

OU Alit Program
7/25/22
A Day Inside the Venetian Ghetto I
Source Sheet

I. The Formation of the Ghetto:
A. *Cum Nimis Absurdum* 1555:

Laws and ordinances to be followed by Jews living in the Holy See [decreed by the] Bishop [of Rome, the Pope] Paul, servant of the servants of God, for future recollection.

Since it is completely senseless and inappropriate to be in a situation where Christian piety allows the Jews (whose guilt-all of their own doing-has condemned them to eternal slavery) access to our society and even to live among us; indeed, they are without gratitude to Christians, as, instead of thanks for gracious treatment, they return invective, and among themselves, instead of the slavery, which they deserve, they manage to claim superiority:

Considering that the Church of Rome tolerates these very Jews (evidence of the true Christian faith) and to this end [we declare]: that they, won over by the piety and kindness of the See, should at long last recognize their erroneous ways, and should lose no time in seeing the true light of the catholic faith, and thus to agree that while they persist in their errors, realizing that they are slaves because of their deeds, whereas Christians have been freed through our Lord God Jesus Christ, and that it is unwarranted for it to appear that the sons of free women serve the sons of maids. [Therefore,]

1. Desiring firstly, as much as we can with [the help of] God, to beneficially provide, by this [our decree] that will forever be in force, we ordain that for the rest of time, in the City as well as in other states, territories and domains of the Church of Rome itself, all Jews are to live in only one [quarter] to which there is only one entrance and from which there is but one exit, and if there is not that capacity [in one such quarter, then], in two or three or however many may be enough; [in any case] they should reside entirely side by side in designated streets and be thoroughly separate from the residences of Christians, [This is to be enforced] by our authority in the City and by that of our representatives in other states, lands and domains noted above.
2. Furthermore, in each and every state, territory and domain in which they are living, they will have only one synagogue, in its customary location, and they will construct no other new ones, nor can they own buildings. Furthermore, all of their synagogues, besides the one allowed, are to be destroyed and demolished. And the properties, which they currently own, they must sell to Christians within a period of time to be determined by the magistrates themselves.
3. Moreover, concerning the matter that Jews should be recognizable everywhere: [to this end] men must wear a hat, women, indeed, some other evident sign, yellow in color, that must not be concealed or covered by any means, and must be tightly affixed [sewn]; and

furthermore, they can not be absolved or excused from the obligation to wear the hat or other emblem of this type to any extent whatever and under any pretext whatsoever of their rank or prominence or of their ability to tolerate [this] adversity, either by a chamberlain of the Church, clerics of an Apostolic court, or their superiors, or by legates of the Holy See or their immediate subordinates.

4. Also, they may not have nurses or maids or any other Christian domestic or service by Christian women in wet-nursing or feeding their children.
5. They may not work or have work done on Sundays or on other public feast days declared by the Church.
6. Nor may they incriminate Christians in any way, or promulgate false or forged agreements.
7. And they may not presume in any way to play, eat or fraternize with Christians.
8. And those among them who are physicians, even if summoned and inquired after, cannot attend or take part in the care of Christians.
9. And they are not to be addressed as superiors [even] by poor Christians.
10. [This will be in effect] notwithstanding opposing decrees and apostolic rules, and regardless of any tolerance whatever or special rights and dispensation for these Jews [granted] by any Roman Pontiff prior to us and the aforementioned See or of their legates, or by the courts of the Church of Rome and the clergy of the Apostolic courts, or by other of their officials, no matter their import and form...

Declared at St. Mark's, Rome, in the one thousand five hundred fifty fifth year of the incarnation of Our Lord, one day prior to the Ides of July, in the first year of our Papacy.

B. The Augustinian Theory of “Witness”

“And this is the reason for his [G-d’s] forbearing to slay them [Jews]—that is for not putting an end to their existence as Jews, although they have been conquered and oppressed by the Roman; it is for fear that they should forget the Law of God and thus fail to bear convincing witness on the point I am now dealing with. Thus it was not enough for the psalmist to say, “do not slay them [Jews], lest at some time they forget your Law”, without adding, “scatter them.” For if they lived with that testimony of the scriptures only in their own land, and not everywhere, the obvious result would be that the Church, which is everywhere, would not have them available among all nations as **witnesses to the prophecies which were given beforehand concerning our Savior**”

II. Inside the Ghetto:

A. **Exceptions to the Ghetto Curfew:** Based on E. Kittel and T. Madden "Curfew Time in the Ghetto of Venice" in Benjamin Ravid, *Studies on the Jews in Venice 1382-1797*. 237-275.

1. General Exceptions:

- a. Jewish physicians who were called out to administer to the sick must provide details of the visit to the ghetto guards. These would in turn be submitted to the office of the *Cattaveri* (who oversaw ghetto activities). If they did not find everything in order, the doctor in question would be heavily fined. Physicians were also permitted to wear black hats instead of the mandatory yellow or red head coverings.
- b. Merchants who were expecting a shipment or who were departing after hours were allowed to leave. The guards were to write down their destination or place of origin to be verified by the *Cattaveri* subject to penalty if they were falsified.

2. Specific Exceptions (Granted on a Case by Case Basis). Each of these cases stipulated that the Jews in question were prohibited from sleeping outside the ghetto walls.

- a. For the purpose of proof-reading and printing Hebrew books
- b. To plead before the *Collegio* for a charter or charter extension:
- c. For the purpose of pursuing a law suit
- d. Accompanied by police officers in pursuit of a servant who robbed them.
- e. To perform or entertain in dance, music, gaming and "the like".

3. Exceptions made for Christians to be allowed into the ghetto after hours:

- a. Christian lawyers adjudicating in Jewish courts.
- b. Christians attending (musical) performances in the Jewish ghetto which lasted several hours into the night.
- c. Porters who worked in the ghetto on a daily basis were permitted to remain on the winter Sabbath until "four hours into the night" in order to perform services such as lighting fires

4. Occasions when Jews were confined to the ghetto even during the day-time:

- a. Easter Week-From holy Thursday to Holy Saturday: Why? Both from Christian perspective-not ok for jews to show themselves adorned and smirk etc at Christians during this week and also from Jewish side to avoid riots. Goes back very long way to 6 century and officially to 1215 –Lateran IV
- b. As a form of punishment or coercion for specific Jews on a case by case basis. Ie. If they owed a debt they were forbidden to leave the ghetto until they had paid it.

B. Topics for Discussion:

1. The Ghetto Republic: Jewish Self-Government in the Ghetto

- a. The collection and administration of taxes
- b. Serving as liaisons between the office of the *Cattavari, Cinque de Savi Mercatti*, and the Venetian Senate
- c. Administering the Confraternities: Burial Society, Charitable Societies, Study Groups etc.
- d. Religious Leadership:

2. Jewish Women and Family Life:

- a. Childbirth: Rituals of childbirth and attitudes towards high infant and child mortality.
- b. Childhood and early education in the ghetto:
- c. Marriage: including the average age of marriage, common marital practices, and expectations within a marriage
- d. Women on the home front:

3. Higher Education and Entertainment in the Ghetto:

- a. Jews in the University of Padua
- b. Sermons, musical entertainment, and night life in the ghetto

C. Religious Leadership in the Ghetto: An Example of a Renaissance Rabbi: R. Yehuda Aryeh (Leon) Modena:

Rav Yehuda Arhey Modena's Printed Works. From S. Simonson *Ziknei Yehudah* 15-17. (The English translation of the basic content of each work is my own).

1. סוד מרע: Venice 1595, A Dialogue on the topic of gaming (gambling). Written at the age of 13.
2. סוד ישרים: Venice 1595 (printed only in part). Includes riddles, amulets, and medicinal treatments
3. תפילות ישרים: Venice, 1622, Prayers (Hebrew Poetry)
4. צרי לנפש ומרפא לעצם: Venice 1619, Prayers for the ill
5. מעדני מלך: manuscript publicized in 1694, a Treatise on Chess
6. צמח צדק: Venice 1600 and onward, a translation of the Italian Fior di Virtu
7. שאגת אריה: In defense of the Rabbinate and rabbinic Judaism in response to כל סכל.
8. ארי נוהם: Printed in 1840, a Polemic against the study of Kabbalah
9. בן דוד: (published in Frankfurt 1854), an article against the belief in reincarnation (אמונת הגלגל)
10. מדבר יהודה: Venice 1602, Sermons
11. שירי יהודה: Philadelphia 1932, Hebrew Poetry

12. חיי יהודה: Kiev 1911, an autobiography
13. גלות יהודה: Venice 1612 A Hebrew-Italian dictionary for *Tanach*
14. פי אריה: Padua 1640, A Hebrew-Italian dictionary for post-Biblical works
15. בית לחם יהודה: Venice 1625, An index for עין יעקב
16. בית יהודה: Venice 1635, additions to עין יעקב
17. צלי אש: Venice 1629, a commentary on Don Isaac Abravanel's commentary on the *Haggadah*
18. לב אריה: Venice 1612, Instructions and advice to aid in memory preservation
19. מגן וחרב: Breslau 1856, An anti-Christian Polemic

The following were authored by Leon Modena but have either been lost, or are available primarily in manuscript form:

1. זקני יהודה: Collection of *Halakhic* Responsa
2. מלון למונחים פילוסופיים: A dictionary of philosophical concepts
3. פרשת כסף: Commentary on the Pentateuch
4. פירוש לספר שמואל: A commentary on the book of Samuel (Prophets)
5. פירוש לחלקים שונים של התנ"ך (אבד): Commentary on various parts of the Bible including Prophets and Writings (כתובים) (lost)
6. האבות ליהודה: A commentary on *Masechet Avot* (Talmud)
7. גאון יהודה (אבד): A commentary on the *Haggadah* (lost)
8. ספר פולמוס נגד הקראים (אבד): An anti-Karaite Polemic (lost)
9. Comedy Plays (lost)

D. Musical Entertainment in the Ghetto:

The following question was addressed to R. Yehuda Aryeh (Leon) Modena from Solomon deRossi (שלמה מן האדומים), author of the first printed book on Jewish music: From S. Simonson Ed. *Ziknei Yehudah*, 15-19 (*Translations are my own*).

We pose this question to one who is knowledgeable in “the wisdom of song”, that is to say in music. Six or eight knowledgeable ones of our community who will lift up their voices during the holidays and on special occasions and who would sing in praise [to God] in the synagogue. *Ein ke-Loheinu*, *Yigdal* and *Adon Olaam* etc and they calibrated their voices with the aforementioned wisdom [they formed a choir]. One man objected and wanted to have them removed claiming that it is improper to do this for to rejoice and sing and play [instruments] are forbidden since the destruction of the temple for it says “Do not rejoice oh Israel...”

Please advise us as one who is knowledgeable in *Torah* and *Halakhah* if a prohibition truly exists regarding this [forming a choir to sing in the Synagogue].

Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh's response:

...one who examines this topic [playing music/singing post the destruction] and all that has been said on it, will find that there are six distinctions to be made. [For example if instruments are engaged or not, or if it is a public affair or a private one and if the music is employed merely for purposes of revelry]. ...however if it is for the purpose of a *mitzvah* such as the case of [singing before] a bride and groom [in order to bring joy to the couple], it is completely permissible...and the same [permission] applies to anyone who wants to praise God with song in the synagogue on the Sabbath or on holidays it will be called a mitzvah just like bringing joy to a bride and groom. Indeed every Sabbath is [considered] a bride¹ and we are obligated to adorn her and bring her joy with all kinds of song...

¹ The Sabbath is welcomed with the words בואי כלה "Welcome oh Bride"