

THE JEWS, THE MEDICI, AND THE GHETTO OF FLORENCE

History, Identity, Culture, and Segregation



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History, Identity, Culture, and Segregation

edited by
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AND THE GHETTO OF FLORENCE
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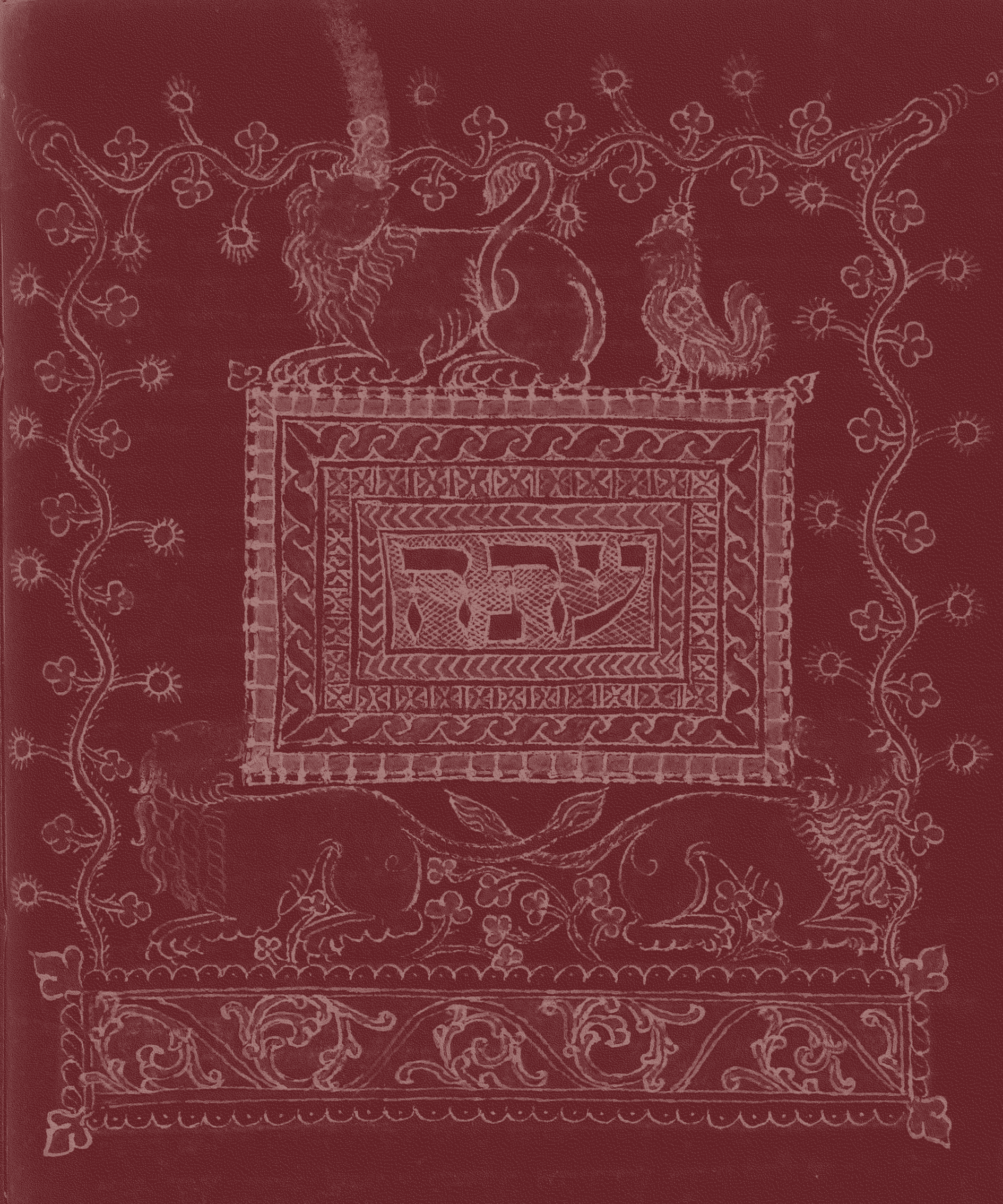
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Rooms of the exhibition
The Colours of Judaism in Italy, Florence,
The Uffizi Galleries,
27 June-
27 October 2019

Jewish Culture in the Uffizi’s Past and Present

The fact that we are opening the year 5784 of the Jewish calendar with a major exhibition at the Uffizi on the history of the Jews and Judaism in Florence is primarily thanks to the studies on the topic that have been carried out over the last century, and in particular thanks to the extremely interesting and extensive research done by The Medici Archive Project: the results of over a decade of study are presented here for the first time. This is our third collaboration with the Florence-based American foundation, which works on Tuscan, and above all Medici history, linking it to the rest of the world using documents in the Archivio di Stato and other archives in the city as a starting point. The interwoven archival data and material heritage has already led to important and unexpected results in the joint exhibitions: *A Hundred Lanzi for the Prince* (2019), on the presence of the landsknechts at the Medici Court, and “*The Greatness of the Universe*” in the Art of Giovanna Garzoni (2020) on the art and life of the great seventeenth-century painter.

The exhibition about to open its doors also takes up the theme of the history of Judaism in Italy previously explored in the magnificent exhibition *All the Colours of Judaism in Italy*, which attracted almost a million visitors to the Uffizi between 27 June and 27 October 2019 (to be precise, 923,749). The triumph of masterpieces of textile art from the past, often adapted for reuse in synagogues and brought together for the first time for the event, was completed by historical and sociological studies on the role of the Jews in the professions linked to the creation and production of fabrics, but also, and above all, of the secondary market for the products between the Middle Ages and Modernity. In addition, the exhibition was part of a programme of study and appreciation of the treasures of other religions, or at least beliefs other than Catholicism, kept among the heritage of the Uffizi Galleries: a fortunate globalism due specifically to the vast – and far from prejudiced – interests of the Medici including, first and foremost, those of Cardinal Leopoldo during the seventeenth century. Many works of art of this genre that the Medici collected were included in the exhibitions *Portraits of the Reformation. Luther and Cranach in the Medici Collections* (from 31 October 2017 to 4 February 2018) and *Islamic Art and Florence from the Medici to the 20th century* (from 22 June to 23 September 2018).

By combining objects and themes linked to the celebration of beauty and the fundamental contribution of Judaism and Jews to the Italian culture and history, we also aimed to balance and enrich the topics linked to International Holocaust Remembrance Day, an occasion for which the Uffizi Galleries has organised a study day every year since 2016. Just a few months ago, through the exhibition *Rudolf Levy (1875-1944). Work and Exile*, seen by 247,435 visitors from 24 January to 30 April 2023, we endeavoured to combine two aspects: the celebration of creativity and beauty in the works of the pupil of Matisse – a truly important figure throughout Europe – and the terror of the *Shoah*, brought into sharp focus by the cruel fate of the painter, who was deported from Florence to Auschwitz and killed upon arrival if not already during the journey on the train.

The Jews, the Medici, and the Ghetto of Florence also has dual historical and cultural significance. The foundation of the ghetto in 1570 forms a fundamental chapter in the history of Jews in Florence and their relationship with the Medici. Before this time, and during the segregation, the interactions between the Jewish community and the wider population formed a complex, undoubtedly difficult relationship, but one that was not without fruitful exchanges. Some extraordinary stories are now told here for the first time in a comprehensive and deeply-moving way, such as the one of the Jewish painter Jona Ostiglio, who worked for the Grand Ducal Court and Florentine nobility in the seventeenth century, and the one of the explorer and merchant of precious stones Moisè Vita Cafsuto. In the hope that you enjoy the exhibition and the catalogue, I would like to add a wish that in the not-too-distant future a similar initiative can also be devoted to all the smaller centres of Jewish faith and culture in Tuscany, such as Pitigliano, Monte San Savino, Siena, Pisa and, to the largest one, Livorno, which, thanks to the Livornine Laws, issued only a few years after the ghettoisation in Florence, anticipated the emancipation by a few centuries.

Eike D. Schmidt

Director of the Uffizi Galleries



The Ghetto of Florence and the Origins of an Exhibition

This exhibition devoted to the Jewish Ghetto of Florence is the culmination of a period of intense and cutting-edge scholarly research embarked on by the Medici Archive Project more than a decade ago. In 2013, thanks to the pioneering support of E. Robert Goodkind and the late Eugene M. Grant, the Jewish History Program was founded with the aim of bringing to the fore the Jewish presence in the epistolary archive of the Medici Grand Dukes (*Mediceo del Principato*), housed at the Archivio di Stato in Florence. Directed by Piergabriele Mancuso since its inception, scholars of all walks of academic life have been uncovering and valorising thousands of letters that describe both the everyday life and extraordinary events of Jews in Tuscany and around the world. Transcriptions, summaries, and digitised images of archival documents are available on the Medici Archive Project online digital portal (mia.medici.org).

Over the years, this research programme has organised numerous lectures, educational activities, institutional collaborations, digital projects and, above all, important publications. This extraordinary corpus of research complemented and advanced the seminal publications on Florentine Jewry by Umberto Cassuto (1918) and Stefanie B. Siegmund (2006).

In 2016, an extraordinary discovery was made: over two hundred manuscripts from the Medici real estate archives (*Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*) detailing the foundation and development of the Florentine Ghetto. These volumes include the names of all the residents of the ghetto; the detailed blueprints of every space within the complex; and the records of every single professional activity that took place therein. Along with the letters in the *Mediceo del Principato*, this treasure trove of documentary material constitutes the scholarly foundation of this exhibition, co-curated, along with Piergabriele Mancuso, by Alice S. Legé and Sefy Hendler.

In recent years, the Medici Archive Project received important support from a great number of foundations and individuals. Our deepest gratitude goes to Michele Tocci (David Berg Foundation); Gail Binderman (Norman E. Alexander Family G Foundation); Edouard Sterngold (Shifting Vision); Sid and Ruth Lapidus; Andrea, Carolyn, and Terry Grant (Eugene and Emily Grant Family Foundation); Richard Kobrin; and Dario Disegni (Fondazione Beni Culturali Ebraici in Italia).

After *Cento lanzi per il Principe* (2019) and the *“La grandezza dell’universo” nell’arte di Giovanna Garzoni* (2020), this exhibition marks the third collaboration between the Gallerie degli Uffizi and the Medici Archive Project. Together with the curators, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Eike D. Schmidt and his staff.

Special recognition for the work on this catalogue goes to Laura Belforte and Sillabe.

The Medici Archive Project would not exist without the guidance and support of its board members. My gratitude goes to Nicole Bourgois, Joshua Dick, Elizabeth Fama, Sheila ffolliott, Antonia Fondaras, Artur Kluz, Joan McClure, Joanna Milstein, Andrew Moses, Robert B. Strassler, Julia Vicioso, Howard C. Yang and, especially, George T. Frampton, Jr, who has wisely and impeccably led this research institute for more than a decade.

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Alessio Assonitis

Director of the Medici Archive Project



Memory and Stories of the Florentine Jews: The Contribution of an Exhibition

The centuries of ghetto life represent a central chapter in the history of the Jewish presence in Florence – a history that probably originated in the early Middle Ages, but is documented from the Medici period, with the first *condotte* granted in 1437 by Cosimo the Elder. This complex central chapter is characterised by the segregation rules modelled on the system of government and control found in the Roman Ghetto, and is at the same time symbol of a form of official “inclusion” in the civic fabric of Florence. The ghetto was next to the Mercato Vecchio (now Piazza della Repubblica), at that time the pulsing commercial heart of the city, spatially equidistant from the Duomo and Palazzo Vecchio, the former being the epicentre of the Church’s spiritual power, and the latter that of the Medici.

The ghetto was an instrument of oppression but also, paradoxically and in a manner not dissimilar from what happened in the Ghetto of Venice, a place where the life and growth of the community were possible. It is undoubtedly a period of history that – despite the demolitions and the cancellation of the physical presence of the place – needs to be studied carefully, especially if we want to understand the dynamics and characteristics of the relationship that linked the Jewish minority to the city.

In the rapid change of the very concept of citizenship and of residence that is recorded today in Florence as in any other centre of contemporary Europe, the history of this small community offers an important look at the ways, times and spaces of coexistence, covering every possible nuance of the broad spectrum ranging from segregation to assimilation; from the almost hidden presence of small family communities to the official creation of places of residence; from active participation in the political development of the community to the accusation of connivance with the enemy; from the creation of the walls of the ghetto to their destruction; from a presence that tries to make itself invisible to the sumptuous creation of the Tempio Maggiore; from normalisation that becomes a melting pot, to the opposite extreme of “scientific” racism and state persecution.

Florentine Jews witnessed all this and more. The long phase of existence of the Ghetto of Florence represents a fundamental element for the preservation and analysis of this memory, which is important in itself, but also as a contribution to understanding the mechanisms of present-day and future coexistence.

All the more reason, therefore, that the study carried out by the Medici Archive Project and the organisation of this exhibition are fundamental, taking place in one of the most distinguished and most representative cultural institutions of our country, namely, the Uffizi Galleries and Palazzo Pitti. For this reason, the Jewish Community of Florence is proud to participate in this initiative and to have actively collaborated with the curators and organisers of this exhibition.

Enrico Fink

President of the Jewish Community of Florence



The Ghetto of Florence: Recovery and Preservation of a Piece of Memory

The Jews, the Medici, and the Ghetto of Florence, curated by Piergabriele Mancuso, Alice S. Legé and Sefy Hendler, provides an extraordinary opportunity to learn more about the history of the Florentine Jewish community and the ghetto, from its establishment by Cosimo I de' Medici in 1570 to its demolition in the nineteenth century. This exhibition illustrates in an in-depth and original way the relations between the Jews and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany during centuries of conflict as well as their fruitful cultural interaction.

The Fondazione per i Beni Culturali Ebraici in Italia (FBCEI) is delighted and honoured to have been able to contribute to this exceptional exhibition by supporting the creation of the three-dimensional reconstruction of the ghetto, which provides a very precise view of the variety of living conditions within this urban complex, in a context where very small and poor dwellings coexisted alongside apartments of considerable size on several floors, with heated bathrooms, cellars, covered loggias and terraces. No less important is the work that enabled the reconstruction of the Italian and Levantine-Sephardic synagogues and the *mikveh*.

The FBCEI's support for the exhibition fits perfectly into the framework of its institutional aims. Since 1986, the year of its establishment by the Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane (UCEI), the foundation has been working to safeguard and promote the vast artistic and cultural heritage of Jewish Italy, an integral part of Italian history and culture. This immense and ancient patrimony is spread all over the peninsula, even in the regions of southern and insular Italy, where Jews have not lived for centuries. The work of recovery, conservation, restoration and valorisation includes the most diverse types of cultural, religious, archaeological, archival, bibliographic and musical patrimony, with the task of disseminating knowledge in Italy and abroad. This widespread and deep-rooted memory in this country is marked by a presence that has lasted over 2,200 years. The foundation is therefore working to ensure that this varied and extensive patrimony is safeguarded, valorised and known, aware that only culture and knowledge are capable of fighting intolerance and prejudice. *The Jews, the Medici, and the Ghetto of Florence* therefore represents a prestigious milestone in the FBCEI's journey as well as an initiative rooted in scholarly excellence. For this reason, I renew my sincere gratitude and lively appreciation to the promoters and to all those who have collaborated on this project.

Dario Disegni

President of the Fondazione per i Beni Culturali Ebraici in Italia



The Medici and “Their” Jews. Defining a Historical Itinerary through the Paradigm of the Ghetto of Florence

Piergabriele Mancuso, Alice S. Legé and Sefy Hendler,
co-curators of the exhibition

The Jewish Ghetto of Florence is one of the great absentees from the Florentine Renaissance narrative. Considering its founding father, Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, its central location at the heart of the city, between the Duomo and Palazzo della Signoria, and its political and religious role, the ghetto was scarcely studied, certainly if compared with its Venetian and Roman counterparts. While the place and function of the Ghettos of Venice and Rome are seen as an essential part of the history of the two cities, the Florentine Ghetto remains an isolated incident, hardly considered as a major factor when examining the urban space located in the heart of the city. The reasons for this lacuna are numerous, starting with its destruction at the end of the nineteenth century. Yet, we find it is necessary to reintegrate the story of the ghetto with that of Medici Florence. With the help of new archival discoveries and a 3D reconstruction of the ghetto we can propose a new approach to its history and importance for our understanding of Florence, its culture and politics.

This exhibition brings to the fore the results of a long process of research promoted by the Medici Archive Project begun exactly ten years ago with the establishment of the *Eugene Grant Jewish History Program*, whose goal is to study the role of the Jewish minority in the context of the Medici State, with a particular emphasis on Cosimo I's rule, through the analysis of a vast archival patrimony. The nucleus of this initiative has been the study of the Ghetto of Florence, from two very different perspectives: as a place of segregation and as a component in the Medici real estate patrimony. Their ownership of the ghetto and the consequent existence of rich archival sources, largely housed at the Archivio di Stato in Florence, were an authentic gold mine of information. Thanks to a team of scholars, architects, architectural historians and engineers it has been possible to reconstruct the Ghetto of Florence not only in its structural appearance but also in its demographic, cultural, and economic dimensions, with a focus on the relations between the Jewish quarter and the rest of the city.

From its foundation, in 1570, the Ghetto of Florence was certainly a place of segregation and social exclusion for Jews, but also the site of a variegated human microcosm that gave life to complex processes of internal interaction, also with the social majority. In the six sections of the exhibition and in the fifteen essays in the catalogue, the narratives of three themes are interwoven: the Jews, the Medici, and the spatiality of the ghetto. Against the background of political contexts in continuous transformation, these three elements weave relations that were subject to the social climate and historical conditions, here explored through a variety of objects.

As well as presenting to the public the digital and 3D reconstruction of the ghetto, the exhibition seeks to recount the story of the ghetto and its communities. Starting from 1437, the year when Cosimo the Elder allowed