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Weinstein Prize Abstract

In June of 1541, the Levantine Jewish community of Venice, who had previously been treated as itinerant merchants by the city’s government, were allowed to take up residence within the Ghetto Vecchio along with the Ponentine (Spanish Sephardic) community. By 1589, the Levantines had completed their synagogue, called the Schola Levantina (School of the Levantines) in Venetian. This structure, rumored by some to be designed by preeminent neoclassical architect Baldassare Longhena, was a drastic evolution from the previous clandestine synagogues of the Ashkenazic, Provençal, and Italian synagogues established in the Ghetto Nuovo. This was primarily due to the pronounced influence of various secular and ecclesiastical buildings located outside the Ghetto’s walls, as well as the institution of Kabbalistic symbolism previously utilized by the Ponentines in their own synagogue. The ways in which the structure parallels and turns away from both of these sources speak to the dichotomous view the Levantines had of themselves within the city, as well as points towards the evolution of the synagogue’s role within the Jewish communities of Venice.