewish spot in Venice  
**LEVANTINE SYNAGOGUE**



Introduction by

# Jack Gottlieb

WJH FOUNDER



Through this eBook The World Jewish Heritage Fund is proud to participate in the upcoming commemoration of the 500th anniversary to the establishment of the Venetian Jewish Ghetto – an institution which set precedent to the confinement of hundreds of thousands of European Jews for centuries to come.

This eBook is much different than our last one, [Israel's Top 100 Ethnic Restaurants](#). The latter explored the relationship between cultural heritage and food, taking us cross-country into the unexplored territory of Israel's unique culinary scene. It bridged a cultural gap between the diaspora's perception and reality of Israel's culinary heritage,

Here, we explore the legacy of a specific city, its institutions, and its community. We segway into the cultural heritage of a small but influential Jewish community in an effort to close the gap between the misconception and reality of what a ghetto is and what it represents. By honing our focus on the Venetian ghetto on its 500th anniversary, we tackle an event which is often misunderstood and is still being assessed in the context of its impact on our cultural heritage of today.

To do this, we have created the first ever interactive digital travel book about the ghetto, which gives you access to key sites, events, trails, guides, and tours – all at the click of a button. By digitally curating the smaller story of the Jewish Ghetto, we hope to tell the bigger story of the global Jewish community. The narratives

surrounding the German, Spanish, Levantine and Italian synagogues illustrates and exemplifies the recurring historical intersection between the Sephardic, Ashkenazi, and Oriental cultures.

The beauty of the ghetto is that its narrative will mean different things to different people. For me, the story of the ghetto is reminiscent of my own journey, relocating from 'ghetto to ghetto' in Boston, from Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan to my final destination, that of the upper-middle-class suburb of Brookline. Left in this journey's wake were the vestiges, memories, and traces of a once thriving Jewish community: the G&G Restaurant, the Lubavitcher Yeshiva, and the Woodow Ave 'Big Shul'. These 'ghettos' now stand bare, virtually emptied of their Jews, much like the Venice Ghetto of today.

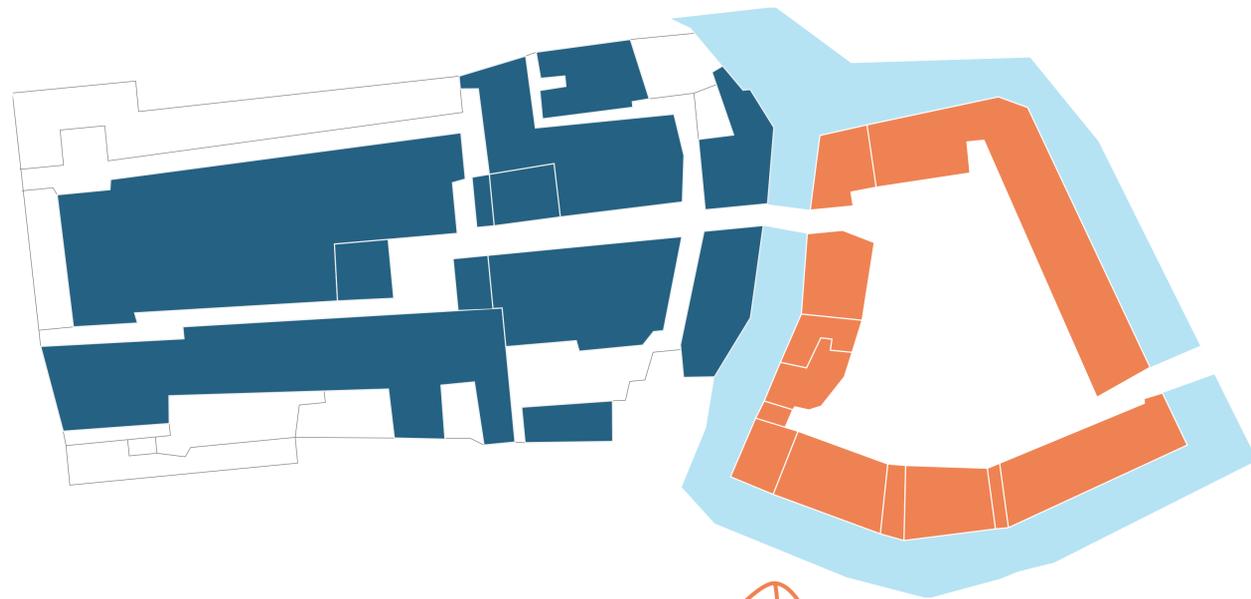
As you explore Venice and its historical Jewish community, take a moment, as Shaul Bassi suggests, to reflect and understand how its rich history parlays into your own life. Use our ecosystem to digitally curate more stories related to the ghetto. In that way, you can relate the narrative of the ghetto to a deepened understanding of your story, your family's history, and, by doing so, add to our collective Jewish heritage.



My favorite Jewish spot in Venice  
**THE JEWISH MUSEUM**

# THE JEWS OF VENICE

📍 OLD GHETTO    📍 NEW GHETTO



# THE JEWS OF VENICE

While Jews did not settle in Venice until the 13th century, many Jewish merchants and moneylenders visited and worked in the city beginning with the 10th century. Little by little, and despite alternating moments of “permission” and “prohibition”, the number and importance of Jews in Venice grew considerably, so much that on March 29, 1516, the Republic of Venice found it necessary to enact a decree to organize their presence. Beginning in 1516, Jews were obliged to live in an area of the city where the foundries, known in Venetian as “geti”, had been situated in ancient times, to wear a sign of identification and to manage the city’s pawnshops at rates established by the Serenissima. Many other onerous regulations were also included, in exchange for which the Community was granted the freedom to practice its faith and protection in the case of war. Ashkenazi Jews were the first to relocate to the ghetto, followed by the Sephardic Jews. The premises and adjacent canals were guarded come nightfall by Christian watchmen who ensured no man entered through the ghetto gates. Given the freedom of religion, the community erected various ‘scolas,’ (Synagogues) within the ghetto. Five holy structures were built between the 16th and 17th century, each corresponding to an ethnic group within the greater Jewish community. The Jewish population grew vastly throughout the centuries, yet living conditions remained substandard. Napoleon’s invasion in 1797 ushered in the

end of Jewish segregation. Jews were decreed equal to other citizens and granted full freedom. The rise of fascism in Italy brought the Jewish status to question once again, up until World War II, when it began to dwindle. As members of the community were sent to concentration camps, the community’s growth came to an abrupt halt. A Jewish community still remains in Venice, although of much smaller proportions than in its past. Current estimates count a population of about 500 Jews, 20 of which still reside in the ghetto.



- 01 > Jewish community est. 1321
- 02 > Max population 5000
- 03 > Population today 500
- 04 > Ethnic Groups: Ashkenazi, Levantine, Ponetini (Castilian and Portuguese)

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