



Italian Jewish Heritage:
Knowledge, Transfer, Authorization

Invitation to Keynote Lectures

Fondazione Levi, S. Marco 2893, 30124 Venezia

Sunday, 15. September, 17:00

“Lives in the World’s Courtyard. Reflections on Jewish Venetian Heritage”

By Prof. Shaul Bassi

The keynote lecture will examine the evolution of the Ghetto of Venice over time, focusing on how the selected narratives have shaped its heritage. Prof. Bassi will draw on his own family history to illustrate the complexities of this process. His analysis will focus on certain paradoxes and misunderstandings that contribute to the paradoxical visibility and opacity of this paradigmatic space. It will also present some mildly provocative ideas on how heritage is simultaneously supporting and suffocating the living tradition of Jewish Venice. The conclusion will suggest that we are at a historical crossroads, facing a stark alternative between the dangers of over-tourism and the potential for survival through the study of the subject.

Tuesday, 17. September, 18:00

Leon Modena (1571-1648) – The First Modern Rabbi or Not?

By Dr. Sandra Anusiewicz-Baer

In 1596, William Shakespeare produced the play *The Merchant of Venice*. At its core is the best-known Jew of English literature, Shylock, the moneylender of medieval legend who seeks his pound of flesh. It is unclear whether Shakespeare was aware of the prodigy and polymath Leon Modena, a Jew who resided in Venice during the same period. Modena, who was only later in life ordained as a rabbi, was an intriguing figure and renowned among Jews and Gentiles alike. He was involved in Jewish publishing from an early stage of his career and produced a substantial corpus of writing on the art of preaching and teaching, rhymed poems in Hebrew and Italian, extensive commentary on halakhic questions in the form of responsa, and a variety of musical compositions, including dance and cantorial music. It seems reasonable to posit that, in addition to his activities in Northern Italy, Modena gained considerable renown beyond that region, potentially reaching as far as Shakespearean England. This may have led to his involvement in translating the Hebrew Bible into English and his commission to write a description of Jewish practices for King James I of England. In this presentation, we will examine various aspects of Modena's life and investigate how his renowned autobiography influenced our understanding of Jewish life in Europe during the Renaissance.