# The Venice Ghetto During Rabbi Leone da Modena's Time: The Insider/Outsider Status of Venice's Jewish Community in the Early Seventeenth Century

Jessica Zimmerman

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York

Spring, 5763
Advisor: Dr. Stanley Nash

This thesis consists of five chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. Each chapter represents one subject. The five chapters address the following subjects: the history of the ghetto; the history of Rabbi Leone da Modena; synagogue architecture in the ghetto; the development of Jewish liturgical music in the ghetto; innovation in preaching style in the ghetto.

This thesis is an exploration of the Jewish ghetto in Venice, during the time of Rabbi Leone da Modena. It focuses on the exchange of influence through the ghetto's walls, between the Christian and the Jewish communities of Venice, seen through architectural, musical and sermonic developments in the ghetto, during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

This thesis is intended to introduce the reader to some of the cultural developments in the ghetto which demonstrate an exchange of styles between the two communities, despite the enforced enclosure of the Jews. This thesis is, to my knowledge, the only exploration of the "insider"/ "outsider" status of the Jewish community, through the lens of artistic media.

Many secondary sources were used. Though this topic has not been completely explored, there are works written on the ghetto and life within it. Some primary sources were used, as well. These include: Modena's autobiography, in translation; some of Modena's *tshuvot*; some of Modena's sermons.

## I. Introduction

This thesis has been developing for several years. In 1992, I first went to the Venice Ghetto and found myself standing in the courtyards, imagining what Jewish life must have been like there in the height of its cultural time. I wandered through the narrow alleys, and along the canals, feeling the spirit of those who lived and worked in the ghetto when it was a thriving and bustling center of Jewish life. I was intrigued by the ornately decorated synagogues overlooking the canals, which were home to so many different ethnic Jewish communities. And I was struck by Venice's location at the center of Europe. I made a mental note to learn about this community one day.

In 1994, I had the privilege to live and study in Florence. I took residence with an Italian family and, after becoming proficient in the language, the family and I exchanged stories about our histories. Every night, the matriarch of the family would climb down a rickety wooden ladder into the basement, carrying an empty wine bottle. She always returned with a full one and I asked her about the cellar. "It's just used for wine, now," she told me. I was intrigued by her answer. "What was it used for in other times?" I asked. "During the War, we hid a Jewish family there," she told me. As our conversation continued late into the night, I discovered that my host family had saved a prominent Florentine Jewish family during World War II. I was further intrigued about the history of Italian Jewry.

In 1997-1998, during the first year of rabbinical school at HUC-JIR in Jerusalem, I volunteered at the Italian Synagogue and Museum, learning about costumes, artifacts, ritual objects, and working on a Purim exhibit of Venetian masks. I wanted to study

further and promised myself I would find a class to learn more about this fascinating community.

In the spring of 2002, I happened upon a wonderful new program at the Jewish Theological Seminary, entitled Jewish Art and Material Culture. The department, in partnership with the Jewish Museum, encourages and enables students to learn about Jewish communities through their ritual objects. I registered for a class in which we studied, in depth, the ritual objects of Italy's Jewish communities. Finally, I was able to explore the colorful and culturally rich communities of Italy, and their beautiful ritual objects and sanctuaries.

Thus, the more I learned, the more intrigued I became with the history of Italian Jewish culture. I decided to devote my thesis research to this topic. This thesis, entitled, The Venice Ghetto During Rabbi Leone da Modena's Time, is the culmination of my efforts to understand the complexities of life in the ghetto in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

The thesis is divided into five chapters, allowing the reader to be introduced to the ghetto through various lenses. Chapter One is an introduction to the history of the ghetto and its physical development. It is an introduction to the political and economic climate of Venice at the time of the development of the ghetto and the reasons behind the establishment and enlargement of the ghetto area. Chapter Two is an introduction to the life of one of the ghetto's most significant and influential teachers, Rabbi Leone da Modena. Chapter Three is a study of the architecture of the ghetto's synagogues. Chapter Four focuses on two issues of modernization which affected the ghetto community in Modena's day: whether or not music could be permitted during synagogue

services; and whether or not Jewish men were permitted to remove their identifying head coverings. These issues are explored through *tshuvot* written and publicized by Modena. Chapter Five explores developments in preaching and sermons in the ghetto.

Each of these chapters is intended to be a window onto the community, to allow a modern reader to begin to understand what the ghetto community was like. It was a complex and diverse neighborhood, incorporating Jewish families from many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It was a walled enclosure, an area where the Jews came to be forced to live. And yet, within its gates, the ghetto communities learned to live together to survive and thrive as outsiders to the Venetian world. Despite their isolation and forced enclosure, the Jews of Venice also managed to garner an insider status of sorts. This thesis is an exploration of the insider/outsider status of the Jewish community of the Venice ghetto, as seen through the architecture, music and preaching styles which came to be incorporated into, and enjoyed within, the ghetto's walls.

Rabbi Leone da Modena was a very interesting and important figure within the ghetto. He served as rabbi and cantor to all of the Jewish communities there at one time or another. His extant writings, though incomplete, are vast and give valuable insight on what life was like in the ghetto. By researching and focusing on the ghetto during the life of this colorful rabbi, I was able to study a period of time inside the walls through the eyes of one man who saw and effected a lot of change there. Modena was a man of great spirit who struggled throughout his life with an addiction to gambling. His personal sorrows, including the deaths of his children and the multitude of deaths in the ghetto during the outbreak of bubonic plague, were recorded in his autobiography, in addition to his admission of mistakes as a result of his gambling. Despite his human failings,

Modena, the rabbi, and Modena, the author, left us a legacy of information about the community in which he lived and served. Through his writings, sermons and *tshuvot*, and through a study of the communities he taught, it is possible to gain an understanding of the complicated world behind the walls. He lived at a time and place of great contrasts: development and change, innovation and adoption of style, freedom and enclosure, insider and outsider status. Though freedom was limited by the walls of the ghetto, within those walls, the Jewish community of the Venice ghetto was alive with creativity and imagination, heightened, perhaps, by the boundaries and restrictions to which they were subject. Through the life and experiences of Modena, the life of the ghetto and its inhabitants is revealed. "That the inner/outer contrast is found so acutely in Modena is surely a product of his experience of moving between the two worlds, using the Italian language, motifs, and genres and being listened to seriously by Christians."[1] Modena represents the insider/outsider status of all of the Jews of the Venice ghetto in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This thesis is intended to elucidate that status through various artistic media and the life of the ghetto's rabbi, Leone da Modena.

Since this is a survey, the subject matter is broad. I relied upon the expertise of professors who helped my work profoundly. For the chapter on architecture, I was advised by Dr. Vivian Mann, professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary and curator at the Jewish Museum. Her guidance with regard to study of the Italian Jewish communities, through their ritual objects and spaces was tremendously helpful. I have

[1] Natalie Zemon Davis, "Fame and Secrecy: Leon Modena's *Life* as an Early Modern Autobiography," *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi*, trans. and ed. Mark Cohen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 69.

enjoyed working with Dr. Stanley Nash, professor of Hebrew literature at HUC-JIR. He provided me with the support which enabled me to struggle with Modena's difficult texts, which have not been published in English. Dr. Nash advised this thesis and I am very grateful to him for all of his help.

## II. History of the Venice Ghetto

The Jews of Medieval Italy lived with a tenuous status. The Jewish communities found themselves in a state of flux. With one hand, the governments of the Italian states pushed the Jews away; with the other, they held tightly to the Jews, preventing them from leaving. Why did the governments feel so conflicted? And how were the Jews able to live in societies which both degraded and needed them? While most of the Italian states attempted to rid themselves of Jews, some grudgingly allowed the Jews to stay, but only within defined and guarded enclosures. The history of the Jewish community in the Veneto, the region which includes the port city of Venice, shows, particularly clearly, the complex relationship between the state and the Jews.

Present-day Italy became a nation only in the mid-nineteenth century. Until that time, Italy was comprised of many autonomous states. Thus, the Jewish communities which existed throughout the Italian states had different experiences with different governments. Almost all of the Jewish communities experienced some kind of persecution at one time or another.

It is widely believed that Jews inhabited the Italian lands since "Hellenistic times."[2] It seems quite probable, since Jews lived all over the Mediterranean region. However, they were not welcome in all of the Italian states. The Jewish communities were mainly permitted to live in the southern regions. "Before the thirteenth century only a handful of Jews were allowed to live north of Rome; Jewish merchants and artisans had

[2] David Ruderman, "Introduction," *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 6.

been prohibited from settling in northern neighborhoods out of fear of economic competition."[3] However, that situation changed in the "thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by the simultaneous rise to prominence of Jewish money lending, spurred by the church's campaign against Christian usury, and by the burgeoning populations and economies of the northern Italian communes, which created an increasing need for capital."[4] As the northern Italian port cities grew in commercial importance, so, too, did their populations and significance as prominent economic centers. Venice is one such port. In fact, Venice, in many ways was perfectly situated to become an extremely important gateway between East and West.

Located on the northeast tip of the Italian peninsula, it can be no accident that Venice was the location of the first printing of the Talmud, and, subsequently, a major center of Jewish publishing and printing. The Veneto was an area of many assets, leading to its significance in Jewish history. Foremost, was its geographic location. Venice is a city built on waterways. Access and transport throughout the immediate region were made easy by the system of canals. But more importantly, Venice's direct access to water and close proximity to Turkey, and all of the Mediterranean countries, made it an excellent location for shipping. Goods could come through Venice on trade routes from East to West. As Venice, itself, became a center for paper production and printing, books could be shipped from the Veneto to communities all over the Mediterranean. And as Jewish books came to be printed in Venice, those books were in high demand in Turkey and other nearby lands where large Jewish populations were

[3] Ruderman, 6-7.
[4] Ruderman, 7.

living. Venice became a major economic center, in general, and a port of great importance, Jewishly, as well. As such, money was needed to keep the trade routes open. Due to the success of the port and the need for much capital, the Jewish community became indispensable in the Veneto, thanks to the biblical prohibition against usury.

The Hebrew Bible prohibits usury. Christians, also, revere this commandment. As a result, Christians were not allowed to lend money, for profit, to one another. Since the Bible did not prohibit people of different religions from lending money to each other, the Jews were a logical solution to the problem of capital. "The Jewish moneylenders not only helped to solve the socioeconomic problems of an increasingly urbanized economy, but also made it less necessary for Christians to violate church law by lending money at interest to fellow Christians."[5] In order to sustain and increase trade, capital was needed. The Christian merchants were not able to borrow money from other Christians. The Jews suddenly were in demand. The Jews could lend money, thereby increasing the trade which was turning Venice into a port of great significance. "Consequently, the Venetian government periodically renewed charters allowing Jews to engage in money lending."[6] Jews started moving north. "Increasing numbers of Jews emigrated from the southern regions and invested in pawn broking banks in cities throughout northern and central Italy."[7] As more and more Jewish moneylenders established themselves, they "became the economic mainstay of the small Jewish settlements sprouting up north of Rome."[8]

---

[5] Benjamin Ravid, "From Geographical Realia to Historiographical Symbol," *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 376.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ruderman, 7.
[8] Ibid.

However, the increased acceptance of Jews in northern Italian towns, and their understood economic importance to Christian merchants, did not prevent the Jews from persecution. Though they were allowed to move to the northern states, Jews suffered some anti-Jewish hatred nonetheless. Throughout the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, individual Jewish communities continued to be persecuted at various times of the year or at the government's whim. Many Jews took refuge in neighboring states, where regulations were more lenient or accepting. Despite these persecutions, the Jewish communities were, for the most part, able to live in many of the states and acted independently, creating their own relationships with local government. The independence of individual rulers and states worked in the favor of the Jews. "If there was a shelter from...disasters [of violence against the Jews], it was to be found in the fragmented political nature of the Italian city-states."[9] Since each ruler governed his territory independently, individual uprisings against the Jews were localized. "Yet such disruptions, no matter how harmful, lacked the finality and drastic consequences associated with anti-Jewish hostility elsewhere in western Europe. Because of the localized and circumscribed nature of the outbursts, Jewish life in Italy was never fully suppressed and continued to flourish."[10]

The Jews lived in these states, with relatively few problems in general, and no uniform persecution, until the sixteenth century. Then, "the Jewish communities of the papal states as well as the rest of Italy experienced a radical deterioration in their legal status and physical state...due to a new oppressive policy instituted by Pope Paul IV and

[9] Ibid, 9.
[10] Ibid.

However, the increased acceptance of Jews in northern Italian towns, and their understood economic importance to Christian merchants, did not prevent the Jews from persecution. Though they were allowed to move to the northern states, Jews suffered some anti-Jewish hatred nonetheless. Throughout the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, individual Jewish communities continued to be persecuted at various times of the year or at the government's whim. Many Jews took refuge in neighboring states, where regulations were more lenient or accepting. Despite these persecutions, the Jewish communities were, for the most part, able to live in many of the states and acted independently, creating their own relationships with local government. The independence of individual rulers and states worked in the favor of the Jews. "If there was a shelter from... disasters [of violence against the Jews], it was to be found in the fragmented political nature of the Italian city-states."[9] Since each ruler governed his territory independently, individual uprisings against the Jews were localized. "Yet such disruptions, no matter how harmful, lacked the finality and drastic consequences associated with anti-Jewish hostility elsewhere in western Europe. Because of the localized and circumscribed nature of the outbursts, Jewish life in Italy was never fully suppressed and continued to flourish."[10]

The Jews lived in these states, with relatively few problems in general, and no uniform persecution, until the sixteenth century. Then, "the Jewish communities of the papal states as well as the rest of Italy experienced a radical deterioration in their legal status and physical state... due to a new oppressive policy instituted by Pope Paul IV and

[9] Ibid, 9.
[10] Ibid.

his successors."[11] With the pope as religious and political head of the papal states, his policies of persecution affected Italian Jewry in many of the areas in which they lived. "Italian Jews suddenly faced a major offensive against their community and its religious heritage, culminating in the public incineration of the Talmud in 1553 and in restrictive legislation leading to increased impoverishment, ghettoization, and even expulsion."[12] With these forceful edicts, the life of Jews in the Italian states changed. "The most conspicuous phenomenon associated with these changes was the erection of the ghetto itself, 'a compulsory segregated Jewish quarter in which all Jews were required to live and in which no Christians were allowed to live.'"[13]

In 1516, the Jews of Venice were forced to move to the site of an old foundry, a "ghetto," in Italian. Hence, the first Venice ghetto was formed. Around this time, ghettos were formed in many of the cities in the Italian states.

But the relationship of the Jewish community of Venice to the Christian community seems to have been even more intense, even more intertwined than the relationship of the two communities in other areas. The prominence of Venice as a port meant that the significance of the Jewish moneylenders, who funded much of the trade, was crucial to the existence and continuation, to the success and productivity of the port. And, since the Christian merchants depended on the Jews, relying on the Jews for the money which made their lucrative port function, the ghettoization of Venice's Jews seems to be different from the ghettoization of other cities' Jews.

---

[11] Ibid, 24.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

The creation of ghettos was intended to ensure that "through enclosure and segregation, the Catholic community could be shielded more effectively from Jewish contamination."[14] So, the first goal of the papal edict was to essentially remove the "dirty Jews" from society. Further the Pope's supporters hoped, "since Jews could be more easily controlled within a restricted neighborhood, the mass conversionary program of the papacy would prove to be more effective, and canon law could be rigidly enforced."[15] Not only did the Pope wish to remove Jews from society, but, by enclosing them in one area, the Pope hoped to be able to more efficiently do away with the Jewish religion in Italian states.

Yet, while the papal edict tried to remove Jews from Italian society, the role of Jews in that society, and particularly in Venice, became complex. Rather than banish the Jewish people and destroy the Jewish religion, the ghettos created a paradoxical "insider/outsider" status for the Jews. This is particularly evident in Venice.

While officially, the government attempted to cleanse Venetian society of its Jewish element, it was known to all that the Jews were an intrinsic and necessary part of Venetian commerce, and therefore, society. While the attempt was made to remove the Jews physically, they remained very much central to the functioning of Venice. But, these most important of citizens, the Jewish bankers, lived as both insiders and outsiders. They were forced to live in ghettos, thereby highlighting their outsider status, their lack of autonomy and their "otherness." While at the same time, their relationships with Christians were never cut off. In fact, the gates of the Venice ghetto were believed never

[14] Ibid, 25.
[15] Ibid.

to have been locked, allowing a kind of movement of people and ideas into and out of the ghetto walls. David Ruderman points to the complex insider/outsider status of the Jews by explaining the ghetto in this way: "The ghetto always constituted a kind of paradox in defining the relationships between Jews and Christians in Italy. No doubt Jews confined to a heavily congested area surrounded by a wall shutting them off from the rest of the city... were subjected to considerably more misery, impoverishment, and humiliation than before." Yet, the walls did not serve to completely separate the two communities. Jews and Christians continued to engage in business and share ideas across the ghetto walls. Christian influence on Jewish architecture, music, preaching and other arts will be explored in subsequent chapters. But the ongoing relationship should be noted. It is clear that contact continued between the communities, providing necessary ideas and resources. Benjamin Ravid indicates that in some ways, the definition of the Jews within Christian society was made easier by the ghetto walls:

> The ghetto provided Jews with a clearly defined place within Christian society. In other words, despite the obvious negative implications of ghetto sequestration, there was a positive side: the Jews were provided a natural residence within the economy of Christian space. The difference between being expelled and being ghettoized is the difference between having no right to live in Christian society and that of becoming an organic part of that society. In this sense, the ghetto, with all its negative implications, could also connote a change for the better, an acknowledgement by Christian society that Jews did belong in some way to their extended community.[16]

How ironic that the attempt to exclude Jews from society actually served to secure them a place in that society. Rather than be a group with an ambiguous status, the development

[16] Ibid, 25.

of the ghetto helped to secure and define the Jewish community as both a legitimate and permanent group within the larger society. While the ghettos excluded Jews from full participation, the establishment of the ghettos actually served to ensure that the Jewish community would have a continued relationship with the government. The Jewish community faced "mixed fortunes...attempting to steer its own dignified course against the background of open but tenuous dialogue with the...Christian majority."[17] And, in fact, under those circumstances, the Jewish community was successful at maintaining a relationship with the Venetian authorities. The Jewish moneylenders and merchants created a society within the ghetto which was both autonomous, ie. governed according to Jewish law privately, and respectful of the Venetian law, publicly.

The first ghetto in Venice came to be knows as the "ghetto nuovo," the new ghetto. The Jews lived and thrived in this ghetto and their numbers grew. With much trade in the Veneto, many Jews moved to the region.

In 1541, a group of Jewish merchants in the ghetto contacted the Venetian government to request additional space. Having established and maintained fairly good relations with both the government and the Christian merchants who needed the Jews for capital, the Jewish community had little trouble convincing the governmental authorities to increase the ghetto space. After investigating the request, the government decided to expand the size of the Jewish quarter. "Noting, in the context of a larger plan designed to make Venice more attractive to foreign merchants, that the greater part of the imports from the Ottoman Balkans was handled by these Jewish merchants, it granted their request."[18]

---

[17] Ibid, 6.
[18] Ravid, 377.

But physical space was limited in Venice, and bounded by canals. The streets and homes were built to conform to the areas carved out by the winding waterways. The government assigned a new area to the Jews. Ironically, it would be called the "ghetto vecchio," the old ghetto, though it was a newer addition to the established ghetto area. "Located across the canal from the ghetto nuovo, [it was to] be walled up, joined by a footbridge to the ghetto nuovo, and assigned to the Jewish merchants."[19]

In 1633, the Jewish ghetto area was increased once again. The space allotted in the ghetto nuovo and the ghetto vecchio proved to be insufficient as Jewish merchants and moneylenders continued to come to the booming port of Venice. Thus, in 1630, a request was made to increase the size of the ghetto, once again. The government "always concerned with attracting merchants to the city in order to enhance trade and no doubt especially so after the plague of 1630-1631...provided that an area...located across from the ghetto nuovo...be enclosed and joined to the ghetto nuovo by a footbridge over the canal."[20] This newest part of the ghetto was appropriately referred to as the "ghetto nuovissimo," the "newest ghetto." The establishment of this newest ghetto addition was extremely significant in the history of the Jewish people. With its foundation, came a new sociological understanding of the relationship between Jewish communities and the non-Jewish majority. The terminology used here to describe the addition to the Jewish quarter marks a significant moment in Jewish history.

The naming of "the ghetto nuovissimo differed from the ghetto nuovo and the ghetto vecchio in one important respect. While the latter two designations had been in use prior to the residence of the Jews in those locations and apparently owed their origin

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid, 378.

to the former presence of foundries in the area, the ghetto nuovissimo had never been the site of a foundry."[21] A very significant change had taken place in the world's vocabulary. For the first time, an enclosed region where Jews were forced to live, was given the name "ghetto." Whereas previously, this term had referred to an area which contained a foundry and which, coincidentally had come to be the place where Jews were forced to live, the "ghetto nuovissimo" was an area which had nothing to do with a foundry. But the fact that it was an enclosed quarter, where Jews were to live and Christians were not, allowed the term "ghetto" to be used. This word had been designated as a particular term for compulsory walled Jewish living quarters. A new word had come into regular usage. It was defined and understood to mean an area of Jewish domestic enclosure. It came to be used all too often in Europe in the subsequent centuries.

Despite the exclusive message of the ghettos throughout Italian states, economically viable and financially significant Jewish communities were becoming more common. Christian societies increasingly needed their Jews. At the same time, Christian governments wanted to distance themselves from their Jews. Why not just throw the Jews out altogether? Though it did happen in some communities, and widespread persecution of Jews in Europe is well-documented, not all countries threw out their Jews. In certain places, like most of modern Italy, particularly the Veneto, the Jewish contribution to commerce was so important, that the government chose to accept the Jews into society, albeit in an exclusive way. But Venice's dependence on Jewish merchants is clear from the relatively tolerant relationship that existed between the Jewish community inside the walls, and the Veneto's government, outside.

---

[21] Ibid, 379.

The term "ghetto" had come to be used to refer to an area where Jews were forced to live, within a larger non-Jewish society. This semantic innovation suggests two things. First, Jewish communities were routinely subjected to enforced, enclosed living in the ghetto by the Christian community outside the ghetto. The fact that ties between the two worlds were never cut explains why there is such a wealth of creativity and ideas which slipped over the ghetto walls. As much as the ghetto represents a public and official separation of the Jews from the non-Jews, relationships continued between individuals. Jews and non-Jews communicated and interacted on many fronts. They cooperated for business reasons and medical reasons. And, though it is largely undocumented, there seems to have been interaction between the two communities at Carnival time, while elaborate masks helped to conceal identities.

Thus, no doubt the establishment of the ghetto caused unhappiness on both sides of the walls. It is understandable that the Jewish community would not have wanted to be sequestered, barricaded in a disrespectful way, behind gated walls. And, for many Christians, the walls which kept Jews contained were seen as insufficient in their effectiveness. "The establishment of ghettos did not lead...to the breaking off of Jewish contacts with the outside world on any level, from the highest to the lowest, much to the consternation of church and state alike."[22] Yet, somehow this system worked. The Jews and Christians interacted because they needed each other. But they remained separate. The Jews lived as both "insiders" and "outsiders," defining a complicated reality for themselves. The communities lived, side by side, separated only by walls with cracks.

[22] Ibid, 384.

## III. The Life of Rabbi Leone da Modena

Leone da Modena, also known as Yehuda Aryeh da Modena, was one of the most interesting and colorful characters of the Venice ghetto. A prolific writer, he recorded many of his experiences, leaving us a legacy of insights into his world. In addition to being a writer and scholar, Modena was a rabbi. He served the Jewish communities of the Venice ghetto and provided an account of the happenings of that era. Not only was he well-liked by both Jews and Christians, but his good reputation and popularity allowed him to be invited to visit many religious communities, inside and outside the ghetto's walls. Modena is one of the most well-regarded preachers of his time. His preaching style incorporated much of what he learned listening to his counterparts in Venice's churches. He is credited with having written many "tshuvot," or halachik rulings. These address some of the main issues facing the community during his lifetime. He also wrote important books on Jewish practice for non-Jews, so that they could learn about their Jewish neighbors. Much of the information which exists on this fascinating character today comes from his recording of his own story in his autobiography, The Life of Judah. The book was translated and edited and has come to be known by the title of the new edition, The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi.

Modena lived from 1571-1648. Searching for work, he traveled and lived in many towns in the northern Italian region. But he spent most of his life in Ferrara and Venice. The question must be asked, then, why Modena has a last name which indicates that his family was from Modena. In fact, this is something of a misnomer. Actually, Modena, originally Yehuda Aryeh mi-Modena, explains that his name was changed to

Leone, the Italian translation of Aryeh, meaning "lion." He explains that his last name was changed to the Italian version "da Modena," a translation of the Hebrew "mi-Modena." Apparently, Modena was "the Italian city in which his ancestors had settled after migrating from France. His grandfather had moved from Modena to Bologna, and Leon[e] himself had been born and later settled permanently in Venice."[23] Though Leone never lived in Modena, he usually used the name of that Italian city as a last name. In the autobiography, Modena "states explicitly that he signed his name in Italian 'Leon Modena da Venezia,'"[24] a more factually accurate choice. Thus, this rabbi and personality from the Venice ghetto is referred to and quoted in many places by different names. His complex identity, as expressed through his various names, including Hebrew, Italian, the city of his ancestor's immigration and the city of his adulthood, all indicate that Yehuda Aryeh Leone da Modena da Venezia (who will be referred to as Leone da Modena in this paper) truly was an example of the consummate insider/outsider tension with which all of the Jews of the Venice ghetto struggled.

Modena's autobiography is a particularly important source for scholars, because it is the story not only of one rabbi, but of the entire community in which he lived. The experiences which he recorded serve as a historical record for the Venice ghetto of his time. Through his writings, scholars can understand much of the tension, conflict, history and culture of the ghetto of Venice and its inhabitants. This book "opens a window on northern Italian Jewish life in general in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Tucked

[23] Mark Cohen, ed., *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth Century Venetian Rabbi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), xx.
[24] Ibid.

into this intimate autobiography is a wealth of fascinating detail that sheds much light on the economic, social and cultural realities of the age in which the author lived."[25]

Modena's family, like many who ended up living in Venice, "belonged to that familiar group of Ashkenazic (known in Italian as Tedeschi [literally, German]) moneylenders who, during the later Middle Ages, abandoned the increasingly inhospitable lands of northern Europe to establish new homes in the credit-hungry cities of northern Italy."[26] So Modena's story is actually the story of many of the inhabitants of the ghetto. "The autobiography offers glimpses of the physical, social, and cultural realities of the Venetian ghetto; it is a confined existence, crammed into multistoried, multifamily dwellings. Generations of vertical expansion within the ghetto's limited space sought to accommodate a population growing from both natural increase and immigration."[27]

But in addition to being a historical account of that time, Modena's autobiography provides a fascinating glimpse of the cultural interactions between the Jews and the non-Jews. Whereas the Pope sought to exclude and completely separate the Jews from the Christians, thereby cutting off all cultural and personal exchange between the two groups of people, there is much evidence that that attempt failed completely. Through Modena's writings, it is possible to see that there was tremendous cultural exchange through, around and over the ghetto's walls. "Despite the physical segregation of the Italian Jews in the seventeenth century, there persisted a rich cultural life that exhibited tastes and

---

[25] Mark Cohen and Theodore Rabb, "The Significance of Leon Modena's Autobiography for Early Modern Jewish and General European History," *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth Century Venetian Rabbi*, trans. and ed. Mark Cohen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 3.
[26] Ibid, 3-4.
[27] Ibid, 5.

interests acquired during the Renaissance—that time of intense interaction between Jews and their Christian surroundings in Italy."[28] In fact, Modena himself was quite a Renaissance man, engaging in many of the art forms which were highly regarded in Italy. "Witness Modena's brief description of his youthful course of study, which included 'a little instruction in playing an instrument, in singing, in dancing, in writing, and in Latin'....On and off...Modena drew income from such secular pursuits as 'music,' 'Italian sonnets,' 'writing comedies.'[29] Through Modena's account of his own daily activities, it is possible to see how common interactions were between the Christian and Jewish communities. "Modena, like so many other learned Italian Jews during and after the Renaissance, had extensive relations with Christians, as students, admirers, correspondents, and interlocutors."[30] These relationships influenced Modena, and many of his fellow ghetto residents, very much. It is possible to see a cultural exchange and influence on many of the art forms which developed inside the ghetto walls, including architecture, music and preaching, which will be explored in subsequent chapters in this paper. Thanks in large part to the detailed description Modena provides, it is obvious that there was a tremendous and lasting influence of Christian culture on the Jewish community.

> Although the ghetto imposed a physical barrier between Jews and Christians, members of the two groups continued to have frequent contact even after the erection of its walls and gates. As the autobiography shows, the ghetto gates were open during the daylight hours, and people moved in and out freely. Indeed, a venture outside the ghetto—whether to shop for books. To work in the printshop of Christians, to gamble, to visit gentile

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid, 6.

> friends, to give instruction to gentile students, to appear in court at St. Mark's—is such commonplace that Modena takes it for granted without special comment. He describes a walk via the Rialto to Campo San Cassiano only because of a mishap on the way—he narrowly escapes being crushed to death by a falling chimney.[31]

So—who was this rabbi who lived, wrote and preached inside the ghetto, and who was a frequent and welcome visitor to the neighborhoods outside the walls? Leone da Modena was a colorful and interesting character. Involved deeply in the religious life of the ghetto, Modena was also a notorious gambler and a believer in astrological messages. "Rabbi Leon Modena who preaches, teaches, and issues response also writes, teaches, and traffics in amulets and engages in dream divination. Astrology is a commonplace for him: children are born 'under a propitious star,' and he lives with the firm conviction that 'the heavens [are] battling against us.'"[32] His life was a serious of paradoxes: Modena was both a Jewish guide and teacher, and a follower of astrology; he was a teacher of Jewish values, and a gambler; he was a ghettoized Jew and a member of Venice's society. He was a leader in a community of Jews which "despite their residential separation in ghettos... were very much a part of the world at large, interacting with their environment on all levels, from the highest to the lowest... as the seamier episodes in Modena's autobiography so graphically show."[33] Modena's account of the Jewish community of the Venice ghetto is influenced by his experiences. "To this day there is hardly a work dealing with the period that does not include mention of Modena as a gambler, a deviant, a free-thinker, or someone racked by contradictions. Trying to

[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid, 7.
[33] Ibid, 12.

make sense of these complexities, some recent historians have sought simply to find in Modena the personification of the Renaissance Jew or the 'first modern rabbi.'"[34]

Modena was born in Venice in 1571, "into two important Italian Jewish families known for their scholarship and wealth."[35] But despite the family's emphasis on comfort and education, Modena was not at liberty to spend his days without working. He took up a number of part-time jobs, and "to augment his sparse earnings, he also turned to gambling."[36] For a time, Modena held a job in the publishing industry in Venice. Working with the beautiful papers and prints, which were being developed in Venice, served as "another source of income and [an] outlet for Modena's creativity."[37] The young Leone worked as a "proofreader and jobber who communicated with authors and arranged for the type fonts, the size of the book, and the nature of the paper, as well as the proofreading, binding, and distribution. He also composed dedicatory poems for books."[38] Working in this industry allowed Modena to learn more about Jewish texts. His combination of education and artistic eye helped him to be part of this significant industry in Jewish history. As papers and styles of elaborate print were being introduced and invented in Venice, Modena was involved first-hand in the development of Jewish printing in Venice and the publication of Jewish materials which would be shipped from the port of Venice to Turkey and the European continent.

---

[34] Howard Adelman, "Leon Modena: The Autobiography and the Man," *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth Century Venetian Rabbi*, trans. and ed. Mark Cohen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 39.
[35] Ibid, 19.
[36] Ibid, 22.
[37] Ibid, 23.
[38] Ibid.

Modena's education and interest in Jewish texts took him farther, even, than the printing presses. For a time, Modena worked as a "legal clerk for the Venetian rabbinate, which included such prominent figures as Samuel Judah Katzenellenbogen, Benzion Zarfati, Avigdor Cividal, Leib Saraval, and Joseph Pardo."[39] By watching and listening, Modena learned much about the discussions and decisions of Venice's rabbis. One day, Modena would become a rabbi, a leader in the Jewish community. But, prior to his ordination as a rabbi and teacher, Modena's work with the great rabbis of the time, afforded him a view of the development of law and practice in the ghetto communities. "When Modena could not yet function as a rabbinic authority in matters of religious law, civil disputes, communal strife, or excommunications, he nonetheless gained some rabbinic experience... In this way, Modena learned... first hand about the issues facing the Venetian rabbis and was able to add his voice, albeit not his name, to their rulings."[40]

After much study, in 1609, "when he was almost thirty-nine years old, Modena received his rabbinical ordination from the rabbis of Venice."[41] Modena became an increasingly significant leader in the ghetto. In the 1620s, "Modena's stature in Venice continued to increase... At the Italian synagogue, where he was cantor, he developed a series of ordinances to establish its finances and the order of its prayers. At the Ashkenazic and Sephardic synagogues he was appointed the main preacher."[42]

But despite his continued professional success, Modena's personal life was wrought with tragedy. Several of his children died during plagues. One son was murdered. Throughout the autobiography, a sense of sadness and incompleteness prevail.

---

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid, 27.
[42] Ibid, 30-31.

Modena's life and works affected the community in many long-lasting ways, but his existence was, nevertheless, lonely and unhappy. "As for Modena's calamities, they are foreshadowed from the first page: 'Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life,'"[43] Modena wrote in the opening to his autobiography. One historian writes, "Even his birth was ill-omened, as he entered the world rump first right after an earthquake."[44] This somewhat silly acknowledgement that even Modena's birth foreshadowed pain, though humorous, speaks to Modena's own superstitious and astrological understanding of the world. Modena goes on to describe many of the unhappy circumstances of his adult life. "His miseries he classified in three ways: the loss of his sons...the fear of persecution...the bitter disappointment of the ills of old age."[45]

First, "there was the agony of the loss of his sons, which he blamed not on God, but on himself...He cast himself as Job,"[46] the Biblical character who suffered tremendously. The pain of losing his sons is prevalent throughout Modena's writings. Clearly his hope for the future was destroyed when his sons died, leaving him only a grandson as a male heir. Modena was devastated by these losses.

Second, was Modena's "fear of persecution at the hands of Christian authorities, as in 1637, when he imagined (as it turned out quite needlessly) that the Paris publication of his Historia de'riti hebraici[47] would bring the Inquisition down on his head and on

---

[43] Davis, 60.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] "The Riti was the first work written by a Jew in the vernacular to present the rites and beliefs of the Jewish religion to Christians. Modena's purpose was to describe Jewish practices in a favorable light and to counter the erroneous notions about them often held by Christians. The major impetus for writing the Riti was the publication of a description of the Jewish religion by the Protestant Hebraist and rabbinic scholar, Johann Buxtorf (1564-1629). His Synagoga judaica, which appeared in the original German in 1603 and in Latin in 1614, presented much information on Judaism, but in a very negative light, making it appear superstitious. The Riti was republished many times in Italian as well as in English, French, Dutch,

other Jews as well."[48] Though Modena did not experience direct persecution in Venice, he harbored a profound fear that some of his books on Jewish tradition and customs, written to educate non-Jews about the Jewish community, might cause offense to some of the Christian authorities. He suffered terribly as a result of his fear of misunderstanding or miscommunication through his books on Jewish practice. Ultimately, there was no misunderstanding and Modena's books were accepted by the non-Jewish community. Nevertheless, after sending copies outside of Venice, Modena worried that he may have brought havoc and punishment on himself and other Jews as a result of these publications.

Third, Modena's relationship with his wife deteriorated over the years. Perhaps as a result of the tragedies of their sons' deaths, Modena and his wife found only bitterness and argument in each other in their later years. On many occasions in his story, Modena indicated that his wife was no comfort to him and only provided opposition and argument. He lamented this. "There was the bitter disappointment of the ills of old age and especially of his wife's suddenly starting to quarrel with him 'for no reason, when I had committed no wrong.'"[49] Thus, despite Modena's relative professional success, his personal life was not satisfying. While he received professional and public acclaim, privately, he was an unhappy man.

This tension between Modena's successes and his unhappinesses are evident

---

Latin, and Hebrew." Howard Adelman and Benjamin Ravid, "Historical Notes," *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth Century Venetian Rabbi*, ed. Mark Cohen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 228.
[48] Davis, 60.
[49] Ibid.

throughout his autobiography. "Balancing this story of an accursed [personal] life is the story of Modena's [professional] achievements."[50] He was very proud of his intelligence and education. "He pictures himself at two and a half—the Jewish prodigy—reciting Scripture in the synagogue...[And he refers to his successes as an adult, portraying himself as a] preacher so...celebrated that 'all the congregations gave great praise and thanks' and Catholic friars and foreign notables crowded into the Great Synagogue to hear him."[51] Modena was clearly concerned with his legacy. He wanted to be remembered. In his writings, he insists that his books will allow him to live on. Perhaps he was devastated by the loss of his sons and wanted to leave the world something he considered permanent: books. "He grew up to publish books on so many subjects in Hebrew and Italian that he believed he could count on 'everlasting reputation.'"[52] He mentions this a number of times in his writings. He put a tremendous value on his hope for an eternal name through his books. They served as, as he wrote, "'a source of great comfort'; through them his 'name will never be blotted out among the Jews or in the world at large.'"[53]

Leone da Modena wanted desperately to be remembered. Thanks, in large part, to his extensive writings, his name has been remembered and will continue to be. Modena's writings on the Jewish community of the Venice ghetto help to shape the picture of the community which existed in the seventeenth century. But it is not only Modena's autobiography and his texts about Jewish rites which have helped historians to understand

[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

the community in which he lived. Modena's contribution includes also, many "tshuvot," which give details on issues which were of importance to the community at that time. Modena is such a significant figure in the history of this time and place specifically because he was involved in so many aspects of the community and its growth and development. He participated in the community's life both inside the ghetto, and through the exchange of ideas over the walls of the ghetto. The influence of Leone da Modena, and his vision of change and progress, can be seen in many ways. The exchange of ideas over the ghetto walls is evident in many aspects of seventeenth-century ghetto life, including the ghetto's synagogue architecture, music and preaching styles.

## IV. Synagogue Architecture in the Venice Ghetto

Separated, physically, from the rest of Venice's population, the Ghetto's residents were very much outsiders. At the same time, within the Ghetto's walls, a strong Jewish community grew and thrived and developed its own identity...or identities. Intending to keep Jews under control, the walls of the Ghetto allowed for a unique relationship to develop between the world outside and the world inside. The Jews within the walls were allowed to borrow from the outside culture, while maintaining and developing their own, inside. Evidence of this grew up, literally, inside the Jewish Ghetto of Venice, in the architecture of the Jews' most Jewish buildings, their synagogues. A study of these structures presents an interesting physical manifestation of the complex identity developed by Venice's Jewish community. While deeply Jewish, and externally defined as such, the Jews borrowed from Italian culture, and incorporated some of the beauty of the Venice outside the walls, into their own Venice, inside the walls.

Ironically, though the government tried to create a boundary, limiting Jewish participation in the Christian society, the Jews did not reject art and architecture from Christian sources. Its influence is visible in the Ghetto. The complex identity, which developed inside the Ghetto, was not merely an identity of distinction from the Christians. In fact, the identity of the Ghetto Jews was far more complex than that. Within the Ghetto, settled Jews of many different cultural and traditional backgrounds. As a result, no one Jewish identity could represent all of these varied traditions. Even within the Ghetto, different communities defined themselves and created sub-divisions.

Because of this, many different synagogues were built within the tiny Ghetto area, each with its own music, liturgy, rites and traditions. While these communities struggled to reconcile their traditional Jewish identities with their modern Italian identities, they also worked to distinguish themselves from each other, within the Ghetto. While there are some similarities between these spaces, each is unique.

All of the synagogues in the Ghetto contain highly decorated pews, women's galleries, *bimahot*, and *aronei kodesh*. It is ironic that the formalistic qualities of these elements of traditional synagogue architecture borrow from the contemporary Christian aesthetic. It is also ironic that though the communities were quite distinct from one another, similar influence can often be seen from common Christian sources.

In addition to their decoration, many of the synagogues in the Ghetto share a somewhat unusual placement. Because of the extreme limitation of space in the Ghetto, many of the synagogues were built on the top floor of apartment buildings. This serves two purposes. First, the already insufficient living space on the ground floors was not compromised. And second, by locating the synagogues on the top storey, the communities took literally the Jewish dictum, which teaches that nothing should come between a synagogue and the heavens. These perches also ensured a certain amount of safety from attack. And the height separated these holy places from locales of daily secular life.[54]

[54] Roberta Curiel and Bernard Dov Cooperman, *The Ghetto of Venice* (London: KEA Publishing Services Ltd., 1990), 39.

The first Sephardi synagogue in the Ghetto was the Scuola Grande Spagnola, originally built around 1584, and rebuilt in the seventeenth-century. This synagogue became the official headquarters of the community in the Ghetto. In fact, important visiting delegates were received and entertained in this space because of its large size and rich decoration. The oldest inscriptions on the walls in this synagogue are in Hebrew, while the newest ones are in Italian. Perhaps these Jews, originally from Spain, became most comfortable with the Italian vernacular.

The addition of an organ in 1894 clearly shows influence from the Christian communities outside the Ghetto's walls. In 1605, Venice's most progressive rabbi, Leone da Modena, encouraged the establishment of a male choir in this synagogue. This rabbi attempted to install an organ in his time, but the community was not yet ready for this reformer's modern ideas. They would have to wait two hundred and fifty years before their services would be enhanced by musical instruments! When, eventually, the organ was installed, the *bimah* had to be reworked to accommodate it. This rectangular *bimah*, has a large, ornately carved cupola, supported by four marble, Corinthian columns. The organ was installed behind it. Some historians have compared the platform to Bernini's altar in St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, because of the ornate canopy.[55]

[55] Ibid, 119.

The influence of contemporary Venetian architecture on this synagogue is visible in the layout of the floor plan. The windows of the mezzanine open onto an inner space, the men's section. This style is typical of Venetian palazzi[56]. It is commonly believed that the architect of this synagogue was Baldassare Longhena, a leading Venetian architect who designed many important churches and civil buildings in Venice. Longhena has a reputation of having been "the most eminent Venetian architect of his day."[57] It would certainly seem that a person much familiar with the surrounding Venetian architecture of the time had a hand in the development of this space. Some art historians argue that the ark from this synagogue bears a striking resemblance to many seventeenth-century church altarpieces,[58] some of which Longhena is credited with having designed,[59] like the altar of the Cappella Vendramin in the Church of S. Pietro di Castello.[60]

---

[56] Please see Figure 1 (Page 32). This photograph of a palazzo courtyard is from Giuseppe Cristinelli's, Baldassare Longhena" Architetto del '600 a Venezia. It shows a typical courtyard, in a private residence, designed by Longhena in the 17th century. This style of interior courtyard, with windows opening onto it, was incorporated into synagogue architecture, as well.

[57] Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Story of the Synagogue* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 84.

[58] Please see Figure 2 (Page 33). This photograph of the ark of the Scuola Grande Spagnola shows similar style to church altars designed by Longhena. Please see Figure 3 (Page 34).

[59] Curiel and Cooperman, 111.

[60] Please see Figure 3 (Page 34). This photograph of the interior of the Cappella Vendramin is from Camillo Semenzato's L'Architettura di Baldassare Longhena. The tympanum, columns and balustrade are architectural elements which can be found in synagogues in the Venice Ghetto. This chapel is believed to have influenced Longhena's design for the ark in the Scuola Grande Spagnola.

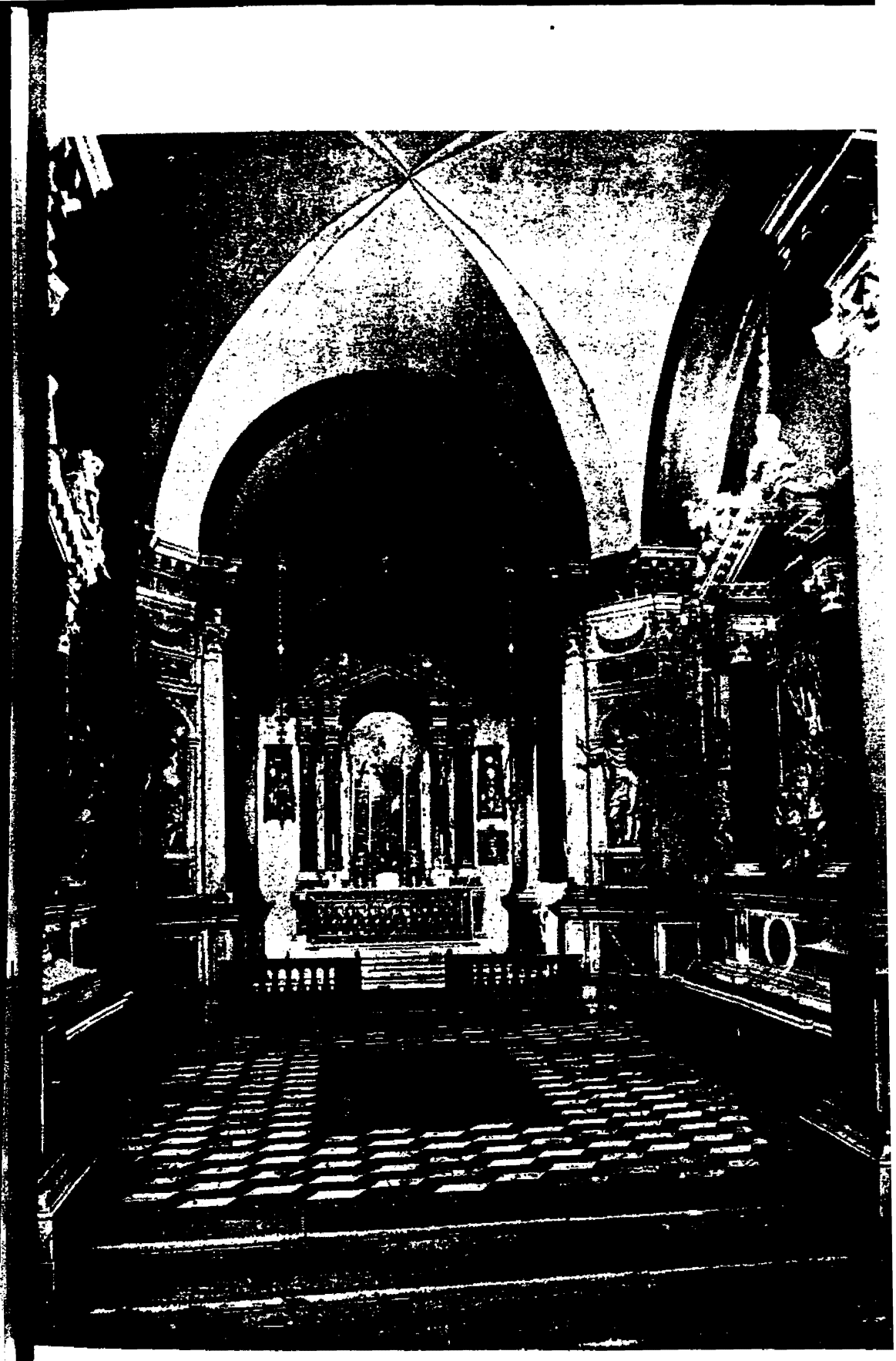


Fig. 3

The central arch, which contains the Torah, is clearly of great significance. Its placement highlights the importance of the scrolls held within it. The central arch is delineated by a double tympanum, a typical baroque detail, under a broad, semi-circular arc. The arc is engraved with the Hebrew inscription, "Know before Whom you stand." The rectangular alcove with a double tympanum rests on four short, marble, Corinthian columns. This type of structure is called an a*edicula*. It consists of one large, central rectangle with two smaller side rectangles, suggesting a reference to the triumphal arches of the Roman Empire.[61] Though the ark resembles some church architectural elements, the Hebrew inscription and the symbolic Decalogue, topped by a crown, which are incorporated into the design, are uniquely Jewish. The ark is veiled and decorated by a *parochet*, a finely embroidered curtain.

The Scuola Levantina, built in 1538, is the only other Sephardi synagogue in the Ghetto. Unlike the other four synagogues in the Ghetto, this is the only one which was built to be a synagogue. This accounts for the beauty of the exterior of the building, especially in comparison to the other synagogues, which were added on to pre-existing structures. The degree of ornamentation and use of expensive materials used in this synagogue demonstrate the wealth and privilege that the Levantine community must have enjoyed. The *bimah* in this synagogue is arguably, "the most elaborate item in the whole Ghetto."[62] Designed by the famous Italian furniture designer, Andrea Brustolon, the platform, where the prayer leader sits, hovers between the main sanctuary and the

[61] Curiel and Cooperman, 111.
[62] Ibid, 135.

women's gallery, because it is so tall. A double flight of stairs leads to the platform of this oversized wooden pulpit. The dark wood is carved with vegetal motifs, in keeping with the Jewish tradition of not displaying human figures or animals in a prayer space. Two large, twisting columns hold up a huge canopy.[63] Its structure and design are similar to Bernini's Baldacchino, in St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome.[64]

Built some forty years after the Scuola Levantina, the last synagogue to be constructed is also the simplest. The Scuola Italiana was home to Jews from southern Italy. Its décor is much less opulent than that of other synagogues in the Ghetto. But it does contain some noteworthy features. Above the *bimah*, there is a skylight embedded in a cupola, which allows rays of light to shine onto the pulpit. Many churches also have skylights or windows high up on the walls, which allow rays of light to fill the sanctuary with a spiritual sensation. In the case of the Scuola Italiana, it is not possible to see the actual skylight. Rather, the light shines mysteriously from above the pulpit.

Let us turn, now, to the first synagogue built in the Ghetto, the Scuola Grande Tedesca. It was dedicated by the Ashkenazi community in 1528. Camouflaged into the other facades on the main square of the Ghetto, the *Campo*, the Scuola Grande Tedesca can only be identified as a synagogue from the exterior, by its five arched windows and

---

[63] Please see Figure 4 (Page 37). This photograph of the ark in the Scuola Levantina is from Curiel and Cooperman's book. The lavishly decorated and intricately carved twisting columns which hold up the canopy above the ark are quite elaborate. The dark wood, double staircase, and heavy décor are typical of baroque style. The intricately carved, twisting columns, and dark wood canopy are strikingly similar to Bernini's Baldacchino. Please see Figure 5 (Page 38).

[64] Please see Figure 5 (Page 38). This photograph of the grand Baldacchino shows the heavy and ornate carving on this giant canopy. This photograph is taken from Aurelio Amendola's book, San Pietro.

the Hebrew inscription beneath the cornice. Below the five windows, three floors of apartments, with low ceilings, face the *Campo*. Overcrowding in the Ghetto left no other option than to condense space between floors and to build upward. Some accounts even tell of the cramped situation by explaining that often in an apartment in the Ghetto, not all of the residents could lie down at the same time![65]

Condensed into the upper floors of an existing building, the floor plan of the Scuola Grande Tedesca is an unusual, asymmetrical shape. The architect exploits this asymmetry by using a trompe l'oeil oval women's gallery, on the second floor. The oval is actually trapezoidal in shape, but appears oval to conform to a more popular baroque aesthetic, and to cover up the awkward and irregular shape of the room. Similar to popular church interiors of the time, the ceiling and women's gallery are filled with delicate forms, including lavishly gilt classical balustrades and typical Venetian marble mosaic on the floor. The walls of the first floor are covered with marble and cherry wood panels. This combination of wall decoration was common in many Christian buildings found outside the Ghetto.

The *bimah* is another interesting element to consider. The *bimah* in the Scuola Grande Tedesca connects the detail of the women's gallery to that of the ark. The platform incorporates the dainty balustrades form the gallery, in conjunction with the heavier leaf-like carvings and Corinthian columns, to create a space of importance.

Interestingly, Venetian law only permitted one synagogue to exist in the Ghetto. Over the course of fifty years, five were built. But the Venetian government

---

[65] Curiel and Cooperman, 20.

only permitted the Jews to legally have one. For this reason, too, synagogues were added to existing buildings, so as not to call attention to them. Jews congregated for prayer in spaces carved out of apartment buildings, thereby skirting the prohibition to not build new synagogues. In addition, the Jews in the Ghetto were obligated to observe sumptuary laws. These laws were established by the Jewish community to prevent Jews from demonstrating their wealth publicly. The laws applied to clothing and jewelry, limiting any display of riches. The laws were intended to limit any and all ostentatious behavior among Jews. As a result, the prohibition was extended to apply to the Jews' architecture, as well. Only "poor" materials were permitted to be used to decorate the synagogue. Clearly, these sumptuary laws were not well enforced in the architectural arena, as many of these synagogues are beautifully decorated with lavish Italian marble and gold. However, there is note taken of the laws in some instances in the synagogues. The Scuola Grande Tedesca, the earliest synagogue in the Ghetto, has visible examples of at least a limited attempt to adhere to the sumptuary laws. This early synagogue is decorated with wood and fake (trompe l'oeil) marble,[66] in addition to the real stone.

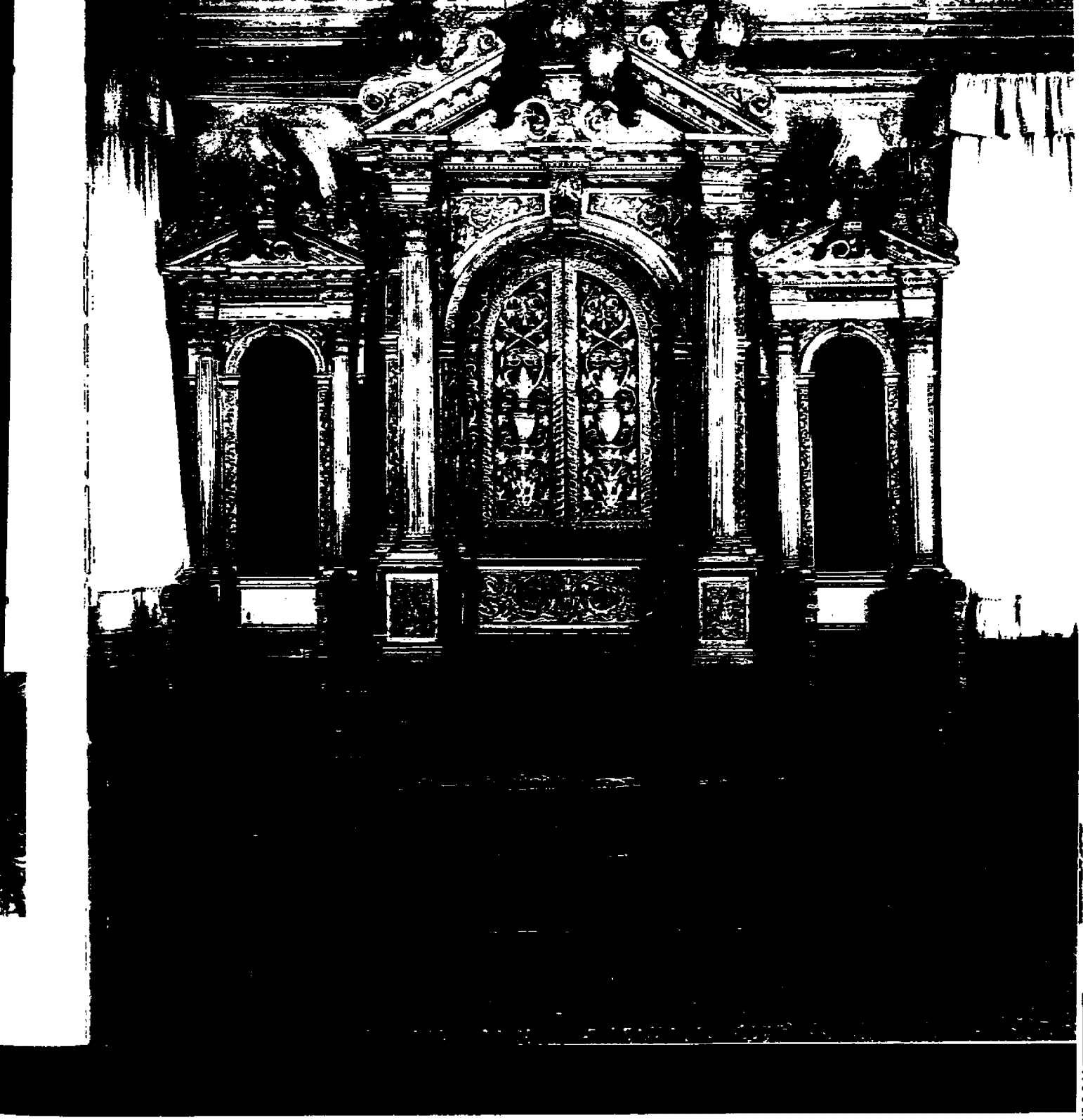
In each of the Ghetto synagogues, the *aron kodesh* is one of the most interesting elements. The holiest architectural inclusion in content, was strangely Christian and Italian in style. Beautiful, baroque arks were created for the Ghetto communities. The *aron* which exists today in the Scuola Grande Tedesca is not original, but is dated to 1671-2. The broken tympanum, a classic baroque feature, is deeply carved and decorated with Palladian urns, cornucopias and leaf-like designs, all typical of that

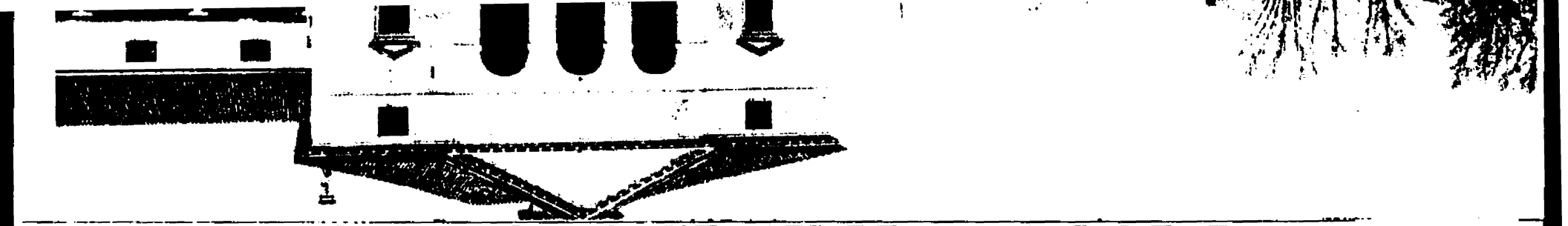
[66] Ibid, 47.

style. Two Corinthian columns, also favored in baroque architecture, support the heavy, triangular piece in front of the double doors of the ark. These doors bear typical Palladian vines. While the front of the *aron* is approached by four marble stairs, the back juts out, over the canal, which borders the Ghetto. This protrusion of the interior space beyond the exterior walls of the building, is called a *liago*, and was typical of Venetian domestic architecture. On either side of the ark, sits a richly carved seat, displaying a small tympanum over a Roman arch, supported by carved pilasters. The arches which make up the back of the two seats are typical arches of the period and area. Arches are visible in all of Palladio's palazzi, which exist throughout the region. The side seats, plus the central ark, create a series of three arches.[67] Though distracted by all of the ornate decoration on the seats and the ark, the eye is drawn to see these three consecutive arches, Palladio's signature motif![68] The influence of Venice's secular architectural culture is very much present and visible here. The dramatic gilded frames around the arches draw attention to the ark and establish it as the primary focus in the room. The drama and the form of this ark bear a striking resemblance to the front elevations of almost any Italian church designed during this period. For example, Il Gesu, Sta. Susanna, and S. Andrea della Valle, all in Rome, share these elements. Each of these facades displays multiple

[67] Please see Figure 6 (Page 42). This photograph of the lavishly decorated ark is taken from Curiel and Cooperman's book. The ornate gold carving is very typical of baroque and Venetian décor. The three consecutive arches found on the chairs and the center of the ark are very typical of architecture found throughout the Venetian republic. Please see Figures 7, 8 and 9 (Pages 43-45).

[68] Please see Figures 7, 8 and 9 (Pages 43-45). These photographs are taken from Vincent Scully's The Villas of Palladio. Many of Palladio's constructions include his famous signature triple arch design. Figure 7 shows the Villa Gazzotti. The façade of this palazzo is dominated by the three central arches. Figure 8, another private palazzo, the Villa Saraceno, also has three central arches, flanked by rectangular windows topped by triangular tympanums. Figure 9 is another palazzo designed by Palladio. It is the Villa Godi. It was Palladio's first villa. It displays the three arches.





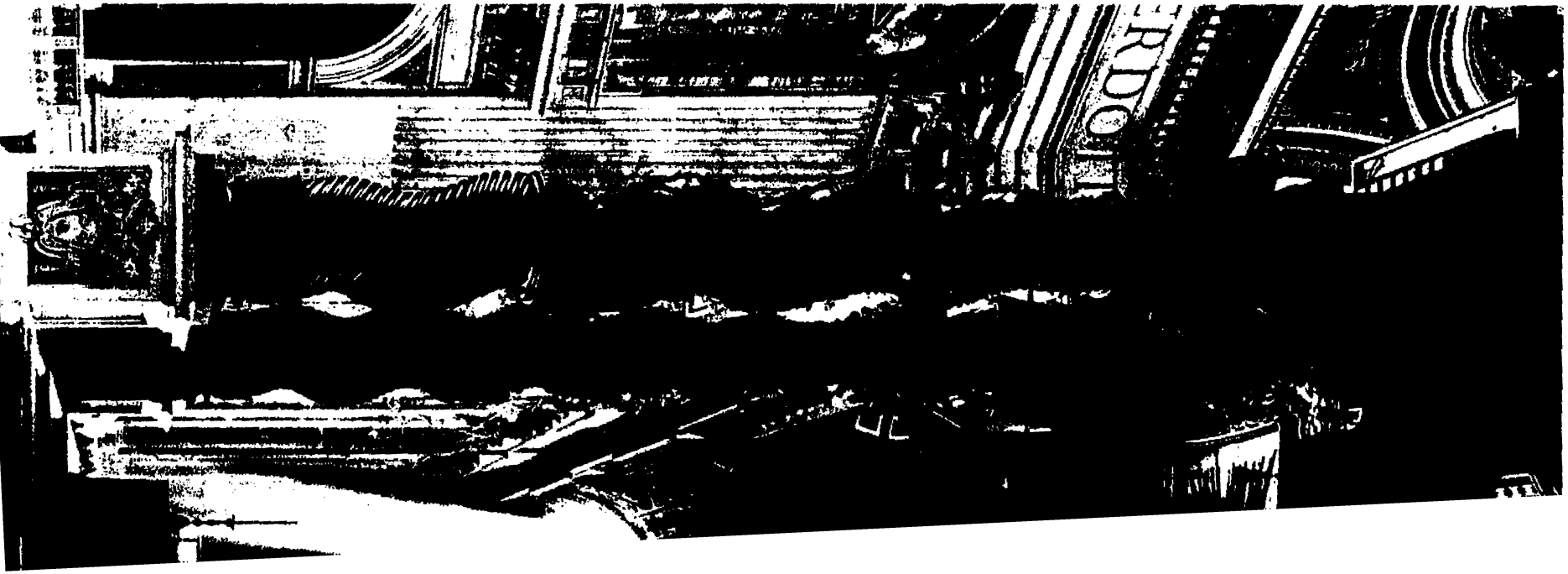
tympanums, to emphasize the entrances, and double Corinthian columns, to dramatize the sculptural quality, by accentuating the shadows.

Another of the Ghetto's synagogues, The Scuola Canton, built in 1532, may have been a break-away congregation from the Scuola Grande Tedesca. It is ornately decorated. The floor is made of a patterned marble mosaic and the women's gallery crowns the main sanctuary with a floral lattice. The ark in this synagogue is unique, in that it contains a small stained glass window. The *bimah* was remodeled in 1780 and has a distinct Rococo style, characterized by sensuous curves and undulating motion in forms.

This synagogue, also, has a small cupola above the pulpit, containing a skylight. This play with natural light projected into religious space is reminiscent of "Cathedrals where the uncontrolled reveling in space and light... [lift one's gaze above the] glimmer of the towering high altar, in the gleam of the 'splendori celesti.'"[69] This use of natural light in the Scuola Canton plays on the Christian notions of Divine illumination in church.[70]

Also reminiscent of grandiose church décor are the elaborate tree-branch style columns supporting the platform and reader's desk. These columns resemble Bernini's colossal columns in his Baldacchino, though those columns also include torsion in their design. Both structures depict climbing tree branches with leaves, resulting in a

[69] Heinrich Wolfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), 64-65.
[70] Please see Figure 10 (Page 47). This photograph from Aurelio Amendola's San Pietro, shows rays of light dramatically streaming into San Pietro. The rays are framed by the Baldacchino.



Corinthian capital at the top. Both accentuate the spaces and both provide a theatrical stage set for worship.

In addition, the gold decoration, used heavily in this synagogue and the Scuola Grande Tedesca, can be attributed to both Jewish and extra-Ghetto Christian sources. As seen in the Torah, gilding holy spaces is part of Jewish tradition. Exodus 37:2 discusses the formal qualities of the Ark of the Covenant and states, "And thou shalt gild it inside and out, and make golden garlands to hang around it." Perhaps because of this biblical verse, gilding was also used heavily to decorate Italian churches and cathedrals. Gilding in the Ghetto synagogues of Venice appears to be a mélange of both Jewish tradition and of popular architectural culture of the time. No doubt the extensive gilding is intended to awe the visitor and is evidence of the competition between synagogues to outdo each other in grandeur.

However, despite the many similarities to contemporary Italian, Christian architecture, one very significant distinction separates the synagogue from church architecture and decoration. Whereas human figures are often used in church décor, there are no human figures depicted in synagogues, due to the prohibition against idol worship. Instead of using human forms, synagogues are decorated with Hebrew inscriptions and geometric or organic floral patterns. In her book, Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts, Vivian Mann makes accessible a responsum from Samuel Archivolti, head of the rabbinical court in Padua, who responds to the question of what sorts of figures may or may not be acceptable in synagogue decoration. This *tshuvah* was most likely delivered "in response to the appearance of elaborately decorated synagogues in

sixteenth-century Italy."[71] No doubt, the fancy Italian styles of art were visible, in many buildings including synagogues, throughout the states of that region. And no doubt, Italy, a cross-roads of trade and culture, enjoyed decorative ideas from many far away lands.

Italy's geographic location and history make it a perfect place to see the influence of many cultures converge. "In Venice, for example, as the result of the immigration of Jewish refugees from Spain, an influx of Levantine Jews, and growth in the population, the Jewish community increased more than five-fold between the mid-sixteenth and the mid-seventeenth centuries. Five synagogues were erected... all of them elaborately carved, painted, and gilt."[72] Indeed, outside influence can be seen in the architecture and decorative arts of Venice. In this environment, Samuel Archivolti submitted his responsum, addressing the issue of appropriate synagogue décor. In his *tshuvah*, Archivolti states that he has determined that he has "succeeded in proving that it is prohibited to have images in the synagogue. It is proper to prevent the making of such images, and to decree that those who made such images in their synagogues should remove them." This ruling is approved by a *beit din*, a rabbinic court, from Safed. They concur that images are inappropriate because they may prove distracting to someone engaged in prayer.[73]

Responsa serve as an excellent tool to evaluate the issues facing a community at a given time. By reading the questions and answers of rabbis who attempted to guide their communities through difficult decisions, it is possible to glimpse the struggles faced

---

[71] Vivian Mann, *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 83.
[72] Ibid, 83-4.
[73] Ibid, 86.

by that community. This responsum provides a window into life in Jewish communities in Italy in the sixteenth-century. Clearly, the influence from outside the Ghetto walls seeped in and created complicated mixes of culture inside the Ghetto. Christian influence led to the elaborate and beautiful synagogue interiors which developed in the Ghetto. Ironically, the Ghetto was intended to be a place of Jewish enclosure, a place where Jewish contact with the outside Christian world would be extremely limited. But even under those circumstances, there was a significant cultural exchange. However, there was a limit. Though many elements of Christian and Italian architecture slipped over the Ghetto walls, the Jewish community maintained Jewish limits. Even within their gilded Baroque synagogues, the Jews always adhered to Jewish law, and did not decorate their houses of worship with icons, like their Christian neighbors. Though the Jews did incorporate many of the Italian styles, they did it in a uniquely and distinctly Jewish way.

Interestingly, and perhaps most elaborately from a thematic perspective, the Scuola Canton has eight wall decorations which display the limited incorporation of Italian art and Jewish limits. These wall decorations show stories from the Torah. These "relief medallions"[74] make up a frieze which decorates the wall above the windows. They are painted in tempera. This permitted Jewish subject, the depiction of Bible stories, includes no human figures. The scenes represent some of the most important stories in the Torah. They are originally Jewish in subject, but elaborately influenced in depiction. While they are religious Jewish scenes in content, and they do not trespass the prohibition against inclusion of human figures, the depiction is fabulously Italian.

[74] Curiel and Cooperman, 65.

These eight relief medallions are, perhaps, the most interesting example of Jewish art and Italian influence observable in the synagogues of the Venice Ghetto. These eight scenes are individually located on the wall. They are framed by incredibly elaborate gold carving, which serves as a three-dimensional frame. The gilded wood provides a very elegant border. The curly, undulating design is grandiose and baroque. The feathery, floral, decorative pattern is typical of Italian design of this time. The bas relief adds to the drama of the frame. Some of the eight scenes include a Hebrew inscription.

One panel, the scene of Jerusalem, is particularly significant as an example of the influence of Italian culture on Jewish art of the Ghetto. The scene depicts "a vision of Jerusalem"[75] which consists of buildings, trees and a cloudy sky.[76] The buildings, though intended to represent structures in Jerusalem, look much more like "the cupolas and campaniles of Venice."[77] The landscape, i.e. the canals and uneven walkways of Venice, and the architecture of Italy, ie. the cupolas of churches, have been incorporated into the artist's vision of Jerusalem. Though this biblical scene is intended to bring the Holy Land to the walls of a synagogue in distant Venice, the inseparable influence of Italian culture and art on architecture and design in Ghetto synagogues is detectable.

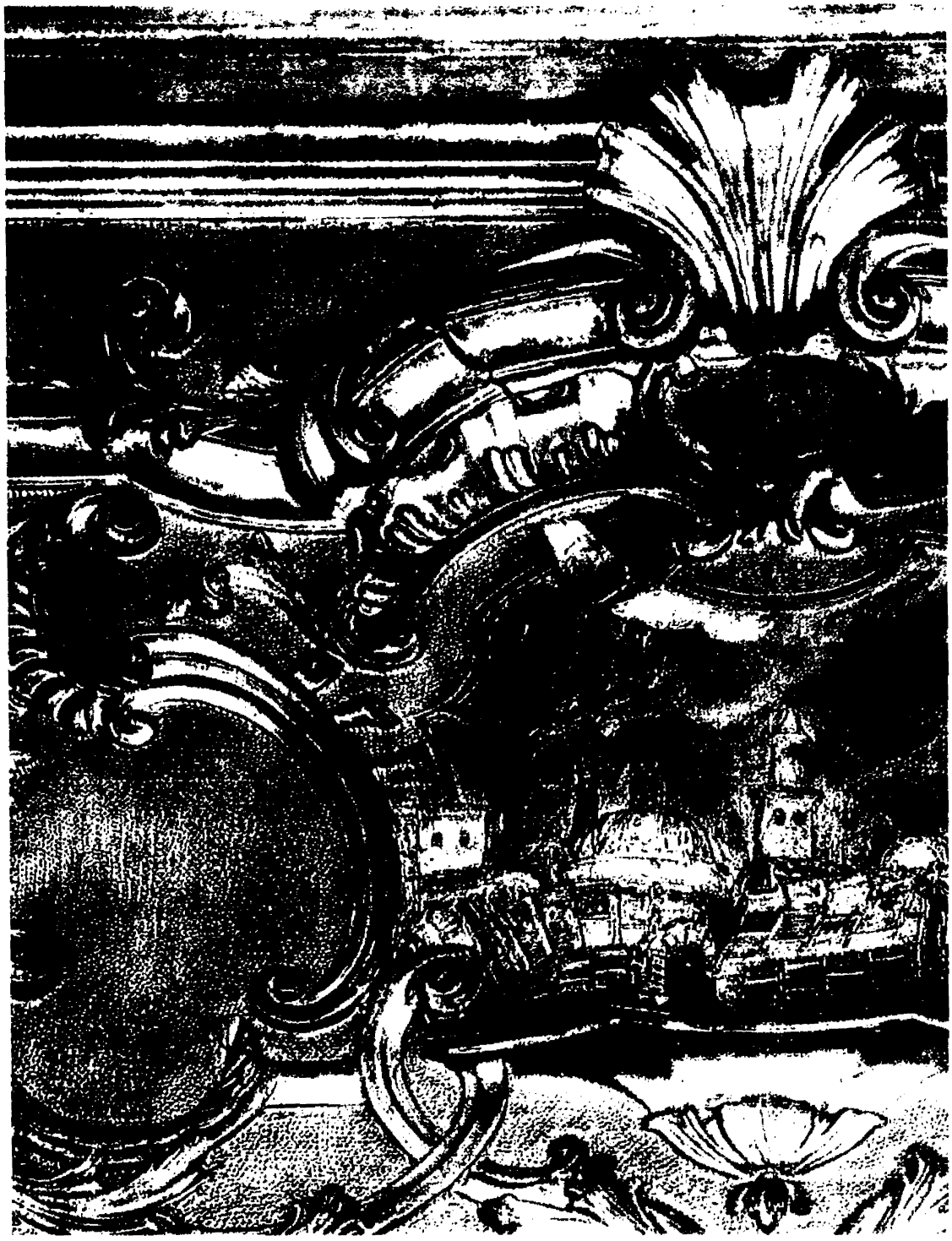
The Ghetto walls were intended to keep the Jews separate—separate from the outside Italian culture, so that the Jews would not interfere in Italian society. What the

---

[75] Ibid.

[76] Please see Figure 11 (Page 52). This photograph of one of the panels is taken from the Curiel and Cooperman book. It clearly shows the elaborate gilded frame and the drama of the carving. The scene of Jerusalem is perched on a gold ledge. The bas relief sculpture shows a very noticeably Italian version of Jerusalem.

[77] Curiel and Cooperman, 65.



A vision of Jerusalem with its cupolas and

inst

government, who decreed that Jews should be separated and kept in their own quarter, did not count on, was the deep interconnection economically, socially and aesthetically, between the Italians inside the Ghetto, i.e. the Jews, and the Italians outside the Ghetto, ie. the Christians. Although the Ghetto Jews were restricted in their participation in secular life outside the Ghetto walls, the art and architecture inside the Ghetto left a clear representation of the blending of Jewish tradition and Christian aesthetic, which took place despite the walls which tried to separate "insiders" and "outsiders." The influence of Christian art and architecture in synagogue design reflects the Jews' desire to acculturate, their acceptance of Christian culture, and a complex Jewish identity, which formed behind the walls of the Ghetto. While the Ghetto walls served to keep Jews "out," it also helped to keep Jews "in." Jewish culture, in all its forms, thrived in the Ghetto. David Ruderman argues that Italy was home to a "mosaic of Jewish lifestyles and ideologies."[78] Perhaps, ironically, the ghettos allowed Judaism to thrive in a protected environment.

Through the architecture which remains from those days, and the art which adorns the buildings of the Ghetto, it is possible to gain an understanding of the culture and the struggles of the people who lived at the time these buildings were created. An enclosed ghetto, intended to separate, seems not to have been impenetrable. Ideas slipped through the cracks in the walls and contributed to the development of communities on both sides.

---

[78] David Ruderman, "At the Intersection of Cultures, the Historical Legacy of Italian Jewry," *Gardens and Ghettos*, ed. Vivian Mann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 20.

## V. Leone da Modena's *Tshuvot* on Music and Head Coverings

Architecture is only one example of the significant exchange of artistic ideas through the ghetto's walls. In addition, influences can be seen in music, clothing and oration. The Jews behind the walls enjoyed enough communication with Venetians from outside the ghetto to adopt and adapt some of the styles and innovations from Christian culture.

In what ways did the Jews intentionally choose to take on traditions from outside the walls? What were the real issues affecting people in the ghetto on a daily basis? What struggles did the community face? How did the Jews imitate their Christian neighbors? How did they balance the simultaneous "insider"/ "outsider" status that defined them?

The visible infiltration of architectural ideas from outside the ghetto is clear by looking at synagogue architecture within the ghetto's walls. Other media also demonstrate this cultural exchange. While the studies of art, architecture, music and literature are all distinct areas of secular historical study, they also comprise a rich part of Jewish legal history.

*Halachah* is the intricate legal code of the Jewish people. Based on Torah and Talmud and subsequent commentaries on those sources, *halachah* has evolved into a system of legal rulings by which Jewish communities live. The application of *halachik* rulings often requires interpretation. A complex system of legal question and answer has developed to address issues of legal application. These answers, which help communities or individuals to understand how to apply a law, are called *responsa. Responsa* literature

is a very significant part of Jewish tradition. Through the questions posed and the answers received in return, it is possible to gain access to the world of those in dialogue. What issues were affecting a particular community at a particular time? What sort of help was needed to determine how to respond "Jewishly" to a tough question affecting a community? What outside developments or challenges were facing a given community and how did its inhabitants respond? *Responsa* literature provides scholars with an invaluable window through which to look at the day-to-day issues affecting any community.

In the case of the Venice ghetto, Leone da Modena was one of the rabbis who often responded to questions of Jewish law, in order to direct how his community should behave. Many of his legal answers were recorded, leaving a legacy from the Jewish community of the Venice ghetto in the seventeenth century. By looking at some of the *responsa* with which Leone da Modena concerned himself, it is possible to understand better what the tensions, confusions and concerns of the community were.

Many of Modena's *she'elot* and *tshuvot*, Jewish legal questions and answers, have been recorded. Though many of them proved to be of great significance to the community, two topics remain particularly famous and elucidating, giving insight into the ghetto community. The two topics are: the question of music in the synagogue and the requirement of Jews to keep their heads covered. Through Modena's correspondences on these two topics, it is possible to get a view of a community struggling to define itself with regard to its non-Jewish neighbors and to gain an understanding of what elements of non-Jewish Venetian society might be permissible to include in the culture of the ghetto.

First, let us focus on Modena's questions regarding the use of music in synagogues. At the time when Modena was boldly proposing that organs and other instruments might enhance synagogue worship services, nearby churches were adding increasingly elaborate and beautiful music to their worship services. It is no coincidence that the thought of incorporating music into a synagogue service took place at the same time that Venice's other religious communities were incorporating music into their own prayer. And so, in much the same way that elements of church architecture were incorporated into Venice's synagogues, some people, like Modena, felt that music might be a nice addition to worship services inside the ghetto walls, as well. The inclusion of instruments was unknown in Jewish worship services. But the beauty and grandeur of the music included in church services inspired the idea in Modena's mind.[79]

In the 1620's, Jewish worship changed forever. In 1622, the first-ever book of Jewish music was published in Venice; this music was written by the Jewish composer, Salamone Rossi.[80] Once again, the development and prominence of printing in Venice contributed to the availability of a product which changed Jewish religious expression forever. The printing of this collection was of tremendous importance. Rossi was a well-known and well-respected composer of secular music. The fact that he dedicated himself to the composition of Jewish music was very significant. "Rossi had at least nine printed collections to his name. The difference is that where the previous collections consisted of secular instrumental or Italian vocal works, usually for three to five voices, his latest one

---

[79] Of course, this also affected synagogue architecture. Not until music became a regular part of synagogue services did the need arise to construct a place for the organ inside synagogues. Once music became acceptable in certain synagogues and communities, architectural styles needed to be modified to include musicians and their instruments. See page 30.

[80] Don Harran, "Tradition and Innovation in Jewish Music of the Later Renaissance," *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 474.

consisted of thirty-three Hebrew works for three to eight voices, set to Biblical and post-Biblical texts and intended, in part, for use...in the synagogue."[81] This collection was unique; it was without precedence. It remained the only such collection of Jewish music in Venice for nearly two hundred years. It states, "in the Foreward to the collection, that 'nothing like this first step has ever been taken before,' and since we know...that no further steps were taken until the nineteenth century, we can safely conclude that with Rossi's collection, we confront a problem of not only musical, but also historical, social, cultural and religious dimensions."[82] That Rossi's work was such an innovation demonstrates clearly that music was not known in a Jewish liturgical context. Music was not used in Venice's synagogues prior to Rossi's compositions. It was this innovation and previously unknown medium of prayer that caused Modena to write his *responsa*, looking to prove that music, which was commonly included in church worship services, should be permissible in Jewish services. "Rossi's collection...[raises] questions of identity in Jewish music...of the connections between Jewish and Christian music...as well as their relationship with the traditions of Christian art music."[83] The collection is seen to be "an example of cultural fusion" and a "prototypical case of cultural mediation within the Judeo-Christian tradition."[84] Rossi's works show a clear influence from Christian music of the time. The influence managed to pass through the walls of the ghetto and radically alter Jewish religious music.

Rossi's compositions are attributed, in large part, to "his 'spiritual mentor,' the Venetian rabbi Leone da Modena, who seems to have originated the idea, then implanted

[81] Ibid, 475.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid, 476.
[84] Ibid.

it in the composer's mind."[85] Modena was pleased with the innovation and the inclusion of elegant music modeled after songs sung in nearby churches. "Modena emphasized that Rossi 'made a beginning which will not cease, the like of which has never been known in Israel.'"[86] Pleased with Rossi's compositions, Modena even took some credit for having inspired Rossi.

"The chief innovation of Rossi's collection is its polyphonic treatment of Hebrew texts, breaking with established traditions of musical song in the synagogue as music for a single voice patterned after the accents for cantillating various portions of the Bible (*ta'amei ha-miqra*) or the modal or melodic formulae for performing other prayer readings."[87] Until Rossi's compositions—songs for five to eight voices—Jewish synagogue "music" consisted only of traditional prayer chanting. The *hazan* or cantor (musical leader) chanted the prayers, as a single voice, in a traditional mumbling drone with occasional melodic inclusions. But this kind of chanting was known and understood to be a way to focus the participants on the prayer and to move quickly through the prayer service. The chanting of the prayers was not a performance.

Rossi's music changed all that. "Salamone Rossi developed his ideas according to the conventions of sixteenth-century polyphonic composition... Rossi... [chose] as his guide the Gentile [style of] 'ars contrapuncti' that regulated not the movement of one voice, as customarily heard in the synagogue, but the combination of several voices."[88] Rossi's real innovation was to bring the complex and beautiful elements which had

---

[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid, 478.
[87] Ibid, 476.
[88] Ibid, 477.

developed in secular music, into the synagogue. Rossi's music was completely new for the Jews, since it was "composed 'according to the science of music' (*be-hokhmat ha-nigun we-ha-musiqa*)... Whatever existed until then was practice, not science."[89] But as the secular world came more and more to appreciate order and science, the art forms of this age demonstrate that, as well. Rossi's music demonstrated the ideal. "Through 'scientia musicae,' one established 'an orderly relationship of the voices,' whereby they became delightful to perceive. 'Order,' 'sweetness,' 'beauty,' 'elegance,' (*seder, ne'imut, yofi, 'arevut*): these are... terms, adopted from... fifteenth- and sixteenth-century literary, art and music critics."[90]

While it is clear from Rossi's compositions that he borrowed from the Christian musical traditions of his time, Rossi's influences were intended to be mutual. "Rossi and Leone da Modena seem to have had an additional end in mind: to integrate Jewish music, in its refurbished form, into a non-Jewish world."[91] Rossi and Modena envisioned a sharing of music in both directions through the ghetto's walls. Once Rossi composed music which was of high secular quality and which adhered to accepted secular definitions of proper composition, Modena was ready and proud to take the new Jewish form of music outside the ghetto. Modena's "remark to the effect that the Jews will no longer be vilified for their crude music suggests that, stylistically... [Rossi's music was] designed to meet the approval of any discriminating Gentiles who happened to hear them.[92] By creating music which was excellent by secular standards, Modena felt that the Jews would be able to contribute, in a significant way, to culture and, ultimately,

---

[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid, 481.
[92] Ibid.

participate in cultural exchange. Modena was proud enough of Rossi's music to say that Rossi, as a composer, would "compare advantageously with Christian musicians."[93] "Thus where innovation had to be justified for the Jewish audience, it had to be demonstrated to the Gentile one justified, for the first, as a renewal of ancient music, demonstrated, for the second, as an example of art music."[94] But first, Rossi's innovative music had to be accepted by the Jewish communities. That was not easy.

Rossi's music caused some dissent, dividing "the Jewish community into two camps. On the one side stood... [those] who, on principle, rejected any changes in tradition as tantamount to its contamination. On the other stood the more liberally minded members of the community who, as we know, found the songs 'sweet to the ear and wanted to hear more.'"[95] Modena's obvious approval of Rossi's compositions caused the rabbi to be in the middle of the community's debate as to the acceptability of the new Jewish music. In his position of prominence as a rabbi within the community, Modena was able to clearly demonstrate his excitement. But not all of the ghetto's residents approved or agreed. Modena decided to widen the discussion. He responded to *she'elot*, Jewish legal questions, on this subject, and published his responses.[96] He wrote about the appropriateness of music in the synagogue, trying to convince others to share his view. Modena responded to the question, "Is it permissible to have music during

---

[93] Ibid, 480.
[94] Ibid, 481.
[95] Ibid, 479.
[96] These questions are recorded in the collection, *Leket Ketavim*. Naveh's book is divided into sections, based on Modena's writings. These *responsa* can be found in *Ziknei Yehudah*, under the rubric *Al haTefilah b'Tzibur*. Neither this collection, nor Modena's legal writings have been translated. The translations included here are mine, with the help of my thesis advisor, Dr. Stanley Nash.

prayer?"[97] Following, is a translation of two *responsa*, including the *she'elot and the tshuvot*, the questions posed to Modena, and the answers he gave.

**Question**: Is it permissible to have music during prayer?

There are those among us who are familiar with the skill of song, that is to say music, six or eight knowledgeable people in the community, who, during the holidays and festivals raise their voices and sing in the synagogue, song and praise and *Hallel* and melody: *Ein Kelohenu, Alenu leshabeach, Yigdal, Adon Olam*, and the like. To honor God with principles of composition in this style (i.e. contrapuntal). A person rose to banish them verbally, responding and saying that it is not correct to do so (sing) because if it is prohibited to be joyous and singing is prohibited, and any boisterous singing whatsoever such as the aforementioned songs are forbidden since the destruction of the Temple, because of the verse according to "Israel rejoice to the point of excess of joy like the non-Jews." The (contrapuntal) singers were vilified in this matter in the eyes of the masses when they heard their voices, in so far as the majority of them were Torah scholars and adherents. Let there go out an authoritative *halachic* decision from among the teacher of Torah. Let rabbis determine whether this is forbidden, if this is the voice of sacrilege or a beautiful voice of its kind on the *halachah* to praise God.

[97] Leone da Modena, "Im Mutar L'zamer b'Musikah,." *Leket Ketavim*, ed. Penina Naveh, (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968), 163-165. The English translations are mine, with the help of my thesis advisor, Dr. Stanley Nash.

**Answer:**

To sing at a wine party or to indulge oneself like a king and the like, all this is prohibited because of our present state of destruction and exile. How can we rejoice when our Temple is destroyed and we are exiled? But if it is a *mitzvah*, like for a bride and groom, any youth could pass judgment that it is completely permissible. "It is permissible on Shabbat to tell a non-Jew to play a musical instrument." And it was customary for all of Israel to recite words of praise or thanks at weddings, to God, over wine. Rav Joseph Caro wrote and the annotator added: "for the sake of *mitzvah* everything is permitted." No one with a brain in his head would doubt that to praise God with song in the synagogue on Shabbat and holidays would be anything but a *mitzvah*. Every holy Shabbat is like a bride to us and we are obligated to adorn and regale her in different ways, and also the holidays. It is a *mitzvah* on the service leader to make his voice very pleasing in prayer. And if he could make heard his voice as a solo as if it were ten choir members—wouldn't that be good? Or if cantorial assistants whom God has endowed with a beautiful voice would stand with him in a different liturgical style of the service than is customary nowadays in Ashkenazi communities, they would sing with him. And if it happened that they should organize their music with proper harmonic relationships would it be considered a sin? It is written, "Honor God with your treasure." We interpret this "From what you have been given." How? If you have a beautiful voice, and the like. If this is so,

those whom God has given the knowledge of this musical skill and they come to honor God, are they mortal sinners? God forbid we decree on the service leaders that they bray like donkeys and not make their voices beautiful? And we who used to be masters of music in our prayers and praises, now shall we be the object of contempt before the peoples who say that we no longer possess wisdom and that we yell to our God and our ancestors like dogs and ravens?

Finally, This is unrelated to this prohibition, "Let not Israel rejoice" and it would never occur to a *beit din* or a learned rabbi to prohibit the praising of God may He be blessed with the nicest voice possible and with this knowledge that arouses the souls in His honor, just as in praise of perfection of this musical know-how. Later authorities have spoken about this at length. For the first Chasidim would dance before the bride with different voices and dances. On Simchat Torah there are cantors who dance with a Torah in their bosom in the synagogue and make merry in different ways and we don't see a protester or critic against them because it is good to praise God is every honorable and glorious form.

However, I have heard supporting evidence prohibiting what is written: "How can we since the song of God on a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:4) We find specifically that it is a song to God that is prohibited while we are still outside of our land. In this also, he proclaimed and was not precise regarding the request of the enemies—the Babylonians—to

Israel was that: They sing by their request from the song of the Levites, which they used to say in the Temple. "Sing to us from the song of Zion," and they didn't just say "sing," and the Israelites would respond, saying: "How can we sing 'the song of God, the holy song specific to His house,' on foreign land?" They didn't say just "How can we sing?" Rather, "a song of God." If it is forbidden to us now to sacrifice outside the land of Israel, should the prayers that were established to be in place of daily sacrifices, and similarly (as well as) the songs of prayer that the Levites said on their *duchan* be forbidden to us now in our exile? It is inappropriate to speak critically at a time of fulfilling, against the students of (musical) knowledge when they sing outside the synagogue and not that it is a *mitzvah*, but rather when they are learning or reciting to themselves. If it is permissible and good to rejoice with bride and groom and in the synagogue to thank God and all matters of *mitzvah*, how can they do that if they don't learn it first? Even after they become a little proficient, they have to become more perfect and to strengthen in their memories what they know, because in the future all will be forgotten.

In this *tshuvah*, Modena clearly states that music is permissible in the synagogue. He explains that praising God is an art form. "Honor God with your treasure," Modena writes, including musical ability. From the reasoning in this *responsum*, it seems that music should, according to Jewish law, be fully accepted in a synagogue, as part of the service of praise to God. Modena responded to another *she'elah*, furthering his argument that music is, indeed, a permissible part of Jewish synagogue prayer:[98]

**Question:**

> In a certain congregation, during festivals, a group of singers/choir sang in the synagogue *Kaddish, Barchu, Kedushah*, songs and praises and the cantor, one of the musically proficient in the musical rendition, they repeated twice the word "keter"[99] and also God's name in their prayer. That is to say: Regarding the mentioning of God's name, everybody would mention it once without repeating it, according to the rules of the composers of music that sometimes repeat words to sweeten the melody.[100] The public rose up in protest saying that it is incorrect to use music in the synagogue and specifically, it is a sin to repeat the word "keter" and God's name according to the Kabbalists and according to the

[98] Leone da Modena, "P'sak b'Musikah," *Leket Ketavim*, ed. Penina Naveh, (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968), 167-168. The English translations are mine, with the help of my thesis advisor, Dr. Stanley Nash.
[99] "Keter" is the first word of the *Kedushah* in the Sephardic tradition. In the Ashkenazic tradition, that prayer begins with the word "Na'artitzcha."
[100] This is understood to mean that each member of the choir said God's name only once, but the musical rendition resulted in God's name being heard several times.

law of the Gemara, and it would be like saying "shema shema" "modim modim" that one should silence him. Will the teachers please pass judgment/determine whether to stop them from singing and duplicating these words or not.

**Answer:**

A person needs three things in order to answer this question: one, whether it is permissible to repeat in song the word "keter;" two, whether it is permissible to repeat God's name in the verse *eleh moadei Adonai*; three, the main thing here is whether it is permissible to sing praises to God in the synagogue. The first two are actually the same. I would like to say, the repetition of "keter" and "hashem"—if I answer this according to those who call themselves Kabbalists today, surely, in my opinion, they are the first ones to make a commotion about this like the sound of rushing waters in accordance with their "mysteries"—"keter" being the first in the *sephirot*. I don't know anything about this. This wisdom (of Kabbalah) is not only not in me and not relevant to me, but I said I don't want to be wise in it and it is distant from me, and I have even explained this reason in an essay I wrote at length which I called "Ari Nohem." Nonetheless, in order that the questioner remain satisfied and appeased through all the means at my disposal, I asked tow learned people who are familiar with this, Dr. Rabbi Yosef Hamitz and the Rav Moshe Zakut. One answered

"The repetition would not cause any harm." The second one answered "Would that they crown righteous men with the name of God all day long."

As for the matter of repetition of words, if it were not concerning the name of Heaven in vain, according to the Kabbalah, I don't know where the prohibition comes from. I've already been able to say that we do not deal with esoteric matters and the like. Despite this, I will say that according to these Kabbalists, both according to the literal meaning of the Talmud, it is not prohibited. And who would stop us from praising God repeatedly?

In this second *responsum*, Modena explains that there is no prohibition against praising God multiple times. Therefore, he explains, there should be no prohibition against the repetition of words of praise to God. In that case, there would be no prohibition against the kind of multi-voice, melodic vocal music, with repetitions, which Rossi so adeptly created. Modena's argument here serves to explain that Rossi's music, is not, in any way, contrary to Jewish liturgy. Despite the fact that its style is different, Modena argues that Rossi's music is perfectly acceptable from a Jewish legal perspective. Neither the repetition of words in the music, nor the multi-voice choral format is opposed by a Jewish legal understanding of prayer, Modena argues. He used this public forum, i.e. *responsa* literature, to publicize his ideas and to try to convince the Jews of the ghetto that Rossi's music was an evolved and appropriate form of prayer.

Why was Modena so determined to include Rossi's music? And why did many Jews in the ghetto feel so uncomfortable with it? The answer to both is: The new music had a distinctly Christian flavor to it, culturally, if not religiously. Modena wanted the new music to be part of the Jewish services because he felt that the music allowed the services to seem more sophisticated. He encouraged the Jewish community to draw on the elegant art forms of the surrounding Venetian culture. Modena wanted the Jewish community inside the ghetto to borrow from and adapt art forms from outside the walls. Some Jews appreciated the music and felt comfortable including it in their services. But for others, the inclusion of music from outside the walls seemed inappropriate. Modena and his followers struggled to acculturate, to adapt and be accepted by the Venetian society outside the walls. For Modena, the walls were penetrable. But for others of the ghetto's residents, the walls seemed more of a protection against acculturation. They wanted to keep their Jewish traditions unchanged. The tension between the Jews' "insider" / "outsider" status was apparent. As changes and adaptations were being made within the synagogues, in the architecture and in the music, some Jews felt more comfortable with the inclusion of outside ideas than others.

Without a doubt, some influence seeped through the walls, in both directions, until ultimately, though there were differences in religious musical styles, there were many similarities. The music which developed shows "cultural fusions, whereby disparate styles come together on common ground, losing some of their particularity in the course of their mutual accommodation. Perhaps the chief disparity between Jewish and Gentile forms of music, then and now, resides in their languages, meaning Hebrew

on the one hand and Italian or Latin on the other."[101] Though the languages remained different, the styles became more and more alike.

The music Rossi wrote for the Jews had to be relatively simple. As a result of the sumptuary laws, which limited Jewish demonstrations of extravagance, and affected both the architecture[102] and the music of the ghetto, Rossi was forced to write less intricate music for the Jews. "To accommodate his works to two audiences, Rossi simplified the style of Gentile music, of his own madrigals, for example, by reducing it to its basic lineaments."[103] In his moderation, Rossi created music which was "not clothed in the advanced harmonic, rhythmic and melodic idioms of secular music... [And it served] to show the Gentiles that... [his works] need not be feared as possible competition with Christian works."[104] Rossi wrote beautiful music, incorporating elements of rich Venetian musical technique into his pieces, while creating music which was melodically and legally acceptable to both Jews and non-Jews. In Rossi's music, there are "reminiscences of the madrigal, of the light canzonetta, of the double choruses of the Venetian ecclesiastical music, of choral monody, of echo writing, of psalmodic recitation....What is particularly novel about the collection is... its mixed Hebrew-Italian"[105] style. Rossi created "Hebrew music after an Italian model."[106]

With a musician writing for both communities, the musical styles began to fuse. Rossi wrote music which could be enjoyed secularly by both Jews and non-Jews. Because both communities shared a composer, they shared musical style, despite any

---

[101] Harran, 482.
[102] See Chapter IV (Page 30).
[103] Harran, 482.
[104] Ibid, 483.
[105] Ibid, 484.
[106] Ibid, 485.

discomfort with this fact. There was both "a Christianization of Jewish music and a Hebraization of Christian music."[107]

Modena's involvement with Rossi and his dedication to convincing people to accept music in the synagogue was one of his great contributions to the development and evolution of the synagogue service in general, and the religious acculturation of Venice's Jews in particular. But there are other issues, as well, which Modena worked hard to change within the ghetto. He was an advocate of acculturation, taking those elements from outside the ghetto's walls, which he considered most advanced, most elegant, and bringing them into the ghetto. Modena wanted the Jews to remain Jewish, while at the same time, incorporating some of Venice's traditions into the Jewish community. He believed that this acculturation would allow the Jews to shift the tense struggle of "insider" versus "outsider" to a more balanced position, allowing the Jews to move about more freely and to participate more fully in the society outside the walls.

Now, let us consider another example of Modena's acceptance of change and evolution with regard to the Jewish community's practice. In one of his most famous *tshuvot*, Modena argues that Jews no longer need to be made distinct from non-Jews by wearing a hat. Modena takes a bold and controversial stand, encouraging Jews to remove their hats. Modena's efforts to shrink the differences between Jews and Gentiles can be seen throughout his *responsa*, but particularly, those addressing music and clothing. These two very significant elements of Jewish life in the ghetto were addressed by Modena because he wanted Jews to feel more like "insiders" and less like "outsiders" in

[107] Ibid, 483.

Venice society. Modena is often referred to as "an early Reformer," an advocate of continued evolution and change for Judaism, so that Jews could be accepted members of the society at large. Modena explains that he sees Judaism as an evolving tradition in the footnote to his *responsum* on whether Jews need to cover their heads. He writes, "It is incumbent upon a cultured person to distinguish properly between important details and insignificant ones and to know that in every generation, changes were made according to place and time. Blind following of the Talmud is an example of that static attitude such as the one the Karaites possessed relating to the Torah."[108] Modena's efforts to encourage his fellow ghetto residents to be "cultured" and acculturated can be seen in his response to a question posed him "regarding exposing of the head."[109]

**Question:**

In the name of Master (Leone da Modena) it has been said that his sermon for *Parshat Vaetchanan*, he said that it is permissible to walk and, needless to say, to stand with the head uncovered and it was astounding to many who are careful about this matter. Therefore, by his grace, let his words come, and if indeed truth comes forth from his mouth, because it is well-established that nothing is said by him without careful reasoning.

[108] Modena, 176, Footnote 36.
[109] Leone da Modena, "B'Inyan Gilui Rosh," *Leket* Ketavim, ed. Penina Naveh (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968), 176-179. The English translations are mine, with the help of my thesis advisor, Dr. Stanley Nash.

**Answer:**

The truth was related to you that in my sermon for *Parshat Vaetchanan*, while I was still speaking about the prayer, I said that one of the conditions says: "We don't stand to pray except with seriousness (*koved rosh*)." (Brachot 5:1) This seriousness doesn't mean to wear a hat or a scarf that weighs ten pounds but rather and that to be relaxed like its opposite, frivolity (*kalut rosh*) doesn't mean walking around with a hat in your hand to honor someone or because of the heat as some thought that this is not forbidden, and it's not the frivolity that was condemned by the rabbis, when they said that "laughter and frivolity accustom a person to promiscuity," (Avot 3:13) because of laughing and joking around and not showing respect to the elders. Such were my words. Since there were those who responded and criticized me about it, I wanted to elucidate my words. In short, if it were forbidden to uncover the head, it is because of the ways of the idol worshippers or because of *Bechukoteihem* (Lev. 18:3) or because of promiscuity, or because of arrogance. Except for these four, I haven't found any prohibition with regards to it. Although, there was one who insisted on thinking it is forbidden, lest it be thought of as removing their hat before a Christian icon in public. That's nonsense, and what's more, when our sages spoke about it, there was a custom in all the areas in which they lived, of removing the hat in order to honor idols.

If that's the case, then let's probe the four aforementioned aspects. Something performed out of respect has nothing to do with the Amorite ways. How garbled are the pretenses of the overly righteous who have contempt for reading a non-religious book and therefore, they don't know world history and what pertains to respect and glory of our Torah. The ones who say there it is because of *Bechukoteihem* because the removal of the hat was introduced by Constantine, the one who strengthened their faith, to show their baptism. This is nonsense. In so far as it is our head which is a body part which is divine and lofty, the place of the brain, the senses and the movement, it is worthy that with this divine body part, we should show honor to those that deserve honor because of the centrality of God in them. With regard to the third reason, that it is forbidden because of promiscuity, we haven't seen any such thing. For behold our sages said "A woman's hair is promiscuous." And that is because it is one of her adornments through which men are aroused to harlotry. But showing a man's hair, I didn't see or find to be prohibited because of promiscuity. If it were so, God wouldn't have commended a Nazirite to grow his hair wildly and would not have given strength to Samson from his hair and the angel would not have grabbed the prophet by his strands of hair, for example. And in the Zohar in *Parshat Naso*, they speak about the hair of the male as among divine symbols. The fourth reason remains—because of arrogance and impertinence. And this is surely something seen but not seen, understood but not understood, by the prohibiters.

And now to their faces, I'll answer them harshly, that even if it is a quality of righteousness to avoid something that has arrogance in it, for us, the people of Italy, it is not an obstacle in any way. Because the words of our rabbis need to be understood according to time and place. Because if not, we will be according to their words, heretics like the Karaites with regard to the Written Torah. Because there is no end to the words that the rabbis provided prohibitions for that later on became permissible with the change of time and place. And here, according to the dress of the Mizrachim, and their shaving of their heads and the head covers, surely the uncovering of the head would indicate brazenness because they don't have the custom of removing the head cover in order to honor elders, nor for any other reason. And if they do that, they will appear silly or arrogant, but we, in Italy, our dress is different. We grow our hair, and it is a custom to remove your hat and stand before elders in order to honor them. How can good manners be considered a *chutzpah* and honor be considered brazenness?? And if you say, "If so, according to this place in which we are accustomed to uncover the head, will it be permissible also in prayer in the synagogue?" The answer is that even though this is a viewpoint, they said to protest against it. Both because the synagogue is now for us a miniature sanctuary and we want to become like the Temple, and in it, it was not customary to uncover the head. Both for this reason and because "And then laws you should follow," the base of their pagan worship was in the placing of their sacrifices on their heads, as is well

known, and also, because it is prohibited to mention God's name with an uncovered head.

I thought that for the judgment of intelligent people it would suffice to show that there are no grounds contradicting what came out of my mouth. How much less so that I already talked about honoring a dignitary or an elder of because of the heat, inasmuch as there are people who won't be able to suffer this pain. I did not say that because of this that it is not right to accustom boys in their infancy to cover their heads and that it is good to go out with an uncovered head even without a hat in his hand or to show the locks of his curls and somebody who can avoid doing this, should avoid it altogether. Rather, my intention here is to offer an apology for myself to all those who see me walking in the sun, because from the heat of the head, it is even a very light thing on myself—not to consider me one who goes against the words of the sages as my ears have heard. On the contrary, because I saw most of this community and most of the Italians who don't treat this as a prohibition, I thought it best to teach that this is permissible, just as if I had the strength for it, I would do in the case of some other things that the Italian Jews are criticized for, whose lead it would be appropriate for the leaders among us to show either that they are permissible or to justify them and not to confess to the Levantine Jews or the Ashkenazim that we are heretics and they are the righteous Jews because God is with us also and our Torah and Talmud is loyal and good for ever and ever for us and our children.

This is part of my *halachic* ruling that I made at the time which I have forgotten and I don't remember all of it in order to put it in writing. But the truth is recognizable to all and will keep us away from committing grave and minor sins which are intrinsically so and will keep us away also from ugliness and its like. Because this is surely not from them. And may He save us from being hypocrites but rather ones who are pure of heart and pure of spirit in His worship. Amen.

Years after I wrote these words, I came across the answer of the *Maharshal* and this man was very important and awesome among the people of Poland and Germany. See and be amazed in so far as the Ashkenazim are among the strictest peoples, as is known, how does he permit to eat and drink and bless and study Torah and pray and read the Shema with the head uncovered? And needless to say, to stand and walk about for the reasons that I wrote about. I really have no idea what the hypocrites and the very devout would answer to this. When the above named rabbis of Prague expounded on these things and they didn't know the details, they blamed me for naught until I wrote them an outline of my *halachic* rulings and they said that it was correct.

Modena's *responsa* show his bold dedication to helping, at least in his mind, the Jews of the Venice ghetto, to become more acculturated and to become more "Venetian." Modena's writings and rulings go right to the core of the "insider" / "outsider" tension

which defined the Jews of the ghetto. By helping to make Jewish worship sound more similar to Christian worship, by familiarizing both Jews and Christians with their neighbors' music, by encouraging Rossi to compose for both communities, Modena helped to let the sounds of Venice's music float through the ghetto walls. And by setting an example for Jews to look less distinctly Jewish, Modena acted as an early reformer of Judaism. Modena's *responsa* helped his community to be less isolated. He responded to the issues, individually, allowing the Jewish community to resolve the quandaries which faced them. But in so doing, Modena helped the ghetto community to have increased similarities to the non-Jews living outside the walls. And by recording his legal rulings in writing, Modena preserved a history of the evolution and development of the Venice ghetto.

## VI. Preaching in the ghetto

Another artistic medium which demonstrates Christian influence on the Jewish community in the ghetto is: preaching. During the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance period, Christian preaching became a respected art form. Preachers began to incorporate literary styles and techniques into their sermons, as well as to focus a new energy on preaching as a literary and artistic form. Evidence of the new interest in preaching can also be seen in the Jewish communities.

One significant reason for the new fascination with the sermon was the widespread availability of printed material. Never before had printed texts been so accessible to the general public. With the advent of the printing press, printed materials became very popular. "The number of...books published in Venice between 1585 and 1615, by both Italian and Ottoman preachers, is an astounding indication of public demand for this kind of literature."[110] In the area surrounding Venice, where printing was particularly popular, it is no surprise that the public became passionate about reading sermons.

> The period of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not only an age of the sermon for Catholics and Protestants but for Jews as well. Just as Christian preachers were increasingly committing their most effective homilies to print for an enthusiastic reading public, so their Jewish counterparts were similarly inclined to polish their oral vernacular sermons, to translate them into elegant Hebrew prose, and thus to satisfy the equally voracious appetite of their Hebrew reading public.[111]

---

[110] Marc Saperstein, "Italian Jewish Preaching: An Overview," *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto*, ed. David Ruderman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 29.
[111] David Ruderman, "Introduction," *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto*, ed. David Ruderman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 3.

As a result of the popularity of sermons, preachers acquired a new popularity, as well.

> In Italy, in Amsterdam, in the Ottoman empire, and in Eastern Europe, the Jewish preacher assumed a status unparalleled in any previous age, and the interest of a Jewish laity in hearing and reading sermons reached unprecedented heights. This new role of the *darshan*, the Jewish counterpart to the 'sacred orator,' as mediator between Jewish elite and popular culture, effected through the edifying delivery and eventual diffusion of his printed sermons, undoubtedly closely approximates similar cultural patterns emerging throughout early modern Europe.[112]

Many preachers suddenly acquired quite a following, enjoying large numbers of people in attendance during services where there were sermons given, and a large readership of the sermons after they had been delivered. Thanks to the printing press, preachers came to be well-known, not only in their own communities, but in other communities, as well.

Rabbi Leone da Modena, for example, became known in many of the Italian Jewish communities, and benefited from his popularity. He was invited to preach in different cities, which helped to supplement his income and to spread his messages. Interestingly, Modena's audience was not exclusively Jewish. In his autobiography, Modena recorded a number of visits, by prominent Christian leaders, to his sermons. "I gave the sermon before a huge standing crowd, packed in as never before, with many Christians and noblemen among the listeners."[113] On another occasion when Modena preached, he recorded that "In attendance were the brother of the king of France, who was accompanied by some French noblemen and by five of the most important Christian preachers."[114] Modena was aware of the significance of his opportunities to preach

---

[112] Ibid.
[113] Leone da Modena, *Chaye Yehudah*, trans. and ed. Mark Cohen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 117.
[114] Ibid, 131.

before such internationally esteemed figures. "Noblemen and other great men came to hear my sermons, notably Duke Candale and Duke Rohan, among others. May God be praised by all for imparting the grace to his servant to hallow his name in public before gentiles."[115] As a result of these visits, the words preached in a particular synagogue in the ghetto traveled far outside the ghetto's walls. Modena's sermons were commented on in "distant places all over Italy,"[116] and as "far away as Prague."[117] This cultural sharing was unusual and significant in that ideas from both sides of the walls crossed stone boundaries. Modena's words impacted his visitors and they, in turn, reported about the rabbi's preaching when they returned to their own communities. In this way, Modena's words had a far-reaching effect.

But even more significantly than the impact on visitors, sermons came to be the central part of the Jewish prayer service, meaning that they had a big impact on the members of the synagogue who came to hear what the rabbi had to say. Sermons became more eloquent and more elegant, during this period. And many preachers took their responsibility seriously, using the sermon format to deliver important messages to their communities.

What did the preachers discuss? Often, they used the preaching time to address issues facing the community. But many of the messages were delivered in a subtle way, linking lessons from the Torah to circumstances affecting a community. Stories and parables were used to help the congregants understand the preacher's message. The

---

[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Adelman, 28.

sermon format became an important tool for communication between the rabbi and the congregants. "Jewish preachers and their sermons, particularly those emerging in the Italian ghetto, also reflect a cultural ambiance unique to Jews, emanating from the special characteristics of their cultural heritage and the specific circumstances of their social and political status in Italy."[118] The ghetto communities, though included to a relatively large degree in the societies outside the walls, were acutely aware of their "outsider" status. The feeling of being ostracized and excluded was never far from their minds, as charters needed to be renewed every few years to allow the Jews even to remain in ghettos; as gates were closed and locked at night; as space in the ghetto became more and more cramped. Many of the sermons delivered to the Jewish communities of the ghetto addressed these feelings.

> The world inhabited by Jewish preachers and their congregations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a fundamentally different one from that of their immediate predecessors...A new oppressive policy instituted by Pope Paul IV and his successors in the middle of the sixteenth century caused a marked deterioration of the legal status and physical state of the Jewish communities of the papal states and in the rest of Italy as well. Jews living in the various city-states of Italy suddenly faced a major offensive against their community and its religious heritage, culminating in the public incineration of the Talmud in 1553 and in restrictive legislation leading to increased impoverishment, ghettoization and even expulsion.[119]

With such a heavy social burden on the ghetto communities, despair must have present for many. As a result, many of the sermons from this time and place address the situation

[118] Ruderman, *Preachers*, 3.
[119] Ibid, 5.

of the ghetto communities through thematically linked parables. The sermons "illuminate...the transformation of Italian Jewish culture in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the adjustment of a beleaguered but proud minority to its ghetto segregation, the openness of the Jews and their surprising appropriations of the regnant cultural tastes of the surrounding society."[120] Leone da Modena's sermons serve as examples of the subtle, yet profound, messages that helped the Jewish communities of the ghettos to remain strong and steadfast in their commitment to Judaism. Modena is remembered as "perhaps the most illustrious Jewish preacher of his generation."[121] His sermons "simultaneously communicated his sympathy for the community he was addressing and engaged their attention."[122]

Modena's style shows a combination of Jewish themes and Christian oratory techniques. He was able to mold the new preaching styles of his Christian colleagues, and make them his own. Modena's brilliance was in his "'blending of the Christian sermon with the traditional Jewish homily,' fusion he engendered according to the model of one of the best-known Christian preachers of the Counter-Reformation, Francesco Panigarola."[123] "It may be more than coincidental that similar stories are told about Panigarola and Modena in regard to early manifestations of preaching talent."[124] "Modena chose to model himself on Francesco Panigarola, who was one of the most famous preachers of the time and whose sermons became a model of style for both religious and secular *literati*."[125]

---

[120] Ibid, 17.
[121] Ibid, 14.
[122] Joanna Weinberg, "Preaching in the Venetian Ghetto: The Sermons of Leon Modena," *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto*, ed. David Ruderman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 108.
[123] Ruderman, *Preachers*, 14.
[124] Weinberg, 110.
[125] Ibid, 122.

Modena learned much about preaching from familiarizing himself with the Christian styles of his day. Modena's "'consciousness of the responsibility of the preacher derived in no small measure from what he learned from his Christian neighbors....' His self-image as a preacher was surely shaped along the lines of the Catholic model...He was teaching Judaism in a manner not so different from that of the Jesuit preachers only a short canal ride from the Venetian ghetto."[126] The close physical proximity of the Christian and Jewish communities made possible the sharing of styles. From his autobiography, we know that Modena attended "the sermon of a Christian preacher, and...that he owned at least one volume of Savonarola's sermons and an Italian treatise on 'The Way to Compose a Sermon.'"[127] Moreover, Modena described his own sermons as "a blending of Christian and Jewish homiletics...[using] the Italian terms *prologhino* and *epiloghino* to characterize the first and last parts of his discourses. All of this bespeaks an openness to what was happening in the pulpits of nearby churches."[128] Modena was "a Jew living in the ghetto...able to structure his sermons according to Christian specifications while their content remained predominantly Jewish in theme and source."[129]

Modena was successful as a preacher because he used "the sermon as a means of penetrating the larger social and cultural setting...of Jewish life in the ghetto age."[130] He was a prolific writer and speaker. From his autobiography, it is clear that he "preached at three or four places each Sabbath over a period of more than twenty years, and that he

[126] Ruderman, *Preachers*, 15.
[127] Saperstein, "Overview," 27.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Weinberg, 105.
[130] Ruderman, *Preachers*, 17.

had in his possession more than four hundred sermons."[131] In addition to the content of these sermons, Modena was so influential because of the number of people he addressed. Unfortunately, though it is known that Modena wrote hundreds of sermons, only twenty-one were published; the rest have been lost.

Though Modena's words were written down and preserved for posterity as a formal Hebrew text, his sermons were most probably delivered in a more casual, vernacular style. "Although he and most other Jewish preachers delivered their sermons in Italian, his notes...consisted of topics and verses from biblical and rabbinic literature in Hebrew or a complete text written in Italian using Hebrew characters."[132] However, it is widely believed that all sermons of the sixteenth century were delivered in the European vernacular. "We know of no Jewish sermons written in a European language before the second half of the sixteenth century; all earlier texts from Europe are in Hebrew."[133] Though his sermons would have been composed for the audience which had the opportunity to hear them delivered, a preacher hoped that his words would influence people beyond the walls of his community. "Preachers who took the trouble to write a sermon in a permanent form would want it to be accessible to all Jewish people, beyond the borders of their own country and the group that was literate in a given vernacular."[134] Because the sermon could be widely read, "We may assume that preachers generally used a more highly embellished style in writing their Hebrew sermon texts than they had in speaking. Such a style, which often produced a pastiche of obscure biblical phrases that

---

[131] Saperstein, "Overview," 24.
[132] Adelman and Ravid, 209.
[133] Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching 1200-1800: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 21.
[134] Ibid, 42.

demonstrated the author's mastery of Scripture, was designed to impress the... reader."[135] As such, the preacher played many roles: "educator and entertainer, articulator of the people's hopes and fears, defender of the tradition and purveyor of novel insights, representative of the establishment and critic of the status quo."[136] Modena played all of these roles at various times.

Let us focus, now, on two parts of a sermon which Modena delivered for Pesach. The first section is entitled "Gedulatam shel Yisrael;" the second section is entitled "Yisrael ve Haamim." Pesach was a time when preachers would try hard to impress their listeners. "The Sabbath before Passover [was]... of special importance in the calendar."[137] "The tradition of preaching on... [that] Sabbath... called *Shabbat ha-Gadol*... had deep... roots. It was considered obligatory not only for the rabbi to preach but for the entire congregation to attend and listen."[138] Therefore, this message, delivered by Modena during this significant festival season, can be considered a particularly important one.

In these sections, there are many examples of biblical text being interwoven into the sermon. This was a common technique, used in both Jewish and Christian homiletics.[139] Many preachers used biblical texts and stories to make their sermons comprehensible to the listeners. "The Hebrew Bible... [served] as an unending inspiration for Jewish preaching. It was an established tradition for Jewish sermons to begin with a biblical verse, and much of their texture was exegetical... The discussion

---

[135] Ibid, 21.
[136] Marc Saperstein, *"Your Voice Like a Ram's Horn: Themes and Texts in Traditional Jewish Preaching,"* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1996), 2.
[137] Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, 31.
[138] Ibid, 32.
[139] Ibid, 63.

generally flowed from the interpretation of some passage in the Bible.[140] But an effort to keep interpretations interesting and innovative was a challenge. The "constant demand for ingenuity and originality risked alienating people who realized that the simple meaning of a passage had nothing to do with the preacher's point. The choice between being implausible and boring was not a happy one."[141] Modena tried to keep his topics interesting and his level of discussion appropriate for learned and unlearned listeners. Modena's sermons demonstrate an attempt to include both biblical and popular themes in his messages.

In both of the sections included here, Modena used biblical text to give directives to the communities in the Venice ghetto and to bring some consolation to a not entirely pleasant living situation. Because preachers used biblical verses to refer directly to the situation of the audience whom they were addressing, most sermons include some allusions and references which must have been clear to the audience, though modern readers can only guess at the exact intended meaning. "Such allusions, immediately comprehensible to the listener but frustratingly ambiguous to the historian, are all too common."[142]

---

[140] Ibid, 59.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, 84.

**Gedulatam shel Yisrael**[143]

It is well known to all that the world was created and exists for the sake of Israel. What does this mean that we say "for the sake of Israel?" What is its superiority over the rest of the peoples/nations? From the beginning (of time) Israel was His real partner through His Torah/teachings and all the world was established based on them (i.e. the couple). And now, although before He established civilized society (the land and societies) Israel was partnered with God, this was not made widely known to the rest of the nations/inhabitants of the world until Israel was taken out of Egypt, for then the nations heard and were agitated[144] because God took the people Israel out from amidst another nation with signs and miracles and they were amazed because a scorned and unsuccessful people were brought close to God. And in that Exodus specifically was the central greatness of the people Israel and the revealing of the partnership. And if after this, God led them and protected them and fed and supported them and gave them Torah and mitzvoth, all of these favors would not be equal to the first (the Exodus), which is the cause for all of them.

And this could be illustrated in an allegory: An earthly king fell in love with a maidservant and proposed to her in private and before her relatives,

[143] Leone da Modena, "Gedulatam shel Yisrael," *Leket Ketavim*, ed. Penina Naveh, (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968), 130. The English translations are mine, with the help of my thesis advisor, Dr. Stanley Nash.
[144] Exodus 15:14.

and after a few days the king took her out forcefully from servitude and announced it publicly that it was his intention to make her his wife and he marries her. And the city was in an uproar because he chose to marry a servant and not one of the daughters of kings, and married a lowly captive maiden. At that time, the amazement and awe would increase. And even if after this he fights for her and provides for her and dresses her in scarlet clothing and puts a crown on her head and makes her a queen and builds her a house, there would be no novelty like the first one because since she has already been partnered with him, he does all of this. And if this queen wants to set a time to commemorate her glory, she would surely choose the day that the king took her out from the house of slavery and announced their engagement. And all the other benefits/greatnesses would be related to that.

And thus it is precisely on all of the holidays; a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt, and in all the righteous things that God has done for us, because it is appropriate to connect them to that day. The beginning of this partnership with God was truly the taking out from Egypt. Although God took great interest in our ancestors, they were still not a people but from that day they became a people; that was the beginning of the marriage and the revelation. King Solomon recited/sang: Seize for us

foxes, little foxes[145] you, Israel, that are (like) little foxes—seize hold of big foxes! Which is to say that God has given strength to this nation to stand since then in the face of stronger kingdoms because they destroy vineyards, (i.e.) they try to separate our love and destroy our vineyards, we need to take more care that our vineyards and unripe grapes flourish, because they haven't ripened yet and it is easy to destroy them. And for all of this, the bride offered praise and said "My beloved is mine and I am his."[146] May his name be praised, because against the will of all of those nations who sought to separate God and His people, they were totally unsuccessful. The marriage was fulfilled and will continue to exist. And despite the fact that God is a shepherd among the lilies, (i.e.) one who is accustomed to great things and fresh and beautiful places, He has come into my vineyard even though it is still unripe and only in the blossoming stages.

[145] Song of Songs 2:15. Song of Songs is the scroll read for Pesach. It is very appropriate to quote from this text for a sermon delivered during Pesach.
[146] Song of Songs 2:16.

**Yisrael ve Haamim**[147]

And so she (Israel) also sought God's favor in the lengthy exile that he would not separate himself from her until the day would end or cool. If so, there is an additional reason to remember in every matter, the Exodus from Egypt, insofar as it is a testimony that just as He took us out then, even though we were unworthy, even now, as well, he will redeem us for the sake of his mercies and he will forgive our sins because he will not violate the betrothal. And the idol worshippers want to prove their closeness to God due to our distance from God when we hear them saying that we have neither a prophet nor a Temple, and they want to infer from that that therefore they are the Chosen ones. And that is the meaning of when it says: "Where did your beloved go, oh most beautiful of women."[148] That is to say: Where is that time when you were the most beautiful woman and he would perform miracles for you in all of these places? And if still now you are His preferred partner to where has He turned away? And in their saying "turned" they are hinting that He turned to other peoples. And this question is the most difficult and terrifying that a person could ask of us since because of our sins, the days (of anticipating redemption) and (the absence of) any (hopeful) prophecy have become long during our troubles, and the one who asks this has a forceful basis and sting to his question. And indeed the one who answers (the

[147] Leone da Modena, "Yisrael ve Haamim," *Leket Ketavim*, ed. Penina Naveh, (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968), 131.
[148] Song of Songs 6:1.

beloved has an answer): What good is it for you to ask about Him when you have no part in Him—for indeed you (correctly) said "your beloved" (indicating that) you have no part in those miracles and wonders! If so, if it were as you say that He abandoned me for a different nation, I say that he has not abandoned me to such a degree, but rather that my sins separate us. Because after I have clung to him and he has clung to me and the wedding was completed with the Exodus, how can He leave me if I haven't left Him? Behold, our entire basis is the contract of betrothal, i.e. the Torah, that was signed upon our joining, and this took place at the time of the Exodus. But, when the desired sign itself will come, that is the redemption, we will mention the deliverance and not (just) the sign of the deliverance and we will thank God for the coming of the Messiah and the building of the Temple. It should be soon and in our days. May this be God's will.

It is significant, in many ways, that this sermon was delivered on Pesach. First, the choice of citations and inclusion of verses from Song of Songs was very appropriate for a Passover sermon. Since it is customary to read Song of Songs on Shabbat Pesach, the references in the sermon link together the message and the holiday in a meaningful way. Second, since Pesach was a major festival on which most people would come to hear the preacher, this powerful message would have reached a large audience. Third, Pesach being the holiday of redemption, the content of Modena's message was subtle, yet profound.

Delivered to a congregation filled with people forced to live in a ghetto, marginalized by society and lacking complete freedom and equality, this sermon gave hope. Its message served as a reminder that even in difficult times, God was with the Jewish people. Modena used Jewish history and text to subtly explain that just as God was with Israel in difficult times in the past, so, too, was God with Israel as the Jewish people were forced to live behind the ghetto walls.

"Gedulatam shel Yisrael" begins with a rather bold statement: "It is well known to all that the world was created and exists for the sake of Israel." In the first paragraph, Modena established his premise that God chose Israel above all other peoples and created a relationship with Israel which caused the other nations to be jealous. Modena argued that the Exodus from Egypt, the central Pesach story, was the significant action which established Israel's primacy above all the other nations. Modena used the allegory of the king and the servant he chose as a wife to represent God's relationship with Israel. Modena likened the maiden's day of redemption from servitude to Israel's day of redemption from slavery (i.e. Pesach). By using the allegory to represent Israel's history, Modena captured the attention of his listeners. He delivered a not so subtle message in a subtle way. He explained that it was "precisely on all of the holidays, a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt" (i.e. Pesach particularly) that God's love for the Jewish people should be recognized.

Modena also cited King Solomon, whose allusion to foxes destroying vineyards spoke directly to the situation of the Italian Jews in the ghetto. Lacking power, subject to the whims of the government, the Jews, represented by the "little foxes," felt unable to protect themselves fully from the "big foxes," who came to destroy the still unripe

vineyards. Modena's message to his audience was a powerful one: *Despite the fact that we live under difficult conditions in Italy, remember, especially on this holiday of our redemption, that God took us out from worse oppression and built a relationship with us when another nation tried to destroy us. God has been with us ever since and God continues to fulfill God's part of the relationship with the Jewish people even while we live behind ghetto walls.*

"Yisrael ve Haamim" is the section of the sermon where Modena states this idea most directly. "And so she (Israel) also sought God's favor in the lengthy exile." Modena used this reference to indicate that the Jews of Italy were also living in exile. He explained that the Jewish people had survived an even more difficult exile, maintaining a relationship with God throughout. Modena's words were meant to inspire the Jewish community of the Diaspora—living in the Venice ghetto. By using the story of the Exodus from Egypt, Modena spoke about the difficult conditions under which the ghetto Jews lived, without ever having to actually denounce the Italian government or the living conditions of the Jews. "Where did your beloved go?" Modena quotes from Song of Songs. Why does it seem that your partner is hiding? Modena used this verse to explain to the Jewish people that though their lives were difficult, God had not abandoned them. God was with them even as God was invisible. At the end of the sermon, Modena pleaded for a new redemption: "It should be soon and in our days." "Because the sermon is an act of communication between a particular preacher and a particular congregation, there is usually no need for the preacher to provide the kind of information

that a chronicler, writing for an unknown distant or future audience, would have to include in his work."[149] The people of the ghetto understood what Modena meant.

It is clear that this sermon, delivered by Modena on Passover, was intended to bring comfort and hope to the people of the ghetto. Modena's use of biblical verse and sophisticated rhetorical style made him a popular preacher. As such, his messages were heard by many people.

Though his style and content were distinctly Jewish, Modena was a gifted preacher who was influenced by Christian preachers of his day. His sermons were well-received in part, perhaps, because his oratory style modeled that of his contemporaries. Modena "showed a strong attachment to Judaism, but kept an open mind toward the outside world and had a keen interest in Christianity. He often attempted to reconcile the Jewish tradition with the culture of Venice, a city he loved."[150] Modena learned from the culture outside the walls and brought his messages to the communities inside the ghetto.

The development of "the sermon" in the ghetto shows the influence of Christianity on Jewish preaching. Similar to the exchange of artistic styles and ideas which influenced architectural and musical styles within the ghetto's walls, there was clearly an exchange of homiletic styles and techniques, as well. Jewish preaching in Venice evolved in an atmosphere of Christian emphasis on preaching during church services. The exchange of ideas which took place on an individual basis, by Jewish and Christian preachers hearing one another, led to an evolution of the sermon as an art form. Homiletic style in the ghetto developed within the larger context of religious preaching in Venice.

---

[149] Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, 81.
[150] Riccardo Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice* (New York: M. Evans and Company, Inc.,1987), 172.

## VII. Conclusion

The complex status of Venice's Jewish community is one of the reasons that life in the ghetto developed into such a rich and full culture. By looking at the ghetto through several different artistic media, it is evident that the combination of Jewish cultures within the ghetto's walls enriched the community, as well as an ongoing relationship with the Venice community outside the walls. The influence of Christianity on seventeenth century Venetian Jewish culture is clear. Though the Jews adopted many ideas from their Christian neighbors, they molded and shaped them into a Jewish context.

From a sometimes tense political relationship with the Christian community, and despite forced enclosure, the Jews of Venice were central to Venice's business and economic life. Even from within the walls, the importance of the Jewish community was so strong that complete segregation or isolation never occurred. During the day, the Jews were central to Venice's shipping trade and at night, they went back to the ghetto. Essential to the functioning of the economy, the Jews, nevertheless, did not enjoy full freedom in Venice. Their identification, both self and imposed, prohibited the Jews from doing certain things, while also allowing them to enjoy certain freedoms and leniencies that the Jews of other Italian communities never could. Life in the ghetto was complicated by the insider/outsider status of its residents.

That reality is most poignantly evidenced in the writings of Venice's rabbi, Leone da Modena. Though he taught and preached with relative autonomy and even enjoyed the respect of Christian clergy and dignitaries, Modena nevertheless felt tension, at times, and even recorded feelings of danger. Following a crime in Venice, Modena reported the

backlash against the Jewish community in his autobiography. "The government agents came...On Purim the ghetto compound was closed off in order to conduct a house-to-house search...The outcry against and contempt for all Jews on the part of everyone in the city...increased as usual."[151] The pain and fear in Modena's report is clear. He continued, explaining that if there was suspicion that a Jew had been involved in a crime, the entire ghetto's status was suddenly in jeopardy. At that time, more than any other, the lack of freedom and equality between the ghettoized Jews and the outside community was felt most intensely. "For when one individual committed a crime, they [the Christians] would grow angry at the entire community, calling us a band of thieves and saying that every kind of crime is concealed in the ghetto. Ever since then...the Jews have been the object of scorn and hatred, instead of, as formerly, being loved by all."[152]

Most of the time, the Jews in the ghetto lived, though enclosed and cramped, under decent conditions. However, the recognition of being "outsiders" always lingered. It is interesting, then, that the ghetto community chose to incorporate so many of the artistic styles and genres from outside the walls. Were they hoping to curry favor with the Christian community by appearing more similar to them? Were they adopting styles which they assumed must have been elegant, since Christians employed them? Was the incorporation of Christian styles evidence that a natural sharing of ideas occurred between neighbors? Or was it a combination of all three? It seems that though the relationship of the Christian and Jewish communities waxed and waned over time, there was a consistent movement of people and ideas through the ghetto's walls.

---

[151] Modena, *Chaye Yehuda*, 144.
[152] Ibid.

The likeness of synagogue architectural styles to many of the church styles is a key to understanding the complicated insider/outsider status with which the Jews lived. Perhaps the Jews felt that by incorporating some of the contemporary styles into their own architecture, the Christians would respect the synagogues as houses of worship akin to the churches. Perhaps the Jews interacted with the outside community enough that they felt some ownership of the architectural styles of Venice. Perhaps this enclosed community, comprised of immigrants and migrants from many other countries and regions of Italy, wanted to find some uniformity within the disparate styles represented in the ghetto, and turned to the Veneto's architecture as a neutral style. Most likely, it was a combination of these goals that allowed the Jews of the ghetto to design and construct beautiful synagogues with so many elements from outside the ghetto's walls.

It seems that the same reasoning would hold true for the inclusion of music in synagogue services. The study of tshuvot helps to elucidate the issues with which Venice's Jews struggled. Their interest in incorporating elegant music into their own services, at the time that lavish music was being written for and performed in church services, can be no coincidence. The Jews wanted to demonstrate their own civility and culture in their religious services. The Jews wanted to be full citizens of Venice. And though they lived behind the ghetto's walls, often, the political climate was good enough that they may have forgotten about their "outsider" status for brief periods of time, opting then, to be "insiders." It must have been during one of these periods that the question was posed, and Modena responded, as to whether the Jews needed always to wear the distinguishing head covering, instead of removing their hats and looking like Venice's citizens.

Since the Jews' lives revolved so much around their synagogues, it is not surprising that many elements of Christian culture seeped into synagogue life, including architecture, music, clothing and preaching. While the Jews maintained a distinctly Jewish religious practice, they borrowed ideas from their neighbors to enhance their own culture. Preaching is an example of that. The sermons of the ghetto were biblical, followed a basic Jewish preaching style which incorporated biblical verses and Jewish themes, but the art of rhetoric and the emphasis on this as an art form came from outside. As a result of the importance placed on the sermon, most of them were recorded and many still exist today. Through them, we can gain a unique window onto the world in which the preacher lived. "The value of sermons as a source for the study of history is hardly a matter of debate...The pulpit served as one of the finest mirrors of contemporary events. Few issues of significance escaped the scrutiny and judgment of the clergy."[153] "Sermons...provide a crucial means for measuring the impact of ideas not merely on a small circle of original minds but also on a whole community. For those who would investigate the dynamic tensions within Jewish society, or Jewish religious practice and folk beliefs, or the institutions of Jewish leadership and the position of the rabbi, few source materials are more to the point."[154]

Thus, these artistic media, so different from one another, allow for an entrée into the world of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Venice. What was the community like? What were the significant issues of the day? What was the relationship between the Jews inside the walls and the Christian community outside the walls? These and so many other questions are addressed by an inclusive picture of the ghetto's society.

---

[153] Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, 79.
[154] Ibid, 1.

By looking at the legacies of the community that lived in the buildings and courtyards, and walked along the canals, it is possible to begin to reconstruct their society. The ghetto is rather well preserved. The synagogues still stand. Many of the writings from the time exist. Research is beginning to be done on the sermons and the religious literature of this time, but this is a relatively new field. This is "essentially an uncharted territory, a puzzle with gaping holes for which most of the pieces remain to be found."[155] By investigating the community as a whole entity, the community can be seen as a full society. With the synagogue at the center of any Diaspora Jewish community, that is a good place to start to recreate the community that occupied that holy space.

The ghetto was designed to keep the Jews enclosed, separate from the rest of Venetian society. While it was an enforced Jewish compound, the community which developed inside the walls created a rich and thriving life. The unique geographical and economic position of Venice allowed for an unforeseen relationship to develop between the people inside the ghetto's walls, and those outside. Despite tensions and problems which occurred over the years, the Jewish community in the Venice ghetto lived as both "outsiders" and "insiders" to the community at large. Their ongoing status was complex. But the community learned to adapt, blending ideas from both sides of the walls. The Jewish community of the Venice ghetto lived in a tenuous state as "insiders" and "outsiders" and created a unique culture inside the ghetto's walls.

[155] Ibid.

Amendola, Aurelio. San Pietro. Milano: Federico Molta Editori, 1998.

Bonfil, Robert. Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy. Trans. Anthony Oldcorn. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Boksenboim, Yaakov, ed. Iggerot Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Mi Modena. Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv, 1984.

Calimani, Riccardo. The Ghetto of Venice: A History. Trans. Katherine Silberblatt Wolfthal. New York: M. Evans & Co., Inc., 1987.

Cohen, Mark R., trans. and ed. The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Cristinelli, Giuseppe. Baldassare Longhena: Architetto del '600 a Venezia. Padova: Marsilio Editori, 1972.

Curiel, Roberta and Bernard Dov Cooperman. The Ghetto of Venice. New York: Rizzoli, 1990.

Davis, Robert C. and Benjamin Ravid, eds. The Jews of Early Modern Venice. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Lotz, Wolfgang. Architecture in Italy 1500-1600. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Mann, Vivian B., ed. Gardens and Ghettos. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Mann, Vivian B., ed. Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Naveh, Penina, ed. Leket Ketavim. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1968.

Pullan, Brian. The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice, 1550-1670. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1983.

Ravid, Benjamin. Economics and Toleration in Seventeenth Century Venice. Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1977.

Roth, Cecil. History of the Jews in Venice. New York: Schocken Books, 1975.

Ruderman, David B., ed. Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times, Vol. II. Chico: Scholars Press, 1985.

Ruderman, David B., ed. Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy. New York: New York University Press, 1992.

Ruderman, David B., ed. Preachers of the Italian Ghetto. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Saperstein, Marc. Jewish Preaching 1200-1800: An Anthology. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Saperstein, Marc. "Your Voice Like a Ram's Horn": Themes and Texts in Traditional Jewish Preaching. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1996.

Scully, Vincent. The Villas of Palladio. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1986.

Semenzato, Camillo. L'Architettura di Baldassare Longhena. Padova: Universita di Padova, 1954.

Simonsohn, Shlomo. "Italy." Jewish Art and Civilization, ed. Geoffrey Wigoder. Fribourg. Chartwell Books, Inc., 1972: 91-132.

Simonsohn, Shlomo, ed. Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Mi Modena: She'elot u'Tshuvot Ziknei Yehuda. Jerusalem: Mosad ha Rav Kook, 1957.

Sullam, Giovannina Reinisch. The Ghetto of Venice, Its Synagogues and Museum. Rome: Carucci Editore Roma, 1985.

Twersky, Isadore, ed. Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.

_____. The Venice Haggadah. Venice: 1609.

Wigoder, Geoffrey. The Story of the Synagogue. San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1986.

Wolfflin, Heinrich. Renaissance and Baroque. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964.