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## Renaissance and Reformation

### Renaissance et Réforme



# Katz, Dana E. The Jewish Ghetto and the Visual Imagination of Early Modern Venice

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Katz, Dana E.

*The Jewish Ghetto and the Visual Imagination of Early Modern Venice.*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xiii, 188. ISBN 978-1-107-16514-4 (hardcover) £75.

Following a notable study titled *The Jew in the Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), Dana Katz turns her gaze on the Venice Ghetto (founded 1516) and considers the complexities of physical marginalization and subsequent effects on both Jews looking out and Christians looking in. She provides a compact, stimulating discourse across a mere 115 pages of text. This is backed by sixty-five pages of notes and bibliography which reflect wide-ranging views about the Jews in and out of the ghettos (in Venice and elsewhere), as well as other enclosed communities of non-Jews and nuns within Venice. A fairly wide selection of archival sources is deployed. Forty in-text black-and-white illustrations support the arguments; photos, prints, and old maps, such as the well-known Jacopo de' Barbari map of 1500, and the less-noted Giovanni Merlo vast map of 1660 and 1676—a “utopian portrait” of “bounded space” that remains “unpopulated in this imagined landscape” (21, and Figs. 11, 13–16).

Unlike Ed Muir, for example, who looks at Venice from the centre outwards, Katz starts from the margins and periphery, and uses new perspectives from the inside of the ghettos. After the suggestion of the Giudecca as a site was rejected by both the *collegio* and Jewish merchants, the 1516 Ghetto Nuovo was created in remote Cannaregio as an enclosed space, bounded by canals, with gates to close in the Jews at night and Christian guards on 24-hour watch. As more Jews arrived from various parts of Europe, such enclosure meant that expansion had to be upwards in tightly packed tenements—up to nine storeys. Rich Jews tended to dwell high up, unlike rich Christians in Venice and other Italian cities. Eventually there were three segmented ghetto areas for Jews of different backgrounds; to the Ghetto Nuovo was added the Ghetto Vecchio in 1541, mainly for Italian Jews, and the Ghetto Nuovissimo in 1633, primarily for Levantine and Ponentine merchants. The uniqueness of the Venice Ghetto complex is brought out by comparisons with other ghettos, or segregations, in Rome, Florence, Candia on Crete (Fig. 40), and Frankfurt-am-Main's *Judengasse* (Fig. 19). In discussing enclosure, Katz considers the post-Tridentine enclosure of nuns and the nature of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi (established 1228 and reconstructed in

the early sixteenth century) for German merchants, and the Fondaco dei Turchi in the seventeenth century for Muslims largely in transit. Unlike with Jews, the Venetian government did not distinguish Muslims according to their origins. They seem to have been as heavily restricted and surveyed as the Jews. Inquisition evidence would buttress Katz's points about surveillance and attempted control of the Muslims and their relations with Christians.

Chapter 2, "Enclosures as Topographies of Vision," deals with "illicit varieties of viewing," when the Jews were "caught in the act of seeing, entrapped in the very moment of control," as Beatriz Colomina argues (57). So we have "Fenestral Filtering" (58–66). Jews high up in the Ghettos could have a commanding view of the Christian city, which worried the authorities and moralists. In reverse, Christians might witness immoral behaviour of Jews at windows or on balconies. Hence orders from the 1560s for outward looking windows to be blocked up, and balconies restricted. Cardinals in 1656 banned women from being at windows during Corpus Christi processions. The Jews were not entirely prevented from being observing subjects, however. Chapter 3 deals with "Windows as Sites of Visual Disturbance." On windows and their dangers, Katz interestingly quotes Shylock's comments to Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, "Clamber not you up to the casements [...] to gaze on Christian fools with varnished faces" (67). (This play's detailed and intimate knowledge of the specific Venetian situation suggests to some the influence of Venetians of Jewish origin—like the author Amelia Bassano Lanier at the Elizabethan court.) Jewish use of window space to look out was judged blasphemous, with Jews accused of "committing irreverent acts against Christ and Christians" (76). For all the 24-hour surveillance and gate-locking, the Venetian ghettos were porous, as the famous Rabbi Leon Modena noted in the seventeenth century. During daytime, Jews and Christians could come and go (and sometimes stay on the wrong side). Levantine Jews, as merchants in the ghetto complex, needed to deal with goods from the east, and given their value to the Republic, officials could approve night-time gate-opening for cargoes, which also enabled smuggling. Moreover, night-time enclosure facilitated Jewish entertainment within the ghetto. Singers were allowed out at night to entertain in the Christian *palazzi*, as exemplified by Rachel Hebra Cantarina in 1609, and again in 1613 (when also singing from a gondola) (108–10). Doctors were called out of the ghetto at night, and might misuse their license by staying out longer, as Sanudo noted in 1516 (153n60). Jews could also get permission to leave the ghetto during plague periods. The

long-standing church campaigns to prevent sexual relations between Christians and Jews were unsuccessful. Jewish women's reputed sensuality, carnality, and attractiveness were much feared and publicly voiced—as noted by visitors like Thomas Coryat and John Evelyn. Venice had long advocated heavy fines for sexual contact but the extent of imposition is not yet well documented. Partly following Beatriz Colomina, Katz maintains that “the ghetto evolved as an institution of exclusion that regulated Jewish sexuality, but such an exclusion of sexuality itself became a sexual act in that it aroused in the Christian imagination an explicit world of Jewish carnality” (110).

This book is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the nature of ghettoization and Christian-Jewish relations, with stimulating new visions of Venetian urban architecture, spatial relations, and social contexts. Beneficially, the author takes us beyond Venice with wider comparisons and contrasts, thus emphasizing Venetian particularity.

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**Kreitzer, Beth, ed.**

***Luke.***

Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament, 3. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015. Pp. lv, 573 + 1 map. ISBN 978-0-83-8-2966-8 (hardcover) US\$45.

The twenty-eight-volume Reformation Commentary on Scripture series parallels an earlier venture drawn from ancient church sources. A guide provides general usage instructions for the entire series and specific chronological definitions of the era, although there is no explicit delineation of geographical bounds. Material appears from Western Europe plus Bohemia; however, items from Scandinavia are absent, although the region appears on the map included with the appendices. Not only individuals but also twenty-one documents are quoted. This edition comprises an impressive breadth of traditions beyond the usual Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed suspects (minus John Knox).

A key advantage of this commentary is that both academic and pastoral users (perhaps the latter particularly) may escape the “echo chamber”