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Minorities' Memory: From the Venice Ghetto to the Holocaust

While Italy is often represented as especially benevolent towards the Jews and a sort of paradise for Italian Jews we should not forget that exactly 500 years ago it invented the first ghetto in history. The word "ghetto" was born in Venice in 1516 to indicate the neighborhood in which Jews were to be forcedly segregated, and in 1555 the ghetto of Rome was created. Centuries later, based also on a centuries-old tradition of Catholic anti-Judaism and on a more recent strand of racism reinforced also by its colonial experience Fascism introduced the 1938 "racial laws" expelling Jews from Italian society and creating a status of apartheid for the Italian Jewish community. Finally in 1943-45 Italy enforced the "final solution" during the German occupation and following the creation of the fascist Republic of Salò. Italian Jewish history through the centuries is also a history of persecution in specific sites now being rediscovered: from the Venice Ghetto to the fascist and nazi transit camp of Fossoli di Carpi near Modena, Italian prelude to Auschwitz.

Simon Levis Sullam teaches Contemporary History at the University of Venice Ca' Foscari. He studied Italian political history in XIXth and XXth centuries, History of Jews, History of antisemitism and Holocaust History.