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Syracuse University

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Abstract: This dissertation studies cross-cultural exchanges of material goods in order to better understand early modern encounters between subjects of Venice and the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt. It focuses on the period 1480 to 1517, when the ascendant Portuguese and Ottoman empires began to alter the balance of power in both the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean. Venetian merchants had by this time established communities in Egypt and the Levant in their search for pepper and other spices, and periodically called in ambassadors to intervene with the Mamluk sultans on their behalf. An examination of gift giving and other exchanges of goods among diplomats, merchants, pilgrims, consuls, and translators therefore serves as a window into the relationship between Venetian and Mamluk subjects in the turbulent years prior to the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517. Making use of anthropological and sociological literature on reciprocity and interaction rituals, this project studies the symbolism contained in the objects exchanged, analyzes the ways in which different transactions constituted communicative acts, and scrutinizes the language of the sources to assess why observers chose to define transactions as licit or illicit. In doing so, it reframes ongoing debates about the Mediterranean, which dispute whether the region constituted an area of cultural confrontation or a shared zone of tolerance. This study reappraises that debate and takes a new position recognizing coexistence while also conceding that harmony was frequently punctuated by bloody moments of ethnic strife. The subjects of Venice and Egypt used objects to interact and communicate in a time of crisis, but with mixed results. Material exchanges at times helped foster cooperation and coexistence, and at other times went awry, engendering hostility between the members of these two regimes.

CONTENTIOUS COEXISTENCE: THE FUNCTION OF MATERIAL EXCHANGES IN
VENETIAN-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS ON THE EVE OF THE OTTOMAN CONQUEST
(1480-1517)

by

Jesse J. Hysell

M. Phil., Syracuse University, 2014
B.A., Ohio Wesleyan University, 2008
M.A., Western Michigan University, 2011

Dissertation

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Table of Contents

List of Illustrations . . .	vii
Abbreviations . . .	viii
Introduction: . . .	1
Chapter One: Improvisation and Communication in Material Diplomacy: The Circulation of Gifts between Venice and Cairo . . .	28
Chapter Two: Trading across Empires: Collusion and Conflict between the Venetian Merchant Nation and the Mamluks . . .	85
Chapter Three: From Tribute to Courtesy: Gifts, Favors, and Extortion in Venice's Pilgrim Trade with the Mamluks . . .	127
Chapter Four: Between Thrift and Largesse: The Role of the Consuls in Mamluk-Venetian Material Exchanges . . .	166
Chapter Five: Translation and Betrayal: Dragomans in the Service of Venice and the Mamluks . . .	200
Epilogue: The Twilight of Contentious Coexistence . . .	234
Appendix . . .	253
Bibliography . . .	266
Vita . . .	285

List of Illustrations

<i>Figure 1: Cut Velvet, Early Fifteenth Century</i>	43
<i>Figure 2: Section from a length of velvet, The Metropolitan Museum of Art</i>	45
<i>Figure 3: Giovanni Mansueti, Episodi della Vita di San Marco, Gallerie dell'Accademia</i>	51
<i>Figure 4: Detail from Episodi della Vita di San Marco</i>	52
<i>Figure 5: Depiction of the Sultan, Woodcut from Die Pilgerfahrt des Ritters Arnold von Harff</i>	59
<i>Figure 6: Map</i>	92
<i>Figure 7: Glass Serving Flask</i>	159
<i>Figure 8: Arabic Alphabet Woodcut, From the Pilgrimage of Bernhard Breydenbach</i>	204

Abbreviations

ASI	<i>Archivio Storico Italiano</i>
ASVe	Archivio di Stato di Venezia
AV	<i>Archivio Veneto</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
Correr	Biblioteca del Museo Correr
IS	<i>Journal of the Society of Italian Studies</i>
Marciana	Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana
MSR	<i>Mamluk Studies Review</i>
QV	<i>Quaderni Veneti</i>
RIS	<i>Rerum Italicarum Scriptores</i>
SOCC	<i>Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea</i>
SV	<i>Studi Veneziani</i>

Introduction

That's a fault. That handkerchief
 Did an Egyptian to my mother give;
 She was a charmer and could almost read
 The thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it,
 'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
 Entirely to her love; but if she lost it
 Or made gift of it, my father's eye
 Should hold her loathed and his spirits should hunt
 After new fancies. She dying gave it me,
 And bid me when my fate would have me wive,
 To give it her. I did so, and take heed on't:
 Make it a darling, like your precious eye.
 To lose't or give't away were such perdition
 As nothing else could match.

Othello, Act 3, Scene 4

In the climactic scene of *Othello*, the eponymous protagonist strangles Desdemona, his noble Venetian bride, in a fit of jealous rage. He believes that she has committed adultery, only to discover too late that his lieutenant, not his wife, has betrayed him. Set in Venice and its client kingdom of Cyprus in the sixteenth century, the play explores themes of identity, jealousy, and betrayal.¹ *Othello*, a Moorish soldier in Venetian service, is in the end ruined by his own misplaced trust in his friend Iago, who has fabricated evidence of Desdemona's infidelity by planting her handkerchief on another man. The exchange of a single, simple gift drives the actions of the characters and allows the awful tragedy to fully unfold toward its bloody conclusion. Material goods not only alter the course of literary plotlines but also history itself.

¹ On Shakespeare's presentation of cultural encounters, particularly in the Venetian settings of *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*, see Geraldo de Sousa, *Shakespeare's Cross-Cultural Encounters* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

Objects of all kinds, as the Bard so brilliantly recognized, affect human interactions in countless subtle ways and their exchange governs, both formally and informally, many aspects of social relations.

Shakespeare was equally cognizant of the fact that Venetians had long traveled widely throughout the Mediterranean and traded with the many different societies that occupied its shores. In the fifteenth century, the merchants of Venice nurtured especially close relations with the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and the Levant, where they had established a number of small expatriate communities.² Situated at the central axis of both east-west Mediterranean and north-south transalpine trade routes, Venice functioned as a pivotal entrepôt, having become the primary supplier of Indian Ocean spices such as pepper, cloves, and cardamom, which arrived at European markets via the Red Sea. Correspondingly, the republic's oligarchs kept a watchful eye on affairs in Egypt and the Levant, continually dispatching diplomatic envoys to the sultans in Cairo to safeguard Venetian economic interests in moments of perceived instability.

The political and economic aspects of this relationship necessarily overlapped and complemented one another, with commerce incentivizing stable relations and ambassadorial engagement helping to maintain them.³ Yet in spite of what has been described as a "perfect equilibrium" between diplomacy and trade, one finds the official Venetian documentary record interspersed with regular complaints of aggressive extortion perpetrated by corrupt Egyptian officials.⁴ How then did business continue and even thrive in such ostensibly difficult conditions? Through the lens of material exchanges, this project examines cases of conflict and

² Francesco Gabrieli, "Venezia e i Mamelucchi," in *Venezia e l'oriente* ed. Agostino Pertusi (Venice: Sansoni, 1963), 417-432; Deborah Howard, "Venice and the Mamluks," in *Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797*, ed. Stefano Carboni (New York: Yale University Press, 2007), 75-89. For an overview of Venice's overseas communities in the eastern Mediterranean, see Benjamin Arbel, "Venice's Maritime Empire in the Early Modern Period," in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400-1797*, ed. Eric R. Dursteler (Boston: Brill, 2013), 125-253.

³ Maria Pedani, et al., *Venezia e l'Egitto* (Milan: Skira, 2011), 107.

⁴ Ibid.

cooperation during the last years of the Mamluk regime (1480-1517) in order to understand how the subjects of these two seemingly disparate states, a Christian republic of merchant mariners and a vast land-based Islamic sultanate of slave-warriors, attempted to negotiate and resolve points of friction in a period of intense crisis.

By analyzing the records concerned with ambassadorial missions, business transactions, consular administration, and pilgrim voyages during these fateful years, this study argues that varying perceptions of gifts, bribes, and extortions shaped some of the central aspects Venetian-Egyptian relations. Commodities regularly passed between Venetian and Mamluk subjects—through trading, but also through transactions presented in the sources as ceremonial diplomatic offerings, illicit payments to officials, and illegal seizures.⁵ Those exchanges held together the entire trans-imperial enterprise that linked Venice to Cairo. Often, such transactions functioned as communicative performances, transcending the cultural divide more easily than words. Arriving at a mutual consensus about what constituted a licit versus an illicit dealing was, however, a delicate process, and the relationship remained fragile in even the best of circumstances. An examination of gifts, bribes, and extortions as contingent categories coexisting on a continuum of material exchanges draws attention to the factors that facilitated the partnership between Venetians and Egyptians and better explains how the links in this great chain of cross-cultural interaction sometimes came undone.

Because of the potent symbolism that objects possessed in these cases, a substantial portion of the project requires an in-depth analysis of the specific items that were exchanged. Each chapter offers a survey of the goods involved at each level of the Venetian-Mamluk

⁵ I here use Malinowski's definition of "ceremonial" to mean any act that is public, occurring under the observance of formalities, carrying obligations, and possessing a sociological, religious, or magical character. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (New York: Dutton, 1961), 95.

encounter, from the high politics of diplomatic undertakings to the quotidian level of face-to-face bargaining between merchants, pilgrims, and translators. In addition, a comprehensive table of all such objects that were exchanged can be found in the appendix. The purpose of this is twofold: first, by reconstructing the rich and varied roles of goods in both facilitating and constraining the outcome of those encounters, this project aims to underscore their critical importance as a kind of communicative currency and represents a contribution to the history of material culture; second, by reframing the encounter narrative with a consideration of material exchanges, it offers a way to better explain the paradox of contentious coexistence that characterized interactions between Muslims and Christians in the early modern Mediterranean.

This study concentrates on the final decades of the Venetian-Mamluk alliance for a number of reasons. At the turn of the sixteenth century, both Venice and Egypt faced severe external political and economic problems, and their increasingly desperate circumstances heightened the frequency of confrontations between them. At this time the trading networks in which Venice and the Mamluk Sultanate collaborated began to collapse.⁶ The most obvious problem at the close of the century was that, with the revolution in sailing technology pioneered by the monarchs of the Iberian Peninsula, an older medieval long-distance economic system was coming to be subsumed into a larger and more truly global economy. Word of Vasco da Gama's rounding of the Cape of Good Hope in 1497 came as grave tidings to the Mamluk regime.⁷ By 1502, Portuguese vessels had begun coordinated attacks on Muslim shipping in the Indian Ocean as they established their first outposts on its shores, interrupting the flow of spices into the Red

⁶ Cf. Benamin Arbel, "The Last Decades of Venice's Trade with the Mamluks," *MSR* 8, no. 2 (2004): 87-86; Palmira Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 27-50.

⁷ Doris Behrens-Abuseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 109.

Sea. For the same reason, when news of the arrival in Lisbon of the first Portuguese spice fleets from India reached Venice, panic and despair broke out among the merchants at the Rialto.⁸ The virtual monopoly on the pepper trade hitherto enjoyed by Venice and Cairo, many feared, had been shattered.

At the same time, both powers faced far more pressing threats closer to home. The Serenissima's *terraferma* mainland empire, which had grown rapidly in the 1400s, suddenly came under new threat from neighboring Italian states. These, together with their Borgia and Valois allies, would in 1508 succeed in establishing a powerful anti-Venetian alliance, the League of Cambrai.⁹ Across the sea, the Mamluk Empire, while plagued by internecine wars against the Bedouin tribesmen who roamed throughout its desert territories, also struggled against petty border lords such as the chieftains (*begs*) of the Turkic Dhū'l-Qādrids who

⁸ Marin Sanudo, *Diarii*, ed. Rinaldo Fulin et al. (Venice: F. Visentini 1879-1902), XVI, 6; Arturo Segre and Roberto Cessi, eds., *I Diarii di Girolamo Priuli: (AA. 1494-1512)*, vol. 2, in Giosue Carducci, Vittorio Fiorini, and Pietro Fedele, eds., *RIS: Raccolta degli Storici italiani dal cinquecento al millecinquecento ordinata da L. A. Muratori, Nuova Edizione* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1921), vol. 24, part 3, 169, 171.

“The King of Portugal undertook this Calicut voyage each year, and it was the ruin of the state and city of Venice. . . and given that this new route was discovered by the King of Portugal, and that the spices had to come from Calicut, Cochin, and other places, from India to Alexandria or Beirut and thereafter to Venice, and in place of Venice it captured thereafter all the world by buying spices and bringing gold, silver, and other merchandise, whence with its money it was able to sustain every war; now, when the King of Portugal has found this new route, all the spices that had formerly gone through Cairo, all went to Portugal by way of the caravels that go to India, Calicut, and other places to take them, and as a result the Venetians could not obtain spices, either in Alexandria or Beirut. And spices went lacking in Venice, except in very small amounts, and little by little that supply dwindled to nothing.” (My translation.)

“Questo viazo de Cholochut ogni anno per il Re di Portogallo se frequentava, et fo la ruina del Stato et citade veneta;” “Donde che essendo stato trovato questo novo viazo per il Re di Portogallo et che le spetie, quale doveanno venir da Cholochut, Cuzim et altri lochi de India in Alexandria over Barutti et *postea* venir a Venetia, et in questo locho venetto capitava *postea* tutto il mondo per comprar simel spetierie et portavano lo auro, lo argento et ogni altra marchantia, dove *cum* il danaro se poteva sustentare ogni guerra, ahora, essendo trovato questo novo viazo per il Re di Portogallo, tute le spetiere, quale tendevano la volta del Chaiero, tute capiteranno in Portogallo per le charavelle, che anderanno in l'India a Cholochut et altri lochi a prenderle, et in questo modo li Venetiani non potranno aver spetie nè in Alexandria nè a Barutti, et, manchando le spetie a Venetiam, tranno far chossa che bona sia, et a pocho a pocho se conveniranno consumar et pervenir in niente.” Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 2, 169, 171.

⁹ Robert Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 280-282.

dominated southeastern Anatolia.¹⁰ The situation at the sultanate's northern salient became even less stable in 1501 when a messianic figure, the thirteen year-old Ismail Safavi, conquered Isfahan and proclaimed himself shah of a resurrected Persian Empire.¹¹ The charismatic youth's adherence to a millenarian form of Twelver Shi'ism, coupled with a series of stunning victories on the battlefield, threatened the established order in Egypt and the Levant, associated as it was with Sunni orthodoxy.¹² At the same time, the forces of the Ottoman sultans posed an ever-greater threat throughout the eastern Mediterranean to both Mamluk and Venetian possessions. Venice and Cairo could not seriously consider the idea of using military force to resolve their differences in such a turbulent climate. The complex and at times contradictory interactions witnessed between subjects of both empires, characterized by both tolerance and antagonism, were due in part to the absolute refusal of the rulers of either Egypt or Venice to go to war.

This project explores the impact of material exchanges on Venetian-Mamluk relations in a period of heightening crisis from three angles of inquiry. First, it seeks to survey and describe the commodities themselves in order to learn how members of the two societies perceived, engaged with, and catered to one another's tastes. This sheds light on the ways in which people from both regimes used goods to express or validate their collective identities. Second, it interrogates the language of the sources to analyze the terminology of gifts, bribes, and

¹⁰ Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamluk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 24.

¹¹ On Ismail's ascendancy, see Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: The Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 13-25.

¹² Markus Dressler, "Inventing Orthodoxy: Competing Claims for Authority and Legitimacy in the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict," in *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Hakan T. Karateke (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 151-173.

The rise of Ismail even became something of a cause célèbre in the European courts of Christian princes who readily conflated the young shah's emergence with the legends of Prester John. On Ismail's image in the west, see Palmira Brummett, "The Myth of Shah Ismail Safavi: Political Rhetoric and "Divine" Kingship," in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays*, ed. John V. Tolan (New York: Routledge, 2000), 331-359; Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) 231-7.

extortions, demonstrating them to be points on a single spectrum of ambivalent exchanges open to a range of varying interpretations. Third, it attempts to interpret these exchanges as forms of nonverbal communication, operating on the premise that such transactions could express amity, anger, or submission, and could help avert outright violence. Yet, like words, they could also be misread, heightening misunderstanding and antagonism between Venetians and Egyptians.

For many years this aspect of early modern cross-cultural exchanges has been neglected. True, the historiography of early modern Muslim-Christian encounters does reflect the long presence of Italian maritime states in the eastern Mediterranean, having especially focused on contacts between Venice and Istanbul. Indeed, the subject of interactions between the Republic of San Marco and the Ottoman Empire has probably garnered greater attention than Turkish relations with any other European power.¹³ But these examinations have consisted, for the most part, of either intellectual histories of perceptions of “the Turk” among western authors, or broad surveys of changes in Venetian-Ottoman political and economic relations. A third and only relatively recent line of inquiry has made use of a more diverse body of sources to explore encounters between Ottoman and Venetian subjects as they occurred “on the ground.” The

¹³ Lucette Valensi, *The Birth of the Despot: Venice and the Sublime Porte* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Kenneth M. Setton, *Venice, Austria, and the Turks in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1991); Maria Fusaro, *Political Economies of Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean: The Decline of Venice and the Rise of England, 1450-1700* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Arbel, “Operating Trading Networks in Times of War: A Sixteenth-Century Venetian Patrician Between Public Service and Levant Trade”, in S. Faroqhi & G. Veinstein (eds.), *Merchants in the Ottoman Empire* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008): 23-33; Maria Pedani, “In nome del Gran Signore: Inviati ottomani a Venezia dalla caduta di Costantinopoli alla guerra di Candia,” *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 9 (1994): 281-284. Maria Pedani, “Ottoman Merchants in the Adriatic: Trade and Smuggling,” *Acta Histriae* 16 (2008): 155-172; Ronald C. Jennings, *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World, 1571-1640* (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Anna Contadini and Claire Norton, *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013); Andrei Pippidi, *Visions of the Ottoman World in Renaissance Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

Some examples of non-Venetianist scholarship on Ottoman-European interactions include Kate Fleet, *European and Islamic Trade in the Early Ottoman State: The Merchants of Genoa and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

illuminating results of Eric R. Dursteler's *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Natalie Rothman's *Brokering Empire: Transimperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul*, and Molly Greene's *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* demonstrate the importance of incorporating a number of small-scale case studies into a larger narrative. This project's methodology derives in part from those in this latter group, which have adeptly drawn from an array of governmental, commercial, autobiographical and diplomatic records to analyze points of quotidian cross-cultural interaction between the Serenissima and the Sublime Porte.

The history of Venetian relations with the Mamluk Sultanate, extending from the date of 'Izzudin Aybak's establishment of the regime in 1250 to the Turkish conquest of 1517, holds second rank behind that of relations between Venice and Istanbul as an object of scholarly attention. But as with studies of Venetian-Ottoman interactions, the bulk of this scholarship has an either purely political or purely economic focus. Some notable exceptions to this historiographic trend from the past several years exist, such as Georg Christ's *Trading Conflicts: Venetian and Mamluk Officials in Late Medieval Alexandria*, Francisco Apellániz's *Pouvoir e Finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne: le deuxième État mamelouk et le commerce des épices (1382-1517)*, and Doris Behrens-Abuseif's *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World*.¹⁴ Each of these authors has explored Venetian-Mamluk relations by making use of diverse sets of commercial and diplomatic data. Unlike the present study, however, Apellániz, and Behrens-Abuseif embrace a much wider scope, looking at a far larger historical period and also considering Mamluk interactions with

¹⁴ Georg Christ, *Trading Conflicts: Venetian and Mamluk Officials in Late Medieval Alexandria* (Boston: Brill, 2012); Francisco Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne: le deuxième État mamelouk et le commerce des épices (1382-1517)* (Barcelona: CSIC, 2009); Behrens-Abuseif, *Practising Diplomacy*.

non-Venetians. Christ, on the other hand, has produced a micro-history that assesses conditions for a handful of Venetians dwelling in Alexandria between 1418 and 1420. This study instead occupies a niche between these two methodological extremes, insofar as it embraces a moderate geographic and chronological scope encompassing events of a single generation that occurred across Egypt and the Levant. Such an approach is important because it sheds light on how the opening of the Atlantic trade routes and the rise of the Ottomans affected conditions both for the rulers of the two regimes and for individuals in the eastern Mediterranean, while also offering a more global perspective from which to view the changing fortunes of the Mediterranean and the Venetian empire, caught between east and west.

Of course any study of European Christians' interactions with Muslims must at the outset consider the viability of the terms "East" and "West." Among other points of debate that have emerged since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, an ongoing discussion surrounds the soundness of projecting his framework onto an earlier period. In his now classic essay, Said famously condemned what he outlined as an insidious system of discourse about non-Europeans that facilitated Western domination of the Middle East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁵ Subsequent attempts to apply his model to the Middle Ages and Renaissance have met with criticism from some, such as James G. Harper, who have pointed out that the peoples of Western Europe in earlier periods did not engage in colonialist enterprises on par with the great overseas enterprises of the modern era.¹⁶ On the contrary, they point out that it was instead often the European states that were on the defensive against Muslim powers, such as the Ottomans, who enjoyed technological and military superiority well into the 1500s. Still

¹⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3-6.

¹⁶ James G. Harper, introduction to *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye*, ed. James G. Harper (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 1-18.

others have taken issue with the very premise of an early modern East-West dichotomy, as Europe in general, and Western Europe in particular, was (paraphrasing Metternich) a mere geographic expression prior to about the fifteenth century.¹⁷ Although scholars are not likely to reach a consensus on these points any time soon, one must address these because they concern some of the basic epistemological foundations of research into early modern encounters.

The present study acknowledges the limitations of using *Orientalism* in an early modern context while also recognizing the validity of several of Said's principal contributions. In the first place, a conscious use of the descriptors "western" and "eastern" has been adopted in subsequent pages, but solely where it is geographically appropriate and with attentiveness to the above caveats. The following chapters have been written with a deep awareness that the power balance between Islamic and Christian regimes prior to the seventeenth century was far different from the period that Said examined, and far less favorably skewed toward the latter. Even so, it is nonetheless true that any depiction of a foreign culture will contain elements of what Said called "positional superiority," or the attempt by an author to present outsiders as symmetrically opposed yet diametrically inferior to the self.¹⁸ With that in mind, however, even the most heavily biased accounts merit study. That is because they offer information not only about perceptions from a "western imaginary" that they might offer, but also because they can still contain an enormous degree of veracity, however interspersed with misconceptions and half-truths such details might be. For that reason, this project has sought to make use of both varieties of material, weaving more empirical evidence about Muslim-Christian interactions together with

¹⁷ Martin W. Lewis and Karen Wigen identified at least seven different meanings of the term "The West" and eight different meanings of "The East" and "The Orient." Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 49-62.

¹⁸ Cf. Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 21. "Every time we make others part of a "reality" that we alone invent, denying their creativity by usurping the right to create, we *use* those people and their way of life and make them subservient to themselves."

“engaged representations” of the Mamluk Sultanate into the larger narrative fabric of Mediterranean history.¹⁹

To be sure, care must be taken with the terminology applied to the groups under discussion here. Although the rulers of the Mamluk Sultanate possessed a coherent identity as members of the Circassian Burji dynasty, they governed an enormous, heterogeneous empire that was composed not only of Muslim Arabs, but also nomadic Bedouins, Syrian, Coptic, and Armenian Christians, Jews, Turkmen, Druze, and Kurds. By the same token, though a portion of Venice’s male inhabitants could consider themselves patricians or citizens, the range of persons who by varying degrees belonged to the Republic of San Marco at this time included Greeks, Jews, Slavs, Albanians, and other Italians.²⁰ In short, because the two regimes reigned over multi-lingual, multi-ethnic societies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it makes little historical sense to assume that the people mentioned in the sources would have identified as Venetian or Mamluk. Preference is given to the designations “Venetian subjects” and “Mamluk subjects” wherever individuals cannot be unequivocally identified as Venetian citizens, patricians, or Circassian Mamluks.

Within the context of Mediterranean studies more generally, a related issue concerns the degree to which the region ought to be understood as either a zone of sharp ethnic boundaries or

¹⁹ The phrase was coined by Stephen Greenblatt. See Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

²⁰ The Venetian nobility at this time was divided into three classes, collectively known as the patriciate (*Patriziato Veneto*): The old houses (*case vecchie*) were composed of members from the original twelve families who, according to legend, participated in the first ducal election of 697, called *apostoliche*; another twelve families present in the lagoon before 800, called *evangeliste*; the new houses (*case nuove*), who had risen to prominence after 800; and the newest houses (*casate nuovissime*), granted membership in the nobility after the War of Chioggia in 1380. Noblemen were identified by the title *nobilis* or, in Venetian, *ser*.

Venetian citizens (*cittadini originari*) belonged to a distinct class separate from the patriciate that claimed specifically assigned civic rights within the republic. This group was further divided between *cittadini de intus*, who had rights in the city of Venice, and *cittadini de intus et extra*, who held the right to participate in overseas commerce. After 1486, candidates for citizenship had to demonstrate proof of legitimate descent. Andrea Da Mosto, *L'Archivio di stato di Venezia; indice generale, storico, descrittivo ed analitico* (Rome: Biblioteca d'arte editrice, 1937), 70, 73.

as a space of cross-cultural coexistence. The former, often dubbed the “Clash of Civilizations” model, was originally inspired by monographs such as Norman Daniel’s *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (1960) and R. W. Southern’s *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (1962), though later expounded more forcefully in the writings of Samuel P. Huntington and Bernard Lewis.²¹ The alternative, which has been called the “Global Village Model,” draws perhaps its greatest inspiration from Fernand Braudel’s magisterial *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*.²² The vast breadth and depth of *The Mediterranean*, characteristics that were to become hallmarks of Annaliste scholarship, have allowed Braudel’s ideas to resonate in a wide range of research areas, including cultural exchange and coexistence, as in Richard Bulliet’s *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* and in Molly Greene’s *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean*.²³ This project assumes a middle position that accepts the view of widespread coexistence while also conceding that such harmony was frequently punctuated by moments of antagonism and violence. In other words, it explores the mechanisms of pragmatic coexistence and at the same time explains where and why such mechanisms failed to prevent intercultural conflict. To that end, this study applies several underutilized anthropological and sociological

²¹ R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1960); in his 1990 article, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” Bernard Lewis argued that a struggle between rival systems of thought, Islam and Christianity, had characterized the last fourteen centuries. The term was later popularized by the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington in a 1993 essay, in which he argued that religion will play a larger role in the post Cold War era than political ideology. Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 266, no. 3 (1990): 47-60. Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49.

²² Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). The phrase “Global Village Model” is discussed by Harper, introduction to *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye*, 1-18.

²³ Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

theories of rituals of exchange and social interaction to examples of Venetian-Mamluk encounters.²⁴

One of the most germane of these contributions comes from Bronisław Malinowski, the Polish anthropologist who was among the first to suggest that giving and trading ought to be understood as coexisting on a spectrum of various forms of material exchanges. Forced unexpectedly to remain in the Trobriand Islands of Papua New Guinea for the duration of World War I, Malinowski's years in exile led him to develop a keen understanding of the annual rituals that connected the scattered communities of the archipelago. He observed that a specific set of practices, which he labeled the *kula* ring of exchange, functioned as a vast and highly refined social mechanism that bound the islanders to one another within networks of reciprocal obligations. As a result of his field studies in Melanesia, Malinowski was able to make a compelling argument in *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) that gifts were the prime factor in upholding social structures beyond the family unit in pre-industrial ("primitive") societies. At the same time, he was also one of the earliest writers to note the degree of artificiality involved in distinguishing gift giving from related transactions, asserting that "it is impossible to draw any fixed line between trade on the one hand, and exchange of gifts on the other."²⁵ Malinowski's work influenced subsequent literature on exchange rituals, above all within the functionalist school of anthropology, by suggesting that gifts constituted but one part

²⁴ On the use of ritual in the study of early modern history, see Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), as well as his *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1991). On the use of ritual as a concept among anthropologists, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). See also the issues raised in Geoffrey Koziol, "The Dangers of Polemic: Is Ritual Still an Interesting Topic of Historical Study?" *Early Medieval Europe* 11, no. 4 (2002): 367-368.

²⁵ Malinowski, *Argonauts*, 176.

of a vast system of exchange that served the needs of individuals while binding them together through mutual obligation.

His writings most immediately impacted Marcel Mauss, who used *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* to inform his 1925 essay, *The Gift*.²⁶ Mauss, nephew and pupil of Émile Durkheim, saw giving as an inherently self-interested practice that structured much of human behavior. He underlined that self-interest through a lengthy meditation on the potlatch exchange rituals among the tribes of the Pacific Northwest, in which he argued that the old Roman maxim *do ut des* (“I give so that you give”) could be found underpinning all types of exchanges, including even those that appeared on the surface to be altruistic donations. Mauss reflected further upon the instrumentality of giving as a means of conflict avoidance than Malinowski, positing that the exchange of goods enables communication and contact between peoples as an alternative to war. “In order to trade, man must first lay down his spear,” he wrote in his discussion of potlatch, “it is only then that people can create, can satisfy their interests mutually and define them without recourse to arms.”²⁷ Mauss emphasized, moreover, that goods were sociological artifacts necessary to reconstruct the composition of any society completely. In seminars, Mauss would display a Hopi prayer feather to his students as the starting point for exploring the essential aspects of Hopi civilization. That single feather, he said, could unlock information about the tribe’s commercial networks, kinship structures, religious practices, and village life. This project takes Mauss’s principles a step further by using exchanges of goods *between* cultures to make similar revelations. It sees goods as instrumental parts of a system of exchanges designed by participants to arrive at concrete self-interested ends, and suggests that

²⁶ Marcel Mauss and W. D. Halls, trans., *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge, 2002).

²⁷ Mauss, *The Gift*, 80.

their movement reveals much about how groups expressed collective identity and related to their political and commercial partners.

In the 1960s, Marshall Sahlins elaborated on the ideas of Mauss and Malinowski, and posited the notion of a continuum of different types of exchanges distinguished by varying degrees of reciprocity. “The spirit of exchange,” he wrote, “swings from disinterested concern for the other party through mutuality to self-interest.”²⁸ Unlike Mauss, for whom “no gift is freely given,” Sahlins insisted that certain distinct, observable characteristics separated the “pure gift” from other more profit-oriented forms of exchange.²⁹ The level of altruistic generosity present, what he called the “sidedness” of a transaction, made the crucial difference. In the kind of spectrum he proposed, negative reciprocity denoted self-interested exchanges, positive reciprocity stood for truly altruistic giving, and a balanced reciprocity stood between them. At a theoretical level, these are indeed useful heuristic devices for organizing abstract concepts, but one cannot adhere too closely to this model when dealing with the type of real-world evidence used in this project. Based on a meticulous examination of the language of Venetian-Mamluk exchanges, the subsequent chapters in fact challenge some of Sahlins’ interpretations, in particular by rejecting the notion of a discrete barrier between “barter” and pure gift” and focusing instead on the subjective, constructed nature of such categories.³⁰

Sociologist Erving Goffman’s writing offers a more useful theoretical avenue on interaction rituals, especially his work on self-presentation behavior. In his essay, “On Face-Work,” he surveyed the mechanisms of “interchange,” a term he used for the process

²⁸ Marshall Sahlins, “On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange,” in *The Relevance of Models for Social Anthropology*, ed. Michael Banton (London: Routledge, 2004), 146-7.

²⁹ Mauss, *The Gift*, 1.

³⁰ Sahlins, “On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange,” 146.

by which two parties restored social equilibrium in moments of crisis.³¹ Gift exchange in Goffman's conceptualization constituted a kind of "ceremonial contest" or ritualized "expression game" in which players "lead themselves into duels, and wait for a round of shots to go wide of their mark before embracing their opponents."³² There is room for posturing, threats, and mock-battle, but the participants remain cognizant of their interdependence and never aim to actually destroy their adversaries. This project applies these ideas about such strategic methods of interaction to the case of material exchanges between Mamluk and Venetian subjects. It is perhaps most obvious in ambassadorial interactions involving ostentatious presentation rituals, "the performance of face-work," effectively competitive engagements that ultimately benefited the reputation of the sultanate and the Serenissima.³³ A certain game-like character is discernably present in Venetian-Egyptian exchange practices, which, as Goffman noted, could allow the two groups to reaffirm their own collective identity and might without causing their partners to lose face.

These chapters take additional inspiration from the ideas laid out by the historian Richard White in *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*. In this monograph, White called attention to the role of ceremonial gifts in determining the course of French relations with the Algonquians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. White believed that presents such as service medals and calumet pipes promoted stability, cooperation, and compromise where force of arms would have failed. Situating ceremonial exchanges within an ambiguous zone between gift and barter, he argued that prior to France's defeat in the Seven Years' War these transactions allowed French colonials and Algonquian

³¹ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face to Face Behavior* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 19.

³² Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 31.

³³ Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 31.

tribesmen to achieve mutual economic and political aims. Through those objects, they succeeded in creating a relatively stable confederacy, conducting the fur trade and presenting joint resistance to the encroachment of the British and their Iroquois allies. The French and Algonquians achieved the best results when, at the village level, members of the two groups agreed that their exchanges met the criteria of fairness (*bon marché*). It was only when the administration of New France denied chiefs the gifts they expected, and thereby denied them the wherewithal to maintain prestige in their villages, that warriors acted independently, violent encounters occurred, and the confederation unraveled.³⁴ These aspects of White's approach, which proved groundbreaking in the field of colonial American history, can also be applied to other cases of early modern encounters and have done much to illuminate the findings of the present study.

An investigation into points of material contact between Venetian and Mamluk subjects can best be achieved by engaging with a rich combination of ambassadorial, mercantile, and religious documents. These sources include Venetian ambassadorial "relations" (*relazioni*) and dispatches as well as unofficial documentation such as merchant correspondence and travel narratives. There are other equally important details to be gleaned from the passages of traditional narrative chronicles and diaries composed in Venice, especially that of Marin Sanudo, which occasionally include redactions of entire letters from visitors to the eastern Mediterranean. The massive fifty-eight volume *Diarii* of the graphomaniacal patrician Marin Sanudo (1466-1536) extend from 1496 to 1533 and offer transcriptions of letters and speeches by merchants and ambassadors as well as many stray pieces of information concerning Egypt. Sanudo wrote prolifically in the vain belief that he would one day be named the state historian, only to see the

³⁴ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 205-7.

honor bestowed on his rival, the humanist Pietro Bembo, in the last years of his life. What's more, the Venetian government forced Sanudo to grant Bembo access to the *Diarii* to aid in the production of his own *Historia Veneta*. Sanudo, who felt "it is necessary to write everything," and who insisted that his text "contains all the truth" and "comprises everything that happened" must, however, be read with meticulous scrutiny.³⁵ His challenging prose at times becomes quite ambiguous, seemingly in a deliberate effort to obscure the author's exact meaning, and although he presented himself as a savvy and well-informed member of the political establishment, he was in fact a political outsider.³⁶ Sanudo's difficult and vague style requires that his writing always be interpreted with care, and balanced alongside additional sources wherever possible.

Fortunately, Sanudo's diaries can be weighed against histories of three other Venetians active at the turn of the sixteenth century: Pietro Dolfín, Domenico Malipiero, and Girolamo Priuli. Unfortunately, although each of their texts contains some material relating to the Mamluk Sultanate, only Priuli's is comparable in scope to that of Sanudo. His *Diarii* originally covered the period from 1494 to 1512, but the volumes for August 1506 to June 1509 have been lost.³⁷ It was Priuli who recorded the horrified reaction of the merchants at the Rialto in 1499 upon receiving news of the Portuguese voyages to the Indian Ocean, and he who made the pessimistic but incorrect prediction that this would spell the immediate doom of the Venetian economy.³⁸ As with Sanudo, however, Priuli presents the researcher with information that has been filtered through the diarist's own rather insular perspective, as he was concerned mainly with politics near to home. Yet, when the scattered pieces from Priuli's writings are taken together with

³⁵ Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 276.

³⁶ Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 13.

³⁷ Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 9.

³⁸ Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1973), 285.

Sanudo's diaries, one can compile an impressive quantity of letters and public notices (*avvisi*) pertaining to affairs in the eastern Mediterranean.³⁹

Mamluk sources are considerably scarcer for this period, although the historian Muhammad Ibn Iyas (1468-1517) provides an important Egyptian perspective and can help fill gaps in the Venetian record through his chronicle, *Bada'i al-Zuhur fi Waqa'i al-Duhur* ("Marvels Blossoming among Incidents of the Epochs").⁴⁰ Additional voices of Mamluk leaders can be found scattered throughout the archival records of the Venetian Senate for the Quattrocento, as the government of Venice made every effort to preserve copies of treaties with Cairo as well as correspondence from sultans and lesser officials. This same collection of governmental deliberations (*deliberazioni*) adds an additional source layer to the project as it includes official discussions of affairs in the eastern Mediterranean and correspondence pertaining to Venetian embassies in the Mamluk Sultanate. The information found in the *deliberazioni* was especially useful in informing the opening chapter of this study.

This project is organized around the five different perspectives offered up by different visitors to the Mamluk Sultanate: ambassadors, merchants, consuls, pilgrims, and translators. Various episodes of gift giving, extortion, and trade will serve as case studies to be used in building a complete image of each of these figures in turn. Chapter One, "Improvisation and Communication in Material Diplomacy: The Circulation of Gifts between Venice and Cairo," looks at the presents that the two regimes exchanged on three Venetian ambassadorial missions to Cairo in 1489, 1502, and 1512. This chapter considers the use of a recurring pattern of gifts,

³⁹ Mario Infelise, "From Merchants' Letters to Handwritten Political *avvisi*: Notes on the Origins of Public Information," in *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 33.

⁴⁰ Muhammad Ibn Iyas and Muhammad Mustafa, *بدائع الزهور في وقائع الدهور (Badā'i al-zuhūr fī waqā'i al-duhūr)*, five volumes, (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣrīyah al-Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 1982).

including silks and other textiles; furs; robes; and cheese; and explores how such commodities functioned at the heart of diplomatic interchange. It also examines the counter-gifts that the sultans sent to the ducal court at the conclusion of every ambassadorial mission, which included porcelain, balsam, incense, exotic spices, and sugar, and reveals that the two regimes had very different messages to convey in their offerings. The holdings of the Archivio di Stato di Venezia, the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, and the Biblioteca del Museo Correr in Venice contain a wealth of information on Venetian-Mamluk transactions, including substantial material concerned with Venetian ambassadorial affairs in Cairo.⁴¹ As Jacob Burckhardt remarked, “every Venetian away from home was a born spy for his government,” and it was standard practice for diplomats returning to Venice to deliver oral and written accounts of their experiences.⁴² Since the purpose was to brief the audience on current affairs, those reports were delivered only to officeholders in the upper echelons of the patriciate and treated as state secrets. A variety of details found their way into such reports, which could touch on topics as diverse as geography, economic developments, social customs, and domestic politics. Unlike pilgrim narratives and most other travel literature, which sought to entertain and encourage a devout readership, *relazioni* were intended to educate the leaders of the merchant oligarchy. The myth of the Venetian diplomat as a selfless and tireless servant to the *patria*, however, must be kept in mind when reading their texts.⁴³ The letters and reports adhered to a standardized form and could be framed in deliberately misleading and self-serving language presenting the authors as gracefully adroit negotiators who remained calm in the face of adversity. They are, nevertheless,

⁴¹ These do not belong precisely to the same genre as the type of *relazioni* that became more refined from the mid-1500s on, and which became well-known by attracting the attention of historian Leopold von Ranke.

⁴² Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1999), 44. Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 57.

⁴³ Douglas Biow, *Doctors, Ambassadors, Secretaries: Humanism and Professions in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 107.

invaluable eyewitness sources. With insights borrowed from Goffman, Chapter One shows that although diplomatic transactions followed a tightly scripted pattern, participants nevertheless found room to deviate from established protocol according to the exigencies of the moment.

Chapter Two, “Trading across Empires: Collusion and Conflict between the Venetian Merchant Nation and the Mamluks,” examines commercial conflicts, particularly instances of fraud, extortion, and bribery, between Venetian merchants and Mamluk subjects in Alexandria, Beirut, and Damascus. This chapter is concerned above all with disputes over commercial shipments of commodities such as pepper, coral, cloves, and cloth. The Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASVe) possesses a substantial collection of documents once belonging to merchants active in Syria and Egypt. Ranging from simple notes recording a purchase to detailed instructions for business partners that extend over several folios, most of these are held in the collections of the *Procuratori di San Marco*, a group of state officials within the republic whose duties included acting as trustees and estate executors.⁴⁴ At the governmental level, the ASVe possesses a set of capitularies, the so-called *Libri del Cottimo* of Beirut and Alexandria, which chronicle events in the Mamluk Sultanate and the various decisions made by the Senate, the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia* (a council of five patricians responsible for overseeing maritime trade) for the well-being of the Venetian communities there, and other magistracies. A more diffuse assortment of information on the Levant trade can be found in the records of the Senate’s *Deliberazioni*, especially the *Mar* deliberations concerned with maritime affairs. These contain occasional discussions of economically or politically significant events in the Mamluk Sultanate and reflections on their impact on Venetian merchants. In addition, the registers of the Senate’s

⁴⁴ ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, *de citra*, b. 197, ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, *Misti*, b. 161.

On the *Procuratori di San Marco*, see Andrea Da Mosto, *L'Archivio di stato di Venezia*, 25. Reinhold C. Mueller, “The Procuratori di San Marco and the Venetian Credit Market: A Study of the Development of Credit and Banking in the Trecento,” *The Journal of Economic History* XXX, no. 1 (1970): 240-43.

Deliberazioni Secreti and the *Commemoriali* contain a few treaties between Venice and Cairo, alongside several translated copies of Arabic letters dispatched to the Venetian government by sultans and emirs. Finally, Marin Sanudo, Girolamo Priuli, and Pietro Dolfín devoted substantial portions of their histories to mercantile affairs in the eastern Mediterranean, often including transcriptions of entire letters from merchants overseas. Relying on insights from Malinowski and Mauss, this section demonstrates that Venetian merchants exploited existing trade regulations of both powers to maximize their profit. For their part, depending on the situation, Mamluk subjects may have seen certain acts of “extortion” and “fraud” as legitimate efforts to recover debts owed to them.

Chapter Three, “Gifts, Favors, and Extortion in Venice’s Pilgrim Trade with the Mamluks,” analyzes the Serenissima’s involvement in the pilgrim traffic to the Holy Land and the role of material goods in shaping pilgrims’ experiences there. This focuses on the use of goods, such as food, crystal and glassware, and cash, which functioned as “courtesies” (*cortesie*) paid to Mamluk officials in exchange for their cooperation. This section makes use of both edited pilgrim narratives by Venetians, Italians, and northern Europeans written between 1480 and 1517, as well as a 1501 pilgrim guide, the *Viazo al Sancto Iherusalem* by Niccolò da Poggibonsi, an incunabulum complete with exquisite woodcut images of holy sites in the eastern Mediterranean, now held by the Fondazione Giorgio Cini on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore. Further information comes from a capitulary of Venetian legislation on oversight of the pilgrim industry held at the ASVe (*Ufficiali al Cattaver*, b. 2-3), and from the senatorial *Deliberazioni Secreti*. All of this material allows for a full survey of the problems of the pilgrim industry, including Venetian extortion and exploitation of the pilgrims, while also helping to chart the decline of pilgrimage to the eastern Mediterranean generally in this period. Venetians themselves

did not travel to the eastern Mediterranean solely for material gain or for political reasons, however, and another relevant set of sources for this project concern pilgrims to the Holy Land. For this, there is Francesco Soranzo's *Trattato di Terra Santa e dell'Oriente* and Barbon Morosini's *Peregrinagio*. Suriano was a Franciscan friar who traveled throughout the Mamluk dominions, eventually taking a position as guardian of Mount Sion, a hospital for pilgrims in Jerusalem. Morosini, on the other hand, was a wealthy trader from a prosperous merchant family who accompanied the Venetian trade convoys (*mude*) to Syria in 1514 and from there journeyed on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where he in fact lodged with Suriano.⁴⁵ Pilgrim texts, however, require cautious scrutiny. The venerable tradition of voyaging to Palestine extends back to antiquity, and guides for pilgrims as a literary genre had existed for centuries. This fact makes both of the travel narratives composed by Venetians on pilgrimage useful as well as potentially deceptive. Far more than diplomatic or commercial sources, the authors of these texts wanted to entertain their audiences and to fit their descriptions within a well-established set of conventions. Nevertheless, these are still useful for providing a sense of what the general perceptions of the author and audience may have been. By assembling a composite image of the pilgrim industry from these numerous sources, Chapter Three reveals that while Venice and Cairo sought to minimize the damage to their international prestige by controlling pilgrimage, those efforts at regulation were undone by the unscrupulous activities of their own subjects. Even so, conflict more frequently arose as a result of the travellers' own misperceptions and miscommunications than because of Venetian or Mamluk greed.

Chapter Four, "Between Thrift and Largesse: The Role of the Consuls in Mamluk-Venetian Material Exchanges," examines the status of resident Venetian consuls charged with

⁴⁵ Libero Cruciani, "Barbone Morosini: pellegrinaggio in Terra Santa (pilgrimage in the Holy Land)," SOCC 33 (2000): 251-336.

representing their merchant communities in foreign cities. This chapter analyzes a unique type of gift, the robe of honor, which Mamluk sultans gave to consuls as a mark of their special relationship with the Egyptian ruler. For the consular perspective, this section examines the letters of Pietro Zen, the consul in Damascus from 1508-1510. Zen interceded with the Mamluks on Venice's behalf, but was ultimately disgraced and imprisoned in Cairo in 1511 on charges of spying for Shah Ismail of Persia.⁴⁶ A codex with his letters, including correspondence with the Senate, the Doge, Mamluk officials, and the shah, is held at the Biblioteca del Museo Correr, catalogued as Ms. PDC 975. Placed in the situation of serving two masters could sometimes produce spectacularly disastrous results for the men elected to this office. The uniquely liminal point of view afforded by the Zen correspondence will therefore afford a useful counterbalance to the more secure perspective of the ambassadors. The results of this chapter indicate that significant differences distinguished consuls from ambassadors. Consuls did not enjoy full legal immunity and protection, and, unlike other government agents, received a salary from both the government of Venice and the sultan in Cairo.⁴⁷ The chapter argues that problems in consular administration stemmed from the responsibilities over material exchanges required by their office, which spread them too thinly and bound these liminal frontier agents into the service of more interests than they could feasibly placate.

The closing chapter, "The Role of Dragomans in the Service of Venice and the Mamluks," explores the central role of translating agents in influencing the success or failure of material interactions between their clients. Venetians secured the help of dragomans through

⁴⁶ Benjamin Lellouch and Nicolas Michel, Introduction to *Conquête Ottomane De L'Égypte (1517): Arrière-Plan, Impact, Échos* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 107. Deborah Howard, *Venice & the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture, 1100-1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 32.

⁴⁷ Olivia Remie Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World: Lodging, Trade, and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 284.

gifts (such as cloth, candies, robes of honor, and cash) while the dragomans themselves frequently used similar gift-giving strategies to fulfill the duties of their office. This relies on travelers' experiences with dragomans in the sources described in the previous four chapters. Each of these actors – diplomats, merchants, pilgrims, and consuls – had unique positive and negative interactions with their translators, and so it is important to consider what this kaleidoscopic range of interactions reveals about Venetian-Mamluk relations. The chapter contends that it is incorrect to regard dragomans as passive interlocutors cut off from the reins of power, because their interstitial positions at critical points of contact between Mamluks and foreigners could give them immense power, particularly in the case of Taghriberdi, the grand dragoman of the sultan. Visitors needed to secure their goodwill, and that support came in the form of gifts of cash and commodities. Yet by occupying an ambiguous middle space, translators exposed themselves to uncertainty and antagonism from their clients. Translators' ability to transcend boundaries and to defy easy categorization, the very same qualities that enabled them to succeed in their profession, could also mark them as threatening, untrustworthy enemies.

The experiences of these five sets of figures casts light onto how individuals and societies used material objects to communicate when words failed. The methodology involves highlighting and interrogating areas in the documentary record that the original authors treated as inconsequential or straightforward occurrences. Often, historical research can illuminate hitherto overlooked truths only by focusing on the linguistic ambiguity in the sources. At times, this requires a reexamination of even well-trodden material that other readers have previously taken for granted or passed over as self-explanatory. One must keep in mind that although writers often portrayed gifts, bribes, and extortions as discrete categories in the texts, such simplistic nomenclature could mask far more complex realities. With an eye to the indistinct boundaries

between gift giving, bribery, and extortion, this project reappraises these acts as a form of communication, and demonstrates that material exchanges of all kinds constituted an unwritten, often mutually beneficial diplomatic-commercial protocol that was open to multiple interpretations.

At a turbulent moment when the Republic of Venice and the Mamluk Sultanate came under attack, their subjects relied on gift giving and related forms of material diplomacy to maintain their alliance. The patterns of reciprocity in which they participated, which involved assigning symbolic meanings to goods, allowed for a freer expression of ideas of power and dependence. In studying their relationship, this project builds upon existing scholarship concerned with Venetian-Mamluk history by focusing on the specific role of material goods, suggesting that the exchange of objects – the cement of social bonds – allowed the two groups to “speak” to one another in ways that words could not. This adds to scholarship on gift giving and intercultural communication by applying a specific set of theoretical contributions from those fields to concrete historical examples of cross-cultural exchanges between Christians and Muslims. Whereas the insights offered by these scholars have proven of remarkable use to studies of contemporary exchange practices within communities, only rarely have their ideas been applied to historical examples of exchanges between cultures. In these ways, the present study enhances our understanding not only of diplomacy and commerce in the early modern Mediterranean, but also of the significance of material goods in influencing historical changes in Muslim-Christian relations.

This project illuminates the range of choices that Venetian and Mamluk subjects used to negotiate and communicate by studying the metaphors contained in the objects themselves, the ways in which exchanges constituted ambivalent communicative acts, and scrutinizing how

different participants described their actions depending upon the types of meaning they wished to convey. Gifts, extortions, and bribes provided Venetian and Mamluk subjects with an invaluable set of tools to engage in cross-cultural brinkmanship. Although not always effective, such practices afforded Venetians and Mamluks vital forms of cross-cultural communication and did allow for a degree of stability in their unlikely partnership. Thus, understanding these transactions as belonging to a lexicon of material exchange provides a compelling, innovative way to study the paradox of contentious coexistence between Christians and Muslims in the Mediterranean. By situating local exchanges between Venetian and Mamluk subjects within the larger context of economic and political world systems, moreover, this project aims to approach global history on a small scale.⁴⁸ Considering the unique set of difficulties and advantages facing ambassadors, merchants, pilgrims, consuls, and translators will provide a fresh, comparative way of looking at cultural encounters in the early modern Mediterranean while also charting the changing relationship between that region and the rest of the world.

⁴⁸ “Global history on a small scale helps to unveil connections that have been forgotten and to elaborate on others that are taken for granted. . . It also encourages a multilayered analysis of the power and market relations that Sephardic merchants developed with the social and state entities with which they interacted - coreligionists, local authorities, foreign powers, and other trading communities.” Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 271.

Chapter One:

Improvisation and Communication in Material Diplomacy: The Circulation of Gifts
between Venice and Cairo

“A big, inter-tribal relationship, uniting with definite social bonds a vast area and great numbers of people, binding them with definite reciprocal obligations, making them follow minute rules and obligations in a concerted manner – the Kula is a sociological mechanism of surpassing size and complexity.” – Bronisław Malinowski⁴⁹

The day’s meeting had not gone well, but in the end the message had at least been made clear: “Please me, the sultan, or I will kill you all, and Venetians will no longer dwell in this country.”⁵⁰ According to a report preserved by Marin Sanudo, these sentiments were expressed on 22 February 1511, to two Venetian consuls, Pietro Zen and Thomà Contarini, who stood at the mercy of the enraged Qansuh al-Ghuri. When Zen, shackled from head to toe, asked if he might be unbound, the sultan replied that the chains were nothing in comparison with what awaited him.⁵¹ Having summoned these Venetian representatives to Cairo, al-Ghuri declared that his longstanding suspicions of betrayal and foreign encirclement seemed to have been finally proven true: near the fortress of Al-Bîrâ, along the banks of the Euphrates, Mamluk authorities had recently arrested a Venetian subject in the company of two ambassadors of the Persian ruler, Shah Ismâ’il.⁵² With him, the Mamluks found various letters from the shah addressed to the Signoria of Venice, the rectors of Cyprus, and the Venetian consuls of Damascus, Beirut,

⁴⁹ Malinowski, *Argonauts*, 527.

⁵⁰ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 235. “Fati el cor del soldan bon, altramente vi farò morir tutti, nè farò, più venetiani habitino in questo paexe.”

⁵¹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 212.

⁵² Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Dandolo, Prov. Div. C 975/51 (Zen Correspondence), fol. 16 r. Cf. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XI, 645-646.

Aleppo, and Tripoli.⁵³ Sultan al-Ghuri surmised that the documents proved the existence of a Persian-Venetian alliance against the Mamluks.⁵⁴ The episode soon unraveled into a disaster for Venetian-Egyptian relations, culminating in the dispatch of the last major Venetian diplomatic mission to Cairo, led by Domenico Trevisan. The mission reached a successful conclusion in 1512, but, had Trevisan's gifts failed, it is unlikely that commerce between Egypt and Venice would have continued, nor would Pietro Zen have kept his head. Here, as in previous embassies from Venice, gift giving stood at the heart of diplomatic practice and functioned as the material foundation for the two parties to voice and resolve their grievances.

A brief glance at some of the subsequent documentation concerned with the affair highlights the central place of the gift in negotiations. In response to al-Ghuri's accusations, Consul Contarini begged the sultan's forgiveness, asserted that a misunderstanding had occurred, and promised that an ambassador with gifts would come to Cairo and resolve the situation.⁵⁵ The consul wrote to the government in Venice that al-Ghuri demanded a diplomat carrying "many presents and other things," despite the fact that he and his fellow Venetians had already brought over 12,000 ducats worth of *presenti e doni* to the ruler.⁵⁶ "We are all in chains," he wrote, "we have decided to write to the Signoria because we know that an ambassador, an honored man carrying presents, will have to be sent."⁵⁷ Responding in August, the Venetian Senate voted in favor of sending a diplomat to Cairo with 2,000 ducats worth of gifts.⁵⁸ The concern that Venetian and Mamluk leadership placed on presents both here and elsewhere suggests that a special significance surrounded such objects in this particular diplomatic milieu. An

⁵³ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XI 646.

⁵⁴ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XI, 827-8.

⁵⁵ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 235; Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 214.

⁵⁶ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 234-5.

⁵⁷ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 235.

⁵⁸ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 403.

investigation into gifts as distinct political-social artifacts shows that these items and their presentation served an invaluable function in relations between Venetian and Mamluk leaders, which words alone could not have achieved.

In all three of the cases under discussion in this chapter, conflict resolution required both verbal and material forms of communication. The preoccupations with *presenti* detailed in the records from 1511 constitute only a thin section of an ongoing and extremely important pattern in diplomatic interactions between the two powers. Some of the most sensitive aspects of diplomacy, the expression of ideas that could not be easily conveyed in words, found an outlet in ambivalent exchanges of material goods. “Objects say things in situations,” notes the anthropologist Annette Weiner, that can avert immediate fighting by displacing “the power of ‘hard words.’”⁵⁹ Although goods allow partners to express their thoughts about one another, “stating the Negative with objects will not elicit the immediacy of aggressive behaviour. With objects, unlike ‘hard words’, the danger in exposure for both parties is displaced.”⁶⁰ Ambivalent exchanges, which participants could read in multiple ways, helped Venetian and Mamluk leaders to heal the rifts caused by ongoing political and commercial tensions in the eastern Mediterranean. Whenever a crisis developed between Venice and Cairo, therefore, the Signoria would dispatch a diplomatic mission to the sultan, placing special importance on the gifts because they provided a vital measure of non-verbal communication to both parties, functioning as the primary means by which ambassadors could initiate and conclude negotiations.

For the years 1480-1517, detailed records exist for three episodes of diplomatic gift exchange between the Republic of Venice and the Mamluk Sultanate. These concern the

⁵⁹ Annette B. Weiner, “From Words to Objects to Magic: Hard Words and the Boundaries of Social Interaction,” *Man* 18, no. 4 (1983): 698.

⁶⁰ Weiner, “From Words to Objects,” 698.

ambassadorial mission of 1489-90 led by Pietro Diedo, that of 1502-3 under Benedetto Sanudo, and that of Domenico Trevisan in 1512.⁶¹ The choice of each of these three individuals to lead the missions was significant in and of itself. Diedo, a seasoned politician with a distinguished record of service both overseas and on the *terraferma*, had occupied the post of *bailo* of Cyprus and been a royal advisor to Caterina Corner in the 1470s.⁶² Benedetto Sanudo had served as the consul of the Venetian community in the Levant from 1496 to 1500, held the post of *avogador di comun*, and was elected captain of Cyprus in 1506.⁶³ Domenico Trevisan, a *cavaliere* from an ancient family distinguished by the diplomatic careers of its members, had served as an ambassador to the papacy in 1488 and 1510.⁶⁴ Trevisan was also a *procuratore di San Marco*, a public office that involved acting as a trustee and estate executor. Since it required handling large amounts of money, the position of procurator was reserved for the most distinguished nobles who were deemed exceptionally trustworthy, and was second in prestige only to the office of doge.⁶⁵ Based on the respective experience of these three individuals, one can safely conclude

⁶¹ ASVe, Archivi propri degli ambasciatori, Archivio proprio Egitto, b. 1, "Lettere de S. Pietro Diedo Ambasciator al Soldan del Cairo del 1489;" Franco Rossi, ed. *Ambasciata straordinaria al sultano d'Egitto (1489-1490)* (Venice: Il Comitato editore, 1988). Giovanni Danese, "Viaggio di Benedetto Sanudo," Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana Cod. Ital. XI, 66 c. 265 r. - c. 270 v. D. Pellegrini, ed., *Relazione inedita d'un viaggio al Cairo, Giornale dell'Italiana Letteratura* 9 (1805): 99-133. Niccolò Barozzi, ed., *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan ambasciatore veneto al gran sultano del Cairo nell'anno 1512, descritto da Zaccaria Pagani* (Venice: Antonelli, 1875).

⁶² Diedo had held office numerous times in the Senate, the Council of Ten, the *Minor Consiglio*, the *Avogaria di comun*, as well as in the *Savi di terraferma* and *Savi del Consiglio*. In the year 1471, Diedo occupied the post of *bailo* of Cyprus, representing the interests of the large Venetian commercial community in Famagusta. In the 1480s, Diedo involved himself in the Republic's *terraferma* affairs, gaining military experience as *provveditore in campo* in 1482 and 1487. He served as captain of Bergamo in 1483, ambassador to Bologna and to Rimini in 1482 and captain of Verona in 1487. Rossi, introduction to *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 22.

⁶³ Franco Rossi, "Diedo, Pietro," in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani: Deodato - Di Falco* 39, ed. Alberto M. Ghisalberti (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1991).

⁶⁴ Sanudo, *Diarii*, I, 379. Sanudo, *Diarii*, III, 673. Sanudo, *Diarii*, IV, 31, 107, 141. Museo Correr, Cicogna DCCCXXXVI, Inventario n. 169, "Commissione del doge Leonardo Loredan a Benedetto Sanudo eletto capitano di Cipro."

⁶⁵ Catherine Fletcher, *Diplomacy in Renaissance Rome: The Rise of the Resident Ambassador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 41. Sanudo, *Diarii*, IX, 574-81.

⁶⁵ Da Mosto, *L'Archivio di stato di Venezia*, 25. Mueller, "The Procuratori di San Marco, 240-43.

that their ambassadorial missions were regarded as appointments of extremely high-status and represented the capstones to illustrious careers.

Before analyzing the significance of the objects given and the attendant physical presentation of the gifts that marked these three episodes, it is first essential to outline the circumstances of the missions. Situating the embassies within the specific historical contexts that surround them sheds light on the differing methods and outcomes witnessed in each episode. The first case, Pietro Diedo's 1489 mission, sought a settlement with Sultan Qaytbay concerning the Republic's annexation of Cyprus earlier that year.⁶⁶ When the last monarch of Cyprus, the Venetian noblewoman Caterina Corner, retired to Venice, she ceded the island to the Republic of St. Mark on 26 February 1489.⁶⁷ Qaytbay, who considered himself the island's overlord, interpreted this coup as an affront to his honor.⁶⁸ In a resolution passed on 22 August, the Senate directed the ambassador to employ a carefully orchestrated combination of gifts and words to ameliorate mounting difficulties with Mamluk authorities. The Senate had come to this decision in response to pressing complaints from merchants in Damascus and Alexandria alleging that commerce had been greatly inhibited in the past few months by unusual mistreatment from Egyptian officials.⁶⁹ In particular, the Mamluks had demanded that the Venetians buy large sums

⁶⁶ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 245.

On the reign of Qaytbay, see Carl Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 13-20. Born in the Circassian Caucasus around the year 1418, he was sent as a slave to Egypt at a young age where he was employed as a mounted archer and lance caster. He served as an attendant of Sultan Barsbay (1422-37) and bodyguard of Sultan Jaqmaq (1438-53). He became a senior officer in the oligarchy of grand emirs under the reign of Sultan Inal (1453-60). Petry remarks that he possessed a "sincere commitment to the formal responsibilities of kingship" and was depicted in Arab historical literature as "a paragon of charity and justice." *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁷ Rossi, introduction to *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 16. On the life of Caterina Corner, see Holly Hurlburt, *Daughter of Venice: Caterina Corner, Queen of Cyprus and Woman of the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁶⁸ For a relevant discussion of these claims, see Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*, 199.

⁶⁹ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 255. "Essendo sta' a Damascho et in Alexandria et per tuta la Soria interropte molte consuetudine ali nostri merchadanti de li et innovato cosse insolite cum grande danno loro et de le soe merchadantie, habiamo deliberato, cusi rechiesti instantamente da dicti nostri merchadanti, mandar uno nostro orator al signor Soldan, come in simel casi assai altre volte habiamo facto, et cussi habiamo electo el nobel homo

of pepper at exceptionally high prices and had impounded their goods or detained their persons if they refused.⁷⁰ In April, Venice sent to Egypt its first representative, Marco Malipiero (the queen's former ambassador), who was met with a cold reception in Cairo.⁷¹ It was with Malipiero unable even to gain an audience before the sultan, and with complaints from the merchant communities in Damascus and Alexandria mounting, that the Senate finally resolved to send a second, gift-laden diplomatic mission to Qaytbay in late August, to be led by Pietro Diedo.

Diedo's gifts and words brought results. On 9 January 1490, an order was sent to the sultan's representative in Damascus that the merchants and their goods were to be freed and that they should be treated well, without being expected to buy more than the customary amount of pepper.⁷² After months of negotiation, the two parties finally agreed that the Republic would pay Qaytbay 16,000 ducats (a sum based on two years' worth of annual tribute owed to Cairo by the kingdom of Cyprus) in exchange for Mamluk recognition of Venetian control of the island.⁷³ Cyprus and the matter of its annual tribute would remain a perpetual stumbling block in Venice's relationship with Egypt's rulers, however, lasting up to the Ottoman conquest of the Mamluk Sultanate in 1517.⁷⁴

Piero Diedo chavalier per procurar la obsevantia dele costume predicto et far tuor via ogni innovatione facta a dicti nostri merchadanti."

⁷⁰ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 261. For more information on the "pepper tax" (*danno del piper*), see Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 78. See also Arbel, "The Last Decades of Venice's Trade with the Mamluks," 38.

⁷¹ Rossi, introduction to *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 17.

⁷² Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 127.

⁷³ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 156. Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta believes that this large sum of cash was needed for the sultan's war against the Ottomans. In this way, the Venetians were called on to shoulder part of the cost of the Mamluk war effort. Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne*, 198.

⁷⁴ On the Ottoman sultan's demand that payment of the Cyprus tribute be transferred to Istanbul, and his corresponding insistence that it be paid in cash rather than in commodities, see ASVe, *Commemoriali*, reg. 20, f. 61 v (8 September 1517 / 1 Shaban 923). "Per avanti il paese del Cayro nel tempo che lora di cercassi de la insula di Cypro ogni anno veniva carazo in robe per la summa di 8m ducati, come era usanza di darle. Al presente, il paese del Cayro, cum la gratia de Dio, ho tolto cum le arme, et tuto il resto del dominio, secundo il resto del mio paese questo e facto mio paese, pertanto quel carazo che si pagava, e honesto et perho commando, che non siano piu robe, ma che siano ogni anno 8m ducati."

When Qansuh al-Ghuri conquered the throne in 1501, putting an end to nearly five years of civil war, he renewed the issue of the Cyprus tribute. His ascent to power, in fact, immediately presented a challenge to the Venetian government and prompted the dispatch of an ambassador. Seeking to expand and modernize his army and navy, fast becoming outdated in an age of gunpowder warfare, this “reviled innovator” turned to the Venetians to help resolve his need for funds.⁷⁵ Al-Ghuri’s belligerent behavior resulted from the danger that he, the penultimate sultan, faced: the Ottomans to the north (against whom he would die in battle in May 1516), the Safavids to the east, and the Portuguese to the southeast, all the while presiding over a dangerously ambitious coterie of self-serving lieutenants.⁷⁶ At the same time that the quantity and quality of spices entering Egypt through the Indian Ocean suffered from Portuguese incursions spearheaded by Vasco da Gama, al-Ghuri began to demand that western merchants increasingly buy their pepper directly from him.⁷⁷ The new sultan also chose to press the issue of tribute from Cyprus, which had been neglected for two years under his predecessors, then, after receiving payment in cloths and silks, he contended that it was of poor quality, or *tristi*, causing him to suspend commerce with the Venetians.⁷⁸ A fascinating example of a gift gone wrong, the

⁷⁵ Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 20.

⁷⁶ In general, it seems that the Mamluk elite regarded it as their right to depose any sultan who had failed to safeguard their interests. Amalia Levanoni, “The Mamluk Conception of the Sultanate,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* XXVI, no. 3 (1994): 375-6. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 20-21. The Portuguese incursions were so threatening to both powers that it prompted a Venetian proposal for the construction of a canal at Suez so that Venice’s navy might combat them. On this sixteenth-century Suez Canal project, see R. Fulin, “II Canale di Suez e la Repubblica di Venezia, 1504,” *AV* 2 (1871), 194-195.

⁷⁷ On the sultan’s intervention into the Venetian spice trade, see Benjamin Arbel, “The Last Decades of Venice’s Trade with the Mamluks,” *MSR* 8, no. 2 (2004): 37-86

⁷⁸ The rectors of Cyprus report this in a letter preserved by Marin Sanudo. Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 114. On the suspension of trade with the Venetians, see Arbel, “The Last Decades,” 39. The tribute paid by the Venetian representative from Cyprus, Vicenzo Soranzo, amounted to 622 pieces of camlet cloth, about which the sultan complained, and some 430 meters of silk. Sanudo, V, 115. The sum provided by Sanudo is 663 *picchi*. A *pico* or *picchio* could correspond to between 22 and 27 English inches, but varied from region to region. Thomas H. Goddard, *The Merchant, Or Practical Accountant: Being a Series of Mercantile Accounts in Single and Partnership Business to which are Added Tables of Moneys, Weights, and Measures, of the Commercial World* (New York: C. Starr, 1821), 199.

“sad” tribute of 1502 contributed to the deterioration of Mamluk-Venetian relations and the suspension of commerce.⁷⁹

It was this state of affairs that led to the dispatch of the ambassador Benedetto Sanudo in 1502, who succeeded in resolving tensions, bringing a new set of gifts and 500 ducats to the sultan.⁸⁰ Following their negotiations in April of 1503, Al-Ghuri sent a letter to the Venetian government in Cyprus, acknowledging that he would accept the cloth and silk as payment for two years, but he also warned them bluntly: “You should send good material to our treasury, nice and beautiful, something you did not do . . . you should make the payment annually, not every other year. So far as is possible, make the island and all of its people comply with this.”⁸¹ The Cyprus tribute had plainly become one of the major axes around which Venetian-Mamluk diplomacy revolved.⁸² The textiles owed for recognition of the Republic’s possession of the island served as the main point of contact used by the sultan to voice his grievances.

⁷⁹ On the idea of the “gift gone wrong,” see Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

Records suggest that the ambassador from Cyprus, Girolamo Giustinian, was to blame. The island’s lieutenants denounced him to the Venetian Senate, asserting that he had substituted the original goods with cheaper materials, taking the finer gifts for himself. The government called for an investigation into the matter and demanded that an example be made out of this *contracambio*. The results of the inquiry do not seem to remain, but the fact that Giustinian was serving as the island’s principal representative to Cairo a decade later suggests that he either proved his innocence or came away with only a slap on the wrist. Regardless, this scenario, in which a high profile diplomat carrying out an important diplomatic mission was at least accused of absconding with ceremonial tribute intended for an already hostile foreign ruler, is revealing. In the first place, it indicates that the Signoria could suffer from the same sort of corruption of which it accused the Mamluks. It would also imply that Qansuh al-Ghuri, who often appears intransigent and belligerent in Venetian sources, could at least occasionally have legitimate complaints concerning the issue of the Cyprus tribute. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 39, f. 31 v (8 July 1502). The sultan continued to complain about the quality of the camlet and claimed that fraud was taking place. In 1512, he sent five pieces as examples to Venice for the Signoria to investigate. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, p. 204. Giustinian is mentioned in a mission to Cairo in 1514 by Sanudo. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XIX, p. 309.

⁸⁰ Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 114-115.

⁸¹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 115.

⁸² The conflict between the Mamluks and Venetians over the spice trade worsened following Benedetto Sanudo’s departure in 1503. This led to renewed diplomatic overtures from Venice during the 1504 embassy of Francesco Teldi and Bernardino Giova, for which scant details survive. In 1507, the sultan’s dragoman, ibn Taghriberdi traveled to Venice as an ambassador and the two parties successfully negotiated a treaty, lasting until the Zen Affair of 1511-12.

The last great crisis to precipitate the dispatch of a formal embassy to Cairo developed during the summer of 1510, and was not finally resolved until 1512 through the embassy of Domenico Trevisan. As mentioned above, the catalyst for this episode concerned the interception of letters from the Persian shah that were interpreted as evidence of Venetian betrayal by Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri.⁸³ Once again, political vicissitudes threatened Venice's trading interests in the eastern Mediterranean. A second diplomatic fiasco only worsened the sultan's attitude, when, weeks later, Rhodian corsairs attacked an Egyptian convoy carrying Anatolian timber.⁸⁴ The entire cargo, intended for the construction of a Red Sea fleet to combat the Portuguese, was lost, and the Knights of Rhodes enslaved the surviving Egyptian mariners.⁸⁵ Al-Ghuri subsequently ordered the arrest of all Latin Christian merchants residing in his territory along with the seizure of their goods.⁸⁶ In Jerusalem, he had the Church of the Holy Sepulcher closed, and brought the small Franciscan community who resided there to Cairo as prisoners.⁸⁷ Meeting with the

⁸³ Zen Correspondence, fol. 16 r. Sanudo, *Diarii* XI, 645-646.

⁸⁴ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XI, 645. According to Piero Liom, the captain of Famagusta, this naval engagement took place on 20 August, 1510. A letter to Doge Leonardo Loredan from the master of the Templars, Aiméry d'Amboise, records the date as 12 August. Cf. Sanudo, *Diarii* XI, 645 and *ibid.*, 570, respectively.

The ships were sailing in the Gulf of Satalia, held to be a naturally dangerous zone for shipping because of its shoals. Anna Laura Momigliano Lepschy, ed., *Viaggio in Terrasanta di Santo Brasca, 1480 con l'Itinerario di Gabriele Capodilista, 1458* (Milan: Longanesi, 1966), 121; K. D. Hassler, ed., *Fratris Felicis Fabri Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae Peregrinationem* (Stuttgart: Bibliothek des Literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 1843-9), vol. 3, 353. Captain Agostino Contarini told pilgrims that his hair had turned white from once nearly losing his ship in that region. C. Schefer, ed., *Le Voyage d'Outremer de Bertrandon de la Broquière, Premier Écuyer Tranchant et Conseiller de Philippe Le Bon, Duc de Bourgogne* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1892), 54.

Both Muslim and Christian corsairs used the region to practice piracy. In 1408, a pilgrim galley operated by the patron Andrea Quirini was nearly intercepted by Turkish pirates in the Gulf of Satalia. ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 92 r.

⁸⁵ This, at least, is the justification for the attack used by Aiméry d'Amboise in his letter to the doge. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XI, 570. The timber was apparently part of a payment for the return of the Ottoman sultan's brother, Korkud, who had fled to the Mamluks in 1509. See Nabil al-Tikriti, "The Hajj as a Justifiable Self-Exile: Şehzade Korkud's *Wasīlat al-ahbāb* (915-916/1509-1510)," *Al-Masāq* 17, no. 1 (2005), 135.

⁸⁶ The Venetians were targeted in particular because witnesses claimed to have seen four Venetian galleys in the pirate fleet. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XI, 645.

⁸⁷ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XI, 829.

Venetian consuls of Egypt and the Levant, al-Ghuri demanded compensation of ten thousand ducats before order would be restored.⁸⁸

Through the second half of 1511, the Venetian government drafted a plan for diplomatic intervention. In June, the Senate wrote to the sultan and argued that nearly every other country had abandoned the Levant to get spices from Portugal instead, whereas Venice had prohibited any trade with the Portuguese. The Venetian government further asserted that al-Ghuri could not interfere in Venice's foreign relations, and that he should not interpret Venice's diplomatic engagements with Persia as evidence of sinister intentions.⁸⁹ As for corsairs in the eastern Mediterranean, the letter reminded the sultan that Venice not only refused to aid pirates, but also had actively used its fleet to combat them in the eastern Mediterranean.⁹⁰ The Senate closed the letter with a concession, however, promising to send an "honorevole ambassator" to negotiate with al-Ghuri soon.⁹¹ Domenico Trevisan received his commission for this mission from the Council of the Ten on 30 December.⁹² According to his instructions, the ambassador was to facilitate a restoration of trade in Alexandria and Syria while committing the Venetian state to as

⁸⁸ Sanudo, *Diarri*, XI, 828.

⁸⁹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 44, f. 42 r-43 r (20 June 1511). Luchetta, "L'affare Zen," 165-71. "E se i nuntii del Sophi sono stati a nui, sa ben la illustrissima Signoria vostra che non se puol prohibir ad alcuno che non mandi sui homeni. Et se non li fu dato adviso, non processe per alcuna altra causa, salvo che non ne exposeno cosse de alcun peso, ma da poy le salutatione consuete ne disseno dela prosperità et boni successi del Signor suo, dicendo quello esser prompto ad mantener la amicitia havemo cum li sui precessori. Ali qual respondessemo *etiam* nuy cum parole general, come se convenia. El non ne parse fastidir le sapientissime orecchie dela Excellentia vostra de cosse si legiere et de niuna substantia, perhoché ne haria parso manchamento de cossa si frivola darne aviso a vostra serenissima Signoria." Cf. Francesco Lucchetta, "L'afare Zen in Levante nel Primo Cinquecento," SV 10 (1959): 170.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 44, f. 42 r-43 r (20 June 1511).

⁹² ASVe, Consiglio Dieci, Misti, 34, reg. 34 f. 172 r (c. 121 r) (30 December 1511). Reprinted in Louis de Mas-Latrie, ed. *Traité de paix et de commerce entre les chrétiens et les Arabes de l'Afrique septentrionale au Moyen Âge* (Paris: PERSEE, 1867), vol. 2, 271. Sanudo, *Diarri*, XIII, 248. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 44 f. 86 v - 87 r.

little as possible.⁹³ Trevisan and his retinue set out on 22 January 1512, arriving in Cairo nearly four months later, on 6 May.⁹⁴ By the end of June, he had arrived at a settlement: the Venetians would be released and relations would be normalized in exchange for a promise that the tribute owed for Cyprus (in arrears and estimated at 30,000 ducats) would be paid; the Republic's merchants, moreover, would be required to buy 15,000 ducats worth of pepper from the sultan over the next three years.⁹⁵ As a parting gift, al-Ghuri transferred custody of the disgraced Pietro Zen (wearing a chain around his neck) to Trevisan, effectively giving him over as a personal slave.⁹⁶

In all of these cases, diplomatic giving involved several important issues: the selection of symbolically meaningful objects and the concomitant investment of state capital in their acquisition and transportation, followed by elaborate presentation rituals upon arrival in Egypt, which in turn required a reciprocal display of munificence on the part of the sultan. An analysis of the types of objects chosen, the physicality of their presentation before the rulers of Egypt, as well as the Mamluk counter-gifts demonstrates some of the most important modes of non-verbal communication available to the Signoria and the Mamluk oligarchy. Focusing on the depiction of

⁹³ ASVe, Consiglio di Dieci, Misti, reg. 34, f. 172 r (c. 121 r) (30 December 1511). Mas Latrie, *Traité entre Chrétiens et Arabes*, vol. 2, 271. "Laudata la Excellentia sua in ogni provisione che possi operar. . . li dichiarirai largamente che non havemo mancho desyderio che tal navigatione se rompi et se perdi de quello che ha ley, perchè potemo dir chel interesse sii comune." Trevisan's commission went on to state that he should point out that, as was well known, the laws of Christendom prevented Venice from supplying military engineers, lumber, or other war materials to the Mamluks. As for the attacks of the Rhodians, only the pope could be responsible for the damages they caused. Trevisan could further assure the Qansuh al-Ghuri that Cyprus was not in any way responsible, that its revenues should not go to pay for the sultan's losses caused by the Rhodians, and that the government of the island was under strict orders not to give any aid to corsairs. The ambassador would need to undo the work of Taghriberdi, "who has always been against us," and who was by that point already in disgrace with the sultan and languishing in prison. As early as January of 1510, Pietro Zen had noted that the grand dragoman was no longer in "bona gratia" with Qansuh al-Ghuri. Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 10 v. Kenneth Setton observed that Trevisan received "almost *carte blanche* to reach a peaceful agreement with the soldan in accord with what he knew to be their objectives." Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571)*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1984), 30.

⁹⁴ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 1, 19. He records that he was in the service of the ducal secretary Andrea de Franceschi, who accompanied Trevisan to Cairo.

⁹⁵ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 17-18, 174.

⁹⁶ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 200.

exchanges in the documentary record, turning the sources into “an inventory of interaction and the movement of goods,” serves two functions: first, it allows the researcher to identify the differing priorities of the Mamluk and Venetian regimes, and second, it helps to expose the ways in which the leadership of these two cultures defined and perceived one another.⁹⁷

Although a well-established protocol limited their range of choice in the field of gift giving, the Venetians and Mamluks nevertheless managed to find room for variation in order to send subtle messages to one another. In the final analysis, the patterns of gift exchange reveal that, beneath the language of honor and friendship, the two regimes regarded one another, not with friendship, but with an aloof tolerance. Despite the tone of reciprocity that characterized the gift exchanges, moreover, the sultans typically exercised a great degree of power over the nature of the Venetian delegations sent to them. The sultans’ ability to dictate certain aspects of Venetian diplomatic missions, consistently insisting that gifts be sent to them from Venice (and yet at least once denying reciprocal gifts) indicates that these exchanges in fact amounted to a form of tribute paid by the Serenissima to Cairo.⁹⁸ At no point, however, do the sources ever

⁹⁷ Seth Mallios, *The Deadly Politics of Giving: Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke, and Jamestown* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 8.

⁹⁸ This would conform to the general impression that Georg Christ has given of the relationship, in which an alliance of equals was foreign to Cairo’s worldview. In his opinion, the Mamluk sultans could not regard Venice as more than a peripheral client state. “The Mamlūk body politic shall be understood as an empire, stylised and represented as universal and thus *a priori* without borders. Therefore, foreign representatives were perceived as coming from the fringes rather than from outside the empire. Indeed, the concept of horizontal *pari passu* communication between political entities of equal standing seems to be an idea born in the context of the *ius gentium* and the cooperation of equal and sovereign powers in early modern Europe. It therefore risks not fully capturing the coexistence of imperial universalism and proto-national statehood found in the relations between Venice and the Mamlūk Sultanate;” “by incorporating Venice into the sultan’s imperial realm as a vassal, albeit a distant one, the objections in terms of Islamic law became absurd, for Venice was part of the empire.” Georg Christ, “The Venetian Consul and the Cosmopolitan Mercantile Community of Alexandria at the Beginning of the Ninth/Fifteenth Century,” *Al-Masāq*, XXVI, no. 1 (2014): 63, 68. It is interesting to note that only once in this period did the Venetian government send a representative to Cairo without presents, in 1505, and this was commented on as extremely unusual by Girolamo Priuli. Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 2, 385.

classify the activity as anything other than a giving of presents (*presenti, doni*).⁹⁹ This simple label concealed what were actually intricate expressions of power and deference.

The means by which the Venetian state decided which objects best fit within the diplomatic script for an ambassadorial mission underlines the delicate nature of Venice's relations with the Mamluks. The Council of Ten, the most powerful governing body of the republic in this period, oversaw all critical aspects of Venetian foreign policy, including the dispatch of ambassadors and the details of their missions.¹⁰⁰ This group, which in practice also included the doge, his six ducal councilors, and often a *zonta* of fifteen to twenty additional officers, determined nearly every aspect of an embassy to foreign lands, covering such questions as how the diplomat should act, what he should say, and what gifts he would bring.¹⁰¹ Thus, the presents that an ambassador carried were physical components of a larger diplomatic script written by the leaders of Venice. They were, in effect, the theatrical property belonging to a set of actors performing deliberately choreographed roles. Close examination of the objects given to Cairo will therefore highlight important elements at work in the messages that the Serenissima sought to communicate. Each type of object possessed a specific set of diplomatic meanings.

Furs and textiles constitute the most prevalent gift type found in the extant sources from this period. According to Ambassador Diedo's records of 1489, he brought chests loaded with lengths of satin, velvet, and cloth of gold in a variety of colors.¹⁰² Barrels holding huge numbers

⁹⁹ Pietro Diedo's records describe "presenti consignadi." Giovanni Danese writes of "presente" and uses the verbs "mandare," "dare," and "presentare." Zaccaria Pagani uses "presente" with the verbs "mandare," and "presentare." Thomà Contarini, in a letter preserved by Marin Sanudo, mentions "presenti e doni," without giving any other impression that the words held different meanings. Sanudo, XII, 234. Pagani, on the other hand, seems to have used the term "doni" only for edible gifts. Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 78; Giovanni Danese, *Viaggio al Cairo*, 129. Zaccaria Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 16, 24-7.

¹⁰⁰ Donald E. Queller, *Early Venetian Legislation on Ambassadors* (Geneva: Droz, 1966), 57. The Council of Ten shared some of this responsibility with the Pregadi and Maggior Consiglio.

¹⁰¹ Robert Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 189-90.

¹⁰² Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 78-83.

of ermine, sable, and squirrel furs, similarly, accompanied the crates full of fabrics. The quantities were enormous; cloth amounting to some 896 *braccia* (a unit of measure roughly a half-meter in length), 5,500 animal pelts, and 22 finished robes (*veste*). Benedetto Sanudo's embassy of 1502-3, his secretary Giovanni Danese reports, required gifts of "cloth of gold and silk of diverse sorts and colors, as well as purple, gold, and scarlet cloth" together with some 60 robes and 3,120 pelts.¹⁰³ In 1512, Trevisan brought gifts of 123 *braccia* of satins, velvets, and cloth, 5,020 pelts, and 131 robes.¹⁰⁴ By sheer volume, these wearable, functional gifts represent far and away the most popular category of object offered up to the sultans.

A small collection of beautifully preserved examples of such fabrics has survived in Venice, and is now preserved at the Centro Studi di Storia del Tessuto e del Costume, in Palazzo Mocenigo. One piece in particular, a cut of scarlet velvet from the fifteenth century represents the pinnacle of Italian Quattrocento textile manufacture (figure 1). Measuring 57 by 54 centimeters, it exemplifies the delicate technique of producing multi-layered fabrics through complex embroidery that used silk, the most expensive thread of the early modern period. Upon a base of velvet, a master artisan wove alternating patterns of flowers, leaves, and fruit. Such an elaborate and painstaking design, executed with one of the costliest materials in existence, highlighted the wealth and importance of the owner.

Another fine example now held at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, a large length of double-pile scarlet velvet measuring 3.75 meters, features vegetal designs of artichoke, pomegranate, palmette, and garland executed in metallic thread (figure 2).¹⁰⁵ In a slightly earlier

¹⁰³ Danese, *Viaggio al Cairo*, 127. Danese is quoted above. The ambassador's other secretary, Alvisi Barbafela, provides the other details in Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 50.

¹⁰⁴ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 24-29.

¹⁰⁵ In finished form, a similar design can be seen on the robes of Leonardo Loredan in Giovanni Bellini's famed portrait of the doge from 1501.

period, Egypt had been a center of production for such commodities, and it is worth noting that the technology of textile manufacturing had likely been imported to Venice from Egypt in the Late Middle Ages.¹⁰⁶ One therefore sees a pattern of exchange upon counter-exchange at work in the importation of Venetian velvets to the Mamluk court, a process that resulted through centuries of material interaction. Although these particular pieces remained in Europe, similar examples arrived in Egypt and Syria as gifts and trading commodities, where the Mamluks could incorporate them into robes of state and other sumptuous garments that displayed the status and rank of the wearer.

¹⁰⁶ Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 126, 204. P. Minucci del Rosso, "Invenzione di ferri da tessere drappi di seta e di velluto," *ASI serie 5*, 6 (1890): 310-11. On velvet production specifically, see Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 24-47.



*Figure 1: Cut Velvet, Early Fifteenth Century*¹⁰⁷

In the early modern period generally, as in many other eras, textiles and furs were the prime currency of diplomatic business. For little wonder, perhaps, given that they served as functional, tactile, and highly visual displays of power and influence. The recipient could alter, redesign, or altogether repurpose the fabrics and pelts in any number of ways. The fact that these commodities were not yet finished, moreover, meant that they had not been imprinted with the same fixed significance as pieces of clothing, and so retained a greater degree of fluidity in

¹⁰⁷ Velluto tagliato (ambito veneziano - seta, xv secolo, no. inv. Cl. XXIII n. 0101). Venice, Centro Studi di Costumi. Fair use. Photo Credit: <http://www.archiviodellacomunicazione.it/Sicap/OpereArte/10363/?WEB=MuseiVE>

meaning. Cloth and fur could still be tailored, and thereby assigned a different symbolic valence by the receiver, in a way that finished apparel could not.

Although the ancient roots of textile giving appear to extend back at least as far as the Neolithic, it is well worth dwelling for a moment on its special significance in this very specific context.¹⁰⁸ The Mamluks were passionate consumers of finely woven materials and of furs, which they needed for the highly ornate ceremonial robes they wore as markers of their social status and as physical demonstrations of their authority.¹⁰⁹ In spite of their barracks origins as slave-warriors, the Mamluks were, as Maria Sardi has noted, "fashion-conscious and fond of textiles."¹¹⁰ The Egyptian elite's demand for fabrics had, by the late Quattrocento, not only exceeded the productive capacity of the native textile industry but had driven them to regularly pay what one scholar has described as "colossal prices on the open market."¹¹¹ This was not mere extravagance, however, but a matter of necessity: the robes and accessories of the ruling elite delineated the Mamluk hierarchy and served to awe subjects and visitors with dazzling displays of magnificence.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ E. J. W. Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles: The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Age with Special Reference to the Aegean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), Margarita Gleba and Judit Pástókai-Szeőke, *Making Textiles in Pre-Roman and Roman Times: People, Places, Identities* (Oakville: Oxbow, 2013), Marie-Louise Nosch, H. Koefoed, Eva B. Andersson Strand, *Textile Production and Consumption in the Ancient Near East: Archaeology, Epigraphy, Iconography*.

¹⁰⁹ Concerning the squirrel pelts in particular, see Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 220. "Among the Mamluks, the squirrel furs were very popular, they were used for winter clothes and to line honorary robes. The Mamluks, in general, coveted furs to the extent that they exempted their import from customs duties, and repeatedly 'confiscated' them."

¹¹⁰ Maria Sardi, "Mamluk Textiles," in *Islamic Art, Architecture, and Material Culture*, ed. Margaret S. Graves (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2012), 8.

¹¹¹ J. M. Rogers, "Court Workshops under the Bahri Mamluks," in *The Arts of the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria: Evolution and Impact*, 247.

¹¹² Sardi, "Mamluk Textiles," 9.



Figure 2: Section from a length of velvet, The Metropolitan Museum of Art¹¹³

The Signoria chose such gifts with care, selecting objects that had a utilitarian function to the Mamluk court. Yet, on another less explicit level, these commodities conveyed a rather nuanced message about Venice's mercantile empire. The gift register from Diedo's 1489 mission mentions some twenty-eight different colors and types of textiles. The ability of the Venetian Senate to organize a large and varied array of silks, fabrics, and furs reflected the power that the state could exert over land and labor. Production of colorful, patterned, and high-quality textiles required access to multiple supply lines and scarce materials. Animal pelts, similarly, required connections with northern European markets reaching as far as the Baltic.¹¹⁴ It would have been obvious that the Egyptians could neither easily acquire nor produce such commodities by themselves. Although a native textile industry did exist in Egypt at this time, it seems to have

¹¹³ Length of Velvet. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Used with Permission. Photo Credit: <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/219394>

¹¹⁴ Dennis Romano, *Patricians and Popolani: The Social Foundations of the Venetian Renaissance State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 68.

been in an advanced state of decline, and the ruling elite tended to rely on European suppliers for much of its attire.¹¹⁵ “Exchange relationships are about production, labour, ritual, even travel, and also the histories of relationships, making objects involved weighty with meanings,” observes Weiner. “These meanings give autonomy to both partners because they address the implications of future loss and past histories.”¹¹⁶ Thus the gifts demonstrated the power of the Venetians’ own international trading networks, thereby reaffirming Venice’s sovereignty in relation to Cairo. Yet on a more practical level, the gifts also served as a reminder to the sultan of how useful the Venetians could be in supplying the Mamluks with the commodities that gave them social credibility and bolstered their authority in front of foreign and domestic audiences.¹¹⁷

Food also figures prominently in the ambassadorial records of this period. In all three of the embassies under consideration here, cheese stands out as the most popular and frequently recurring edible gift taken to the Mamluk court. Diedo brought 92 *pezzi di formazi* to Cairo in 1489, Sanudo brought forty pieces with him as presents in 1502, and Trevisan brought a total of seventy-four in 1512.¹¹⁸ It should be emphasized that the term “piece” (*pezzo*) refers to a great wheel, described by Danese as “molto grande,” and weighing anywhere between fifty and eighty Venetian pounds (*lire*).¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the diplomats brought a particularly expensive and high quality variety, *piacentinu ennese*, a renowned type of cheese produced in Enna, Sicily.¹²⁰ This *piacentinu*, deriving its name from its pleasing taste, was a goat cheese infused with saffron as a

¹¹⁵ Benjamin Arbel, "The Last Decades of Venice's Trade with the Mamluks," 51-55; Sardi, "Mamluk Textiles," 13.

¹¹⁶ Weiner, "From Words to Objects," 698.

¹¹⁷ On textiles as statements of power, see Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 354-359.

¹¹⁸ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 107 ff.; Danese, *Viaggio al Cairo*, 127; Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 50; Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 16, 24-29.

¹¹⁹ Danese, *Viaggio al Cairo*, 127; the weights were recorded by Marin Sanudo in a letter from Marco Trevisan during Domenico Trevisan’s embassy of 1512: Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 195.

¹²⁰ Michele D’Innella, ed., *Enna e Provincia: Laghi, Torri e Castelli* (Milan: Guide d’Italia, 2001), 41.

flavorful preservative that also lent it a special golden hue. It had become a coveted delicacy owing to its creamy texture and strong unique flavor. The food, like the fabric and fur, belonged to a special class of commodity that the Venetians procured for the Egyptian rulers from beyond the borders of the Serene Republic.

As with the wearable gifts of fur and fabric, the cheese possessed both symbolic and utilitarian aspects as well. On one level of meaning, the dozens of cheese wheels represented another attempt to remind the Mamluks of how beneficial their friendship with the Venetians could be in terms of pleasing their palate. European cheeses had by the late fourteenth century become a popular item among the Cairene elite.¹²¹ According to Paulina Lewicka's recent study of food in fifteenth-century Egypt, European cheeses, particularly those from Sicily, occupied a high rank in Mamluk cuisine, regarded as more appealing (and therefore more expensive) because they were so different in flavor from the local variety.¹²² The native brined cheese of Egypt, *mish*, simply could not compete, and was stigmatized as coarse peasant fare with enough sharpness, so the saying went, to sever a mouse-tail.¹²³ Sicilian cheese, by comparison, was regularly served at celebrations held by the highest members of the Mamluk regime.¹²⁴ Thus, as with the furs and fabrics, there is in part simply a straightforward practical aspect at work here, with regards to giving the Egyptian rulers a western commodity that they enjoyed.

At the same time, however, *piacentinu ennese* possessed a deeper symbolic significance that would not have been lost on the sultan and his lieutenants. In the first place, any food such as this, made with saffron, the most expensive spice in the world and associated with gold and

¹²¹ Paulina Lewicka, *Food and Foodways of Medieval Cairenes: Aspects of Life in an Islamic Metropolis of the Eastern Mediterranean* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 234-235.

¹²² In the sixteenth century, Venetian diplomats brought gifts of cheese to the Ottoman court in Istanbul, although the Turks apparently preferred Parmesan. Howard, "Cultural transfer between Venice and the Ottomans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries," in *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, vol. 4, 142-3.

¹²³ Lewicka, *Food and Foodways of Medieval Cairenes*, 242.

¹²⁴ Lewicka, *Food and Foodways of Medieval Cairenes*, 235, 238.

material prosperity, would have greatly amplified the degree of respect being paid to the recipient.¹²⁵ Culinary historian Ken Albala observes that “the ideal self-image of wealth and power expressed in extravagance and conspicuous consumption, in lieu of eating actual gold, is fulfilled by consuming its analogue [saffron].”¹²⁶ For the Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino, saffron was a “solar thing,” that, together with gold and balsam, he associated with magnanimity, recommending it as an ingredient in food.¹²⁷ The added fact that this particular cheese contained whole peppercorns, which were at the very foundation of the trade relationship between Venetians and Mamluks, would have further underscored the importance of their alliance.¹²⁸

In sum, the commodities given conveyed both explicit and implicit messages to the recipient party. Although it should perhaps come as no surprise that the pragmatically minded government of Venice consistently chose items with everyday utility, such choices also served as expressions of interdependence. In one respect, useful goods helped define the identity and capabilities of the Venetian commercial empire within the framework of the Mamluks’ own collective self-image. The sultan and his lieutenants used European food and dress to fashion themselves into a unique ruling class, and the provenance of those items could not have been lost on them. Mindful of this, Venetian ambassadors advanced and framed their missions through these crucially important material offerings.

¹²⁵Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002), 166. “Saffron was an ideal symbol of wealth, not only because it was difficult to harvest and expensive but because it lent a dazzling effect to foods. The way to impress a guest was to present saffron-daubed dishes sparkling like gold. Saffron became a symbol for gold, as visibly striking as the shimmering gold background of a religious painting. To the wealth reader of culinary literature, eating saffron invests the body with wealth the same way a gold chain would, but here it is literally incorporated.”

¹²⁶ Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* 166.

¹²⁷ Marsilio Ficino, *De vita libri tres, recens iam, à mendis sitūique vindicati* (Paris: Gautherot, 1547), 101, 135.

¹²⁸ It is worth noting that the late fifteenth-century traveler Anselme Adorno mentions cheese as being a useful commodity to possess in transactions with Arabs when traveling to the Holy Land. Georgette de Groer, and Jacques Heers, eds., *Itinéraire d'Anselme Adorno en terre sainte 1470-1471* (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1978), 213.

Equally important in framing the ambassadorial discourse was the physical delivery of the gifts. The manner in which diplomatic actors displayed and offered up their objects represents, in fact, a “language of negotiation and appraisal.”¹²⁹ Ambassadorial missions to the Mamluks followed a normative routine, thoroughly standardized by the late fifteenth century, which culminated in the diplomat’s first audience with the sultan and his presentation of gifts. The basic outline of this behavior conformed to treatment patterns for all foreign guests of the rulers of Egypt, a protocol the Mamluks had inherited from the Byzantines and earlier Islamic dynasties.¹³⁰ Upon disembarking in Alexandria, an ambassador would be met by high-ranking officers of the sultan together with representatives of the Venetian merchant community. Mounted on horseback (a mark of honor not typically permitted to anyone from outside the ruling caste) the ambassador would be escorted to one of the Venetians’ two *fonteghi* in a public procession through the streets of Alexandria.¹³¹ During his stay in the port city, he might meet with the local governor (*na’ib*), to whom he would offer gifts.¹³² At a later date the sultan would summon the diplomat, who would at last arrive at Cairo after journeying some two hundred kilometers by camel and riverboat.¹³³ Met and accompanied by the *mihmandar*, the chief officer

¹²⁹ Annette B. Weiner, “From Words to Objects to Magic: Hard Words and the Boundaries of Social Interaction,” *Man* 18, no. 4 (1983), 696.

¹³⁰ On the common traditions shared by eastern Mediterranean court culture, see Stewart Gordon, “A World of Investiture, in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 1-19

¹³¹ On Mamluk policies of discrimination toward native Arabs, Jews, and Christians, see Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 214-15; Albrecht Fuess, “Sultans with Horns: The Political Significance of Headgear in the Mamluk Empire,” *MSR* 12, no. 2 (2008): 74; Ayalon “The Muslim City and the Mamluk Military Aristocracy,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 2 (1968), 311-29. Cf. Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 407.

¹³² Venetian sources tend to call such officials emirs (*amiragli*), though Ibn Iyas employs the term *na’ib*, meaning a deputy or governor.

¹³³ Christ estimates that this journey was most practical when traversed through a combination of river and overland methods, taking three days. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 29.

of protocol, the ambassador and his entourage would be brought to a royal guesthouse to await an order to come to the citadel, the Qal'at al-Jabal, or Fortress of the Mountain.¹³⁴

A stunning visual representation of such a Venetian-Mamluk opening encounter, executed by the artist Giovanni Mansueti for the Scuola Grande di San Marco in the early sixteenth century, gives viewers a clear sense of the physicality involved in episodes of first contact (figure 3). Although Mansueti's works were once thought to have been inspired by "The Reception of the Ambassadors in Damascus" attributed to Giovanni Bellini, it has more recently been argued that it was instead Mansueti, Bellini's pupil, who influenced the master.¹³⁵ The painting, belonging to a cycle associated with the life of St. Mark, uses as subject matter scenes from the painter's own contemporary impression of Alexandria rather than from antiquity. Thus, instead of populating urban Egypt with Roman citizens, Mansueti chose to depict Mamluks, Arabs, and Europeans. With the Evangelist relegated to a jail cell at the periphery of the canvas, the central action is dominated by a group of western visitors awaiting a meeting with a Mamluk dignitary, seated upon a dais (*mastaba*), who wears a robe of state and an immense, horned "waterwheel" turban (*takhfifa kabira*) typical of high officials in the later Burji dynasty (figure 4).¹³⁶ The presence of Mamluk heraldic devices, seen in the corners of the portico where this individual sits, further indicates Mansueti's familiarity with early modern Alexandria. The official appears to be in the act of receiving a message regarding his foreign guests from a court functionary, perhaps a dragoman, who approaches from the stairs. The most striking elements of

¹³⁴ Karl Stowasser, "Manners and Customs at the Mamluk Court," *Muqarnas: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture* 2 (1984): 15.

¹³⁵ Paul Wood, *Western Art and the Wider World* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 40.

¹³⁶ Albrecht Fuess, "Sultans with Horns: The Political Significance of Headgear in the Mamluk Empire," *MSR* 12, no. 2 (2008): 71-94.

the painting, though, the colorful and elaborate dress of the figures, shows that a great degree of symbolism and theatricality went into these encounter performances.



Figure 3: Giovanni Mansueti, Episodi della Vita di San Marco, Gallerie dell'Accademia¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Giovanni Mansueti, *Episodi della Vita di San Marco*. Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia. Used with Permission. Photo Credit: <http://www.gallerieaccademia.it/sites/default/files/styles/colorbox/public/works/images/0571.jpg?itok=nec8ugdE>



Figure 4: Detail from *Episodi della Vita di San Marco*

Deviations from the standardized ambassadorial itinerary did occur, however, and not always to the diplomat's benefit. The diplomatic mission of 1489, charged with resolving the international crisis produced by Venice's annexation of the nominally Egyptian territory of Cyprus, is a case in point. Upon Diedo's arrival in Alexandria, the gifts became an immediate stumbling block to his entire mission and a means by which the Mamluks expressed their displeasure over these recent events in Cyprus. At the docks, the *nazir al-khass* (supervisor of the privy fund) insisted on a full inspection of the ambassador's inventory before he could leave his ship.¹³⁸ Diedo bluntly refused to comply, dispatching a letter to the Venetian consul, Lunardo Lungo, voicing his outrage over such treatment. As he explained it, "this emir intends to employ an opprobrious innovation against me, never before used on any diplomat who came to these lands; that is, he desires and fully intends to open my crates and to make note of the presents that

¹³⁸ Rossi, introduction to *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 31.

I am bringing to the most illustrious lord sultan."¹³⁹ Throughout the course of this dispatch, Diedo highlighted the ways in which, from his perspective, this marked a departure from established policy. He wrote that he would not be the first ambassador of Venice to receive such shameful treatment, and asked that the consul do everything in his power to arrange Diedo's summons to Cairo as soon as possible in order to prevent further mistreatment in Alexandria.¹⁴⁰ On the same day, Diedo composed a similar letter to the sultan's chief dragoman, Taghriberdi Ibn 'Abdullah.¹⁴¹ Although writing to a Mamluk dignitary, Diedo expressed himself in almost exactly the same language with which he had written to the consul, again asking the dragoman to have him summoned to an audience with Qaytbay quickly. He asserted that an inspection of the sultan's gifts would be an insult both to the "excellence of the sultan and to my most illustrious Signoria," portraying the emir as a rogue agent who simply derived "great contentment" from "offense to our nation."¹⁴²

Within a few days, it appears that Diedo had lost the battle. On 15 November he wrote to the consul and dragoman, again decrying the "many uncustomary novelties" that he was being forced to suffer on account of the gifts. The Mamluks, he wrote, had unloaded the presents for the sultan, inspecting everything and forcing the unhappy ambassador to give his consent.¹⁴³ "I

¹³⁹ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 76. "Questo armiraglio el qual intende al tuto verso mi usar una novità obrobriosa ma più uxata verso alcuno altro orator che in queste parte sia venuto, che è che 'l vole et al tuto intende aprir le mie casse et tuor in nota li presenti ch'io porto per apresentar alo illustrissimo signor Soldan."

¹⁴⁰ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 76. "Pregandola assai la uxi ogni termine possibile a zò che honoratamente et presto me possi transferir de li che desydero quanto la vita, offerendomi et dando opera ch'io habi commandamento de li de tal efficacia che in questa et in le altre mie cose non sia traversato da questo armiraglio che per tute vie dimostra receiver gran contento quando el pò offender la nation nostra."

¹⁴¹ Taghri Berdi was for many years, until his downfall in 1511, one of the most important officials in the Mamluk sultanate. Probably an Aragonian renegade (either Jewish or Christian, it is not clear), he spoke six languages and was involved in many negotiations between the sultan and western European rulers. He was one of few Egyptian diplomats to personally visit Italy at this time, traveling to Venice in 1506. John Wansbrough, "A Mamluk Ambassador to Venice in 913/1507," *BSOAS* 26 (1963): 503-530.

¹⁴² Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 75-76, 261.

¹⁴³ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 77.

did not want to," he explained, but in the end he "told them to do what they wanted."¹⁴⁴ After being escorted with his belongings to his temporary quarters, the goods were placed in a warehouse, and Diedo was given a receipt stating that his cargo amounted to a hundred crates. "I don't know where they came up with this number, since there are actually forty crates between me and my household."¹⁴⁵ Diedo expressed his fear that this inaccurate number would be used in some cunning way to seize some of his baggage in a fashion "contrary to custom."¹⁴⁶ For this reason, he said, he had tried to make it clear to the Mamluks that no one should dare touch Qaytbay's presents, but only look. Anything more, he had told them, would damage the honor of both the sultan and the Signoria.¹⁴⁷ At least from the Venetian perspective, it seems that the Mamluks had little difficulty deviating from established patterns of acceptable behavior in order to put pressure on a diplomat.

Diedo's dispatches to Venice, on the other hand, pass over these difficulties and instead present a glamorized account of a successful and impressive arrival into the harbor of Alexandria. Rather than mentioning his difficulties with the *nazir al-khass*, who initially refused to let him disembark from his vessel, the ambassador exaggerated his control of the situation. Explaining the delay at the harbor, he wrote to the doge: "I decided, on behalf of your Most Excellent Signoria, to stay on the ship for two days to lend my descent more honor and dignity."¹⁴⁸ Diedo claimed that his galley was put at arms, with its sailors at attention and its flags raised.¹⁴⁹ Two Mamluk emirs and their slaves, whom he claimed to have kept waiting for quite some time, met him as he at last came down from his vessel. The Egyptians fired a salute,

¹⁴⁴ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 77.

¹⁴⁵ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 77.

¹⁴⁶ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 77.

¹⁴⁷ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 77-78.

¹⁴⁸ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 83.

¹⁴⁹ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 84.

hoisted their flags, and made celebratory demonstrations. Diedo touched hands with the two Mamluk officials, thanked them and congratulated them on the honor that they had done to both the sultan and the Signoria.¹⁵⁰ He was presented with three horses, on which he, his secretary Giovanni Borghi, and the Venetian viceconsul rode, flanked by two Mamluks.¹⁵¹ Having been brought to his quarters, these officials presented him with "honored edible presents" and kind words.¹⁵² This alternate version that Diedo constructed for the Signoria could be said to represent the Venetian ideal of an arrival ceremony, and in the discrepancy between the letters it becomes apparent that deviations from the normative diplomatic script were always a possibility.

Records of Diedo's difficult arrival at the port in 1489 seem to stand in marked contrast with the narratives of Domenico Trevisan's apparently spectacular entry in 1512. Then, the merchant community provided him with two great, gilded barques that had been decorated with

¹⁵⁰ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 85.

¹⁵¹ Local Christian communities were legally prohibited from horseback riding. This was a special privilege that the Mamluks afforded the Venetians. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 54.

¹⁵² Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 85. "Per l'uno et l'altro de questi armiragli me fu mandato honorato presente de cosse commestibile et cum large offerte et parole."

The discrepancy between the two sets of letters, one going to the Signoria and the others to the consul and dragoman, raise doubts about which version is more reliable. It seems likely that Diedo's intention with this dispatch to Venice, the first one since his arrival in Egypt, was more than anything to allay fears and assure his superiors that all was proceeding smoothly under his prudent aegis. Diedo, like any shrewd officeholder, showed a capacity for refashioning the narrative of events to suit his audience's expectations. The letters to the consul and dragoman, who were presumably in a better position to be of immediate help than the distant Senate and doge, probably present a more realistic account of the ambassador's arrival. Intended to provoke a quick response and to expedite his summons to Cairo, they may have purposefully exaggerated the severity of the situation. The reality probably lies somewhere between the two extremes. It seems clear that the ambassador did encounter some serious resistance from at least one official, the so-called nadracas, and was unable to unload his cargo until it passed inspection, an event that Diedo interpreted as an insulting "novelty" that violated "custom." He was eventually forced to submit all of his baggage to an examination, but his fears about robbery were apparently misplaced since there are no subsequent complaints from him on that score. The sultan's presents were placed in a warehouse, where they evidently remained until they were distributed to Qaytbay and his court in Cairo. There was almost certainly some type of ritual welcoming ceremony held in the harbor, once Diedo was finally allowed to leave his galley, and it likely involved a high degree of pageantry from everyone involved. Although the mood may have been slightly more tense than Diedo indicated, he nevertheless probably did enjoy at least the requisite or "customary" degree of hospitality. When the two sets of documents are synthesized, it would appear that the problem of the mistreatment of the ambassador, which he claimed *dishonored* the sultan and Venice, was overcome through a welcoming ceremony and an offering of small gifts, which instead *did honor* to the sultan and to Venice. In Diedo's presentations of these events, the honor of Venice and Egypt were bound up together in the fate of the embassy, which he embodied, and success could best be achieved by avoidance of innovation and a return to custom.

crimson and scarlet velvet, “to elevate the ambassador’s magnificence,” as his secretary Pagani explained.¹⁵³ Dressed in a robe made from cloth of gold, Trevisan disembarked in the presence of the governor of Alexandria and the *dawadar* (secretary of state), in front of countless cavalry and men-at-arms.¹⁵⁴ In the company of the Mamluks, the ambassador and his retinue paraded toward the Venetian *fontego* on horseback, passing along roads thronging with crowds. The streets were covered with scarlet cloth, and the gate through which they entered the city was covered with fabrics, upon which were stitched Trevisan’s personal coat of arms and two appropriate passages from Psalms: *Haec [est] dies quam fecit Dominus, exultemus et letemur in ea; Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini, laqueus contritus est et nos liberati sumus* (“This is the day which the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it; blessed is he who has come in the name of the Lord; the snare is broken, and we are freed”).¹⁵⁵ The gate to the *fontego* was also covered in crimson velvet and inscribed with the admonition: *Cogitantes in nos mala fiant sicut pulvis ante faciem venti* (“Let those working evil against us be like chaff before the wind”).¹⁵⁶ The ambassador was then put up in a palace once belonging to Sultan Qaytbay’s wife. Such a spectacle, if these accounts are even remotely accurate, would have put an entirely new meaning on the reception ceremony, converting the visit of a foreign diplomat into the liberating arrival of a Biblical hero. Such a degree of pomp attracted attention from the populace, who, according to one observer, began to murmur that there appeared to be two sultans in Egypt, one Christian and

¹⁵³ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 12.

¹⁵⁴ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 13. Pagani did not comment upon Trevisan’s wardrobe in this instance, but Ibn Iyas did. Ibn Iyas, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i’ al-duhūr*, vol. 4, 259; Ibn Iyas and Gaston Wiet, ed. and trans., *Journal d’un Bourgeois du Caire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1955), 242.

¹⁵⁵ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 13. Ps. 117:24, 117:26, 124:7. The full Latin motto is provided in a letter from another of Trevisan’s secretaries, Marco Stella, copied in Sanudo, *Diarii*, XIV, 501. The edition has erroneously transcribed the phrase as “loquens contritus est et nos liberati sumus.”

¹⁵⁶ A variation on Ps. 34:4-5. *Confundantur et revereantur quaerentes animam meam avertantur retrorsum et confundantur cogitantes mihi mala fiant tamquam pulvis ante faciem venti et angelus Domini coartans eos* (“Let those be ashamed and dishonored who seek my life; let those be turned back and humiliated who devise evil against me. Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the Lord driving them on”).

one Muslim.¹⁵⁷ In Trevisan's arrival, ritual and material ostentation intersected at a carefully orchestrated moment of diplomatic engagement, allowing the Venetians to reassert their own authority in the face of Sultan al-Ghuri's belligerence.

There is a fascinating level of attention that the Venetian sources for this event devote to cloth, omitted in the Mamluk account by Ibn Iyas. According to Pagani's narrative, textiles, a central component of Venice's Levant trade, heightened the spectacle of the ambassador's dramatic arrival and underscored the power of the Signoria in Egypt. For Venetians, moreover, the phrase *Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini* would have carried particularly strong associations with the Serenissima, since it adorned the interior of the basilica of San Marco's cupola. As seen above, the merchants apparently emblazoned declarations of Venetian identity onto the very kinds of fabrics that formed part of the backbone of Venice's commercial exchanges with the Mamluks. Indeed, the materials that contributed to the pageantry of this event helped to upstage the contemporaneous arrival of other foreign ambassadors in Egypt, and to drive home the point that Venice's interests in Egypt were of singular importance.¹⁵⁸ In this way the merchant community, at least in the story that Trevisan's retinue provides, attempted literally to inscribe a statement of Venetian identity upon the same goods that formed the material foundation of Venice's commercial relationship with Cairo. Yet it is important to take the Venetian version of this episode with more than a grain of salt, not only because it is self-congratulatory in the extreme, but also because the corresponding Mamluk source, Ibn Iyas, passes over it in complete silence.¹⁵⁹ Regardless of the objective truth value of the story of

¹⁵⁷ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 193-4.

¹⁵⁸ Ibn Iyas records fourteen separate embassies arriving in Egypt during the spring of 1512. Ibn Iyas, *Ibn Iyas, Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 4, 268-9; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un Bourgeois*, 251-2.

¹⁵⁹ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 3, 259. He describes him as "messenger of the king of the Venetian Franks" (*Qasid malik al-fīranj binadiqa*). Cf. Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un bourgeois*, 242. "Le lundi 23,

Trevisan's arrival in Alexandria, however, it is significant that two Venetian eyewitness sources would choose to focus so much attention to the use of textiles to honor the ambassador, and, by extension, the Signoria. Thus protocol seems to have been malleable, and could be manipulated to serve the purposes of either the Venetians or the Mamluks.

It was, similarly, an expected, but not always observed rule that the first meeting between sultan and ambassador be extremely formal, adhering to a precise etiquette intended to impress the visitor with Mamluk power. After being carefully briefed, the diplomat would be led from his residence at dawn by the *mihmandar* and a dragoman to the hilltop fortress, which was perched above the city of Cairo. Both Diedo and Pagani recorded a multitude of people in attendance throughout the citadel, and Ambassador Sanudo estimated somewhat more precisely that he saw some 7,700 soldiers in total.¹⁶⁰ The party would ascend the steps to the entrance, pass through a series of thirteen iron gates and thirteen halls, with hundreds of soldiers and slaves standing at attention, before arriving at an open courtyard in which a large pavilion stood.¹⁶¹ There, the guest

on vit arriver aux Portes royales un ambassadeur vénitien: un consistoire solennel fut organisé pour son audience d'accueil, qui attira beaucoup de monde; la porte de l'arsenal était pavoisée de cottes de mailles et de panoplies. L'ambassadeur monta à la Citadelle, accompagné de porteurs chargés de présents splendides, des vases en cristal de roche, du drap, du velours, des vêtements en velours, des pièces d'étoffe, de la soie unie et bien d'autres présents de valeur. Il était à cheval, précédé de sept dignitaires également à cheval; le reste de sa suite, qui comprenait une cinquantaine de personnes, cheminait à pied. L'ambassadeur était un vieillard à barbe blanche, un homme assez corpulent, qui inspirait le respect; il portait une robe dorée traînante sur un vêtement de soie jaune. Toute cette délégation fut reçue à la Citadelle, puis se rendit dans une demeure aménagée pour l'héberger. On prétendait que cet ambassadeur venait intercéder auprès du sultan pour obtenir la recouverture de l'église de la Résurrection à Jérusalem, fermée par ordre du sultan et où aucun Européen ne pouvait avoir accès à cause des incidents que nous avons relatés."

¹⁶⁰ Rossi, *Ambasciata Straordinaria*, 107; Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 23; Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 49.

¹⁶¹ Both Benedetto Sanudo and his secretary Danese recorded 13 *porte* and 13 *corti*, Danese, *Viaggio al Cairo*, 126; Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 49. Information about the layout of the citadel was in common circulation among travelers to the Levant, even among those who did not actually visit the citadel. The pilgrims Santo Brasca and Gabriele Capodilista, who perhaps shared a common source, both report fifteen iron gates, separated by large open courtyards. Lepschy, *Viaggio in Terrasanta*, 141, 233. On the similarity of the two texts, see *ibid.*, Introduction, 32-3.

The French pilgrim Georges Lengherand reported on the protocol used for ambassadors to the Mamluk court in detail, information that he claimed to have received from a Venetian resident of Egypt. Godefroy

would arrive before the sultan, who sat cross-legged upon a high cushion beside his bow and scimitar and was flanked by attendants on either side, with a long carpet extending out before him.¹⁶² According to custom, this first formal audience was meant to be a staged ritual instead of an actual conversation.



Figure 5: Depiction of the Sultan, Woodcut from *Die Pilgerfahrt des Ritters Arnold von Harff*¹⁶³

On the surface, it might appear that this type of scripted performance should offer little room for maneuvering. The guest would bow low, kissing the carpeted floor exactly three times at specific intervals upon approaching the ruler's throne.¹⁶⁴ Once the *nazir al-khass* had announced the ambassador, the *dawadar* would take his letter from the doge, then hand it to the

Méniglaize, ed., *Voyage de Georges Lengherand, Mayeur de Mons en Haynaut, A Venise, Rome, Jérusalem, Mont Sinai et le Kayre, 1485-1486* (Mons: Masquillier et Dequesne, 1861), 184-5.

¹⁶² The most detailed information on this protocol can be found in Méniglaize, *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 184-5. See also Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 21.

¹⁶³ E. von Groote, ed., *Die Pilgerfahrt des Ritters Arnold von Harff von Cöln durch Italien, Syrien, Aegypten, Arabien, Aethiopien, Nubien, Palästina, die Türkei, Frankreich und Spanien, wie er sie in den Jahren 1496 bis 1499* (Cologne: H. Lempertz, 1860), 90. Fair use.

¹⁶⁴ Stowasser, "Manners and Customs," 16.

sultan.¹⁶⁵ The sultan would break the seal on the document before handing it off again, this time to be translated and read aloud by the chief dragoman.¹⁶⁶ Typically, after this moment the diplomat presented and distributed his gifts. He could neither sit nor address the sultan directly, nor was the Mamluk ruler to make any acknowledgment of his presence in the room.¹⁶⁷ Afterward, the ambassador would withdraw toward the exit, moving backward out of the room so that he at no point turned his back to the sultan. Real negotiations with the ruler or his lieutenants were supposed to take place later, in private residences elsewhere in the city or other areas of the palace complex.

Looking beyond the basic structure that protocol demanded, however, it becomes apparent that the sultans and the Venetian ambassadors once again allowed for a degree of flexibility and improvisation in their otherwise rigorously structured ceremonies. In 1489, for example, Diedo records that at the very first meeting he broke with custom and spoke directly to Qaytbay, who responded by welcoming him, telling him to take his leave and rest, and assuring his guest that he looked forward to speaking with him at greater length thereafter.¹⁶⁸

Alternatively, the timing of the gifts could vary: during Sanudo's embassy, the ambassador waited until after the first audience to send on his gifts, whereas in 1512 Trevisan sent them in advance of his arrival.¹⁶⁹ Sound effects constituted another variable: in 1512, al-Ghuri had cannons fired during Trevisan's arrival at the citadel, then had the ambassador led through a

¹⁶⁵ Cihan Yüksel Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks: Imperial Diplomacy and Warfare in the Islamic World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 49.

¹⁶⁶ Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 47-50.

¹⁶⁷ Stowasser, "Manners and Customs," 16.

¹⁶⁸ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 107.

¹⁶⁹ Danese, *Viaggio al Cairo* 126; Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 23.

room where slaves played a variety of musical instruments.¹⁷⁰ Trevisan, evidently having a flair for the theatrical himself, had brought along eight scarlet-clad trumpeters to the citadel, but was expressly forbidden from having them play until his departure.¹⁷¹ Such efforts to alter the general pattern of scripted behavior represented efforts to bolster the prestige and influence of either the sultan or the diplomat.

This improvisational, game-like quality to Venetian-Egyptian giving rituals allowed the participants to reaffirm their power and identity without forcing either party to lose face. As ceremonial contests, gift exchange in this context represents what Goffman termed strategic interaction. In such scenarios, groups in competition with one another would find themselves, paradoxically, compelled to help each other “save face” lest both “lose face.” Participants, “as players of a ritual game,” must “lead themselves into duels, and wait for a round of shots to go wide of their mark before embracing their opponents.”¹⁷² In these expression games, the players possess the capacity to threaten their partner’s identity but are at the same time cognizant of one another’s interdependence, meaning that the posturing, slights, and profanations rarely get out of hand: in other words, the game’s rules may be bent but never broken. It is this very same phenomenon that one finds at work in the ambassadorial missions under consideration here.

The physical presentation of the gifts to the sultan comprised yet another layer of meaning, and offered further space to maneuver within a seemingly static diplomatic script. Diedo wrote that the sultan was “greatly pleased” when the Venetians brought forward their textiles, furs, and cheese in the first audience, and his contentment was perhaps what allowed the

¹⁷⁰ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 21. He also passed by an arms workshop where men pretended to be busy hammering out weapons. The development of gunpowder artillery was a major preoccupation for Qansuh al-Ghuri, who faced threats from the Ottomans, Persians, and Portuguese.

¹⁷¹ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 23.

¹⁷² Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 31.

ambassador to break precedent and speak to the ruler at that time.¹⁷³ Interestingly, the items here were not simply delivered to the Mamluk sultan in bulk. Each container had its prescribed recipient, demonstrating a keen awareness of the composition of the Egyptian court. The gift list, then, provides a sense of the political hierarchy of the sultanate, at least from a Venetian perspective. The majority of the presents, naturally, were assigned to Qaytbay himself. Second on the list was the "Soldanessa," whom Diedo had been ordered to visit and furnish with gifts; but, according to a marginal note, "these goods were given to the lord sultan since the queen was neither present nor visited nor presented since it is not the custom."¹⁷⁴ Next came the *amir kabir* (grand amir) "Isbech" (Ezbek min Tutukh), the *mihmandar*, the grand *dawadar* (Aqbirdî min Alibây),¹⁷⁵ and the two emirs of Alexandria.¹⁷⁶ The gifts become progressively smaller as one proceeds down the list to the grand dragoman, Taghriberdi, who received fifty ducats and two wheels of cheese.¹⁷⁷ The offerings, although numerous, do not appear to have been entirely sufficient: Diedo mentioned in one letter that "the *amir akhur*, second *dawadar*, *nazir al-khass*, *na'ib al katib as-sirr*, and others required me to give them presents although presents were not assigned for them."¹⁷⁸ The ambassador was apparently able to improvise by giving them small

¹⁷³ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 107.

¹⁷⁴ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 79-80.

¹⁷⁵ Rendered in Italian as "Diodar." This was a royal secretary responsible for correspondence and record keeping, but who served a variety of roles. Aqbirdî is described by Ibn Iyas as a successful military leader, quashing revolts and leading a Mamluk army to victory against the Bedouins in Upper Egypt that culminated in the massacre of women and children. Ibn Iyas, *Badâ'i' al-zuhûr fî waqâ'i' al-duhûr*, vol. 3, 240; Ibn Iyas, and Gaston Wiet, ed. and trans., *Histoire des Mamlouks Circassiens* (Cairo: Institut Français d'archéologie orientale, 1945), 268.

¹⁷⁶ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 80-81. Ezbek is mentioned by Ibn Iyas, *Badâ'i' al-zuhûr fî waqâ'i' al-duhûr*, vol. 3, 223; Ibn Iyas, *Histoire des Mamelouks*, 250. "Per i do armiraglio de Alexandria. . . Campsum armiraglio del castello de Alexandria hebbe el contrascripto suo presente." Diedo probably meant Alibây, the *na'ib* (governor, whom he called the *armiraglio de Alexandria*) and the captain of the port (*armiraglio del castello*), whom he identified by name as "Campsum" (i.e. Qansuh). On the captain of the port (*armiraio del porto*) and the *na'ib* (emir of the castle of Alexandria), see Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 93.

¹⁷⁷ He is the only person identified as receiving any form of cash gift rather than textiles. Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 82.

¹⁷⁸ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 107. "El miriachur, diodar segundo, nadrachas, naibo de catibiser et altri me à bexognato apresentar, ben che per loro non era assegnati presenti." The "miriachur" (*amir akhur*) was the

amounts of scarlet and purple cloth and some wheels of cheese.¹⁷⁹ The records of the 1489 embassy also note that afterward some of the officials exchanged a few of the goods with one another upon receiving their presents, for example, trading a measure of gold cloth for fifty squirrel furs.¹⁸⁰ The orchestration and planning that went into identifying which individuals held the highest positions in the sultanate suggest that the Signoria took a sharp interest in the Egyptian hierarchy and in pleasing all of the most important figures at court.

During the embassies of Sanudo and Trevisan decades later, pageantry appears to have remained a major goal with the gifts. The former, for example, sent his gifts to the citadel in Cairo held aloft on serving trays carried by some 110 men.¹⁸¹ During Trevisan's visit, the sultan sent word to the ambassador that the presents were to be paraded through Cairo and up to the citadel, uncovered for all to see, the better to enhance al-Ghuri's "reputazion," when custom instead would have normally dictated that they be covered, and not put on display or seen until they arrived before the ruler.¹⁸² At this point, interestingly, the Venetian merchants and consuls evidently chose to augment the assortment of gifts, purchasing additional silks in Cairo to give to the sultan. On the day of the first audience, Egyptian porters carried the presents to the palace, holding them high above their heads, which one Venetian observer proudly considered "un triumpho a veder."¹⁸³ Thus visibility became a source of honor for the Venetians and the

master of the stables. The "catibiser" (*katib as-sirr*) was the sultan's secretary, a post held at this time by Ibn Muzhir, but it is not clear what official *Diedo* meant by the expression "naibo de catibiser" (i.e. deputy of the *katib as-sirr*). Amalia Levanoni, "The Sultan's *Laqab*: A Sign of a New Order in Mamluk Factionalism," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, ed. Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 102. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 92-93. See also Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne*, 198.

¹⁷⁹ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 82-83.

¹⁸⁰ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 81.

¹⁸¹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 50.

¹⁸² Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 195. "El signor Soldan avanti li fece intender el desiderio suo era che el presenti, se li ha a far, non se mandasse al consueto da poi l'audientia e coperto, ma si portasse per sua reputazion el zorno di la prima audientia davanti l'ambassador e scoperto."

¹⁸³ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 195.

Mamluks. In this instance, successful and ostentatious presentation rituals coincided with the interests of the ambassador and the sultan, benefiting the reputation of both parties, and constituting what Goffman calls “the performance of face-work.”¹⁸⁴

The presentation of diplomatic gifts instead going from Cairo to Venice possessed strong similarities to Venetian gifts, despite being of entirely different composition. Reciprocal exchanges of food were at the heart of this interaction and, as icebreakers, often opened the door to exchanges of more elaborate, high profile diplomatic offerings. Diedo claims to have been honored to receive his first “presente di cosse commestibile” at Alexandria, and this perhaps helped him to forget his difficult arrival in the port days before.¹⁸⁵ When Benedetto Sanudo arrived in Cairo in 1503, the sultan quickly sent him generous gifts of food for his entire entourage: 20 lambs, 100 chickens, 40 cakes of sugar, honey, and butter, which were followed later by a great jug of sugar, 12 more lambs, another pair of chickens, 10 nectarines, and 7 apricots, apples, and watermelons.¹⁸⁶ It seems reasonable to conclude that food given to the Venetians served as an important starting point from which to begin more intensive interactions.

Food in fact served as a catalyst for further, greater acts of gifting. For example, Pagani reports that the Mamluk governor of Alexandria used food to initiate the process of material exchange during the 1512 embassy. In his report, the Mamluk ruler dispatched a load of *doni* on the morning following ambassador’s arrival in the harbor. Here, Pagani records that this included ten lambs, three baskets of bread, one basket of lemons, three baskets of radishes, three baskets of peas in fresh grass, two pigs, two baskets of oranges, four baskets of turnips, and ten pairs of

¹⁸⁴ Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 31.

¹⁸⁵ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 85.

¹⁸⁶ Danese, *Viaggio al Cairo*, 126 and 127. “castroni 20 galine 100, pani 40, de zuccheri, miel, onto sottil” and later “uno altro presente, el qual fo de zuchari cantara 1, castroni 12, galline para, 10 nosperseghi, armelini, pomi, et angurie 7. da aqua.”

chickens.¹⁸⁷ The surprisingly taboo offering of pigs may have been a deliberate attempt to comfort foreign guests with the familiar rather than the exotic.¹⁸⁸ These animals, a present that the givers themselves could never lawfully consume, constitute an especially striking instance of a gift that transcends cultural boundaries. The ambassador paid the porter four ducats “per cortesia” and in turn sent the following to the governor: eleven and a half *braccia* of gold fustian for garments, eleven *braccia* of cloth of gold, twenty-three *braccia* of orange satin in two pieces, eleven and a half *braccia* of silver satin, fifteen *braccia* of scarlet cloth in three pieces, ten *braccia* of purple cloth in two pieces, and six wheels of Sicilian cheese weighing forty pounds each.¹⁸⁹ In turn, the governor then paid twenty ducats to the porter “per cortesia,” outdoing the ambassador in magnanimity five-fold.¹⁹⁰ On 19 April Trevisan met with the governor at his palace, where a letter inviting the ambassador to make his way to Cairo had recently arrived from the sultan. Finally, the governor and ambassador exchanged kisses, departing on friendly terms.¹⁹¹

Another fascinating discrepancy between Venetian and Mamluk accounts of the 1512 embassy concerns the first exchange of presents in Alexandria. Whereas Pagani reports that it was the Mamluk governor, rather than the Venetians, who initiated the gift giving, the Mamluk chronicler Ibn Iyas contradicts this. In his chronicle of the Mamluks, he states that Trevisan Trevisan came with his retinue directly to the citadel of Alexandria, where he delivered rock crystal vases, velvet cloth, articles of fine clothing and silk, but does not mention any gifts

¹⁸⁷ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 16.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Constable, *Housing the Stranger*, 275-6, on the presence of a pig at the Venetian *fontego* in the late fifteenth century.

¹⁸⁹ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 16.

¹⁹⁰ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 16.

¹⁹¹ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 17.

coming from the Egyptians.¹⁹² The difference, most likely, stems from the Mamluk chronicler's desire to depict European ambassadors as deferential tributaries instead of diplomatic representatives of a sovereign power. By the same token, Trevisan's personal secretary may have wanted to magnify the degree of respect shown to his patron and his government by asserting that the Mamluks offered up the first gifts.

Regardless of which source holds more accuracy in reporting this episode, it seems highly likely that a certain amount of liberality expedited Trevisan's mission and his journey to Cairo. Placing his apparently felicitous outcome in comparison with Diedo's difficult exit from Alexandria - during which Diedo claimed to have found himself forced to bribe his way out of the city - one might rightly suppose that Trevisan's willingness to give and be given to was an important factor in his success.¹⁹³ Trevisan and the governor played the game of reciprocal giving in an artfully effective way, whereas Diedo's outright refusal to participate, rejecting the custom as extortion, jeopardized the success of his mission.

Food continued to serve a role in forging bonds between the Mamluks and the Venetians over the remaining course of the 1512 embassy. Leaving Alexandria on 28 April, the company arrived in Rosetta the following day, forty miles to the east, where they would begin their journey up the Nile. There they were received by the local governor, who presented them with six geese, sixty loaves of bread, and a basket of rice.¹⁹⁴ It is at this point in Pagani's narrative, precisely when the journey deeper into Egypt begins, that the familiar foods begin to give way to the exotic. The Mamluk governor of Rosetta, he reports, even led Trevisan into a private garden,

¹⁹² Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 4, 259; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un bourgeois*, 242.

¹⁹³ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 98-9. "Etiam ch'io habi le seraffi 30. ch'io exbursai nel supplimento del presente del armiraglio;" "quel tristo armiralgljo dovese existimar el mio vegnir qui [Cairo]." 30 *seraffi* would have equaled roughly fifty ducats according to Rossi's calculations. Rossi, introduction to *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 47.

¹⁹⁴ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 18.

impressing him with unfamiliar species of plants, such as a banana tree. “The fruit,” wrote Pagani, “which they call *muse* (Ar. *muz*) are similar almost to cucumbers and sweet like figs; one peels them like figs, and they are indescribably sweet.”¹⁹⁵ Later, in Cairo during Trevisan’s second audience with al-Ghuri, the ambassador met the sultan in one of his gardens. There they toured the fruit trees and drank a kind of lemon syrup (*sharab al-laymoun*) from porcelain pitchers. The sultan drank first, then personally served the ambassador and his entourage in turn.¹⁹⁶ Pagani’s account, dwelling as it does on eating and drinking, highlights reciprocity and perhaps even a degree of intimacy in such food-based encounters.

In these instances, it becomes apparent that the Mamluks and Venetians employed their consumable goods to lay the foundation for future negotiation. Food and its consumption, as Mary Douglas recognized, plays a major part in binding together individuals within a social system.¹⁹⁷ In this case, the two parties relied on reciprocal food-giving ceremonies to develop a greater sense of alliance and interdependence. These “little presents,” or what one scholar has described as “the small coin of social bonding,” were suitably flexible in meaning and universally necessary, so that they could be applied to almost any circumstances, justifying and promoting an ongoing dialogue between participants in the exchange.¹⁹⁸ The fact that these were unique foods produced in specific regions and cultures (Italy and the Nile Valley) would have

¹⁹⁵ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 18.

¹⁹⁶ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 27-8.

¹⁹⁷ See Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” *Daedalus* 101 (1972): 61-81. Although this is her most famous commentary on the subject, she offers another important commentary in her essay “Standard Social Uses of Food: Introduction.” See Mary Douglas, “Standard Social Uses of Food,” in *Food in the Social Order*, edited by Mary Douglas (New York: Russel Sage, 1984), 1-39.

¹⁹⁸ Felicity Heal, *The Power of Gifts: Gift-exchange in early modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 35-6.

added to the symbolic value of exchanging and consuming them, both expressing and reconfiguring the relationship between self and other in the process.¹⁹⁹

Although such “little presents” played a significant part in Mamluk-Venetian diplomacy, sultans reserved their more spectacularly high-profile gifts for the doge. Following the conclusion of the 1489 embassy, Qaytbay sent a chest full of rare luxury goods “to be presented to the most illustrious Signoria for the conclusion reached concerning the matters of Cyprus.”²⁰⁰ These included a dazzling variety of intricately decorated porcelain tableware (possibly from China),²⁰¹ muslin fabrics, aloeswood (an incense from southeast Asia),²⁰² benzoin resin (another type of incense from Indonesia),²⁰³ perfume (civet musk), “powder for the eyes,” and roughly two hundred pounds of sugar.²⁰⁴ In 1503, Sultan Qansuh al-Gahwri offered similar gifts to the Signoria: twenty pieces of large and small porcelain, six dishes, five bundles of benzoin, fifteen bundles of aloewood, four horns of civet musk, and fifty loaves of sugar.²⁰⁵ In 1512 the sultan assigned Sanudo an individual award of five bundles of aloeswood, five pieces of porcelain, five bundles of benzoin, and 200 ducats.²⁰⁶ These were not mere tokens, but exquisite and unique gifts undoubtedly meant to awe their Venetian recipients.²⁰⁷

¹⁹⁹ Anna Meiggs, “Food as a Cultural Construction,” in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 1997), 105.

²⁰⁰ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 225.

²⁰¹ On Mamluk tableware and dining utensils, see Amalia Levanoni, “Food and Cooking during the Mamluk Era: Social and Political Implications” *MSR* 9 (2005): 201-222.

²⁰² Wilhelm von Heyd, *Histoire du Commerce du Levant au Moyen-âge*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1967), 581-582. *Aquliaria agallocha*, was imported from as far away as China but was cultivated and used in religious ceremonies in India.

²⁰³ Heyd, *Histoire du Commerce* II, 580. *Styrax benzoin*, also known as Javanese incense, a product of Sumatra.

²⁰⁴ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 225.

²⁰⁵ Danese, *Viaggio al Cairo*, 129, with additional information in Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 92. Sanudo records the number of porcelains that arrived in Venice at 19, suggesting that one was lost (or stolen) in transit.

²⁰⁶ Pagani, *Viaggio al Cairo*, 129.

²⁰⁷ There is no mention in the sources of gifts being sent to the doge during the 1512 embassy. The Venetian documents make no explanation of this absence, nor is it commented upon by Ibn Iyas.

The Mamluk sultanate's presents played on multiple senses through the soft touch of the fabrics, the beautiful sight of the porcelains, the smell of the perfumes and incense, and the sweet taste of the sugar. The gifts of 1490 were accompanied by a written message from Qaytbay: "to His Excellency the Doge, religious, prudent, valiant, victorious, a champion and glory of the nation of Christianity, honor of the faith and of the cross, Duke of Venice and her Dominion and other leaders of the faith and of the baptism, friend of kings and sultans - may God in the Highest bring peace upon him."²⁰⁸ With utter solemnity, the Muslim ruler offered the blessings of God to the doge, the "champion of Christianity."²⁰⁹

Perhaps the most significant present of the 1490 gift exchange was also the smallest: a single ampoule of balsam. Balsam was a fragrant oil produced through the extraction of sap from the tree known as Balm of Gilead, which grew in the groves outside Cairo.²¹⁰ Used in the preparation of many different medicines, it was believed to possess thaumaturgical properties: it could prevent blindness, heal wounds, delay aging, and cure poisoning.²¹¹ These last two attributes probably made balsam particularly sought after by princes, but the substance was reportedly extremely difficult to obtain because it was thought to be found only in Egypt.²¹²

²⁰⁸ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 271.

²⁰⁹ This type of religiously charged language was not uncommon in letters from Egyptian sultans to Christian rulers. Benjamin Z. Kedar, "Religion in Catholic-Muslim Correspondence and Treaties," in *Diplomatics in the Eastern Mediterranean 1000-1500: Aspects of Cross-Cultural Communication*, ed. Alexander D. Beihammer et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 407-422. The rulers of Venice reciprocated in equally confessional terms. A letter from Doge Michele Steno to the sultan Faraj, composed in 1411, greeted the Mamluk ruler as "champion of the Islamic community, whose rule let God render eternal. Michael, doge of Venice, kisses the earth in your shadow, and prays that God in the highest increase his grandness, given that he is the champion and sustainer of the truth, and the refuge of all Muslim lands." Gabrieli, "Venezia e i Mamelucchi," 428.

²¹⁰ Efraim Lev and Zohar Amar, *Practical Materia Medica of the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean According to the Cairo Genizah* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 351. The region was known as Matarīya. Dopp, *Traité*, 82n.

²¹¹ Lev, *Practical Materia Medica*, 351.

²¹² Lev, *Practical Materia Medica*, 351. Ludolph von Suchem, a pilgrim to the Holy Land in the mid-fourteenth century, wrote that "crude balsam is the most precious jewel in the world, wherefore the holy patriarchs were wont to mix it with holy oil for anointing, and whatsoever flesh is touched with crude balsam never rots or corrupts, and when it is dripping fresh from the tree, if a drop be placed in a man's hand, it will drip through on the other side and pass through his hand. Moreover, if four or five drops of crude balsam be put into a man's eyes, which

Balsam was necessary for preparation of the Holy Chrism necessary for baptism and confirmation, and had an association with royal authority through its use in the anointing of kings.²¹³ Qaytbay, therefore, was giving the doge a treasured commodity with Christian connotations that was, in addition to being highly useful and desirable, an item that only he could provide. The exchange of such valuable presents between the Signoria and the sultan expressed not only imperial might, power, and identity, but also mutual dependence and the successful conclusion of a peace pact.

The robe of honor, or *khil'a*, represents a special type of gift given directly to the ambassador by the sultan. These clothes belonged to a longstanding tradition of ceremonial investiture in the Eastern Mediterranean, inherited from the Byzantines, and were most frequently used by Egyptian rulers to reward Mamluk officials. In these cases, the donation conveyed a message of possession and authority over the recipient, as when the sultan regularly sent a robe to the kings and queens of Cyprus. The *khil'a* could also be given to a visiting dignitary, and in such instances seems not to have had the same connotation of domination, but served rather as a means to honor a guest of inferior rank to the sultan. Thus these robes were not generally given to doges or other foreign leaders, but rather to their servants. By comparison, resident consuls, theoretically Venetian officials but at the same time both supported by and

are going blind through lack of moisture, old age, or any other infirmity, straightway his eyes will remain exactly as they were at the instant when the balsam was poured in, getting neither better nor worse. . . this fact is clearly shown in many corpses of great men of old which have been found entirely uncorrupt, because they have been anointed with balsam. . . Moreover, this boiled balsam is an exceeding noble drug, and is very good for the scars of wounds. . . The Blessed Virgin Mary dwelt with the Boy Jesus in the place where the Garden of Balsam now is, when she fled into Egypt from before the face of Herod; and she constantly washed her sheets and clothes and Jesus in the fountains which water the garden, for which cause it is thought of a truth that the balsam grows here, for as far as we know it is found nowhere else in the world." Aubrey Stewart, ed. and trans., *Ludolph von Suchem's Description of the Holy Land and of the Way Thither, Written in the Year A.D. 1350* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 69-70.

²¹³ Jean Hani, *Sacred Royalty: from the Pharaoh to the Most Christian King* (London: Matheson Trust, 2011), 221. Dopp, *Traité*, 82n.

answerable to the Mamluks, did undergo ritual investiture. There was of course a certain amount of ambiguity and freedom of interpretation available during such moments in ambassadorial missions. Different interpretations were undoubtedly available to the donor and recipient regarding the significance of investiture.

After the death of Ambassador Diedo in early 1490, his secretary and successor, Giovanni Borghi described the investiture ceremony that took place prior to his departure from Cairo. "Yesterday [26 March 1490], in the name of the Holy Spirit, I was dressed by this most excellent lord Sultan and benignly dispatched. The robe is silk, gilded in the Turkish fashion, and lined with ermine . . . Tomorrow I will receive the presents and the robe for the investiture of Cyprus."²¹⁴ One of the most striking aspects of this passage is that the ambassador noticed no contradiction in being dressed by a Muslim ruler while invoking the "Spirito Sancto" of the Trinity. Borghi's words, which brim with self-satisfaction, reflect the mingling of identities involved in such intimate diplomatic exchanges. Although Elias Muhanna has examined Ottoman-Mamluk diplomatic exchange of fabrics as a demonstration of Muslim solidarity against the "infidel," it is important to keep in mind that the Mamluks gave similar presents to westerners, and that at least some of the materials for these costumes came from western suppliers.²¹⁵

The range of possible interpretations of the robe of honor available to a Venetian recipient perhaps best underscores the element of ambiguity necessary in the diplomatic gift. From the elaborate descriptions of these vestments found in the sources, one can safely conclude

²¹⁴ Rossi *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 220. "Questa io scrivo solamente a vostra magnificentia per dichiarirli come heri cum el nome del Spirito Sancto fui vestito da questo excellentissimo signor Soldan et benignamente spazato. La vesta è de seda cum oro ala turchescha, fodrata de armelini. Fo etiam vestito el reverendissimo monsignor Malipiero et similiter Alvise de Piero, mio coadiutor, servitor de vostra magnificentia. Domane harò i presenti et la vesta per la investition de Cypri."

²¹⁵ Elias Muhanna, "The Sultan's New Clothes: Ottoman-Mamluk Gift Exchange in the Fifteenth Century," *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World* 27 (2010): 199.

that the ambassador might regard such a present as a handsome reward for a job well done. Yet at the same time, the fact that similar garments were given to the resident consuls (who could on occasion find themselves imprisoned by the sultans), to the sultan's lieutenants (whose very lives depended on the ruler's favor), and to the monarchs of Cyprus (described as slaves of the sultans), must also have been known to the Venetian ambassadors.²¹⁶ The liminal quality of the *khil'a* was enhanced further by its mixed provenance: of Islamic manufacture but of potentially Italian or at least European materials. Although a source of pride to the recipient in Cairo, it may be worth asking whether a Venetian would have worn such ostentatious and foreign trappings in the lagoon itself.²¹⁷

One of the most striking differences between Venetian and Mamluk gift-giving practices is the way in which the two governments received their gifts. As already noted, the Egyptian court followed a prescribed protocol in accepting and disbursing diplomatic presents. The Venetian government assigned gifts in advance to every leading member of the Mamluk hierarchy, from the sultan to the grand dragoman, and recipients were afterward apparently free to exchange gifts with one another. The situation was much different in Venice, where strict provisions existed concerning the receipt of presents by governmental officials. Queller notes that legislation passed as early as 1375 forbade any officeholder from accepting gifts, with the

²¹⁶ Sanudo, *Diarii*, II, 906. Caterina Corner referred to herself as "tua schiava," in a letter to Qaytbay written in September 1489. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 34, f. 44 v (carta 32 v) (7 September 1489). Cf. Rossi *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 256.

²¹⁷ Leon Mayer posed a similar question regarding Mamluk ambassadors. Leon Mayer, *Mamluk Costume: A Survey* (Geneva: Albert Kundig, 1952), 64. "It would be interesting to know whether Mamluk ambassadors were given robes of honour cut according to European fashion at the few Christian courts (such as Barcelona, Venice, Cyprus) with which the Mamluks were in diplomatic relations, and, if so, whether they would have dared to wear them on arrival in Cairo as they used to wear robes of honour granted by Moslem rulers. The fact that they were given robes of honour and appeared in them before the Sultan is too well known to be disputed, the only point at issue is the cut. On the other hand it is a fact that among the presents brought to Cairo and Alexandria by Venetian ambassadors there were textiles as well as ready made clothes."

penalty of immediate dismissal and exclusion from any future position.²¹⁸ Similar provisions required ambassadors to turn over all gifts they received to be sold at public auction, originally supervised by the *ufficiali alle rason nuove* (though the *ufficiali alle rason vecchie* took over the responsibility in 1507 in response to charges of abuse of power).²¹⁹ Anyone who wished to keep a gift had to purchase it back from the state.²²⁰ Custom dictated that certain types of goods (benzoin and aloeswood incense, cloth) would be given to the basilica of San Marco.²²¹ Although the spirit of such laws aimed at eliminating bribery and personal interest from statecraft, it is difficult to imagine that the practice of auctioning off ceremonial presents would not have soured both the donor and the recipient.

Instead of preventing a loss of dignity to the state, moreover, the legislation seems to have rendered officials all the more eager to seize gifts for themselves before they could be auctioned. Marin Sanudo describes a particularly embarrassing moment he claims to have seen in 1515, when a load of gifts that the sultan had sent to Cyprus arrived in the Collegio. “It was opened and ransacked. One person grabbed one thing, and someone else took another, with such madness that it was a great shame to see.”²²² The doge came away from the fracas with a horn of civet musk, and others took porcelain and, it seems, whatever they could get their hands on.²²³ Sanudo explained that “Ser Antonio Tron, the procurator, had not wanted it to happen that way,

²¹⁸ Queller, *Early Venetian Legislation*, 42.

²¹⁹ Queller, *Early Venetian Legislation*, 42-3.

²²⁰ Queller discusses some initial attempts at preventing the original recipient from buying back his gift, but this effort seems to have been abandoned by the fifteenth century. Queller, *Early Venetian Legislation*, 43.

²²¹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XX, 41. “Si consuetava. . .el benzui e li panni da far pianee restava a la chiezia di San Marco e lo aloe.”

²²² Sanudo, *Diarii*, XX, 41. Although the disorder is noteworthy, the practice of splitting up the presents rather than auctioning them does not seem to have been unusual by the early sixteenth century. Sanudo describes a similar instance of division of gifts among members of the Collegio, rather than an auction, taking place in 1503. Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 216.

²²³ Cf. Patricia H. Labalme and Laura Sanguinetti White, eds. and trans., *Venice: Città Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 275, n. 125.

but instead that the chest be sent away and given to the *Rason vechie* and sold for the benefit of San Marco. That availed him nothing, and he left with the intention of reporting the matter.”²²⁴ The diarist then proceeded to report the names of the guilty: the councilor Ser Alvise Pisani took an ermine-lined robe of gold, the councilor Ser Francesco Foscari took daggers and muslin,²²⁵ and the head of the Forty, Ser Zuan Francesco Bragadin, took a saddle.²²⁶ Sanudo noted that the news of this had caused considerable scandal in Venice, and that it had been decreed that anyone who had taken something was to turn it over to the *Rason vechie* or be subject to a fine of one hundred ducats.²²⁷ One can only wonder whether, if word of either the ransacking of the sultan’s gifts or the practice of public auction ever arrived in Cairo, it was met with amusement or offense.

Although considering patterns of Venetian-Mamluk gift behavior helps explain important aspects of the relationship between these two regimes, the silences in the documentary record shed still further light on Venice and Cairo’s regard for one another. Publicly, the Venetians presented themselves to the Mamluks as important partners of the sultan and the Egyptian military aristocracy. Trevisan described the situation to Qansuh al-Ghuri as a loving friendship, an *amor natural*, like that “between a father and his children.”²²⁸ The reality, of course, was something rather different. Venetian leaders seem to have found the Mamluks difficult business partners. Thus, Diedo could refer to them in a private letter not as friends or family, but as

²²⁴ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XX, p. 41.

²²⁵ Neither the transcription nor the terminology in this passage of Sanudo is clear. The Fulin edition reads “fese, et iscari,” and “ixari e fessa.” But see the interpretations made by Labalme, *Venice: Città Excelentissima*, 275n125. They interpret the text as *sesse* (muslins) and take *iscari* to be similar to the Turkish word *işki*, a kind of dagger.

²²⁶ Cf., Labalme, *Venice: Città Excelentissima*, 275.

²²⁷ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XX, p. 41. “De la qual voce e acto la terra fo piena.” *Ibid.*, 47. Cf. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 71 v (7 Mar 1515).

²²⁸ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 200.

“barbarians.”²²⁹ The “de facto alliance” was based on economic necessity and dictated by geographical circumstance, not love, and both its delicate nature and its limitations become apparent when considering precisely which sorts of gifts were *not* exchanged.²³⁰

Arms and armor were a common diplomatic gift among Christian and Muslim rulers in this period. In Italy, as Machiavelli observed, “we often see Princes given horses, weapons, cloth of gold, precious stones and similar.”²³¹ Yet the practice was widespread, and equally common in Islamic lands. For example, the Hafsids of Tunis sent Qansuh al-Ghuri a cannon on the occasion of a military victory at Djerba in 1511.²³² The leader of the Blacksheep Turkmen (*Qara Qoyunlus*) sent Sultan Jaqmaq weapons captured from a rival family member in 1457.²³³ The upstart sultan of the Whitesheep Turkmen (*Aq Qoyunlu*), Uzun Hasan, sent Sultan Qaytbay a suit of armor in 1468 and 1472, receiving a counter-gift of weapons in return.²³⁴ Weapons were also among the gifts sent by Qaytbay to the Ottoman sultan Bayezid in 1494.²³⁵

Such material exchanges could transcend confessional boundaries as well. The French king Charles VII sent an ambassador to Jaqmaq in 1442, who offered the sultan a crossbow, six arrows, six glaives, six axes, harnesses, and a mail shirt.²³⁶ In 1483, according to the Dutch pilgrim Joos van Ghistele, King Ferrante I of Naples sent as a gift to Qaytbay a veritable arsenal: cuirasses, mail shirts, helmets, brassards, halberds, axes, spears, javelins, swords, knives, arbalests, culverins, serpentines, harquebuses, “other firearms,” a bombard, powder, ammunition,

²²⁹ Rossi *Ambasciata Straordinaria*, 83.

²³⁰ The phrase is from Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 125.

²³¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, and Peter E. Bondanella, trans., *The Prince* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

²³² Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 24.

²³³ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 78.

²³⁴ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 80.

²³⁵ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 90.

²³⁶ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 116-117.

or, “in short, every type of weapon.”²³⁷ That a Christian prince who gave weaponry to the Muslims violated longstanding papal prohibitions appears to have mattered to Ferrante not at all.²³⁸ This practice does not, however, seem to have occurred in the context of Venetian-Mamluk diplomacy.

If there is no evidence of any such direct exchange of military accouterment between Venice and Cairo directly, this merits investigation. Especially in a well-established diplomatic context, in which so many other types of gifts were given, it is a rather conspicuous absence. To complicate the picture further, the Mamluks *did* give military paraphernalia to the rectors of Cyprus as customary gifts: in 1499, for example, the sultan’s annual gifts were a gold and silver saddle, two saddle covers, four pieces of camlet, fifteen bundles of benzoin, a four-ounce horn of civet musk, four pieces of muslin, and fourteen pieces of porcelain; in 1503, al-Ghuri sent porcelain, aloeswood, civet musk, treacle, benzoin, a horse blanket of purple and gold cloth, a silver and golden saddle, and two shields.²³⁹ In fact, the Flemish pilgrim Joos van Ghistele clearly explained the significance of military gifts to Cyprus in reporting one episode of exchanges between Qaytbay and the queen, writing that after one payment of tribute arrived in Cairo “the sultan sent the queen a gilded robe made in the Muslim fashion; he also sent an

²³⁷ Renée Bauwens-Préaux, trans., *Voyage en Égypte de Joos van Ghistele, 1482-1483* (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1976), 40-41. The King of Naples actively aided the Turks’ rivals. Santo Brasca reports learning from a Venetian that Ferrante had also supplied the Knights of Rhodes (enemies of both the rulers of Cairo and Istanbul) during the Ottoman siege of 1480. Santo Brasca attributed the subsequent Turkish expedition into Apulia in September 1481 to this. “Domandato se havevano hauto secorso da christiani [the Rhodians] rispose ch’el re Ferrando gli havea mandato tre nave grossissime cariche de homeni, munitione et artigliarie, et ch’el Turcho indignato per questo have deliberato mettere campo in Puglia, et cosi fu in effecto.” Lepschy *Viaggio in Terrasanta*, 121. For details regarding the conquest of Otranto, see C. Foucard, “Otranto nel 1480 e nel 1481,” *Archivio storico per le province napoletane* VI (1881): 74-176.

²³⁸ On this topic, particularly the bull *In coelam Domini*, see Stefan K. Stantchev, *Spiritual Rationality: Papal Embargo as Cultural Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 101.

²³⁹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, II, 615, V, 116. Since the shields are described as “scudeloti picoli,” and are listed with the porcelains, however, they may have referred to a kind of porcelain piece in the shape of a shield rather than an actual shield. This seems even more likely given that in Sanudo, *Diarii*, II, 615, a gift of “porzelane, scudele due” is mentioned.

extremely beautiful horse, a gilded sword, and two gold spurs.” “He did this,” van Ghistele continued, “at each payment, to show that he held the king or queen of Cyprus as his slave, as one who could possess no wealth without his permission.”²⁴⁰ For that reason, whenever Mamluk presents of a more martial character arrived in the lagoon, they had officially been given to the regional government of Cyprus, a liminal zone and a tributary of Egypt until 1517.²⁴¹ The reason Venice and Cairo did not exchange arms or armor (at least directly) involved pragmatism and the dangerous capacity of a gift to miscommunicate, but had little to do with spiritual concerns about supplying the infidel.

As has been seen, the two parties tended to give one another goods that reflected the nature of their commercial relationship, primarily consumable commodities. By the same token, the sultans of Egypt may have been reluctant to give their principal trading partner military objects that had little to do with the economic character of their alliance. Weapons may have also been seen as less appropriate for a mercantile republic than for a princely regime such as that of Milan, Naples, or Florence. Finally, it is likely that Venetian-Egyptian diplomacy had settled so firmly into well-established norms that anything too far outside the acceptable range risked being misconstrued. It is worth observing that weapons as gifts possessed both utilitarian and ambiguous qualities, and, depending on the context, they could be read as a threat. Neither party wished to present themselves as military allies, and, perhaps worse from the Venetian perspective because it was too near to the truth, both wanted to avoid any gift that might connote vassalage.

²⁴⁰ Bauwens-Préaux, *Voyage en Égypte*, 46.

²⁴¹ See, for example, the arrival of a chest of gifts that apparently included ceremonial daggers and a saddle, which Sanudo describes as presents of the sultan “mandata di Cypri.” Sanudo, *Diarii*, XX, 41.

By the same token, the sultans also frequently gave exotic animals to foreign rulers, often in exchange for horses. Indeed, horses appear to have been a popular present for the Mamluks, who were famed cavalymen. In the late fourteenth century, the sultan of Tunis sent his best horses as a gift to the Mamluk sultan Barquq at the urging of the Maghrebi diplomat Ibn Khaldun.²⁴² Likewise, Gian Galeazzo Visconti sent horses and dogs to Barquq, who in turn sent leopards to the duke for his menagerie in Milan.²⁴³ Giraffes, which the Mamluks received as tribute from Ethiopia, were on occasion dispatched to foreign courts in the fifteenth century: in the 1490s, Qaytbay sent a giraffe to Ferrante I of Naples and another to the Ottoman sultan Bayezid II together with a red parrot and a lion.²⁴⁴ During his 1487 embassy to Florence, Qaytbay sent Lorenzo di Medici a giraffe, a horse, exotic goats and sheep, and a lion.²⁴⁵ To the duke of Milan, Galeazzo Sforza, he sent an elephant and a tiger.²⁴⁶ Such “animals of power,” as Cihan Yüksel Muslu has shown, made impressive statements about the wealth and imperial might of the sender and underlined the prestige of the recipient, who would require vast resources in order to maintain a menagerie.²⁴⁷

If the Venetian and Mamluk rulers possessed the requisite means to exchange animals with one another, therefore, one must ask why they seem to have avoided doing so. Venice, in contrast to other cities of northern Italy, lacked a strong tradition of horsemanship, perhaps

²⁴² Walter Joseph Fischel, *Ibn Khaldun in Egypt: His Public Functions and His Historical Research* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 24. The ship transporting both the horses and ibn Khaldun’s wife and daughters sank in transit, however, killing all on board.

²⁴³ This probably occurred in 1394 or 1395. Described as *pardi* by the diplomat Bertrando de Mignanelli, Koornwinder-Wijntjes argues that these were in fact cheetahs. T. M. Wijntjes, “The Sultan, the Duke, and the Leopard: The Embassy of Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan to Sultan Barquq,” in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk Eras*, ed. U. Vermeulen et al. (Louvain: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1995), 549-61. Cf. Anne Wolff, *How Many Miles to Babylon?: Travels and Adventures to Egypt and Beyond, 1300 to 1640* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 26-7.

²⁴⁴ Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 159. Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 141.

²⁴⁵ Marina Belozerskaya, *The Medici Giraffe: And Other Tales of Exotic Animals and Power* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2009), 87-129.

²⁴⁶ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 142.

²⁴⁷ Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 40.

explaining why the Venetians did not give horses to the sultans. Yet it remains striking that the Mamluks were equally reluctant to give animals to Venice. The answer may have much to do with the Venetians' presentation of themselves abroad, an image upheld by Cairo: menageries flaunted luxury and princely power. The Signoria, overseeing what it insistently presented both at home and abroad as a tranquil republic, might have deliberately wished to avoid the kind of ostentatious excess that had become synonymous with the tyrants of Milan, Florence, and Naples. Even though the doge was in some sense a prince, the sultans of Egypt supported the rulers of Venice by avoiding conspicuous animal gifts that they understood to suit a monarch better than an elected official.

Human beings could serve as diplomatic gifts, but only in certain contexts, and (with the exception of Pietro Zen) were never exchanged between Venetians and Mamluks. For obvious reasons, slaves were usually only offered up as presents between rulers of the same faith. Among the more notable examples from this period, King Fernando II of Aragon sent one hundred Moorish slaves to Pope Innocent III, fifty to the court of Naples, and thirty to that of Portugal following his successful conquest of Malaga in 1487.²⁴⁸ Not to be outdone, in the following year King João II of Portugal gave one hundred newly imported African slaves as a present to the pope.²⁴⁹ Venice even received a Canary islander as a gift from the Spanish crown in 1497, but seems to have considered re-gifting him to Francesco II Gonzaga of Mantua.²⁵⁰ In short, the phenomenon of slave-as-gift could occur as an aspect of Christian diplomacy at this time, but there is no instance of the Venetians using them as currency in their dealings with the sultans of Cairo.

²⁴⁸ L. P. Harvey, *Islamic Spain: 1250 to 1500* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 300.

²⁴⁹ Junius P. Rodriguez, *Chronology of World Slavery* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 125.

²⁵⁰ K. J. P. Lowe and T. F. Earle, *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 139.

There was certainly a demand for this type of human commodity within the sultanate itself, which was a great importer of slaves. In the eastern Mediterranean, the Genoese had dominated this particular niche of the slave trade, operating out of the Black Sea and supplying the Mamluks with fresh recruits.²⁵¹ This was a business, though, and not a case of diplomatic gift giving.²⁵² The Genoese-Mamluk slave trade apparently went into a decline in the second half of the fifteenth century, moreover, prompting Egypt to rely more heavily on its African and Ottoman neighbors rather than on Christian mariners.²⁵³ While Nubia paid Cairo an annual tribute of four hundred slaves, prisoners of war frequently made their way into the diplomatic gift lists, particularly as the Ottomans began to enjoy a renewed success in Europe.²⁵⁴ Following the battle of Varna, the Ottoman sultan Murad II sent sixteen Christian noblemen, still wearing their armor, as a gift to Cairo.²⁵⁵ On the occasion of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, Mehmed II included thirty nobles and two clergymen as slave-gifts to the Mamluk

²⁵¹ See for example Piloti, *Traité sur le Passage en Terre sainte*, 143. "La cité de Gaffa est de Genevois, et si est voisine et circondee du pays payens, comme de Tartres de Cercassi et de Rossi et d'autres nations poyens. Jusques à celles pars le souldain du Cayre mande ses facteurs et fait achatter esclaves; lezquelx n'ont nésune aultre voye de monter en mer, senon que en la cité de Gaffa; ' et quant ilz viennent mennés audit lieu de ceulx ytels esclaves genevois; gouverneurs dudit lieu, font demander se ilz veullent estre crétiens ou poyeus, et ceulx qui disent voloir estre cretiens les retiennent, et ceulx lezquelx respondent valoir estre poyen lessent aller, et demeurent en la liberté du facteur du souldain, lequel lez vient à charger sur naves de très-faulx et très-mavais cretiens, et lez apportent en Alexandrie ou vrayment à Damia et de là au Cayre. Et se ne fust la nécessité que Genevois ont de la cité d'Alexandrie, ilz ne lasseroyent passer nésuns desdis esclaves."

In the 1430s, Bertrandon de la Broquiere claimed to have met a Genoese merchant employed by Sultan Barsbay to procure slaves at the fortress of Caffa, in the Crimea. Schefer, *Le Voyage d'Outremer*, 68.

²⁵² This is not to say that the Venetians abstained from slave trading with the Mamluks. Venetian involvement in the late fifteenth century slave trading seems to have been more common in North Africa. In 1494, for example, a ship captain, Ser Pietro Dolfin received a white female slave from Qaytbay's wife that he was to transport and offer as a gift to a ruler in Barbary. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 14, f. 42 v (11 August 1494). Giovanni Manzini mentioned that the Venetian ship he was on transported two black slaves, purchased at Bugia, to Algiers. ASVe, Cancelleria Inferiore, notai, busta 124, document 3, fol. 52 v. Cf. the transcription of this document in Lucia Greco, ed., *Quaderno di Bordo di Giovanni Manzini prete-notaio e cancelliere (1471-1484)* (Venice: Comitato per la pubblicazione delle fonti relative alla storia di Venezia, 1997).

²⁵³ Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 364.

²⁵⁴ Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 52.

²⁵⁵ Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 38.

sultan.²⁵⁶ The defeated did not even need to be living, necessarily. At times, the Ottomans and Mamluks gave one another the severed heads of vanquished enemies.²⁵⁷ But far less frequently did the Mamluks give slaves or prisoners of war to the Ottomans: in 1502, Qansuh al-Ghuri rewarded a visiting Ottoman ambassador with female slaves, probably in return for the gift of slaves that a Mamluk ambassador had received from Bayezid II in 1497.²⁵⁸

In sum, slaves were most often a gift between rulers, whether Christian or Muslim, who viewed themselves as participating in a joint war against the infidel. This is not to say that Venetian merchants did not engage in the slave trade in the eastern Mediterranean in much the same fashion as the Genoese, and in spite of Church prohibitions against selling slaves to Muslims.²⁵⁹ Crete, Venice's great colony, in fact served as an entrepôt in the fifteenth century, and local authorities there sent captured slaves to the markets in Alexandria as well.²⁶⁰ As with animals, arms, and armor, the Venetians and Egyptians lacked neither the experience nor the means to exchange slaves as diplomatic gifts. That both parties chose not to suggests that they did not wish to present themselves to each other or to other powers as too closely aligned. It has already been seen that the Mamluks displayed a strong reluctance to give slaves away even to other Muslim rulers. Presumably the complicated politics involved in Venice's already problematic trading relationship with Cairo prompted the Serenissima to shun the use of slaves

²⁵⁶ Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 111.

²⁵⁷ For example, Uzun Hasan sent the heads of his rivals, the Aq Qoyunlu Shah Jahan and the Timurid sultan Abu Sa'id as gifts to Qaytbay in 1468 and 1469. In the latter case, the Mamluk sultan showed displeasure and gave the head a burial. Qansuh al-Ghuri received the head of a rebellious vassal from Sultan Selim I, in this case interpreted by the recipient as a threat despite assurances to the contrary by the Ottomans. Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 135, Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 41. On the latter example, see also Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 583. "El Signor turcho, poichè ebbe fato d'arme con el signor Sophi, tornando amazò el signor Allidulli, e la testa mandò a donar al signor Soldan, il qual ebbe molto a mal, essendo suo amiraglio, et deliberò unirsi con il signor Sophi, el qual de novo è stà molto danizato dal Signor turcho."

²⁵⁸ Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 165.

²⁵⁹ Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 36.

²⁶⁰ Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 364.

as gifts. By the same token, the Mamluk sultans, on ever weaker footing in their efforts to present themselves to the Ottomans as rightful guardians of the caliph and stalwart custodians of the holy cities, would not have wished to be seen giving such a meaningful present to a Christian power.

By way of conclusion, it is worth returning once again to robes of honor, gifts given regularly by both Venetians and Mamluks to foreign ambassadors, but never given from one ruler to another. The doge might send the sultan's retainers fine silk robes, for instance, and the sultan could personally outfit a departing Venetian with a robe of honor, as happened during Diedo's embassy. But between the doge and the sultan, the possibility of the gift going wrong, since giving clothing could potentially convey a sentiment of possession or hierarchy, was simply too dangerous. As Gavin R. G. Hambly and Paula Sanders have noted, robing in the eastern Mediterranean context invoked intimacy, bonding, and power.²⁶¹ "Robes of honor in particular," writes Hambly, "became the currency of mutual obligation and loyalty between superior and subaltern."²⁶² Muslu rightly points out that it should never be assumed that a foreign diplomat's receiving of a *khil'a* from a sultan implied disloyalty, but she also notes that robes did not make suitable gifts for sovereigns.²⁶³ Bayezid I, for example, was outraged when Tamerlane gave him a robe as a gift, a clear indication that the Timurid ruler regarded the Ottomans as

²⁶¹ Gavin Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara, From Ghazhna to Dehli: The Khil'a Ceremony in the Transmission of Kingly Pomp and Circumstance," in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 195-233.

²⁶² Hambly, "From Baghdad to Bukhara," in *Robes and Honor*, 195.

²⁶³ Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 42. Consider, for example, that in 1514, the Signoria gave robes of honor to the visiting Ottoman ambassador and his retinue. It seems extremely unlikely that either party viewed this investiture as a Venetian attempt to claim superiority over the Ottomans. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XVII, 566. "Vene l'orator dil Turco vestito con le tre veste li ha donato la Signoria nostra, di raso cremesin veludo cremesin, et restagno fodrà di zebelini. . . Et era acompagnato da zercha 10 zentilhomeni nostri, et li altri turchi vestiti chi de damaschin zalla, chi damaschin lionato, chi panno d'oro turchesco, chi de scarlato di le veste ha donà la Signoria nostra. Era assa' zente a vederlo a venir."

inferiors.²⁶⁴ On the other hand, both the rulers of Venice and the Mamluk sultanate appear to have been keenly aware of the complicated nature of investiture, making appropriate use of robes only in suitable contexts. In this regard, the Mamluks and Venetians acknowledged one another as sovereigns and equals.

Yet beneath the surface, in which parity and friendship were stressed, was the relationship ever acknowledged to be less than symmetrical? In the context of notable absences, it must be emphasized that none of the sources mention gifts from Qansuh al-Ghuri to the Signoria following the 1512 embassy of Domenico Trevisan. This lacuna is striking, because even when detailed information about presents is absent, chroniclers such as Marin Sanudo usually at least commented upon the fact that gifts were sent from Cairo, as in the poorly documented case of Girolamo Giustinian's embassy of 1514.²⁶⁵ The letter from the sultan to Doge Leonardo Loredan that Trevisan brought back mentions only investing of the ambassador and his company with robes of honor.²⁶⁶ As if to hint at the absence of gifts, Qansuh al-Ghuri's letter states that the doge "should gratefully receive our good works and should recognize what we have forgiven in order to please him, and on account of the good friendship, sincerity, and sound operations that we have."²⁶⁷ The letter, according to Marin Sanudo, finished with a warning: "it is no secret what tribute we must have from Cyprus for our noble treasury."²⁶⁸ The word tribute, which rarely appears in the context of Mamluk-Venetian diplomacy, is, crucially,

²⁶⁴ Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 42.

²⁶⁵ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XX, 47. "Essendo stà portà eri in Colegio il presente trasmesso a la Signoria nostra per il signor Soldan secondo el consueto, quello *immediate* è stà distribuito tra alquanti dil Colegio nostro, sicome a loro aparso."

²⁶⁶ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 48. "L'abbiamo vestito lui e il suo figliuolo e quelli che sono più reputati delle sue brigate di belle vesti avanti al nostro cospetto magnifico."

²⁶⁷ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 48. "La presenza del Doge debba ricevere le nostre buone opere con buon accetto, e conoscere quello che abbiamo perdonato per compiacerli, e per la buona amicizia che abbiamo e sincerità e buone operazioni nostre."

²⁶⁸ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 266.

defused through its association with Cyprus. Yet this stern language, coupled with the fact that the sultan gave the disgraced consul Pietro Zen as a personal gift to Trevisan, suggests that a deliberate choice had been made in not sending counter-gifts to Venice.²⁶⁹ Unlike the embassies of Diedo or Sanudo, in 1512 the sultan chose to reciprocate Venetian diplomatic gifts only with forgiveness and by allowing Zen to keep his life, while at the same time making demands about tribute.

Gift-giving allowed representatives of Venice and Cairo to come to the bargaining table in 1489-90, 1502-3, and 1512, and analyzing these episodes reveals much about their complex relationship. Diplomatic material exchanges followed a tightly scripted pattern, but even so, the actors found space to improvise and deviate from established norms according to the exigencies of the moment (for example, the inspection of Venice's gifts by the *nazir al-khass* in 1489, or the use of fanfare and music during Trevisan's 1512 expedition). At the same time, Mamluks and Venetians relied on material commodities to communicate a range of subtle and not-so-subtle messages about their own collective identities and about their regimes' turbulent entente. If the sources describe such material exchanges as a giving between equals, they do so in a deliberate effort to mask the strains and limitations of a relationship based on a medieval pattern of commerce under attack from the Portuguese and Ottomans.

²⁶⁹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 206.

Chapter Two:

Trading across Empires: Collusion and Conflict between the Venetian Merchant Nation and the Mamluks

In the late winter of 1492, the Senate of Venice voted in favor of a collective boycott against a Syrian merchant in Damascus. The council accused one Omar Sulemani of having absconded with 223 ducats belonging to a Venetian merchant, Andrea de Polis, in a sale of coral.²⁷⁰ According to the Senate's decree, Omar would be obligated to make restitution to Andrea before he could engage in any further trade with the Venetians. The details concerning this and similar cases contained in the governmental records of the *Deliberazioni Mar* show that Venetian merchants often accused their Muslim colleagues of fraudulent business practices. The Venetian Senate regularly complained that their merchants operating in the Mamluk Sultanate found themselves victims of "acts of deception from the Moors."²⁷¹ These duplicitous practices could take any number of forms, such as using false measures to weigh goods, diluting spices with dirt, or simply not fulfilling a crucial part of an agreement.

In response to these ongoing trade problems, Venetians overseas called on their home government to help organize boycotts against the Syrian and Egyptian traders whom they accused of fraud and theft. Following a petition from the merchants, the Senate would record the names of the individuals, the circumstances of the case, and then blacklist them. Too often, the

²⁷⁰ ASVe, Senato, *Deliberazioni Mar*, reg. 13, ff. 78r (13 February 1492). "Quod auctoritate huius consilii abataletur Homar de Sulimani, mercator maurus Damasci, ad instantiam viri nobilis Andree de Polis Ser Alvisis, per ducatos 223, quos ei manducavit occasione unius garbulei et levati in uno mercato coralarum. Ita quod nemo ex nostris civibus Venetianis ut qui pro Veneto tractetur possit mercari cum eo ut aliquo eius nomine contractari donec soluerit universum debitum superscriptum. Et si quis contrafecerit teneatur ad satisfactionem omnis debitis superscripti ipsi Ser Andree ut eius comisso."

²⁷¹ e.g. ASVe, Senato, *Deliberazioni Mar*, reg. 12, f. 193r (2 January 1490) "el fo provisto nei superior anni opportunamente per obviar ale deception et ingani facevano mori."

early modern Mediterranean has been portrayed in extremes, as either a zone of confrontation between incompatible cultures, or as a peacefully shared world of tolerant coexistence. The reality, however, lies somewhere in between. The merchants of Venice did business with Mamluk subjects, making loans, arranging long-term partnerships, and buying and selling spices and cloth.²⁷² Yet although the members of these two groups knew and depended upon one another, their interactions were hardly devoid of fierce conflict and competition, as the example of the dispute between Andrea de Polis and Omar Sulemani reveals.

Yet the actual relationship between Venetian merchants and Mamluk subjects was far more complex than this single example might suggest. Much like the diplomats and other officials discussed in Chapter One, merchants found room to maneuver within the constraints of the legal and institutional power structures in which they worked. As shown in the previous chapter, Venetian ambassadors and their Egyptian hosts made use of gifts and gift giving ceremonial to work against the restrictions that generations of standardized diplomatic protocol imposed upon them. Representatives delivered and manipulated messages through symbolically meaningful gifts and by subtly altering the attendant rituals of physical gift presentation in an effort to further their own particular agendas. In this way, they found a means to deviate from the normative dictates of diplomacy. By the same token, the dictates of commerce were equally susceptible to manipulation. Venetian merchants and their Mamluk counterparts deviated from the expectations of standard business practices and altered the language used to describe the nature of those exchanges for their own benefit. The dichotomy between merchants and the government must not be exaggerated, however. The patriciate was itself composed of the older

²⁷² The goods bought and sold included, in addition to pepper, aloeswood, benzoin (or styrax) resin, camlet cloth, cheese, cinnamon, cloth of gold, cloves, copper, coral, cotton, molasses, monkshood, muslin, satin, soda ash (sodium carbonate, used in glass production), talc, velvet. For a complete list of the commodities bought and sold by Venetian and Mamluk merchants in this period, see the appendix.

generation of traders who had already made their profits overseas and had transitioned in later years to public service. Rather than a clash between government and commerce, therefore, this should be seen as a generational conflict between the older resident merchants of the city and the younger Venetians who were still actively engaged in overseas trade, and defied the regulations of their elders while away.

Commerce, far more than diplomacy, was the lifeblood of the Venetian-Mamluk alliance. In spite of this, observers often characterized day-to-day business negotiations negatively, describing many commercial dealings as acts of fraud, extortion, and bribery. To what extent were such portrayals accurate, and why would the Venetians have tolerated such unfair business conditions? The following pages borrow from the contributions of Mauss, Malinowski, and Goffman to attempt to answer these questions, and explore how different parties – the Venetian home government and its consuls, their merchant subjects, and members of the Mamluk regime – chose to interpret and portray these material exchanges positively or negatively. This examination indicates that although cases of fraud and extortion did sometimes occur, Venetian and Mamluk subjects were also willing to alter the narrative, misrepresenting events to their own benefit. This chapter argues that Venetian merchants exploited the existing trade regulations of both powers to maximize their profit, and at times even colluded with Mamluk officials at the expense of their home government. In contrast to the standard image of the republic's tight state regulation of the eastern trade in this period, the evidence brought forth in this chapter highlights the merchants' clever strategy of combining ad hoc expedients and claims of dependence on the home government. Venice's overseas entrepreneurs sometimes resisted governmental intervention, at other times took advantage of their status as subjects of the Serenissima, in a

flexible and fluid strategy of profit and self-preservation that did not always coincide with the policies of their rulers in the lagoon.

Venetians in Egypt and the Levant exchanged material goods with the Mamluks and their subjects, contributing to a vibrant economic bond that bridged the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.²⁷³ They bought and sold from one another on an open market, but they also engaged in forms of gift giving and other less easily classifiable transactions. As has been shown in the previous chapter, gift exchange helped diplomatic representatives of Venice and Cairo to come to the bargaining table, resolve conflicts, and communicate a range of messages about their relationship. Gifts, in those particular ambassadorial contexts, served specialized political purposes that fostered cross-cultural communication and interaction between regimes. For Venetian merchants, other varieties of material transactions -- built upon diverse concepts of fraud, extortion, and gift giving--defined their own medial status between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Republic of Venice.

To profit from the trade in spices and fabrics that flowed westward across Asia, merchants from Venice had established small, semi-permanent trading colonies in Alexandria, Damietta, Damascus, Beirut, and Aleppo starting in the fourteenth century.²⁷⁴ Organized around

²⁷³ I here follow Trivellato's narrower definition of exchange and cross-cultural trade as "prolonged credit relations and business cooperation between merchants who shared implicit and explicit agreements about the rules of exchanges but who, because of historical patterns beyond their control, belonged to distinct, often legally separated communities." Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 1-2.

²⁷⁴ Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 74, 123-4. Ashtor estimates the Venetian merchant population in Alexandria in the 1470s to have been around 30-50 and 20-25 in Damascus. Cf. Constable, *Housing the Stranger*, 272, however, who considers this a low estimate. See also Alexander Cowan, *Mediterranean Urban Culture, 1400-1700* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000). Other eastern products that Venetians bought included cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, aloeswood, cloves, and molasses, for which see Heyd, *Histoire du commerce*, vol. 2, 555 ff.

A Venetian mercantile presence in Egypt existed in the thirteenth century. At papal instigation, trade had been suspended in the late 1200s in the wake of the final expulsion of the crusaders from the eastern Mediterranean littoral. Although Venetians were the most numerous of European traders in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, they lived and worked alongside communities of Catalans, Genoese, and French as well. Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 479-94. The presence of Florentine, Neapolitan, and Anconitan merchants in the sultanate tended to be more intermittent. *Ibid.*, 495-510.

their trading compound, or *fontego*, and overseen by their consul, these merchants negotiated, bought, and sold, often acting as agents for investors who stayed at home.²⁷⁵ They dealt with local Muslim brokers, with the sultan's own cartel of spice merchants, and with provincial Mamluk officials.²⁷⁶ This interaction on the commercial frontiers between Venice and Cairo necessitated flexible local solutions to problems of supply and demand that sometimes interfered with the government's own objectives, and could run counter to the leaders of the Serenissima's own policies. Such solutions involved the development of routines of exchange premised, perhaps not on trust, but at least upon clear, ritualized expectations of behavior that made business possible.²⁷⁷ But even such pragmatic brokering between merchants and Mamluks did not avert conflict entirely. Acts of aggression against Muslims perpetrated by other European

²⁷⁵ These factors (*fatori*) made purchases for their partners in Venice at the time of the *muda* convoys and negotiated future arrangements between shipping seasons. A collection of factors in a city was known as a *fatoria*. An example of this terminology, and the way in which agents did business in the Levant, is found in ASVe, Giudici di Petizion, Sentenze a giustizia, b. 199, fol. 3 r (Michele Foscarini agrees to loan Gregorio de Benenaris of Beirut 120 ducats at seven percent interest to be paid within three years), *ibid.*, fol. 27 r (Michele Foscarini contracted with Alvisio Arimondo to send him two bundles of pepper from Alexandria for 26 ducats). A similar example can be found in ASVe, Giudici di Petizion, Lettere Missive, b. 4, fol. 22 r. In Alexandria, the Venetians had two *fonteghi*. On the Venetian *fontego* system and on the history of the term more generally, see Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Medieval Mediterranean*, 269-72. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 90. In addition to the regular merchants, each community included a consul (Alexandria and Damascus) or vice-consul (Aleppo and Beirut), a secretary, a chaplain, a barber, a doctor, and at least one dragoman.

Although Italian women and children had at times lived in the merchant colonies in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, this practice seems to have been largely abandoned after the fall of Acre in 1291. Ashtor pointed out that free European women rarely appear in notarial acts from the Levant, although some merchants kept slave girls or concubines. Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 408. Two notable exceptions are represented by Caterina Vilion, who died in China in 1342, and the wife of Nicolo de' Conti, who together with her two children died from plague in Cairo in the 1430s. Giovanni Curatola, "Venice and the Islamic World in Light of Archival Documents," in *Venice and the Islamic World*, 62.

²⁷⁶ Venetian writers usually referred to Muslim merchants as *mori mercadanti* (or just *mori*), to the sultan's merchants as *coze* or *mercadanti del Soldan*, and to Mamluk officials as amirs (*amiragli*), "lords" (*signori*), or by a corruption of the Arabic name for their office (e.g. *nadracas* for *nazir al-khass*). *Coza* (Arabic, *khawaja*) was a title for a low-ranking chancery official in the Mamluk sultanate. Some *khawajas* were merchants of the sultan, but the title was not synonymous with that occupation. Venetian sources sometimes describe individuals in terms such as "Coza Bencolib marchadante del soldan," though it's not clear if these authors necessarily always distinguished the title from the occupation, or treated the word "coza" as a given name. See for example ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 11, f. 115 r (19 May 1481). On the title of *khawaja* among the Mamluks, see Ira Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 128.

A fascinating collection of documents pertaining to Venetian-Muslim trade in Alexandria from the mid-fifteenth century can be found in the notarial records of Servodio Peccator. See Franco Rossi, ed., *Servodio Peccator: Notaio in Venezia e Alessandria d'Egitto (1444-1449)* (Venice: Il Comitato Editore, 1983).

²⁷⁷ Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 4.

Christian powers and similarly disruptive geopolitical events reduced the compatibility of Venetian and Egyptian interests, in some cases resulting in commercial disputes over material goods in Alexandria and Syria or even reciprocal violence against the merchants of Venice. Thus, although the Venetian merchants of Egypt and the Levant and the subjects of the Mamluk Sultanate had developed their own set of gift giving and related exchange practices that facilitated a measure of partnership and cooperation, political vicissitudes at the global level seriously undermined the stability of those material relations.

Between 1480 and 1517, the entire system of exchange networks established in the Mediterranean entered a period of crisis. New international developments threatened the traffic of spices and other luxury goods coming from Asia to Europe, an enterprise in which the Venetians and their Muslim business partners had come to play a primary role.²⁷⁸ Vasco da Gama's rounding of the Cape of Good Hope in 1497 rightly concerned both the patricians in Venice and the Mamluk rulers of Cairo, since European navigation along the East African littoral and beyond posed a clear threat to Egypt's access to the Indian Ocean.²⁷⁹ When news of the establishment of a Portuguese spice route around the African continent reached Venice in 1501, it induced despair among the citizenry over the future vitality of trade in the eastern Mediterranean.²⁸⁰ In the following year vessels from Portugal began coordinated attacks on

²⁷⁸ "I portoghesi. Circumnavigando l'Africa hanno alterato i tradizionali circuiti commerciali, rompendo il monopolio delle spezie." Giuseppe Gullino, "Le Frontiere Navali," in *Storia di Venezia: Dalle Origini alla Caduta della Serenissima IV: Il Rinascimento. Politica e cultura*, eds. Alberto Tenenti et al. (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1996), 95.

The situation was equally bad for Venice closer to home, particularly over the course of the War of the League of Cambrai. Robert Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 167. "Loss of state and private income was accompanied by decline in revenue from trade. Enemy domination of the mainland cut off Venice from its principal customers in Germany, and the city suffered as enemy troops devoured the grain and wine of the captured lands. Galley voyages to the West were discontinued from 1509 to 1517, while trade with the Levant declined as the Venetian role as middleman was thus eliminated. Trade fell not only because of Venetian difficulties at home but because of turmoil in the Levant prior to the extension of Turkish authority to that area in 1516."

²⁷⁹ Abuseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 109.

²⁸⁰ Marino Sanudo, *Diarii*, XVI, 6.

Mamluk shipping near the Horn of Africa just as they started to establish their first outposts there, interrupting the vulnerable supply of spices that entered the Red Sea.²⁸¹ In a remarkably short span of time, world markets underwent a radical change so that by 1503 pepper sold in Lisbon cost only a fifth of the price asked in Venice.²⁸² The virtual monopoly on the pepper trade hitherto enjoyed by the sultanate and the Serenissima had been shattered.²⁸³ On the other side of the Mamluk Empire, meanwhile, the Ottomans began asserting a newfound naval superiority in the waters off Anatolia, threatening not only Cyprus and Syria, but putting Rhodes to siege in 1480 and seizing several Venetian maritime possessions (including the two “eyes of the Republic,” Modon and Coron) in the years that followed.²⁸⁴ The impact of the global shifts that

Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 2, 169, 171. “Questo viazo de Cholochut ogni anno per il Re di Portogallo se frequentava, et fo la ruina del Stato et citade veneta;” “Donde che essendo stato trovato questo novo viazo per il Re di Portogallo et che le spetie, quale doveanno venir da Cholochut, Cuzim et altri lochi de India in Alexandria over Barutti et *postea* venir a Venetia, et in questo locho venetto capitava *postea* tutto il mondo per comprar simel spetierie et portavano lo auro, lo argento et ogni altra marchadantia, dove *cum* il danaro se poteva sustentare ogni guerra, ahora, essendo trovato questo novo viagio per il Re di Portogallo, tute le spietiere, quale tendevano la volta del Chaiero, tute capiteranno in Portogallo per le charavelle, che anderanno in l’India a Cholocut et altri lochi a prenderle, et in questo modo li Venetiani non potranno aver spetie nè in Alexandria nè a Barutti, et, manchando le spetie a Venetiam, tranno far chossa che bona sia, et a pocho a pocho se conveniranno consumar et pervenir in niente. *Tamen* questi heram pronostici prusumptuosi, perchè li cielli potranno disponer altramente. Et veramente li marchadanti venetti stevano di mala voglia, giudicando che li viazi dovessero esser molto poveri, dubitando in la Soria non poter aver spetierie, che da Portogexi saranno state levate in la India, et *postea* li marchadanti Todeschi et altre natione, che solevano venir a comprar le spetierie a Venetia, per aver piu utilidade et miglior marchatto se ne anderanno in Portogallo a levar le spetie, perchè chadaun zercha la utilidade sua: tutavolta il seguito di questa materia dimostra lo effecto.”

²⁸¹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 230-3.

²⁸² Bernard Doumerc, “Il dominio del mare,” in *Storia di Venezia: Dalle Origini alla Caduta della Serenissima IV: Il Rinascimento. Politica e cultura*, eds. Alberto Tenenti et al. (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1996), 132.

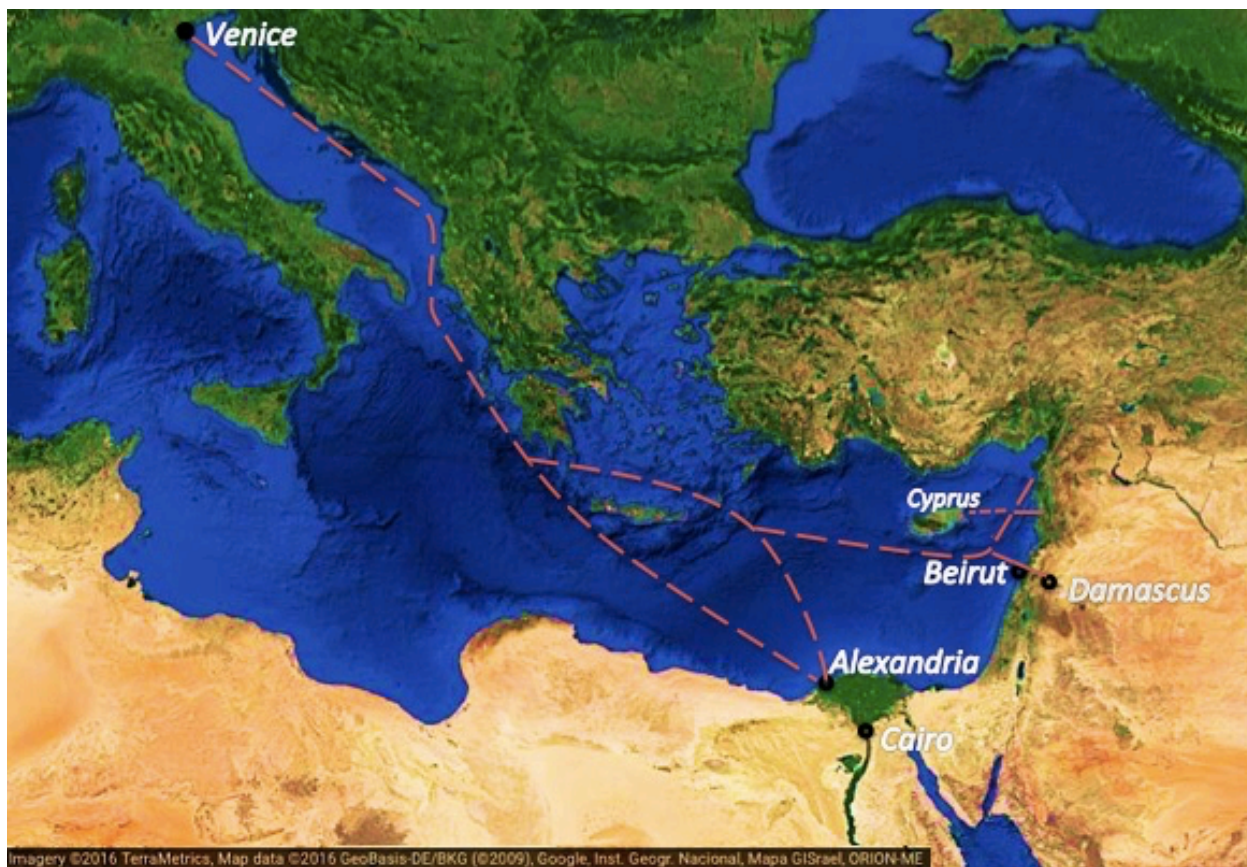
²⁸³ Priuli reported in 1505 that the Portuguese had ruined Venice’s trade with northern Europe. “La fiera consueta deli Todeschi di San Jacomo di questo mexe have facto pochissimo respecto ali anni passati et haveano levatto piper niente, zenzer blanco da miera 140 a ducati 17 in 17 ½ el cento, garoffolli a d. 11 in 12, noxe a grossi 5 in 5 ½ mazia a grossi 19 in 20: et Todeschi non voleano comprar, et *maxime* piper, ad niuno pretio, respecto a queste caravelle di Portogallo, quale metevano il mondo in grande expectatione et dubietà a comprare et fare marchadantia.” Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 2, 382.

The Venetians went on to recapture a share of the Mediterranean spice trade in the mid-sixteenth century, for which see Lane, *Venice*, 285.

²⁸⁴ By the end of the Ottoman-Venetian war of 1499-1503, Venice had lost Modon, Coron, Zonchio, and Santa Maura. Giuseppe Gullino, “Le Frontiere Navali,” 80-95.

Michael E. Mallett wrote that “la perdita di Modone e Corone nelle ultime fasi della guerra non fece che enfatizzare le difficoltà in cui versava Venezia nella sua tradizionale area di influenza, difficoltà aggravate dalla

occurred between 1480 and 1517 heightened tensions between Venetians and Mamluks considerably and kindled the outbreak of material conflicts between them.



*Figure 6: The Venetians' principal trade routes with the Mamluks linked the port cities of Alexandria and Beirut to Europe.*²⁸⁵

Aside from these developments, though, the overall stability of the Venetian-Mamluk trading system had always fluctuated from year to year to a degree. As mentioned in Chapter

notizia del ritorno delle flotte portoghesi cariche di spezie da Calicut, e della crisi del mercato di Alessandria.” Michael E. Mallett, “Venezia e la politica italiana: 1454-1530,” in *Storia di Venezia: Dalle Origini alla Caduta della Serenissima IV: Il Rinascimento. Politica e cultura*, eds. Alberto Tenenti et al. (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1996), 281.

²⁸⁵ Image courtesy of Google Maps.

One, the prosperity of the Venetians depended heavily on the timely arrival of ships laden with silver, gold, and merchandise coming out of the Serenissima's dominions.²⁸⁶ By the same token, the Venetians' Muslim counterparts depended just as much on the influx of spice shipments carried via the Red Sea, which meteorological considerations in the Indian Ocean, most especially the semi-annual monsoon wind cycle, easily affected.²⁸⁷ Whenever cash or commodities were not immediately at hand, Venetian and Mamluk agents frequently advanced one another loans. Ideally, these debts would be settled with the arrival of the next wave of imports, either from Venice's territories to the northwest or the sultan's ports to the southeast.²⁸⁸ Yet that was not always the result, and this particular economic climate – in which debt was common, goods were not reliably available, and the risk of defaulting ran high – only further intensified the potential for conflicts over cash and commodities. The calamitous developments in the Indian Ocean and the eastern Mediterranean at the turn of the century did not singlehandedly disrupt Venetian-Mamluk relations, therefore, but rather contributed to the disturbance of what was already a precariously balanced arrangement.

For their part, the leaders of the Republic of San Marco had endeavored to oversee and organize the economic practices linking Venice and Cairo into a carefully regulated commercial system.²⁸⁹ As the Senate frequently observed, the eastern trade had come to dictate “the well-

²⁸⁶ Ashtor estimated that 1,940,000 ducats were shipped to Alexandria from 1495 to 1511, and another 513,000 ducats were shipped to Syria. E. Ashtor, *Les métaux précieux et la balance des paiements du Proche-Orient à la basse époque* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1971), 1971, 66. On the role of currency in the trade system, see Ugo Tucci “Monete e banche nel secolo del ducato d'oro,” in *Storia di Venezia: Dalle origini alla Caduta della Serenissima V, Il Rinascimento. Società ed economia*, ed. Alberto Tenenti et al. (Rome: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1996), 754-6.

²⁸⁷ The seasonal monsoon weather pattern means that a steady four-month easterly wind in the winter is followed by a four-month westerly wind in the summer. In the age of sail, shipping from the Red Sea to India was easily achieved from June to September but would have been all-but impossible in the winter. Curtin, *Cross Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 97-8.

²⁸⁸ Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 90.

²⁸⁹ Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 74. For a relevant appraisal of the Venetian merchant presence in Egyptian lands and relationships with the Mamluk Sultanate, see Deborah Howard, “Venice and the Mamluks,” 75-89. See also

being of our state by comprising the majority of this city's income, as is known to everyone."²⁹⁰

Acting on behalf of its citizen-traders, the government assumed responsibilities of both a corporate board and a regulatory agency by promoting and attempting to control eastern commerce aggressively.²⁹¹ By law, participation in trade with the Mamluks was restricted to patricians and citizens who had paid for access to the state-owned galleys.²⁹² These men bid on rights to the galleys annually at public auction and could thereby become sponsors (*patroni*) of the vessels.²⁹³ A sponsor could use a ship and its crew for his own commercial enterprises or sell cargo space to his compatriots, but the vessel itself remained firmly the property of the government.²⁹⁴ Politics had become inextricably linked to trade, and the republic in this way

Gabrieli, "Venezia e i Mamelucchi," 417-43; Doris Stöckly, *Le système de l'incanto des galées du marché à Venise* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). For an overview of Venice's overseas communities in the eastern Mediterranean more generally, see Benjamin Arbel, "Venice's Maritime Empire in the Early Modern Period," in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400-1797*, ed. Eric R. Dursteler (Boston: Brill, 2013), 125-253.

²⁹⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 34, f. 42 r. (1 September 1489). Cf. Rossi *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 249.

²⁹¹ The government sought to protect the interests of patricians who paid money for the right to participate in the galley trade, and to that end tried to grant them a degree of monopoly. See Eliyahu Ashtor, "Venezia e il pellegrinaggio in Terrasanta nel basso medioevo," *ASI* 143, no. 2 (1985): 220.

"Un'organizzazione così complessa rivela la natura della solidarietà tra Stato, armatori e mercanti, in una sorta di mutua protezione contro i pericoli del mare e ancor più contro la concorrenza, fattore che, ai loro occhi, metteva in maggior pericolo il buon andamento degli affari. Il rimedio più idoneo a farvi fronte sembrava poter essere il monopolio con tutto ciò che ne seguiva, e in realtà più che di mutua assistenza, in assenza di una qualsivoglia concorrenza dall'interno e dall'esterno, di vero e proprio monopolio si trattava." Jean-Claude Hocquet, "I meccanismi dei traffici," in *Storia di Venezia: Dalle Origini alla Caduta della Serenissima III: La formazione dello stato patrizio*, eds. Alberto Tenenti et al., 593.

²⁹² That is, anyone wishing to import goods from the Mamluk sultanate into Venetian territories was legally obligated to do so through the *muda* system, either via the galleys or via the slower convoy line of round ships. Goods imported in any other way were technically contraband. Goods imported to be sold on behalf of a foreigner also fell into this category. Because of their speed and security, mercantile galleys, as opposed to slower round ships (*nave* or *coche*), hauled precious goods such as spices and silks that required less cargo space than bulk commodities (e.g. cotton). Frederic C. Lane, "Fleets and Fairs," in *Venice and History: The Collected Papers of Frederic C. Lane*, ed. by a Committee of Colleagues and Former Students (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 131-2. For examples of smuggling, see discussions in the Senate's *Mar* deliberations: e.g., ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 69 r (27 February 1515, a Venetian was accused of transporting goods on behalf of Genoese business partners); ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg., 11, f. 37 r (12 July 1479, a group of Cypriots was accused of illegally shipping goods to be sold in Syria).

²⁹³ The same practice was used for the galleys traveling to Flanders, Barbary, and Aigues-Mortes, although access to these shipping routes cost much less (around one-third of that paid to access the Levantine galleys). Doumerc, "Il dominio del mare," 132.

²⁹⁴ The practice of publicly auctioning galleys dates back to 1329, and was first used in trade with the Byzantine Empire. Lane, *Venice*, 129.

claimed a monopoly over commercial access to the east with the professed intention of guaranteeing profitable opportunities to all members of the patriciate.²⁹⁵

Commercial legislation to that end was ambitious, as the Senate dictated many specific logistical details of business in the eastern seas. For example, regardless of how a sponsor might choose to use his investment, for reasons of safety the galleys usually had to travel together in a convoy, or *muda*.²⁹⁶ In this period, one *muda* usually departed for Syria and another for Egypt every year, in August or September.²⁹⁷ The state aimed to hold the convoys to a tight schedule, allotting ship captains a maximum number of days that they could anchor in Mamluk ports before embarking on their return voyage.²⁹⁸ Timing mattered, not only because late autumn storms would jeopardize shipping if departure from the eastern ports was delayed, but also because buyers at home demanded the arrival of spices in advance of Venice's winter fair, when

²⁹⁵ State management of mercantile galleys began in 1294. Doumerc, "Il dominio del mare," 115. Cf. Lane, *Venice*, 145.

²⁹⁶ For an example of the Senate's command that the galleys travel together in a convoy, and the rationale for doing so, see ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 2, f. 17 v. (10 July 1444). The convoys from Venice to Egypt were progressively organized by the Venetian government beginning in 1317. Doumerc, "Il dominio del mare," 119. Cf. Lane, "Fleets and Fairs," in *Venice and History*, 128-9. Lane notes that *muda* technically had two meanings: it could refer to a convoy of ships or the legal loading period of merchandise while the convoy was in a foreign port. Heyd wrote that the word *muda* came from the Italian *mutare*, meaning to exchange. Cf. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 89-90, who asserts that the term derives from Arabic, *mudda*, meaning a period of time. The term appears to have been, at any rate, employed only in the later Middle Ages. In the thirteenth century, the Venetian government described the convoys as "caravans" (*caravane*). See Roberto Cessi, ed., *Deliberazioni del Maggior Consiglio* II (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1934), 68, c. 99 (1278). "Quod non possint nec debeant ire due caravane in anno."

²⁹⁷ See, for example, Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 1, 30, 42, 76. Priuli wrote that in 1495 and in 1496, four galleys went to Alexandria and another four to Beirut each year. In addition, one must take into account the Barbary galleys, which in the later fifteenth century made a round trip from Venice to North Africa to Egypt. Bernard Doumerc, "Il dominio del mare," 143 ff. In 1495, two of the Beirut galleys, loaded with cotton, soap, and ginger, sank in the Adriatic on their return voyage, prompting the government to attempt a salvage operation. The loss of two galleys in a shipwreck in 1497 prompted a similar effort to recover the lost merchandise. Heyd estimated that an average of 4 to 6 galleys departed for Alexandria each autumn. He suggested that, at the height of the *muda* system, each galley could potentially return with 200,000 ducats worth of merchandise. Heyd, *Histoire*, II, 453. Cf. Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower*, 156.

It was not unheard of for an additional *muda* to take place in March. As late as 1509, the consul of Damascus was still writing of the possibility of an additional March convoy. Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 10 r.

²⁹⁸ On the timing of the convoys, see Bernard Doumerc, "La crise structurelle de la marine vénitienne au XVe siècle: Le problème du retard des Mude," *Annales ESC* 40 (1985): 605-623.

visiting German traders bought pepper and other commodities.²⁹⁹ In addition to these measures, the regime had also instituted a common fund (*cottimo*) that it required the merchants of each trading colony to finance. This money paid for the upkeep of the consul, his household, the *fontego*, and also served as a kind of insurance deposit for emergency expenses in every Mamluk city that Venetians frequented.³⁰⁰ At least in theory, such procedures promoted stability and minimized the risk of crisis and conflict over material exchanges.³⁰¹

Despite the state's efforts to impose order onto its traffic with the sultanate through these measures, however, relations between the home government, the merchants, and the Mamluks were far from orderly. Arbitrary arrest and extortion over commercial property at the hands of local officials in Egypt and Syria appear to have been common occurrences, if the details contained in the diaries of Marin Sanudo, the records of the Senate, and extant merchant letters are to be believed. Writing from Aleppo to his brother in 1484, the merchant Zuan Alvise Morosini put it bleakly, remarking that "we are beaten every day."³⁰² In another document from Morosini's mercantile correspondence with his family members, he reported on problems with the Mamluk governor (*na'ib*) of Damascus, Qidjmâs Ishâqi, who had demanded a loan from the local Venetian community of 3,000 ducats.³⁰³ When they claimed to have no money available (even offering to allow a search of their homes as proof), the governor became enraged, had the vice-consul publicly flogged, and threatened the merchants with further violence. According to

²⁹⁹ Lane, "Fleets and Fairs," in *Venice and History*, 132-4; Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 309-91.

³⁰⁰ Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 78-9. The merchants tended to use the *cottimo*, contrary to the intentions of the government, as a slush fund for payment of *manzarie* to the Mamluks.

³⁰¹ Ashtor praises the Venetian galley and cog lines, which he convincingly argues helped Venice achieve commercial supremacy in the Levant trade. Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 479.

³⁰² ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, *citra*, busta 197, letter 15, fol. 2 v. Cf., Vallet, *Marchands vénitiens en Syrie à la fin du XVe siècle: pour l'honneur et le profit* (Paris: Association pour le développement de l'histoire économique, 1999), 289-90.

³⁰³ ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, *citra*, busta 197, letter 15, fol. 2 r-2 v. Cf., Vallet, *Marchands*, 289-90. Ibn Iyas provides the name of the *na'ib* of Damascus as Qidjmâs Ishâqi, in office from 1481 until his death in 1487. Ibn Iyas, *Badâ'i' al-zuhûr fî waqâ'i' al-duhûr*, vol. 3, 185, 243-4; Ibn Iyas, *Histoire des Mamelouks*, 193, 272.

this letter, the violent spectacle was only halted through the intervention of another Mamluk official, Saidi Ahmed ibn ‘Arabi.³⁰⁴ Morosini closed his epistle with a bitter complaint that in both Syria and Egypt local officials continually persecuted the community in an effort to make money.³⁰⁵ As will be seen, the Morosini letters from Syria are not isolated examples; it would be no exaggeration to say that the prosperity and safety of Venetian merchants throughout Egypt and the Levant depended enormously on satisfactory deliveries of money and material goods to Mamluk authorities.

Alexandria’s governor in the late fifteenth century, Alibây, stands out as an especially troublesome administrator in Venetian sources.³⁰⁶ On 20 February 1492, the Senate discussed its ongoing concerns with him, noting that “because of the malignity of this wicked and scandalous one, twelve of the principal merchants from the galleys have been detained, something never perpetrated before. This has caused great problems for our commerce and done harm to the whole country.”³⁰⁷ Among other misdeeds, Venice’s government accused Alibây of having arrested leading Venetian merchants over a longstanding debt of 28,000 ducats.³⁰⁸ Ambassador Pietro Diedo recorded in 1489 that the governor had also taken 3,500 ducats from one merchant,

³⁰⁴ Attempts to provide approximations of the Mamluk subjects’ original Arabic name, rather than the Italian transliteration, are used throughout this chapter. For the names as spelled in the original Venetian documents, see the footnotes below. Morosini identified this individual as “Bene Nerbi,” a *coza*. He is elsewhere referred to as “Sidi Amett Bene Nerbi.”

³⁰⁵ He also notes that it would be good to send a secretary to Cairo to explain the situation to the sultan, so that “niuna signoria non audissa a domandar danari imprestedì.” ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, *citra*, busta 197, letter 15, fol. 2 r-2 v. Cf., Vallet, *Marchands*, 289-90.

³⁰⁶ Although the Venetian documents refer to him as a lord (*signor*), Ibn Iyas more properly identifies him as a *na’ib*, that is, a deputy of the sultan charged with overseeing a province. Ibn Iyas, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i’ al-duhūr*, vol. 3, 267. According to Ibn Iyas, Alibây took over the office of *na’ib* of Alexandria in 1482, replacing the deceased Djakam Qarâ. Ibn Iyas, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i’ al-duhūr*, vol. 3, 193-4; Ibn Iyas, *Histoire des Mamelouks*, 214.

³⁰⁷ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 34, f. 123 r (20 February 1492). “Per malignita de dicti cativi et scandalosi siano sta retenuti deli xii dei principal marchadanti de esse galie, quello che mai per avanti e sta consueto far, cum grandissimo disturbo de la merchadantia e danno de tuo el paexe.”

³⁰⁸ This debt had most likely been incurred over the mandatory purchases of the sultan’s pepper, which all Venetian merchants were required to buy a portion of, and not pepper being sold on the open market.

and had the patron of a galley flogged until he agreed to pay up.³⁰⁹ According to Alibây, the time to settle the debt, owed for a purchase of pepper belonging to the sultan that had taken place some fourteen years earlier, had finally come. The Senate expressed disbelief at the demand, arguing that too much time had passed, that most of the people involved in the original deal were now old or deceased, and that it was dishonest to expect the members of one generation to be held accountable for those of another.³¹⁰ Alibây soon dropped the matter and the merchants were released with the sultan's declaration that he would allow no wrong to be done to them.³¹¹

In spite of its speedy resolution, the episode prompts one to ask whether such demands, portrayed as arbitrary and unfair by Venetian writers, were ever justified from a Mamluk point of view. It is here rather revealing that although the Senate in this case decried the governor's attempts at claiming the money as an act of "extortion" (*extorsione*), at no point did it deny that the original transaction had indeed taken place. In effect, Venetians had absconded with a large quantity of pepper belonging to the sultan, without having made payment: a legitimate cause for Alibây's actions, however late they were. It is reasonable to posit that on at least some occasions such materially based conflicts, which were portrayed as illicit in Venetian sources, were in actuality justifiable in Mamluk eyes. Whether or not the governor had good reason for imprisoning the merchants, though, it is again nonetheless clear that the security of Venetians was closely linked to material considerations.

Marin Sanudo corroborates such a picture of conflict and confrontation arising over debts and material exchanges in the letters preserved in his diary, which provide a similar image of

³⁰⁹ Rossi *Ambasciata Straordinaria*, 153. "Mi dolsi assay deli portamenti che havea facto et tuta via faceva l'armiraglio de Alexandria, prima havea retnute le galie .4. zorni, cosa de maxima importantia, tolto indebitamente a misser Vetur Pisani ducati .3500., destexo et batutto misser Sancto Venier et manzatoli ducati .430."

³¹⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 34, f. 123 v (20 February 1492). "El padre non sia obligato per el fiol et el fradelo per el fradelo, e molto mancho dieno esser obligati i merchadanti presenti per quelli che erano za anni 14, la mazor parte di qual sono morti over altramente dispersi."

³¹¹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 34, f. 133 r. (8 June 1492).

conditions in Syria and Egypt at the turn of the sixteenth century. In 1499, the consul in Damascus complained in a letter to the Senate that Mamluk authorities in Beirut had imprisoned a group of Venetians on the grounds that they had not paid duties on a shipment of coral buttons and cloth, and threatened to have them all beaten if they did not turn over their silver.³¹² In 1505, the supervisors of the *cottimo* in Alexandria claimed that rapacious officials had seized a total of 7,000 ducats worth of merchandise just in that year.³¹³ In 1506, Qansuh al-Ghuri actually acknowledged Venetian complaints in writing, alleging in a letter to the doge that he had just recently learned of how the Venetians had been suffering from acts of extortion (*manzarie*) from administrators in his cities.³¹⁴ In a subsequent dispatch, he guaranteed security to the merchants, noting that his officers had neither the right to arbitrarily seize goods belonging to Venetians, nor to force them to make loans.³¹⁵ This hardly put an end to the problem, for as late as 1509 Consul Pietro Zen could still observe that the governor of Damascus hoped to extort money from the merchants (*far certe manzarie*) by imprisoning them in his fortress.³¹⁶ Considerable evidence, therefore, points toward a pattern of administrative practices that could be called abusive and extralegal (at least from the Venetian perspective) in both the reigns of Qaytbay and Qansuh al-Ghuri.³¹⁷

³¹² Sanudo, *Diarii*, vol. 2, 1040-1041. The consul at the time was Benedetto Sanudo, who would later serve as ambassador to Cairo.

³¹³ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 206 (this happened, evidently, without justification).

³¹⁴ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 204.

³¹⁵ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 218. Qansuh al-Ghuri did assert, however, that because they enjoyed his protection, they were bound to pay him what he wanted. Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 222.

³¹⁶ Sanudo, *Diarii*, IX, 112. Six years later, in 1515, the consul of Alexandria claimed that local authorities had detained and beaten three merchants. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XX, 45.

³¹⁷ There seems not to have been a great difference between the experiences of Venetian merchants in the Levant and those in Egypt at this time. Ashtor, focusing on an early period, once posited that authorities in Syria were more coercive than in Alexandria because they were further from the administrative center of Cairo. Although this may have been true for the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, it appears that no great discrepancy existed any longer by the last decades of the sultanate's existence. The depictions found in Mamluk and Venetian sources in fact make it abundantly clear that Alibây and his colleagues in Alexandria enjoyed as much of a free hand as other

Ironically, Venetian administrators at home and abroad often accused their own subjects of working to defraud their government as well.³¹⁸ Legislation from the final decade of the sultanate's existence suggests a degree of collusion between Venetian and Mamluk subjects.³¹⁹ In an act from August 1513, the Senate lamented that although authorities in Syria never missed an opportunity to obtain gifts from the consuls and the merchants, Venetian merchants were themselves culpable of plying officials with gifts of merchandise in order to obtain certain favors (*gratia*) from them. In the same deliberations, the government further implied that merchants tried to rid themselves of their unwanted products by giving them away to Mamluks, inventing some imaginary act of unlawful seizure as an alibi, and then taking restitution for the loss out of the common fund of the *cottimo*.³²⁰ As the Senatorial records phrase it, the merchants "frequently favor 'scandal' and the giving of gifts to various rulers in Syria in order to gain the favors of these lords and to unload their merchandise."³²¹ As late as 1515, the Senate was still decrying the readiness of resident consuls to accept acts of extortion (*manzarie*) perpetrated by the sultan's lieutenants, a tendency that benefited a handful of individuals while harming the community as a

officials in Syria. Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 121. "So there were many complaints, and time and again the Venetian consuls and ambassadors protested against the ill-will of the Syrian authorities."

³¹⁸ Accusations of this sort are scattered throughout the senatorial records of the *Mar* deliberations. On attempts by merchants to avoid paying commercial duties to the *cottimo*, see for example ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 14, f. 20 v (24 August 1493) and reg. 18, f. 73 r (22 March 1515). In 1507, the doctor of the consul in Damascus was charged with embezzling great sums from the *cottimo*. Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 16, f. 176 r ff. (16 November 1507). On senatorial concern about frivolous expenses taken out of the *cottimo* (including an annual salary of 250 ducats for the consul's barber!) see Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 20 r (10 June 1513). These issues were said to have caused "molte rise et scandoli."

³¹⁹ These documents support the thesis advanced by Georg Christ, who argued that similar behavior occurred among Venetian merchants and Egyptian officials in Alexandria in the early fifteenth century. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 75-95.

³²⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 24 v (11 August 1513). "Non resta mai le signorie de Damasco de cercar occasion di esser appresentate dal consulo et nation nostra. . . et questo fra le altre cause per che andando el danno al monte di cotimo particular. . . Per molti particular respecti li nostri mercadanti de la Soria et precipue damaschini favorisseno molte volte li garbugli et li doni da esser facti a diversi signori de la Soria si per star in gratia de esse signorie, come etiam per smaltir de le sue mercadantie come pani de seda, scarlati et altro."

³²¹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 24 v (11 August 1513).

whole.³²² The legislative response in Venice was minimal and ineffective, insofar as it simply forbade consuls or merchants from giving the Mamluk officials gifts of merchandise, and instead allowed only small gifts of cash when necessary to secure the goodwill of the authorities.³²³ Paradoxically, in seeking to curb such illicit dealing, the government actually lent it a degree of official sanction by setting fifty ducats as the maximum extortion payment that could be made at any given time and proclaiming that situations costing more than that would have to be referred to the home government for review.³²⁴ These decrees represent what in retrospect appears a hopeless effort on the part of the state to organize and regulate ad hoc expedients (expedients that a modern observer might label “corruption”) into a more coherent and governable system.

As unrealistic a goal as that might appear, the measures do reflect the leadership’s quite sound desire to prevent individual interests from endangering those of the state and its patrician oligarchy. Even more importantly, the legislation reveals how far Venice’s overseas merchants had gone in developing their own set of practices for negotiating with the sultan’s lieutenants. These businessmen focused on the course of action that derived them the greatest immediate benefit, and appear to have been relatively unconcerned with whatever long-term damage their

³²² ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 92 r (29 August 1515). "E tanto cresciuta la liberta che si togliono i consolo nostri de la Soria et Alexandria cum i consigli de lí, in donar et far prender di accettar manzarie in particular beneficio, servendosi luno laltro che non mettendoli freno, vana seria ogni altra provision nche si facesse á beneficio de li cotimi notri, et perhó landera parte che per i consoli nostri predicti cum i consigli delí, non possa esser donato ad alcuna persona ne accettara manzaria particular di alcuno nostro che monti piu de ducati 50 in una fiata. Ma occorrendo acceptar mazor manzaria siano mandate de qui le scripture in quel proposito da esser proposte á questo consiglio et deliberato quanto se haverá ad far. Ne possa esser altramente acceptata tal manzaria sotto pena al consolo che contrafacesse de pagar del suo proprio, da esserli tolto per i proveditori nostri de cotimo al ritorno de essi consoli et applicato á beneficio de quelli cotimi che havesseno havuto el danno. Tolendoli x per cento de pena, quali siano de essi proveditori da esser divisi secundo li ordeni del officio suo."

³²³ Although it is unclear how this was meant to be enforced. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 24 v (11 August 1513). "Landra parte che decetero non se possi ne se intendi preso parte de donar cossa alcuna ad alcuna signoria over altri se non per 3/4 del consiglio general overo di xii, ne se possi prender parte de donar robe de alcuna sorte over mercadantie ad alcuni de li sopradicti per alcuna causa, ma tuti li doni se habino á far in danar contadi et non in robe, sotto pena al consolo che metesse parte in contrario de ducati 500 doro da esser scossi per i proveditori de cotimo senza altro consiglio . . ."

³²⁴ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 78 r (29 August 1515).

actions might have caused either the home government or the local *cottimo*. From this perspective, the Venetian merchants show a cunning capacity for mixing self-governance with claims of dependence: resisting bureaucratic intervention at some points, taking advantage of it at others, and in general engaging in trade strategies with Muslims that wholly defy the traditional impression of hierarchical state control over eastern commerce in this period.

Venetians doing business in the east belonged to exchange networks that enjoyed a degree of autonomy from Venice, and whose rules were not universally in harmony with those of the home government.

If such legislation indicates a pattern of local collusion between Venetians and Mamluks, though, stark limits to the amount of common ground that the two parties could find certainly existed as well. Alibây, the governor of Alexandria in the latter part of Qaytbay's reign mentioned earlier in the chapter, is a case in point. He was a notorious administrator whom Venetians living overseas and in the lagoon repeatedly criticized (the Senate even referred to him as "the lord of scandal" for the difficulties he routinely caused Venice and its subjects).³²⁵ In 1482, the consul of Damascus reported to the home government that Alibây had ordered a group of Venetians robbed and beaten, allegedly without grounds.³²⁶ Zuan Alvise Morosini mentioned Alibây in one personal letter, reporting that merchants were sometimes attacked publicly in the streets of Alexandria at his command.³²⁷ His purported excesses against the community in Alexandria (what the Senate described as *danni, manzarie, violentie et iniurie*) served as one of

³²⁵ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 34, f. 123 v (20 February 1492, Commission to the secretary Zuan Borghi). This epithet is used in a report that he had presented the Venetians with a claim of having sold jewels to the king of Cyprus, and was still awaiting payment.

³²⁶ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 11, f. 151 v (4 September 1482). The consul was Francesco Marcello. "Venendo alcuni nostri marcadanti del loco de Aman verso Alepo, se scontro in Alibey, che andava Armirajo in Alexandria. Al qual fato la debita reverentia, quelli fece prender et spolar, et tuore tuti denari et robe haveano et bater crudelissimamente."

³²⁷ ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, *citra*, busta 196, letter 15, fol. 2 v. "Alibei, almiraijo in Alessandria che anche lui battete in strada."

the primary catalysts for the dispatch of Pietro Diedo's embassy in 1489.³²⁸ Even after Diedo's diplomatic intervention in Cairo, though, as in 1491 Alibây arrested a group of Venetian sailors and refused to free them until the consul paid him 150 ducats.³²⁹ A year later, he surfaces again in the documentary record, with Alexandria's resident consul blaming him for the confiscation of cloth belonging to a certain Zuan Baptista Foscarini.³³⁰ Altogether, this amounts to seven separate charges of abuse leveled by Venetians against a single administrator.

Dismissing these accounts as either prejudiced exaggeration or perhaps even a set of fabricated excuses for lost merchandise and capital would be tempting, if not for the fact that both Mamluk and other non-Venetian sources corroborate this profile of Alibây. The Milanese traveler Bernardo Dinali, for example, described the governor's infamous reputation for despoiling pilgrims in his fifteenth-century travelogue.³³¹ The Mamluk chronicler Ibn Iyas, moreover, recorded in his history of Egypt that Qaytbay summoned the governor to Cairo in 1489 in response to ongoing complaints from the merchants in Alexandria, but issued him only a stern warning to be more circumspect in his behavior toward them.³³² Following the Diedo embassy in 1490 a decree from the sultan ordered, evidently in reference to the governor of

³²⁸ Rossi *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 174-5. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 34, f. 74 v. – 75 r (16 April 1490). Diedo brought up the problem of Alexandria's administrator during his mission in Cairo, but apparently without much effect.

³²⁹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 13, f. 68 r (15 July 1491).

³³⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 13, f. 93 r (13 August 1492).

³³¹ Ilaria Sabbatini, ed., *La "Jerolomitana Peregrinatione" Del Mercante Milanese Bernardino Dinali (1492)* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 2009), 69. "El lunedì, che fo a di xiii del predicto mese, el patre guardiano di Ierusalem si transferi in Rhama, inteso lo advento de' peregrini, dove trovando el dicto signor di Gazera el domandò come si farebbe a condurre li peregrini. Risposeli che ivi era uno signore nominato Alibey, mandato dal Soldano a riscuotere el tributo, el quale li potrebbe condurre. El patre guardiano, cognoscendo questo Alibey, scrisse al patron de la galia che in nesun modo si impaciassi col signore Alibey, perché li peregrini arebono da lui mala compagnia, non essendo egli né temuto né riverito da li huomini di quel paese. Donde el nostro patrone, intendendo questo, certificò per sue lettere al signor di Gazera che per niente meterebbe li peregrini in terra se prima la Sua Signoria non prometteva di pigliar la impresa di condurer lui li peregrini, perché non intendeva meter in mani di Alibey. Donde nacque contentione fra questi doi signori del toglier de la impresa [e] finalmente, doppo lunghe fra loro altercationi, el signor di Gazera restò nostro condutore."

³³² Ibn Iyas, *Badā' i' al-zuhūr fī waqā' i' al-duhūr*, vol. 3, 267; Ibn Iyas, *Histoire des mamlouks circassiens*, 300.

Alexandria, that “in the future, neither consuls nor galley patrons may be beaten . . . nor can the galleys be delayed in any way.”³³³ After Alibây’s death in 1496, the sultan even acknowledged in a letter to the Signoria that his lieutenant had indeed mistreated Venetian merchants, though he also asserted that the extent of the problem had only recently come to light.³³⁴ This line of argument, which portrayed conflicts over material goods as due only to the misdeeds of isolated malefactors (*ribaldi*), will be returned to later, but here it is merely worth noting that it constitutes little more than a rhetorical strategy that representatives of Cairo and Venice alike employed.³³⁵

These were not anomalous episodes, despite what the regimes of Cairo and Venice might have claimed. Responsibility for conflict and abuses cannot be assigned to single individuals such as the notorious Alibây. “Tyranny” and “avarice,” it is true, do constitute recurring tropes that have been associated with the Mamluk Sultanate since the Middle Ages, but substantial evidence does exist to support the notion of a systemic problem with heavy-handed local officials.³³⁶ Indeed, the issue grew especially acute in the decades leading up to the Ottoman

³³³ Rossi *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 235.

³³⁴ Sanudo, *Diarii*, vol. 1, 134.

³³⁵ In 1504 Qansuh al-Ghuri wrote to the Signoria claiming that past mistreatments were due to “ribaldi.” Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 826. In 1489, in a letter to the newly elected Ambassador Diedo, the Senate made it clear that attacks on the merchants could not possibly stem from the commands of the sultan himself, whom the epistle described as a lover of justice, but must instead have been the result of “someone’s” love of scandal and turmoil. Rossi *Ambasciata straordinaria* 260-261. “Quando poi te serà concessa la segunda audientia dal signor Soldan, over che iuxta el suo costume fosse commessa l’audientia tua al diodar grande over altri, exponerai che nui, memori dela antiqua benivolentia habiamo sempre havuto cum suo signoria in el paexe del qual al continuo sono stati li merchadanti nostri et al presente stano cum le loro robe et merchadantie et vogliono conservar et mantener cum perseverantia dicta benivolentia. . . Et in primis exponerai nui haver intexo noviter per lettere dei merchadanti nostri da Damascho et dela Soria che, contra li comandamenti del signor Soldan et pacti hano dicti merchadanti cum sua signoria, li se vuol dar grandissima summa de piper et per non lo haver acceptato, come in effecto seria impossibile potesseno far, sono sta’ retenuti et posti in cime, cossa che ne ha da’ molestia et displicentia, et certo iudichemo questo piutosto procieder da instigation de qualchuno che ama li garbugli et schandoli cha da propria voluntà del signor Soldan che è prudentissimo et etiam cognosce et intende questo esser contra li pacti l’ha cum merchadanti.”

³³⁶ See the important contributions made by Christ on the topic of “corrupt” behavior on the part of local officials as a historiographical construct. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 288-9. Petry, on the other hand fits the phenomenon of extortion into the larger thesis of the downturn of the economy of the eastern Mediterranean in the early modern period. He describes the Mamluk Sultanate as plagued by “rampant parasitism” and suggests that the

conquest. Ibn Iyas reported in 1515 that European merchants had come to shun Alexandria because of the oppression and greed of the local administrators.³³⁷ This problem stemmed at least partly from the unique nature of advancement in the context of the Mamluk political structure, which historian Amalia Levanoni has described as a “factional pattern” at work within the sultanate. She has argued that “Mamluks regarded the sultan, especially when he was their peer, as little more than their representative whose function was to safeguard their own grip on the state’s resources.”³³⁸ The sultan’s lieutenants often purchased their positions in the periphery and expected to be at liberty to wield their powers in order to recover the money they had invested.³³⁹ They attempted to profit in a high-risk environment, much like the merchants who sometimes prioritized their own success at the expense of the community and state. That is to say, one cannot accurately label their actions as simply “corrupt,” “greedy,” or “arbitrary.” Mamluk officials had good reason to make choices that benefited them immediately, even if they consequentially destabilized relations between Venice and Cairo or jeopardized international commerce.

From the Mamluk perspective, conflict and extortion could also be justified by other factors, the most important of which was the frequent incidence of Christian attacks on Muslims elsewhere in the Mediterranean. In particular, the threat of European piracy seriously undermined good faith relations and led to reprisals against Venetian merchants in the sultanate’s

regime’s steadfast dedication to preserving the status quo encouraged its economic stagnation and ultimate decline. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians*, 173-6, 223. For an example of discussions of Mamluk misrule in modern historiography, see Shelomo Dov Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 351.

³³⁷ Ibn Iyas, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i’ al-duhūr*, vol. 4, 424; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d’un bourgeois*, 391.

³³⁸ Levanoni, “The Mamluk Conception of the Sultanate,” 375.

³³⁹ Christ noted that in times of political uncertainty “it made sense for the office holder to maximise his gains in as in as short a time as possible, and without much concern for the long-term consequences of his actions.” Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 34. Cf. Toru Miura, “Administrative Networks in the Mamluk Period: Taxation, Legal Execution, and Bribery,” in *Islamic Urbanism in Human History: Political Power and Social Networks*, ed. T. Sato (New York: Kegan Paul, 1997), 39-76; Bernadette Martel-Thoumian, “The Sale of Office and Its Economic Consequences during the Rule of the Last Circassians (872-922/1468-1516),” *MSR* 9, no. 2 (2005): 49-83.

ports.³⁴⁰ In one case, the capture of a party of Muslims at the hands of Provençal pirates led to the forced exaction of 8,500 ducats from the Venetian community of Alexandria.³⁴¹ Later, when the Catalan corsair Juan Çiralba intercepted and enslaved a group of Muslim merchants on their way to Alexandria, his attacks brought trouble and extortion (*garbuium et dannum*) against the Venetians there.³⁴² Similarly, in 1484, Alvise Dolfín explained in a letter to his brother that because a Maghrebi merchant had been enslaved while traveling in Cyprus, the authorities in Tripoli had detained a ship belonging to Marin Malipiero and threatened the Venetian community with confiscation and beatings if the captive was not returned.³⁴³ When a group of Tunisian merchants in the Venetian city of Modon was executed for suspected collaboration with the Ottomans in 1499, the consul and merchants in Alexandria were brought in chains to Cairo in response. On this, Marin Sanudo succinctly commented that the Mamluks were “consuming (*manzano*) a lot of money because of the capture of those Moors taken at Modon. They want damages, and so on. When a Moor gets bitten by a dog, there’s trouble.”³⁴⁴

Thus what was a justifiable act to one party might be arbitrary and corrupt to the other. Whereas the Mamluks could justify extortion as a punishment for Christian piracy, to the Venetian state and its merchants such actions were simply an excuse to seize goods or money. From Cairo, instead, the *Dar al-Islam* seemed to be under siege. In addition to Mediterranean

³⁴⁰ This had been the case for generations. Jean le Maingre de Boucicaut’s planned attack on Egypt in 1403 induced Sultan Faraj to arrest the Genoese community of Alexandria. Piloti, *Traité*, fol. 53 v – 54 r. When a Catalan deceived and enslaved a group of Arab merchants, Sultan al-Muayyad forced the Catalan nation to pay thirty thousand ducats (half from the community in Alexandria and half from the community of Damascus) Piloti, *Traité*, fol. 675.

³⁴¹ Senate, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 11, f. 30 v (5 June 1478).

³⁴² Senate, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 11, f. 120 v (7 July 1481).

³⁴³ Miscellanea Gregolin, busta 9 (microfilm 77), letter 57. Cf. Vallet, *Marchands*, 276.

³⁴⁴ Marin Sanudo, *Diarii*, III, 96. “Manzono assa’ danari *etc.* E questo fo per la retention di mori a Modom, voleno danni *etc.* Et per uno moro fo morsegato da un can, lieva garbuio *etc.*” On the arrest and beheading of the suspected spies, see Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 1, 167, 210. According to Priuli, Venetian sailors themselves had brought some 600 of these Muslim passengers from Tunis to Modon. Sanudo, *Diarii*, II, 1142.

pirates, the Crown of Aragon and Castille was completing its conquest of Nasrid Granada, while the Portuguese had begun their own conquest of Islamic communities in East Africa and South Asia.³⁴⁵ So for the sultan and his lieutenants, who vaunted themselves as guardians of the Holy Mosques, defenders of the caliphate, and upholders of Sunni orthodoxy at a time of heightened Christian aggression against Muslims, it would have seemed fully legitimate and even honorable to respond by placing equal pressure upon “Frankish” Christian interests in the eastern Mediterranean.³⁴⁶

In turn, as a countermeasure against potential Mamluk retaliation for piracy, the Senate sought to minimize the potential for any appearance of Venetian involvement or liability in these hostile Christian-Muslim encounters abroad. It did so in large part by strictly forbidding its ship captains from taking on Muslim passengers.³⁴⁷ Legislation in this vein could be quite severe. In 1481, the Senate passed a measure that any captain found guilty of transporting Muslims to or from the lands of the sultan would be imprisoned for one year, required to pay a fine of 1,000 ducats, and suffer a decade of exile from Venetian territories.³⁴⁸ In addition, in 1491 the Senate wrote of its intention to inform Qaytbay that the republic was under no obligation to defend the

³⁴⁵ Setton, *A History of The Crusades*, III, 505; Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 2-15; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500-1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993), 59-70.

³⁴⁶ According to Ibn Iyas, in October 1487, the sultan received an ambassador from the Nazarid king of Granada (described as the king of the West and lord of al-Andalus) imploring aid against Castile. Qaytbay responded with a promise to pressure the Franciscan community to intercede in Europe on their behalf. In 1488, news arrived that Castille had captured Malaga, an event regarded as a disaster. Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 3, 244, 282 (respectively); Ibn Iyas, *Histoire des Mamelouks*, 273, 282. On the self-image of the Mamluks, see Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks*, 8-10. On the sultan's complaints against Christian treatment of Muslims in Iberia, see Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, vol. 3, 18-20.

³⁴⁷ Venetians involved in the traffic with Barbary had been taking on North African passengers for decades, and this activity was a cause of diplomatic trouble for the Signoria. In 1464, a group of 220 Muslims were taken prisoner aboard a Venetian galley by the Knights of Rhodes. This led to the arrest of the Venetian consul in Alexandria. The prisoners were only released when Venice's Captain of the Fleet threatened the Grand Master of Rhodes with war. Domenico Malipiero and Francesco Longo, ed., *Annali Veneti dall'anno 1497-1500*, vol. 3 (Florence: Vieusseux, 1844), 615-17.

³⁴⁸ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 11, f. 120 v (7 July 1481). Captains and patrons, on the other hand, were in all likelihood only too happy to raise their income by taking on extra passengers. Cf. Ashtor, “Venezia e il pellegrinaggio,” 220.

sultan's subjects from corsairs, nor should Venetians be held responsible for acts of foreign piracy. Anyone who embarked on a voyage, it went on, should be mindful of the risks of the sea and know that they traveled at their own risk.³⁴⁹ In June 1511, with Mamluk reprisals for Christian piracy ongoing, an exasperated Senate declared in a letter to Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri that Venice never had business with corsairs and contended that its far-flung international trading interests made it a natural enemy of pirates.³⁵⁰ Yet beyond such facile arguments, the Serenissima's true position vis-à-vis Christian naval aggression was far less simple.

Try as it might to solve the problem through the passage of laws, the Senate could do little to restrain one of the principal sources of piracy in the eastern Mediterranean in this period, the island of Rhodes. After the fall of Acre in 1291, the Order of Saint John had relocated to this rocky outcrop off the coast of Asia Minor and succeeded in converting it into the last outpost of crusader zeal in the eastern Mediterranean. Under the command of their grandmaster, the knights fought off an attempted Ottoman invasion in 1480 and, as the Venetian friar Francesco Suriano proudly explained in 1514, "they are still there, bravely fighting and defeating Turks and Saracens, the great enemies of the Christian faith."³⁵¹ Until Suleiman the Magnificent took the island by force in 1522, they regularly harassed Muslim shipping in the name of holy war.³⁵²

³⁴⁹ This idea is expressed in the formal commission of an ambassador composed in 1491. This message, however, was apparently never delivered, although it is useful in gauging the Senate's attitude toward the problem. The commission was for the Pietro Diedo's former secretary Giovanni Borghi, who, having proved instrumental in concluding the negotiations over Cyprus in 1489, was considered for an ambassadorial mission in 1492. The mission was subsequently canceled. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 34, f. 122 v (commission of 20 February 1492); f. 132 v (cancellation, 22 June 1492).

³⁵⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 44, f. 42 r- 43 r (20 June 1511). Reprinted in Lucchetta, "L'affare Zen," 165-71.

³⁵¹ Suriano, *Il Trattato di Terra Santa*, 27. "Li fo assignata et data per lo Re da Hyerusalem la città di Achre, la qual è sita nel lito del mare mediterraneo in Galilea, alias chiamata Ptolemaide o vero Achon (tredece miglia lontana de Nazareth). La quale essendo poi presa da Saraceni, cum tuta Terra Sancta, de comune consilio et consentimento, la Romana chiesa li consignò et diede la città cum tuta l'insula de Rhodi, per esser alli confini de la Turchia. Et in quella stano sino al presente, combatendo et expugnando verilmente turchi et saraceni, nemici capitali de la fede christiana."

³⁵² Helen J. Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001), 43-67.

This put the Republic of San Marco in an awkward position, given its commercial interests in both Christian and Islamic lands. Venice tried to navigate a middle path between Rhodes and Cairo, disavowing an affiliation with the order while also sometimes selling it the oars and other supplies that it needed to continue the fight the infidel.³⁵³ When Qansuh al-Ghuri accused the Serenissima of lending such support to his enemies, the Council of Ten responded with a flat denial.³⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, the weak defensive rhetoric from the government did not prevent the Mamluks from periodically exacting vengeance for Rhodian piracy on Venice's merchants in Egypt and Syria through arrests and forced exactions.³⁵⁵ Again, seemingly random acts of extortion can be better understood when considering the Mamluk sultanate's own sources of frustration with Venice.

Piracy and religious concerns were not the only factors for merchant-Mamluk antagonism. Another contentious issue that frequently marred relations between Mamluks and Venetian expatriates was the mandatory purchase of the sultan's pepper, a longstanding practice known as the "pepper tax" (*danno del piper*). Indeed, the matter was so continually problematic that it served as an ancillary negotiating point in all three embassies discussed in Chapter One. According to custom, foreign merchants were required to buy a quantity of pepper from the sultan's personal spice cartel (typically at a higher cost than the going rate) before they could

³⁵³ For example, in 1507 the Senate voted to respond to the Grandmaster's request and send 700 oars to Rhodes. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, Reg. 16, f. 164 v (16 July 1507). At other times, however, the Senate legislated against its trading vessels even going near Rhodes. Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, Reg. 11, f. 51 v. (22 October 1479); Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, Reg. 16, f. 51 r (22 April 1504). Sanudo mentions grain supplies shipped from Cyprus to Rhodes in 1504. Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 824.

³⁵⁴ ASVe, Consiglio di Dieci, Misti, 34, f. 172 r (c. 121 r) (30 December 1511). Reprinted in Mas Latrie, *Traité entre Chrétiens et Arabes*, vol. 2, 271.

³⁵⁵ For example, the Senate recorded that a Rhodian attack on ships carrying a cargo of cinders owned by the sultan led to "li garbuy passati mossi a nostri." ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 43, f. 175 r (26 December 1510).

make further purchases freely on the open market.³⁵⁶ The fixed amount that Venetians were required to buy varied, as it was renegotiated regularly in the Serenissima's treaties with Cairo. The availability of the sultan's pepper also fluctuated, especially once the Portuguese began disrupting supply lines in the Indian Ocean, so that surfeit could unexpectedly follow long seasons of dearth. The impression given by Venetian governmental sources though, is one of capricious and irregular enforcement of an unfair and manipulative Egyptian policy. From their perspective, the practice sometimes went unobserved, only to be suddenly forced as a point of contention by the sultan - much to the dismay of the Venetians. Yet, as in other sources of conflict, both parties had grounds for complaint regarding the pepper tax.

In 1489, the Senate lamented that the merchants in Syria had been recently called upon to buy a huge sum of pepper.³⁵⁷ Unable to afford the transaction, they found themselves arrested and imprisoned by the Mamluk authorities. The government readily surmised that the Mamluks' justification was that years had passed without any purchase of the sultan's pepper having taken place. The Senate called upon its ambassador, Pietro Diedo, to explain to Qaytbay that Venetians could not be held suddenly accountable if the sultan's agents had failed to sell them pepper in previous years. Expecting them to buy a large quantity all at once was impossible, and would ruin them financially.³⁵⁸ After consulting with Diedo, Qaytbay relented and issued a decree explaining to his lieutenants in Syria that in the future the merchants would buy 530 *sporte* of pepper annually, while for the next four years only they would also purchase an extra 265 *sporte*

³⁵⁶ Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 235-7.

³⁵⁷ Rossi *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 261. A "grandissima summa de piper" of 1,060 *sporte*, or about 530,000 pounds. A *sporta* equaled roughly 500 pounds. The exact amount of 1,060 *sporte* of pepper can be found listed in the documents transcribed on p. 232 of Rossi's edition.

³⁵⁸ Rossi *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 261.

(to compensate for the still unsold 1,060 *sporte*).³⁵⁹ Although this type of logical, negotiated outcome made sense and could theoretically satisfy all parties concerned, external forces affecting supply and demand, coupled with the changing needs of the sultan's own treasury, complicated the exchange process considerably. This was especially true in the reign of Qansuh al-Ghuri, who, experiencing a shortage, raised his pepper prices on the Venetians at the same time that the Portuguese began flooding European markets with inexpensive product of their own.³⁶⁰

The consequences could be disastrous, and it is perhaps a testament to the resilience of the eastern trade that relations between Venice and Cairo continued in the sixteenth century at all. In 1505, the vice-consul in Alexandria vividly described the unfortunate results of one of Sultan al-Ghuri's sudden demands for a purchase of pepper. Mamluk authorities first called upon the visiting Venetian convoy (*muda*) to buy 210 *sporte* at 192 ducats each, but, when this transaction had been completed, they simply responded with the penalty of imposing another sale of an additional 210 *sporte* on the Venetians.³⁶¹ This second unmet demand caused a "great disturbance," the closure of the *fonteghi*, and the *na'ib* Khudâbirdî's refusal to allow the fleet to depart.³⁶² On 15 March 1505, after months trapped in port and with rumors of an outbreak of plague circulating, the fleet captain Paolo Calbo decided to leave without permission.³⁶³ The Mamluks bombarded them from coastal batteries, destroying a ship's mast and killing at least one sailor, but Calbo escaped with his galleys (loaded with ginger, nuts, cloves, and some

³⁵⁹ Rossi *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 232-3.

³⁶⁰ Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, vol. 3, 19-20.

³⁶¹ Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 2, 372-3 (April 1505).

³⁶² Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 150. Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol.2, 372 (April 1505). Khudâbirdî took control of Alexandria in January 1505. Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 4, 74-5; Cf. Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un Bourgeois*, 71.

³⁶³ According to Ibn Iyas, plague did break out across the sultanate in spring of 1505, killing many people, including one of the sultan's sons and one of his concubines. Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 4, 76; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un Bourgeois*, 73-5.

pepper) to Cyprus.³⁶⁴ In a missive to the doge, al-Ghuri later maintained that the Venetians had not been held captive in port, that they could have left at any time if they had only asked permission, but that if the Mamluks' Alexandrian garrison had wanted to, it could have easily destroyed the entire convoy with cannon fire.³⁶⁵ Having come close to outright military conflict over the spice trade highlighted the immediacy of the problem. The following year al-Ghuri dispatched an ambassador, the grand dragoman Taghriberdi, to the Serenissima.

In the treaty drawn up between Taghriberdi and the Signoria in Venice in 1507, it was declared that each *muda* could be called on to buy at most 210 *sporte* of pepper each year, at no more than 80 ducats each, and the Venetians could never be called upon for purchases for other years.³⁶⁶ These terms did not apparently favor the sultan's treasury, and it was in part al-Ghuri's displeasure with the treaty of 1507 that led to the dispatch of Domenico Trevisan to Cairo in 1512. It was thereupon renegotiated so that, for years when no purchase of the sultan's pepper took place, the merchants would be instead required to make an "honest honorarium" of 5,000 ducats to his treasury.³⁶⁷ Given that the Mamluk ruler's supply of pepper continued to dwindle, this concession certainly would have benefited him. Both parties evidently regarded these measures as provisional, acting under the assumption that the status quo of the fifteenth century would soon return.

Yet Venetians and Mamluks had still other reasons for displeasure with one another in the realm of trade. A host of quotidian trading problems faced in Alexandria and Syria in this era. Fraud perpetrated by Muslim merchants comprised one type of negative exchange especially

³⁶⁴ Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 2, 372-3 (April 1505).

³⁶⁵ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 204-6. The sultan also declared that the captain deserved to be hanged from the mast of his own ship.

³⁶⁶ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 220.

³⁶⁷ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 204-5.

decried in Venetian sources. A common ploy discussed in legislation on trade in Alexandria involved tampering with the weights and measures of processed commodities such as pepper, cinnamon, and cloves. In May of 1483, the Senate denounced the “Moors” in Alexandria who mixed diluting agents into the sacks of spice that they sold.³⁶⁸ Subsequent legislation required purchasers to bring their own bags and certify to the consul that they had witnessed the spice being measured out, presumably to guarantee the purity of the product.³⁶⁹ Just three years later, though, it was discovered that the Alexandrian Mamluks had now begun using inaccurate scales to measure their goods.³⁷⁰ The *Provveditori di comun*, responsible for overseeing the consulates from Venice, agreed to send one hundred approved weights so that the consul could inspect the measurements taking place there, while the merchants themselves were recommended to use their own weights when making any kind of spice purchase.³⁷¹ The legislation of 1483 also required cloves, particularly susceptible to mismeasure, to be inspected with the consul’s own weights (the purchase, otherwise, would be deemed contraband).³⁷² In 1490 the law was expanded to include all spices purchased in Alexandria, due to continuing “deceptions.”³⁷³ Still, problems of this sort apparently persisted into the last decade of the Mamluk sultanate’s existence, because in 1510 the Senate dispatched a letter to Qansuh al-Ghuri condemning the fact that Egyptian merchants in Alexandria had been recently discovered mixing dirt into their spices.³⁷⁴

³⁶⁸ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 11, f. 168 r (3 May 1483). They accused the Egyptians of degrading their product in this way by over 25%.

³⁶⁹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 11, f. 168 r (3 May 1483).

³⁷⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12, f. 77 v (16 May 1486).

³⁷¹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12, f. 77 v (16 May 1486). Cf. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 86.

³⁷² ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12, f. 77 v (16 May 1486).

³⁷³ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12, f. 193 r (2 January 1490). See also Wansbrough, “A Mamluk Ambassador,” 528-9.

³⁷⁴ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg.43, f. 182 v (16 December 1510).

In response to trading problems with individual Mamluk subjects, Venetian merchants turned again to their government, seeking to excise specific offenders from their trading networks. If a Muslim trader did not meet the terms of his contract, by committing fraud, failing to deliver goods, or neglecting payment for a purchase, he risked total exclusion from commerce with the Serenissima's citizenry, in effect, a boycott. This involved lodging a formal complaint against the offender with the local consul and a subsequent written denunciation by the Senate. The government would record the names of the individuals involved, the circumstances of the case, then declare the "Moor" *abbatalado*, meaning cast out or disgraced.³⁷⁵ The practice, sometimes described as "the route of the boycott" (*la via de l'abatalation*) or more simply "abbatalation," required that no merchant of Venice could lawfully engage in any commerce with the individual until he had made restitution to the injured party.³⁷⁶ The punishment for those who ignored the decree was simple. If it was discovered that a Venetian later violated this commandment from the state and had engaged in trade with the outcast, then he would have to pay the outstanding debt with his own money.

Although refusal to trade could be a powerful weapon in the mercantile arsenal, it undoubtedly placed a great strain on relations between Muslims and Venetians. In the first place, there is no clear evidence of oversight, nor any indication of how abuse of this system of boycott might be prevented. Unfortunately, the documentation preserved in the Senate's maritime deliberations does not explain how guilt was determined, although once a Venetian secured the support of the consul, the result became a foregone conclusion. In this way, the rulers of the Serenissima, in effect serving as the management of a private corporation, found themselves

³⁷⁵ Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1975), vol. 1, p. 20, "Abbattuto".

³⁷⁶ This phrase appears, for example, in ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12, f. 5 v (2 April 1484). "Le abbatalation" is mentioned in Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 14, f. 132 r (29 July 1497).

overseeing and penalizing the commercial agents of a sovereign power. It is therefore unsurprising that in none of the cases recorded for the period 1480-1517 did the authorities ever uphold the innocence of a “Moorish” merchant, but instead sided with their own subjects.

Though it is impossible to prove, it is reasonable to suspect that Venetian merchants may well have abused the sanction system at times in order to coerce Muslim traders into sales that they did not want to make. To be sure, the Venetians were just as capable of committing fraud or failing to uphold their part of a bargain as their Syrian and Egyptian counterparts.³⁷⁷ In May of 1484, the council voted to bar a certain Abdulla Fakhir in Alexandria from trade for having stolen (*manzasse*) part of a delivery of almonds and other nuts he made to Nicolo da Ca’ da Pesaro and Andrea and Francesco Bragadin.³⁷⁸ One might suppose that this Abdulla, if asked, would have offered up a quite different version of events, and it is reasonable to think that his Venetian partners may have been pressuring him, a reluctant distributor, into making the sale on unfavorable terms. In June of the same year, the Senate placed a ban on Ahmed ibn al-Aqsa’ and Abu Bakr’ ibn Nasir for a sale of Bergamese cloth made by Pietro Bragadin, which they denied having bought and refused to pay for.³⁷⁹ Again, however, it is plausible that these Muslim traders had not wanted to buy the textiles in the first place, and were being threatened with sanctions until they relented.

In spite of the apparent potential for exploitation, the boycott, or *abbatalation*, remained a popular instrument in the late fifteenth century. In the second half of Qaytbay’s reign, the

³⁷⁷ This is, unsurprisingly, less well documented in Venetian sources, but see for example ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 2, f. 11 r. (16 June 1444), in which a Syrian merchant actually traveled all the way to Venice to lodge a complaint against one of its subjects for failing to pay him for a quantity of spices he had sold. To avoid “the problems that might follow,” the Senate ordered the Avogadori di Comun to make restitutions to the Syrian merchant.

³⁷⁸ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12, f. 5 v (2 April 1484) and f. 10 v (12 May 1484). “Fachier Abdela.”

³⁷⁹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12, f. 11 r (10 June 1484). “Ameth Ebene Luxvoi” and “Bubachus Ebenesar.”

Venetian government responded to requests for sanctions against individuals almost every year. In June 1479, the Senate voted to impose a ban on Eisa al-Khaeri of Damascus, a merchant of the sultan, concerning a debt of thirty-six ducats owed to Thoma Maripetro for a load of cloth.³⁸⁰ The council blacklisted two brothers in Aleppo, Abu Bakr' and Omar ibn 'Arabi, in July of the same year for a debt of 440 silver ducats owed to Leonardo Capello, Marino Contarini, Nicoló da Ca' da Pesaro, and Homobono Gritti.³⁸¹ The following month, it placed a ban on Abdul Ali and Turhan Ali in Damascus for failing to deliver 170 ducats worth of cloves and pepper.³⁸² In April 1480, the council barred the Moroccan Hassan Amin al-Mouri from trade with the vague justification of “trouble [*garbuio*] he caused Filippo Bernardo over a trade made in the customs house that cost him a hundred ducats.”³⁸³ Thus sanctions could occur whenever a Muslim trading partner was found to have failed to deliver on his part of the bargain, or simply if he had been causing costly “trouble.”

In August 1487, the Senate announced that it would impose a boycott on Eisa al-Khaeri and his sons in Damascus for having “devoured” (*devoraverunt*) sixty ducats in a transaction with Girolamo Gradonico.³⁸⁴ Omar Sulemani, mentioned at the opening of this chapter, was blacklisted for having “chewed off” (*manducavit*) 223 ducats belonging to Andrea de Polis in a sale of coral in February 1492.³⁸⁵ In 1497, the Senate imposed a boycott on Ali ibn Sadaqa of Alexandria “for having eaten” (*manza*) 40 ducats in a sale of copper and Hassan Sumbuli of Alexandria “for having eaten” (*haver manzade*) 194 ducats in a sale of cloves, which he had sold

³⁸⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 11, f. 32 r (12 June 1479). “Aisse el Chaeri.”

³⁸¹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 11, f. 37 r (12 July 1479). “Bubacho” and “Homar Bene Nerbi.”

³⁸² ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 11, f. 43 r (11 August 1479). “Abdelulli” and “Tornelli.”

³⁸³ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 11, f. 70 r (13 April 1480). “Ason Menemorai.”

³⁸⁴ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12, f. 118 v (2 August 1487). “Ayselchaor. “

³⁸⁵ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 13, f. 78 r (13 February 1492). “Homar de Sulimani.”

to Piero Bernardo in fraudulent, mismeasured sacks.³⁸⁶ Sanctions therefore served as a means to punish deceptive business practices perpetrated against Venetians by Mamluk vendors.

It is difficult to trace the success rate of this punitive policy, but one case from the 1490s suggests that the system failed to secure repayment for the Venetians. In 1495, the Senate instructed the consul of Damascus to give the colorfully named Ahmet al-Khaeri the Thin and Ahmet al-Khaeri the Fat eight days to settle their debts to Zuan di Priuli or they would be barred from commerce. At the end of 1496, the pair had still not repaid Zuan and remained under boycott.³⁸⁷ This boycott was then briefly suspended in order to allow Polo Malipiero to complete a deal with them, but was to be promptly reinstated if they still had not repaid Zuan di Priuli.³⁸⁸ It seems that the pair drifted in and out of their blacklisted status while continuing to conduct business with Venetians. Whether they ever satisfied their debt to Priuli is not recorded, but two years later the Senate again ordered Ahmet the Fat to be banned, this time over a matter of 158 ducats owed to Antonio and Simon Malipiero for a shipment of cloth they sold in Beirut.³⁸⁹ Obviously, the efficacy of boycotting was limited.

The range of targets, including not only the sultan's own merchants but also individuals closely connected to the Venetians, could vary. So too could the causes for exclusion. The Venetians' resident dragoman in Damascus, for instance, found himself under boycott for a debt of twelve ducats and three dirhams owed to Marc'Antonio Contarini in August 1487.³⁹⁰ The boycott was nearly always used for commercial issues, although not universally so. In 1494, the Venetian dragoman in Damascus was accused of operating a brothel, luring young merchants to

³⁸⁶ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 14, f. 132 r (29 July 1497). "Ali Benesadacha" and "Assen Sambauli."

³⁸⁷ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 14, f. 75 r (1 August 1494), f. 112 v (14 January 1497). "Ameto el Chaeri, dicto El Magro" and "Ameto el Chaeri, dicto El Grasso."

³⁸⁸ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 14, f. 132 r (25 July 1497).

³⁸⁹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 14, f. 164 r (11 August 1498).

³⁹⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12, f. 120 v (31 August 1487).

his house to visit a woman he kept there. The Senate feared that such a thing would cause a scandal and ultimately damage the nation, and it therefore threatened the dragoman with sanctions if he did not cease immediately.³⁹¹ These two cases are particularly interesting in that they suggest that dragomans in the service of Venice engaged in commerce with Venetian merchants (otherwise, presumably, a boycott would have meant nothing to them). Yet, in spite of this evidence for flexibility in the purpose and range of targets for boycott, none of the records from this period mention it being applied to a Venetian. The boycott constituted a volatile economic weapon, and, if imposed against the wrong target, it could have extremely negative repercussions. In 1484, Zuan Alvise Morosini reported to his brother in a letter that when Girolamo Contarini threatened to call for sanctions against Saidi Ahmed ibn ‘Arabi, a powerful Syrian merchant whom he felt had cheated him in a sale of coral, the Syrian instead used his friendship with the Mamluk governor of Damascus to have Contarini and his colleagues arrested. The Venetians were only allowed to leave after agreeing to pay ten thousand ducats in reparations.³⁹²

Thus, high-level Mamluks generally enjoyed a degree of immunity from the threat of mercantile sanction. In August of 1484, the Senate wrote to the consul of Alexandria concerning an outstanding debt of 45 ducats that the sultan’s chancellor (*dawadar*) owed Alvise da Ca’ da Pesaro for a shipment of scarlet cloth.³⁹³ Although it had previously asked the consul in writing to press the Mamluk for payment, he had thus far refused to do so. The government reiterated its

³⁹¹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 14, f. 41 r (8 August 1494). Constable observed that “official concern with the presence of prostitutes in *fonteghi* apparently arose from moral and administrative interests, and perhaps concern over relations with local Muslim women.” Constable, *Housing the Stranger*, 145.

³⁹² ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, *citra*, busta 197, letter 9, fol. 2 r. Cf. Vallet, *Marchands*, 252.

Morosini later mentioned Ibn ‘Arabi, however, interceding to halt the public flogging of a consul. This suggests that the Mamluk had not become too estranged from the Venetians because of this attempted boycott.

³⁹³ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12, f. 58 r (23 August 1484). It is unclear to whom the Senate was referring, the *dawadar thani* or *dawadar kabir*.

command once again, but conceded that if payment from the chancellor were not forthcoming, then Alvise could obtain remuneration from the common fund (*cottimo*).³⁹⁴ Similarly, in 1492 the Senate voted that, because Zuan Baptista Foscarini had lost eighty pieces of cloth to the governor in Alexandria (presumably Alibây), he could take restitution from the common fund.³⁹⁵ Nowhere do the sources even discuss the possibility of a boycott in these instances of wrongdoing by high-ranking Mamluk officials.

The use of the boycott seems not to have prevented bad deals from occurring between Venetians and Muslims. Modern scholarship on economic sanctions between nations, it should be noted, offers no clear consensus on the value of boycotts, embargoes, and blockades as policy tools.³⁹⁶ Such negative “influence attempts,” as David Baldwin calls them, operate under the false assumption that punishment and the cultivation of economic hardship will produce a desired outcome.³⁹⁷ In an analysis of 115 case studies from the twentieth century, researchers at the Peterson Institute for International Economics found that this approach led to a positive result in only about one third of the examples from their data pool.³⁹⁸ Robert A. Pape argued that even this estimate was overly optimistic, calling the methods of the Peterson study “seriously flawed” and arguing that societies have repeatedly proved themselves “willing to endure considerable punishment” rather than “bend to the demands of foreigners.”³⁹⁹ Although this economic research may not apply perfectly to the early modern period, the examples discussed in the present chapter nevertheless do suggest that fraud and other trading problems with the Mamluks

³⁹⁴ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, reg. 12, f. 58 r (23 August 1484)

³⁹⁵ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, reg. 13, f. 93 r (13 August 1492).

³⁹⁶ Gary Clyde Hufbauer et al., *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered* (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 1990), 158; Mark R. Amstutz, *International Ethics: Concepts, Theories, and Cases in Global Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 213.

³⁹⁷ David A. Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 373.

³⁹⁸ Hufbauer et al., *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 158.

³⁹⁹ Robert A. Pape, “Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work,” *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 93.

continued into the twilight of the sultanate in spite of government-led boycotts. The Senate, however, upheld the efficacy of the practice, declaring in 1497 that “the principal benefit and aid that our merchants have in the Levant for countering debts from the Moors is the boycott (*abbatalation*).”⁴⁰⁰

Considering the boycott from a sociological perspective, the act of removing a trading partner from the mercantile community could entail less obvious negative consequences as well. For Mauss, the interruption of an exchange system and refusal to participate in trade were “tantamount to declaring war.”⁴⁰¹ If trade functions as an obligatory cycle similar to the gift-exchange traditions of potlatch that he studied, then any sudden attempts to remove members from a network would mean alienation and a disruption of the bond formerly cemented by trading. The transactions that took place in the Mamluk sultanate, characterized by aspects of both a market economy and gift economy, may have been vitally necessary in creating a sense of community, however limited it was, which bridged cultural boundaries. These material exchanges served not only as a source of revenue, but also as a kind of ongoing Mediterranean exchange circle that made cooperation possible. Boycotting carried a less tangible cost, in that it damaged any sense of community created through these continual exchanges. In other words, the Venetians’ repeated use of sanctions to ostracize foreign trading partners who did not satisfy them may have contributed to the erosion of their economic alliance with the Mamluks.

In any case, the frequency with which sanctions were applied between 1480 and 1517, when used as a rough indicator of the overall health and volume of commercial traffic, certainly offers a picture indicative of a state of gradual decline. The number of cases of boycotting falls

⁴⁰⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 14, f. 132 r (29 July 1497). “El principal favor e adiuto che habbi li marcadanti nostri nel paese de Levante de poterse prevaler contra i debitori soi mori sono le abbatalation.”

⁴⁰¹ Mauss, *The Gift*, 17.

steeply in the period after Qaytbay's death and then ceases altogether by the reign of Qansuh al-Ghuri. The last recorded instance of a boycott occurred in March 1513, when Girolamo Morosini reportedly dispatched a courier to Amman carrying sixty ducats worth of damask cloth to be delivered there. Along the way, the man was robbed by a group of youths (*garzoni*) claiming to work for the local governor. The Senate instructed the consul of Damascus to seek restitution from the governor, noting that otherwise the city of Amman would be placed under commercial interdict.⁴⁰² Although the final outcome of the case, in which an entire geographic zone was threatened with a boycott, is not recorded, the episode is perhaps illustrative of the breakdown of law and order (and consequently, of international trade) in the periphery of Mamluk dominions at this time.⁴⁰³

Seen in this light, not all Venetian reports of Mamluk extortion should be interpreted as deliberate efforts to defraud the *cottimo*. Likewise, the extent of their collusion with Egyptian officials was probably very limited.⁴⁰⁴ Although informal "business transactions" amounting to collaboration designed to make illegal withdrawals from the merchants' common fund undoubtedly took place in the period 1480-1517, conflicts between Mamluk and Venetian agents

⁴⁰² ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 15 r (1 March 1513).

⁴⁰³ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 15 r (1 March 1513). "Landerà parte chel sia scripto al consolo nostro de Damasco che debi procurar á presso quelle signoro che sia satisfacto el dicto Ser Hieronymo del dicto damaschin, qual dice valer ducati 60, et non possendo obtenir in termine de un mese, ex nunc sia et se intendi el loco de Aman esser abatalado, fin chel dicto Ser Hieronymos era satisfacto, come e ben conveniente."

⁴⁰⁴ Christ, who has extensively studied Venetian-Mamluk mercantile interactions in the early fifteenth century, observed evidence of frequent collaboration across political-cultural dividing lines. He explains that "the Venetians in Alexandria were not interested. . . in the consul reacting to the 'confiscations' and dictating the return of the goods. . . as this would also cancel the expected return on investment. It was much more advantageous to declare the transaction, *ex post*, as an irreversible act of force. In this way, one could profit a second time registering the 'confiscations' as an additional tax paid or a loss in the accounts with the business partners in Venice. The merchants profited a third time when they succeeded in deducting the difference to the market price (if not the full price) of the 'confiscated' goods from their *cottimo* declaration. If the item was one that could not be sold regularly, then they profited a fourth time by clearing out awkward stock with a reasonable gain. . . The 'confiscation' was thus a mutually agreed upon business transaction and if anyone lost out as a result, it was the fiscal administration, or more precisely the *cottimo*."

appear to have been more common. This was due to a number of circumstances. Venetian and Egyptian sources both indicate the presence of excessively harsh administrators, such as Alibây, who were intent on reaping the rewards of a powerful office. There was, moreover, increased tension between Venetian buyers and Mamluk distributors, including the sultan, over the supply and demand of spices, the flow of which the Portuguese began to dictate and redirect in the 1490s. At the same time, senatorial legislation also points to deliberate and ongoing attempts by native distributors to cheat their Venetian customers by using fraudulent merchandise and other illicit practices of commercial deception. In an effort to curb such tactics, the Venetian rulers imposed economic sanctions on individuals, with mixed results. *Abbatalation* cut specific Mamluk subjects off from their access to European markets, but also very likely heightened the climate of distrust and hostility toward Venetians throughout the sultanate. These difficult factors considerably reduced the degree of common ground that Venetian merchants and their Mamluk colleagues could find with one another.

The rulers of the Serenissima and the Sultanate, on the other hand, regularly glossed over such deeply systemic points of conflict in their official correspondence. Both Qaytbay and Qansuh al-Ghuri generally disavowed any knowledge of abuses among their officials, and claimed that only a few isolated malefactors were responsible for the occasional poor treatment of Venetian merchants. In 1504, for instance, Sanudo tells us that the sultan informed the Venetian government that past mistreatments had been due to problems from a handful of “scoundrels.”⁴⁰⁵ These claims conform perfectly to the rhetorical strategy adopted by the Venetian government, which when complaining about trading conflicts to the sultan continually supported the idea that he was ignorant of misdeeds caused by his lieutenants. Venice’s

⁴⁰⁵ Sanudo, *Diarii*, vol. 5, p. 826.

leadership publicly insisted that the bad practices of a small number of troublesome individuals were not in conformity with the spirit of friendship that had long existed between Cairo and Venice.⁴⁰⁶ This is precisely what Erving Goffman referred to as “tactful blindness” in his studies of interaction rituals. According to him, even antagonistic competitors will often tacitly cooperate in helping one another save face, and maneuver conversations in such a way so as to neutralize a potentially offensive act through deliberate, agreed-upon fictions.⁴⁰⁷ In the Senate’s secret deliberations, however, it readily acknowledged the sultan’s culpability.⁴⁰⁸ For that reason a certain tension in the language of the pronouncements from Cairo and Venice remains detectable, reflecting the very same strains that characterized Venetian-Mamluk interdependence. Thus a decree issued by Qaytbay in the spring of 1490, copied and translated into the records of Diedo’s embassy, declared that merchants should be well-treated, but went on to insist vaguely that anyone who owed the Mamluks would “be made to pay.”⁴⁰⁹

Returning to the terminology that Venetians applied to “bad” exchanges, it is striking that the language employed frequently carried connotations of food consumption. As seen above, Venetians grouped violence, extortion, fraud, and even legitimate taxation together under the name “manzaria.” The term holds, according to the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, an extremely strong negative significance, connoting despoliation, depredation, devastation, misery, and economic ruin.⁴¹⁰ It means not only illicit gain, but also the kind of gain specifically achieved through harming others. There is also an overtly animalistic symbolism conveyed in the

⁴⁰⁶ For example, ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 43, f. 182 v (16 December 1510).

⁴⁰⁷ Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 14-18.

⁴⁰⁸ For example, ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 34, f. 132 r (8 June 1492). “Quantum existimari debeat garbuleum factum per mauros galeis nostri viagii Alexandrie et retentio mercatorum nostrorum, consecutaque extorsio et manzaria ducatorum circa xviiiM cum aliis expensis secutis et demum minime aperte mercatoribus ipsis nostris facte per dominum Sultanum . . .”

⁴⁰⁹ Rossi *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 235.

⁴¹⁰ Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua Italiana*, vol. 9, “Mangeria,” 650. Cf. “Mangiare,” entry 13, 655.

sense of a brutal and unrestrained beast devouring its victim. No other terminology could better describe how the Venetian oligarchy saw what was taking place: its enemies consumed Venice's profits. For the Mamluks and the Venetian merchants, though, transfers were less black-and-white than this narrow schema of licit versus illicit material exchanges suggests.

Instead, participants assigned their transactions a place on a spectrum of ambivalent exchange ranging from wrongful extortion to voluntary gift giving. Mauss recognized that a pure gift does not exist, but by the same token neither does a pure bribe nor a pure act of extortion. Venetian merchants and Mamluks made daily value judgments that determined whether a transfer was "licit" or "illicit," a sale, a gift, or an act of theft, and these depended on the perspective of the observer and the audience involved. In some cases, an act of *manzaria* decried by the Senate could have easily been seen as a fair trade between Venetian merchants and Mamluk administrators colluding to defraud the *cottimo*. One should nevertheless take care not to exaggerate the degree to which trade and partnership broke down cultural barriers, as no evidence exists to suggest that members of the Venetian diaspora ever gave up any aspects of their identity as subjects of the Serenissima. Venetians doing business in the sultanate were instead capable of moving nimbly between the two regimes, sometimes engaging in extralegal partnerships with Egyptian officials against the provisions of the home government in Venice, and at other times instead emphasizing their status as subjects of the republic to take refuge from those same officials.⁴¹¹ Venetians made use of the two regimes, seeking to maximize the benefit they could derive from both, and sometimes even playing them off against one another. For their part, depending on the situation, Mamluk administrators may have seen their other "extortions"

⁴¹¹ Francesca Trivellato has cautioned against the romanticized view of merchant communities as cohesive or obedient, pointing out that "trading diasporas were neither fully dependent on nor intrinsically averse to state power." Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 12, 277.

as legitimate efforts to recover debts owed to them, justified responses to piracy or other acts of Christian aggression, or as a means to recoup the money they had spent in buying their offices.

In conclusion, an analysis of Venetian-Mamluk commercial transactions does much to confirm the absence of any clearly demarcated boundary between gift giving and commerce, and lends considerable support to the concept of a spectrum of exchange practices at work in the eastern Mediterranean at the turn of the sixteenth century. As Malinowski showed in *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, these many varieties of exchange shade gradually into one another, and the lines between them are often very far from clear-cut.⁴¹² In the end, it was a combination of external factors, in the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, and Iberia, that adversely affected and finally halted the Venetians' and Mamluks' ability to build consensus in labeling these transactions. Areas for agreement on the spectrum of ambivalent exchange shrank as their vast trading network declined and eventually collapsed through the intervention of foreign empires. Real abuses, not mere claims of fraud or theft, but arrest, imprisonment, beatings, and even death, came to replace the previously fabricated complaints that had earlier perhaps existed only on paper. Corsairs, Catholic kings, and, finally, Ottoman sultans first destabilized and then destroyed the cross-cultural bridge that linked Venice to Cairo in the

⁴¹² This idea was elaborated upon more fully by Marshall Sahlins, who argued for a continuum of reciprocity in which “the spirit of exchange swings from disinterested concern for the other party through mutuality to self-interest.” Sahlins, “On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange,” 46-7. Even thefts, as Marshall Sahlins would later observe in *Stone Age Economics*, could be conceived of as constituting a type of exchange, as acts of “negative reciprocity” in which one individual seeks to benefit at another’s expense. Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (New York: Aldine Atherton, 1972), 195. “‘Negative reciprocity’ is the attempt to get something for nothing with impunity.”

Claude Lévi-Strauss, on the other hand, envisioned a much more obvious binary opposition between, on the one hand, commercial transactions characteristic of a purely economic character, and ritual acts of generosity on the other. Such a view was based on the premise that a culture could be either entirely altruistic or entirely self-interested, with little in the way of middle ground. Lévi-Strauss pointed to the gift as one of the basic structures underpinning traditional modes of human interaction, and viewed gift exchange practices in the undeveloped world as a key point of difference between “primitive” and “modern” societies. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Principle of Reciprocity,” in James Harle Bell, trans., *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 52-68.

fifteenth century. Commerce and diplomacy were not the only links in the chain tying Venice to Cairo, though. The following chapter will explore another important aspect of Venetian-Mamluk ties, the pilgrim industry, and its decline in the early 1500s.

Chapter Three:

From Tribute to Courtesy: Gifts, Favors, and Extortion in Venice's Pilgrim Trade with the Mamluks

Venetian involvement in the transportation of Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land served as an important point of cross-cultural contact that further linked the interests of the Serenissima to the Mamluk Sultanate. Alongside mercantile and diplomatic contact, this specialized branch of the passenger transport business involved a specific variety of material exchanges that allowed Europeans to access the eastern Mediterranean at a time of heightening tensions between Christianity and Islam on a global level. Pilgrims labeled these property transfers variously as presents (*presenti*), favors (*cortesia*), tribute (*tributo*), or forced exactions (*extorsioni, manzarie*), labels that depended heavily upon their perceptions of the context in which the transactions were made. Analysis of the ambivalent exchanges of cash and commodities associated with pilgrimage can shed further light on the range of interpretations that were possible in gift giving, extortion, and bribery between Venetian and Mamluk subjects, thus better explaining how the two groups negotiated conflict and coexistence.

Examining the function of material transfers within the framework of the *peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam*, moreover, illustrates not only how the two regimes perceived this act of piety, but also how they and their subjects regarded one another with respect to the larger worlds of Christendom and the Dar al-Islam. As in cases of diplomacy and commerce, both regimes sought to draw sharp distinctions between licit exchanges of gifts and illicit acts of extortion. At the same time, they sought to classify and control pilgrims, differentiating them from merchants in

legal and economic terms. Mamluk subjects, Venetian ship patrons, and even the pilgrims themselves, however, regularly frustrated efforts at such simplistic black-and-white categorizations for their own purposes.

The late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries have been described as marking the twilight of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but the period 1480-1517 is nonetheless incredibly rich in source material on the subject.⁴¹³ No fewer than twenty-one pilgrim guides from these years have survived. The most well known, the *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti Peregrinationem* of 1483, written by the Swiss Dominican friar, Felix Faber (Schmidt), has been the focus of extensive scholarly research.⁴¹⁴ Other, less frequently studied itineraries include those of several Italian authors the chancellor of the duke of Milan, Santo Brasca (fl. 1480); Girolamo Castiglione (1486), a humanist from Ferrara; the Augustinian friar Antonio da Crema of Mantua (1486); Pietro Casola (1494), a canon from Milan; as well as the Venetians Alvise Contarini (1516), Barbone Morosini (1514), and Francesco Suriano (1514). To this list can be added the works of fourteen other writers from diverse backgrounds north of the Alps: the Norman priest Pierre Barbatre (1480); an anonymous author from Paris (1480); the Franciscan Paul Walther von Guglingen (1483); Bernhard von Breydenbach (1483), the dean of the Church of Mainz; the Flemish soldier Joos van Ghistele (1485); the knight Konrad Grünemberg of Konstanz (1486); the Anonymous of Rennes (1486); Georges Lengherand, the mayor of Mons

⁴¹³ Marie Christine Gomez-Geraud, *Le crepuscule du Grand Voyage: les recits des pelerins a Jerusalem 1458-1612* (Paris: H. Champion, 1999).

⁴¹⁴ Anne Osterrieth, "Medieval Pilgrimage: Society and Individual Quest," *Social Compass*, 36, no. 2 (1989): 145-157; Catherine Holmes, "'Shared Worlds': Religious Identities - A Question of Evidence," in *Byzantines, Latins, and Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean World after 1150*, ed. Jonathan Harris et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 31-60; Catherine Delano-Smith, "The Intelligent Pilgrim: Maps and Medieval Pilgrimage to the Holy Land," in *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers, 1050-1550*, ed. Rosamund Allen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 107-30; Kathryn Beebe, "Reading Mental Pilgrimage in Context: The Imaginary Pilgrims and Real Travels of Felix Fabri's 'Die Sionpilger,'" *Essays in Medieval Studies* 25 (2008): 39-70; Kimberly Meyer, "What the Desert Said," *Ploughshares* 38, no. 2 (2012): 119-26.

(1486); the merchant Jean de Tournai of Valenciennes (1488); Jehan de Cuchermoyes (1490); the nobleman Philippe de Voisins (1490); the German knight Arnold von Harff (1499); the English nobleman Richard Guylforde (1506); and the Franciscan Jean Thenaud of Angoulême (1511). The most valuable Arabic source for this period, Ibn Iyas, unfortunately makes only rare mention of foreign Christians. Yet each of these western writers has left accounts of their interactions with the Venetians and Mamluks, and they sometimes even describe the same voyage or the same individuals. Because a comprehensive examination of these texts extends far beyond the scope of the present study, however, the discussion here centers on the Venetian sources (particularly Suriano) and their descriptions of material exchanges. For that reason, the texts of the other authors listed above are only considered to the extent that they provide additional details to fill in the general picture created by Suriano and his compatriots.

A great degree of care must be taken when relying on this particular genre because its creators often sought to force their experiences into a fixed textual schema. The tradition of spiritual voyages to Jerusalem can be traced back to the fourth century, and travel guides on the subject had solidified into a coherent literary genre by the early Middle Ages.⁴¹⁵ The act of pilgrimage itself, in which the participant relived and re-witnessed the experiences of Jesus Christ described in the New Testament through the “legendary topography” of the Holy Land, further complicates the issue of subjectivity in these accounts.⁴¹⁶ To a far greater degree than

⁴¹⁵ On the oldest known pilgrim itinerary, see Jaś Elsner, “The Itinerarium Burdigalense: Politics and Salvation in the Geography of Constantine’s Empire,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000): 181-95. On the development of the practice of medieval pilgrimage, see Nicole Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). On the literary tradition of pilgrim travel narratives, see Donald Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims: Medieval Pilgrimage Narratives and Their Posterity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). On pilgrimage in the early modern period, see F. Thomas Noonan and Margaret Kieckhefer, *The Road to Jerusalem: Pilgrimage and Travel in the Age of Discovery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

⁴¹⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte; étude de mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1971).

with the diplomatic or commercial sources employed in chapters one and two, the authors of these texts wanted to entertain their audiences and to fit their descriptions within a well-established set of literary conventions. For that reason, they regularly borrowed information and even entire passages from earlier authors. Bernardino Dinali and Santo Brasca, for example, either relied heavily on the account left by Gabriele Capodilista of 1458, or else all three shared a fourth, unknown source.⁴¹⁷ Such travel narratives have the potential to be, in short, highly deceptive in terms of verisimilitude. Nevertheless, these are still extremely useful texts, most of all because they provide an accurate sense of the general perceptions of the author and the expectations of his audience. In addition, because the dates of the texts span from the end of Qaytbay's regime to the final years of the Mamluk Sultanate, and since they offer unique perspectives that are primarily religious rather than political or economic, they can significantly improve our understanding of both Mamluk-Venetian material exchanges and Christian-Muslim relations more generally.

In the Quattrocento, Venice served a central role in mediating those relations. To reach the Holy Land in the late Middle Ages, western Christians relied almost exclusively on Venetian shipping, whose mariners had developed a regular "service line" to the port of Jaffa.⁴¹⁸ Whereas the Serenissima kept its eastern trading fleets organized within a state-owned convoy system from the mid-fourteenth century onward, private individuals managed to retain direct control over the business of passenger transport. Chief among the patriciate involved in this enterprise was the Contarini family, who had offered generations of pious travelers annual round-trip

⁴¹⁷ Anna Laura Lepschy, introduction to *Viaggio in Terra Santa*, 32-3.

⁴¹⁸ Gabriella Bartolini, Franco Cardini, and Lionardo di Niccolò Frescobaldi, *Nel nome di Dio facemmo vela: viaggio in Oriente di un pellegrino medievale* (Rome: Laterza, 1991), 40; Ugo Tucci, "I servizi marittimi veneziani per il pellegrinaggio in Terrasanta nel Medioevo," *SV* 9 (1985): 43.

service between Venice and Jaffa, the port linking Jerusalem to the sea, since at least 1403.⁴¹⁹

These Jaffa galleys remained outside of the more tightly scheduled convoy system of mercantile fleets, at least in part, because of the smaller volume of traffic and revenue that they generated.⁴²⁰

Simply put, the passenger business was not thriving in this period. Pilgrimage to the east had been steadily declining since the fall of Acre in 1291, and in the later 1400s Venetian captains offered no more than two voyages per year. After 1480, when the Ottomans besieged and nearly captured Rhodes, this number was reduced to one, which departed in early summer around the Feast of the Ascension.⁴²¹ The net income from this activity, with typically fewer than one hundred passengers paying a per capita average of twenty-five to thirty ducats, seems not to have been very significant in comparison to what could be earned by trafficking spices and other cargo.⁴²² Although in the 1440s the Senate briefly tried to organize the passenger traffic into a system similar to that used for commercial voyages, putting two publicly owned galleys up for public auction, this was deemed unprofitable and hence was quickly abandoned.⁴²³ By 1480, the Signoria had come to find itself and a portion of its citizenry tied to a declining industry of dubious economic benefit, but which nonetheless bound Venice to the role of intercessor between Latin Christendom and the Mamluk Sultanate. For that reason, even though the ships remained privately owned, the government did attempt to regulate the pilgrim industry.

⁴¹⁹ On the Contarini's involvement in the pilgrim traffic, including accusations of mistreating their passengers, see H. F. M. Prescott, *Le voyage de Jérusalem au XVe siècle* (Paris: Arthaud, 1959).

⁴²⁰ Galleys seem to have been preferred because they were fast and capable in naval combat. The pilgrim Konrad Grünemberg described his ship as heavily armed, writing that "the vessel carries mortars and culverins, with expert artillery men, archers and many lansquenets, with good armor." He also claimed that his galley had put pirates to flight on one occasion. Kristiaan Aercke, trans., *The Story of Sir Konrad Grünemberg's Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1486* (Turin: Centro interuniversitario di ricerche sul viaggio in Italia, 2005), 51.

⁴²¹ On the timing of the departure, see ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 105 v. On the number of voyages, see Pierre Tucoo-Chala and Noël Pinzuti, eds., introduction to *Le Voyage de Pierre Barbatre a Jérusalem en 1480*, *Annuaire-bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France* (1974): 79.

⁴²² The number of passengers varied somewhat from year to year, however. According to Breydenbach, the galley that set sail from Venice in 1483, for example, had about 150 pilgrims. For estimates on the revenue and volume of traffic associated with the pilgrim trade, see E. Ashtor, "Venezia e il pellegrinaggio," 215.

⁴²³ Ashtor, "Venezia e il pellegrinaggio," 206.

The regime in Venice acted in several ways to control passenger traffic between the lagoon and the eastern ports. In the Levant, the Venetian merchant consuls interceded with Mamluk authorities in cases of arrest or imprisonment of pilgrims.⁴²⁴ In Venice, meanwhile, the government created the office of the *Tholomacii*, who directed pilgrims through the city, helped them find accommodations upon arrival, prevented them from being exploited, and worked to segregate them from other foreigners such as the German merchants at the Fontego dei Tedeschi.⁴²⁵ Another, related bureau, the *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, regulated the entry of pilgrims through the lagoon and their subsequent passage overseas.⁴²⁶ Cunning and unscrupulous Venetians in possession of a ship demonstrated a willingness to target unsuspecting travelers. As early as 1382, the *Cattaver* noted problems stemming from the “many extortions and deceptions and defrauding of the pilgrims” caused by ship patrons, and required under penalty of fifty ducats that patrons sign formal written contracts with their passengers prior to any service; such a document was then to be inspected by an agent of the *Cattaver*, who could certify the Venetian

⁴²⁴ The Burgundian pilgrim Bertrandon de la Broquière, for instance, described his release from a Mamluk prison with the help of the Venetian consul and a Genoese merchant. Schefer, *Le Voyage d'Outremer*, 67.

⁴²⁵ ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, folio 84 r, contains the formulaic oath sworn by an agent of the *Tholomacii*, who vowed to keep pilgrims from fraudulent negotiations and lead them toward transactions that would be only in their best interests.

The term perhaps came to Venice via German (*tolmetsche*, *Dolmetsch*) from a Turkic word for interpreter, *tilmač* or *tilmadž*. Lepschy argued convincingly that the alternative spelling *Tholomarii* stems from a misreading of Venetian sources, although it is also spelled *Tholomagii* in Venetian documents (for example, ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver* busta 2, folio 84r). See Anna Laura Momigliano Lepschy, “Tholomacii non Tholomarii,” *IS* 25 (1970): 79-80. On this organization, see R. J. Mitchell, *The Spring Voyage: The Jerusalem Pilgrimage in 1458* (New York: C.N. Potter, 1964), 48-9; Vilma Borghesi, *Il Mediterraneo tra due rivoluzioni nautiche (secoli XIV-XVII)* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1976), 26.

⁴²⁶ Luigina Carratori, *Guida generale dell'archivio storico*, vol. 4 (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali. Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1992), 937.

According to the editors of Pierre Barbatre's itinerary, the state also imposed certain specifications that ship patrons had to observe, requiring, for example, that only galleys, which were swifter and more heavily manned than round-ships, could be used for pilgrim transport. I have not found any legislation to that effect in the Archivio di Stato. If that were the case, it does not seem to have been enforced in the period 1480-1517. Legislation from 1496 suggests that patrons were free to use any type of vessel deemed capable of making the voyage (ships that were not seaworthy nevertheless did take on pilgrims, for one example of which see below, note 16. This legislation ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 103 v, imposed restrictions on “qualunche vorà andar patron se de galia come de nave over altro navilio al viazo del Zaffo.” Cf. Tucoo-Chala and Pinzuti, eds., introduction to *Le Voyage de Pierre*, 82.

as a legitimate operator in the passenger traffic to Jaffa.⁴²⁷ Security was also a concern; further regulations required patrons to carry weapons and bowmen aboard under penalty of perpetual prohibition from future patronage and a fine of one thousand pounds.⁴²⁸ In these ways, the Venetian home government attempted to ensure the stability and safety of the pilgrims, and to thereby avoid incurring what the Senate wrote of as the potential “enmity” (*inimicitia*) of other Christian powers whose pious subjects were relying on Venice to reach Jerusalem.⁴²⁹

Pilgrim complaints about Venetian abuses, however, remained a frequent occurrence throughout the fifteenth century. The *Cattaver* repeatedly blamed patrons for the “disregard of the many, many provisions and resolutions made on behalf of the pilgrims.”⁴³⁰ The *Tholomacii*, who were supposed to protect the pilgrims from exploitation, meanwhile, were regularly accused

⁴²⁷ ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, folio 85 r – 86 r. “Multe extorsiones etiam deceptionibus et fraudibus personis peregrinis;” debeant etiam scriveantur dicti officiales nostros alius facere probuerunt mittere tres homines sufficientes et experetos in factis maris dando eis sacramentum solemniter ad videndum et examinandum illud vel illa navigiam si erunt bona et sufficientia pro faciendo dictum viagium et vel melius adimpleatur intentio ferre ordinetur quod quando redicti tres ibunt ad videntum dicta navigia debeant esse etiam ibi unus de officialibus nostri de Cathavere et si predicti tres refferent et consulunt eum sacramento ut dictum est illa talia navigia sint bona et sufficientia pro dicto viagio. . . et debeant ipsa omnia ordinate scripta in una cedula dare et presentare nostris iudicibus foresnsicorum sub pena ducento. . . pro quolibet nauirato seu pacto quod non nottavent et non dedirent in scriptis dictis iuditibus forinsecorum, ut dictum est, in qua cedula debeat inter alia contineri expresse tempus quo patrone seu participes navium predictatum promiserint recere de Veneciis.”

The ships themselves were not always capable of making the voyage. A case recorded in 1546 involved a *navilio non idoneo à quel viazo*, which sank on its return journey, killing all the pilgrims on board. ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol 105 r.

⁴²⁸ These measures were taken in the early fifteenth century, following reports of Turkish pirates in the waters near Anatolia. ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 92 (1408). The act imposed a punishment of “perpetue privationis cuiusmodi patronatus et librarum mille in suis propriis bonis.”

⁴²⁹ ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 103 r - 103 v (1496), “Li frequenti inconvenienti che seguono per diffeto delli patroni del Zaffo con grandissimi cridori, lamenti e querelle de Signori Peregrini da loro tortizati, constrendono la Signoria Nostra à far circa ciò dibita provisione si per honor suo come per evitar la inimicitia de molte provintie et luogi concitati contra la signoria nostra, serà senza colpa di quella ma solum per li mali portamenti de li patroni preditti.”

ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 14, f. 113 v – 114 r (14 January 1497). “La Signoria nostra a far circa zio debita provisione si per honor suo chome per evitar la inimicitia de molte provintie e luogi concitati contra la signoria nostra.”

⁴³⁰ The quote is from ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 94 r, but similar passages recur throughout the documents in this busta.

The tone of frustrated efforts at control is apparent in the legislative record of the *Cattaver*, which regularly sought to “cease the daily innovations and inconveniences that can follow” (*cessent novitates quotidiis occurrentes et inconvenientie que segui possent*). Requirements regarding the drafting and inspection of a written contract between patron and pilgrim was reiterated by the *Cattaver* in 1395, 1401, 1407, 1408, 1417, 1424, 1426. ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 88 v ff.

of negligence and corruption.⁴³¹ In 1496, legislation required patrons to leave a deposit with the *Avogadori di Comun* for each passenger they took on, which would be used to compensate the pilgrims in the event that their contract was violated or damages were incurred through the fault of the Venetians.⁴³² In 1497, however, the *Cattaver* continued to express concern about a possible public relations disaster when passengers on one pilgrim valley (described as “notable persons” of “diverse nations”) returned to the lagoon complaining of the slowness of the journey, due to the patron’s interest in pursuing potential commercial avenues at every port.⁴³³ The government’s concern about the pilgrims, who belonged to an elite, stemmed from a legitimate fear that problems in the pilgrim traffic would lead to a diplomatic incident.

On these grounds, the government sought to exclude the pilgrims and their Venetian patrons from commerce in the east. It was thought, on one level, that the operators of passenger ships jeopardized the well-being and safety of their clients when they engaged in foreign trading ventures, since it diverted their attention from reaching their final destination and meant that living space was sacrificed to cargo.⁴³⁴ At the same time, the Senate recognized that only those of its citizens who had participated in the annual public auctions had purchased a legal right to

⁴³¹ ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 93 v. (1428), f. 99 r – 101 r (1401-1454).

⁴³² ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 103 v (1496), “Qualunche vorà andar patron se de galia come de nave over altro navilio al viazo del Zaffo sia tenuto in primis et ante omnia dar alli nostri Avogadori de Commun quattro piezi de ducati 250 per cadauno le qualli piezi siano ballotadi et probadi nel collegio nostro per la observatione de li pacti et capituli haverano fatti ai cattaveri cum li peregrini et de non li inferir ne over causa che siano inferido alcune iniurie, violentie, over oltrazi ma de ben trattarli et procurar che siano etiam ubique ben trattadi et in caso che i contrafacesse li detti Avogadori debiano senza alcun conseglio constrenzendo dicti piezi proveder alla satisfationi di ditti peregrini in quello cognosceranno per la mazor parte de loro esser stà essi peregrini fraudati over non li esser stà observado li debito observando etiam loffitio de cadauno de dicti Avagodaori de provieder a mazor piena ccontra li detti patroni contrafacenti.

⁴³³ ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 104 r (1497). These pilgrims complained that their patron, Alvise Zorzi (“Aloysius Georgio” in the text), had failed to get them to Jaffa in good time, spending too many days in ports along the way.

⁴³⁴ One aspect of this concern may have been the tendency of patrons interested in commerce to deviate from a more direct route to Jaffa and instead pursue additional ports of call. See ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 104 r (1497). The added weight of the commercial cargo, moreover, may have been thought to contribute to the risk of sinking. See ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 105 r., in which the shipwreck of a pilgrim vessel was associated with the transportation of merchandise.

participate in trade in Egypt and the Levant, a right that the state could not allow to be threatened either by foreigners or those Venetians who transported them. For this reason, on at least eight occasions in the fifteenth century, the Venetian government explicitly barred pilgrim galleys from carrying merchandise.⁴³⁵ Ship patrons were, however, eager to earn added revenue in this way, regarding it as a means of circumventing the state-run galley system.⁴³⁶ They were even accused of transporting Turkish passengers, timber, and iron (all prohibited by papal ban) to Muslim lands while flying a pilgrim naval ensign in order to elude Christian pirates.⁴³⁷ As a result of these factors, the Republic's leadership appears in general to have taken a rather ambivalent view of the pilgrim trade, which it regarded, on the one hand, as a source of income and a point of pride for the city, and yet on the other as a potential liability to its economic and diplomatic relationships with the Sultanate and the courts of Christian Europe.⁴³⁸

Across the Mediterranean, the Mamluks' longstanding possession of Jerusalem allowed them freedom to dictate and to profit from the flow of all visitors (Christian, Muslim, and Jewish) to the Holy City. In his letters to the doge, the sultan proudly included "Lord of the Faiths' Two Pilgrimages" (i.e. Mecca and Jerusalem) among his many honorifics.⁴³⁹ Not unlike the Venetian government, the sultan's provincial administration in Palestine rigidly supervised Frankish pilgrims from the moment of their first arrival at Jaffa in order to control and prosper from them. The official responsible for the region, the governor (*na'ib*) of Gaza, normally sent a

⁴³⁵ Ashtor, "Venezia e il pellegrinaggio," 220. The Senate, by the same token, forbade merchant ships from taking on passengers. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 11, fol. 118 v.

The *Ufficiali al Cattaver* also required patrons to promise that they had no involvement in the *muda* system or other commercial ties to the east. ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 85 v.

⁴³⁶ It is important to recognize, however, that since the fourteenth century relatively few Venetian merchants personally accompanied their merchandise. Tucci, "I servizi," 45.

⁴³⁷ ASVe, Maggior Consiglio, reg. 24, fol. 10 r (1480).

⁴³⁸ Ashtor notes that the Senate even tried in 1438 to abolish the pilgrim trade. Ashtor, "Venezia e il pellegrinaggio," 219.

⁴³⁹ Pagani, *Viaggio al Cairo*, 130. Rendered in one translated letter as "Signor de li do preregrinazi de leze."

delegation to board the Venetian vessel while it was anchored in port. There, the Mamluks inspected the passengers, but prohibited them from disembarking until their Venetian patron had received a safe-conduct authorized by the sultan.⁴⁴⁰ Once this document arrived (sometimes after a delay of several days or more), the Venetian crew rowed the pilgrims into port, whereupon the Mamluks took a head count, recorded their names, exacted payments of tribute, and usually held them in a nearby cave before finally assigning the party a military escort and a dragoman.⁴⁴¹ Traveling unarmed in an unfamiliar land, the *pellegrini* depended on the Mamluks to protect them. In particular, they were at risk from the Bedouin tribesmen who inhabited the sparsely populated desert regions of Palestine and Egypt and regularly preyed on the unwary.⁴⁴² In this sense, the sultanate cooperated with the Venetians in the pilgrim industry, which it relied upon as a valuable source of income.

⁴⁴⁰ Sabbatini, *La "Jerolomitana Peregrinatione,"* 70; Lepscy, *Viaggio in Terra Santa*, 180; Sabino De Sandoli, ed., *Viaggio di Alvise Contarini in Terra Santa (24 luglio-29 settembre 1516)*, SOCC 28 (1995), 291; Méniglaise, *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 111.

⁴⁴¹ De Sandoli, *Viaggio di Alvise Contarini*, 271; Lepscy *Viaggio in Terra Santa*, 180-1, Sabbatini *La "Jerolomitana Peregrinatione,"* 70; Méniglaise *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 113; Richard Guylforde mentioned that a secretary wrote the names of all the pilgrims who landed with him in 1506, Henry Ellis, ed., *The Pylgrymage of Sir R. Guylforde to the Holy Land. A.D. 1506* (London: Camden Society, 1851), 16; Bernhard von Breydenbach, *Peregrinatio Ad Terram Sanctam ex Bernhardo Breitenbach Ecclesiae Maguntinae Decano et Camerario* (Wittenberg: Nickel Schirlentz, 1536), 17; Fanny Blanchet-Broekaert and Denise Péricard-Mea, eds. and trans., *Le Voyage de Jean de Tournai* (Paris: La Louve éditions, 2012), 193. George Lengherand and Jean de Tournai specified that the pilgrims' names and the names of their fathers were recorded.

Fabri records a delay of four days. Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 1, 221; Richard Guylforde records a delay of seven days. Ellis, *The Pylgrymage*, 15.

⁴⁴² Pilgrim accounts frequently mentioned Bedouin attacks. De Sandoli, *Viaggio di Alvise Contarini*, 302, 314; Girolamo Golubovich, ed., *Il trattato di Terra Santa e dell'Oriente di Frate Francesco Suriano, Missionario e Viaggiatore del Secolo XV* (Milan: Tipografia Editrice Artigianelli, 1900), 143, 164, 176, 207; Sabbatini, *La "Jerolomitana Peregrinatione,"* 133, Lepscy *Viaggio in Terra Santa*, 112; Méniglaise *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 116; Charles Henri Auguste Schefer *Le Voyage de la sainte cyté de Hierusalem, avec la description des lieux, portz, villes, citez, et aultres passaiges, fait l'an 1480, estant le siège du grand Turc à Rhodes et regnant en France Loys unziesme de ce nom* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1970), 100.

This was a problem for Muslim pilgrims making the *hajj* to Mecca as well. Ibn Iyas mentioned attacks on a group of pilgrims returning to Palestine by members of the *Banu Lam* tribe, who robbed them and took the women prisoner. Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 2, 306; Ibn Iyas, *Histoire des mamlouks circassiens*, 345.

Aside from the Venetians and Mamluks, the Franciscans served as western pilgrims' primary and most reliable point of contact in Egypt and the Holy Land. Following a series of negotiations between Rome and Cairo in the fourteenth century, the sultans had formally granted the Franciscans the right to reside in their dominions. Having established themselves at the Monastery of Mount Sion in Jerusalem, in 1342 the papacy recognized the Order of Friars Minor as Rome's "Custodians of the Holy Land," assigning them the task of aiding Catholic visitors to the region. Under the leadership of their Guardian, the *frati* of Mount Sion guided the pious through the same precise holy itinerary that had existed for centuries, and in which all pilgrims came to take part. In addition to acting as chaperons and facilitating negotiations between Franks and Mamluks, the Franciscans offered their guests spiritual services (such as confession and last rites), food, lodging, and medical care.⁴⁴³ The Order thereby played a vital part in mediating between pilgrims and Mamluks.⁴⁴⁴

The regime in Cairo necessarily tolerated the presence of the friars for pragmatic reasons. The sultans were acutely aware that the Franciscans and their flow of guests offered a means of exerting pressure on Venice and, by extension, the other Christian states of Europe. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, as Spain and Portugal posed an ever-graver threat to Islam, Cairo tried to use control of Jerusalem for political leverage in the west.⁴⁴⁵ When the

⁴⁴³ Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, 83.

Grünemberg reported dining at a meal hosted by the Minorites and being joined by many "important Infidels." Aerccke, *The Story*, 95.

⁴⁴⁴ Suleiman the Magnificent had the friars removed from their monastery at Mount Sion in 1551. John V. Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 206-233. They were still present in Jerusalem into the seventeenth century, however. The Venetian consul of Cairo, Antonio Capello, reported meeting with the Guardian of Mount Sion in the 1620s. ASVe, Collegio, Relazione finali di ambasciatori e pubblici rappresentanti, busta 31, no. 11, "Relatione d'Alessandria del Nobel Homo Ser Antonio Capello," fol. 11 v.

⁴⁴⁵ The same strategy of retribution occurred in the fourteenth century, when the Mamluks persecuted Christians in the wake of the king of Cyprus Peter I de Lusignan's assault on Alexandria in 1365. Cf., Johannes Pahlitzsch, "Mediators between East and West: Christians under Mamluk Rule," MSR 9, no. 2 (2005): 31-47.

Nasrid king of Granada asked Qaytbay for assistance in his war with Castile and Aragon in 1487, the sultan called on the Christians in Jerusalem to write letters to the west, and threatened to seal or even destroy the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.⁴⁴⁶ In 1504, Qansuh al-Ghuri dispatched a delegation of the Franciscans of Mount Sion to Venice, where they implored the Signoria to prevail upon the Iberian kings to cease their persecution of Andalusian Muslims and to put a halt to Vasco da Gama's incursions in the Indian Ocean.⁴⁴⁷ Three years later, the sultan made the somewhat menacing argument in a letter to the doge that Venice's purchases of pepper should be forthcoming, given that he afforded Christian visitors to Jerusalem his protection from "those who would do them harm."⁴⁴⁸ After the Portuguese killed one of his relatives in a naval battle in 1510, al-Ghuri took even more drastic action. He temporarily put a complete halt to pilgrimage, closed off the Holy Sepulcher, and arrested all Franciscans in his lands, threatening to execute them and raze the church if he did not receive an indemnity.⁴⁴⁹ Although these maneuvers never achieved results from the kings of Spain and Portugal, they did contribute to the dispatch of Venetian ambassadors and cash payments by the Signoria, which for political reasons hoped to maintain the ongoing presence of Franciscans and pilgrims in Palestine.⁴⁵⁰

Although Venice's leaders tried repeatedly to separate commerce and pilgrimage as a way to further guarantee the well being of both the pilgrims and its state-run monopoly, their

⁴⁴⁶ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 3, 244; Ibn Iyas, *Histoire des mamlouks circassiens*, 273. The Mamluk chronicler pointed out that nothing came of this effort, and that the "Franks" ultimately took Granada despite the sultan's threats.

⁴⁴⁷ Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 948.

⁴⁴⁸ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 218. "Et continuamente vien molte zente di vostri fioli, di re et gran maestri, per visitation de Jerusalem et altri luogi, et nui li defendemo da tutti quelli che ge vol far despiaxer."

⁴⁴⁹ Ibn Iyas specifies that this relative was the emir Muhammad Bey. Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 4, 195; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un Bourgeois*, 189. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XI, 829; Schefer, *Le voyage d'Outremer*, 3-4.

There was a multiplicity of reasons behind al-Ghuri's closure of the Holy Sepulcher, for which see Chapter One. In addition to the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean, the piracy of the Knights of Rhodes was a major issue contributing to the dispatch of both the Venetian ambassador Domenico Trevisan and a French ambassador.

⁴⁵⁰ Specifically, the embassies of Bernardino Giova and Francesco Teldi in 1504-5, and that of Domenico Trevisan in 1511-12.

efforts largely failed. Before exploring the reasons for this, it is worth noting that some of the of the authors of pilgrim itineraries from the period 1480-1517 came from mercantile backgrounds. As overseas pilgrimage became an ever more expensive activity restricted to wealthy elites, it drew the enthusiasm of successful traders (including quite a few Venetians), many of whom would have already possessed familiarity with the east from previous business experiences. Merchants wrote several of the surviving travel narratives from the period 1480-1517: Bernardino Dinali of Milan, Jean de Tournay of Valenciennes, as well as Barbone Morosini and Alvise Contarini of Venice. Francesco Suriano, the Venetian Guardian of Mount Sion, even states in his *Trattato di Terra Santa* that he spent many years in trading in Syria prior to abandoning the secular life and joining the Friars Minor.⁴⁵¹ The distinction between “merchant” and “pilgrim” is in this regard something of a false dichotomy, existing, for the most part, only on paper.⁴⁵²

Suriano, indeed, undermined the distinction between religious and worldly enterprise even further. After a thorough discussion of pilgrimage, he chose to devote the latter part of his treatise to the merchandise and potential for profit available in Egypt and Syria. Although, on first glance, this may seem an out-of-place topic for a pilgrim manual, the practical commercial information that he provided accorded perfectly with his worldview, one which did not regard piety and business as mutually exclusive categories. The practical details are considerable, and certainly comparable with the material found in Italian *manuali di mercatura* such as those of

⁴⁵¹ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 166.

⁴⁵² Ashtor pointed out that “Almost all of the Europeans who lived in the Levantine emporia or visited them engaged in trade, not only the professional merchants. The sailors on the ships sailing to the Levantine ports carried some merchandise with them, sold it, and bought some Oriental commodities. Of course, the secretary of a ship could do the same. The artisans who lived in the trading towns of the Moslem Levant, too, carried on trade, though on a modest scale. Everyone was a trader.” Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 410.

Bartolomeo Paxi or Francesco Balducci Pegolotti.⁴⁵³ Writing of civet musk, for example, Suriano advised his readers to pay close attention to coloration because, when authentic, it is “black or dark gray, like liquid soap,” but observed that “what they bring to our region is almost all fraudulent.” The strong smelling oil was worth buying and “it can sell for six ducats an ounce,” he added.⁴⁵⁴ This commercial interest is not unusual for the genre (it can be found in Venetian pilgrim literature throughout the fifteenth century), but the level of attention that Suriano paid it is exceptional.⁴⁵⁵

The author discussed the native crops such as banana, pistachio, figs, oranges, lemons, carob, and sugar cane with the enthusiasm of an amateur botanist, providing a detailed summary of their culinary uses and value in the markets of Venice.⁴⁵⁶ He described the properties and worth of goods, from commonly sought commodities such as pepper, nutmeg, ginger, cinammon, rhubarb, civet and other animal musks, cloves, and benzoin incense, to more unusual goods such as camphor, coral, saffron, lapis lazuli, pearls, rubies, sapphires, and onyx.⁴⁵⁷ In all, Suriano wrote nineteen chapters on the properties and value of various eastern wares. Regardless of his religiosity, the Guardian of Mount Sion, like his compatriots, recognized that any astute visitor to the Holy Land should seize the opportunity to benefit from the experience not only spiritually, but materially as well. His treatise in that sense represents the fluid blending of pilgrim and businessman characteristic of Venetian visitors to the east.

⁴⁵³ Cf. Bartolomeo di Paxi, *Tariffa de pexi e misure* (Venice: Albertin de Lisboa, 1503); Allan Evans, ed., *La pratica della mercatura di Francesco Balducci Pegolotti* (Cambridge: The Medieval Academy of America, 1936).

⁴⁵⁴ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 230.

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. the early fifteenth-century crusade treatise by the Cretan-Venetian Emmanuel Piloti, which includes a discussion of Egypt’s material abundance. Piloti suggested that if Alexandria were taken by Christians, spices and other merchandise could be pillaged. Dopp, *Traité*, fol. 53 r.

⁴⁵⁶ On carob pods, for instance, Suriano wrote that: “they are in plentiful in that country but are costly in Venice, and the Germans buy them and take them to Germany.” Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 224.

⁴⁵⁷ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 223-35.

Other sources from this period, furthermore, make it abundantly clear that western voyagers regularly disregarded prohibitions on commerce in the pilgrim industry. The pilgrims appear to have been eager to buy small, easily transportable items that would serve as souvenirs of their voyage, such as rosaries, textiles, or books. Bertrandon de la Broquière reported bringing back a robe as well as Latin editions of the Quran and a *Life of Muhammad* and giving these to his patron, Duke Philippe le Bon of Burgundy, a man who envisioned a grand reconquest of the Holy Land under his direction.⁴⁵⁸ Konrad Grünemberg recorded seeing both Christian and “Infidel merchants” who offered “wax crucifixes in many colors and rosaries made from camel hair” as well as beads “and other things for sale” in Jaffa and Jerusalem.⁴⁵⁹ Venice allowed returning pilgrims to bring small items back with them, provided they were gifts and not to be sold; the French voyager Lengherand described having his bag searched for contraband at the customs house when he finally arrived back at the lagoon.⁴⁶⁰ These mementos, procured on site served as tokens of the act of pilgrimage, represent another important type of material exchange between Mamluk subjects and Christian European visitors. Like pilgrim badges, keepsakes from the voyage such as rosaries and crucifixes served as physical testaments to the pious devotion of the bearer and material proof of their journey overseas.⁴⁶¹

Venetian mariners, however, traded on a much larger scale, and not for souvenirs.

Antonio da Crema in 1486 reported that “Moorish merchants” boarded his pilgrim galley in

⁴⁵⁸ Schefer, *Le Voyage d’Outremer*, 261.

⁴⁵⁹ Bernhard von Breydenbach, Massimo Miglio and Gabriella Bartolini, eds. and trans., *Peregrinationes. Un viaggiatore del quattrocento a gerusalemme e in egipto* (Rome: Vecchiarelli, 1999), 22; Schefer, *Voyage de la sainte cité*, 61; Aercke, *The Story*, 78, 96.

Felix Fabri recorded bringing back stones and dried palm fronds from the Holy Land as souvenirs. Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 204.

⁴⁶⁰ Méniglaise, *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 194. “Les diz Sgrs de Venise nous demandèrent sur nostre foy se en icelles baghes il y avoit chose dont nous vouldissions faire argent pour y practiquer prouffit. A quoy leur feymes responce que non, mais estoit le tout pour donner à noz parens et amis.”

⁴⁶¹ Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (London: H.M.S.O., 1998).

Giaffa and bought cloth, apples, and cheese from the Venetians.⁴⁶² Dinali mentioned seeing Alvise Morosini sell cloth to the governor of Gaza, and Lengherand reported that “Moors” came aboard his galley at Jaffa several times to sell merchandise to the sailors.⁴⁶³ Casola wrote that an “Arab chief” visited the ship he was on and bought “certain cloths and other things” from the patron Agostino Contarini.⁴⁶⁴ Jean de Tournai even explained that the Venetian crew and the local Muslim merchants employed a complex system of hand gestures to negotiate without words.⁴⁶⁵ The Anonymous French pilgrim who described the arrival of the Jaffa galley in 1480 stated that the event caused the opening of a temporary public market, complete with tents lining the shore: “the merchants of the country here held a fair to do business with the crewmen of our galley, who stayed in Jaffa while we were in Jerusalem; and there they sold cloth and other merchandise and bought a great quantity of cotton, selling for around three silvers a pound. The price is good because it grows all over the area around Rama. The crew bought around six or eight hundred ducats worth and so our galley was full of it.”⁴⁶⁶ Clearly, then, the Serenissima’s

⁴⁶² Gabriele Nori, ed., *Itinerario al Sancto Sepolcro, 1486* (Pisa: Pacini Editore, 1996), 93.

⁴⁶³ Sabbatini, *La “Jerusalemite Peregrinatione,”* 70, 112.

⁴⁶⁴ Anna Paoletti, ed., *Viaggio a Gerusalemme di Pietro Casola* (Alessandria: Orso, 2001), 178. “[Quelo Signore de Nabule, capo de Arabi] vene in galea e comprò certi panni e altre cose.” All translations are from Margaret Newett, ed. and trans., *Canon Pietro Casola’s Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1907), 232.

⁴⁶⁵ Péricard-Méa, *Le Voyage de Jean de Tournai*, 191-2. “Là, le marchand à qui appartenait les draps fit signe en levant les deux mains, doigts ouverts, et leva encore une fois ses mains, ce qui signifiait qu’il faisait 20 ducats d’or la marchandise. Le Maure alla à son sac et lui tira ce qu’il voulait. L’autre montra le dos de sa main sans toucher à l’or. Le Maur compta alors l’argent dans un creux de sa longue robe; si le marchand voit bien il prend l’argent, s’il ne voit pas assez il montre à nouveau le dos de la main; les autres font de même.”

⁴⁶⁶ Schefer, *Voyage de la sainte cité*, 100-101. “Il y avoit audit Jaffé plusieurs tentes et pavillons tant pour loger les seigneurs sarrazins qui nous conduyoient, que pour les marchans du pays qui tenoyent la foire pour marchander avec les galiotz de nostre gallé qui se tindrent audit Jaffé durant le temps que nous fusmes en Hierusalem; et là, vendirent leurs drapz et aultres marchandises et acheterent grant quantité de coton, et avoyent la livre pour trois blancz ou environ; on en a bon marché, car il croist autour de Rames partout le pays. Lesdictz galiotz en acheterent environ pour six ou huit cens ducatz et en estoit toute nostre gallée empeschée.”

The fifteenth century witnessed an increase in cotton farming throughout Syria and Palestine in response to growing European demand. Ottoman land surveys conducted after the conquest in 1516 indicate that this continued into the sixteenth century. Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 174, 201. See also Jong-kuk Nam, *Le commerce du coton en Méditerranée à la fin du Moyen Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

regulations that separated commerce from pilgrimage met with little real effect once a galley had left Venetian waters.

Beyond violating the Signoria's prohibitions on commerce, Venetians were often accused of extortion, and even colluding with the Mamluks, by their passengers.⁴⁶⁷ The pilgrims, who had paid a great deal for the voyage, unsurprisingly expressed frustration at the emergence of any unanticipated costs or failures to honor their contracts.⁴⁶⁸ Fabri described the patron of his galley as a betrayer for his failure to honor the contract he had made with the pilgrims.⁴⁶⁹ Of all the ship patrons from this period, Agostino Contarini earned a particular degree of notoriety for his unscrupulous attempts at exploitation. A French pilgrim recorded that Contarini tried to invent new expenses (*gran extorcions*), at one point detaining the pilgrims for three days because he claimed they owed him for mule rides he had personally financed. When they argued that they had already satisfied that debt and refused to pay anything more, he threatened to call upon the Mamluks to throw them in prison, at which point they relented.⁴⁷⁰ Whether or not this was an

See also the comments of Grünemberg, who wrote that “much merchandise changed hands” during his pilgrimage, and that in Jaffa the Muslims “inspected all the merchandise we carried, and they bought a lot of scarlet.” Aercke, *The Story*, 120.

⁴⁶⁷ On the charges of extortion leveled against the Venetian mariners throughout the fifteenth century, see the various cases recorded by the *Cattaver* in ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, b. 2, fol. 85 r – 105 r.

⁴⁶⁸ e.g. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 14, fol. 112 v – 113 r (14 January 1497). The Senate described “iniurie, violentie, over oltrazi” and “pellegrin fraudati,” by galley patrons, and imposed a fine of 200 ducats and prohibition from taking on future passengers for any patron found guilty of failing to honor his contract: “Li sequenti inconvenienti che siegueno per defecto deli patroni dal Zafo cum grandissimi cridori, lamenti e querelle de signor pellegrini da loro tortizati constrenze la signoria nostra a far circa zio debita provisione si per honor suo chome per evitar la inimicitia de molte provintie e luogi contra la signoria nostra, senza colpa de quella, ma solum per li mali portamenti deli patroni predicti. E pero landara parte, che qualunche vora andar patroni si de galia chome de nave over altro navilio al viazo dal zafo sia tenuto imprimis et ante omnia dar ali nostri avogadori de commun quatro piezi de ducati dusento e cinquanta per cadauno, li quali piezi siano ballotadi. . .nel collegio nostro per la observatione de li pacti e capitoli haverano facto ai cataveri cum li pellegrini et de noli inferir ne esser causa che li siano inferide alcune iniurie, violentie, over oltrazi ma debeno tractarli et procurar che siano etiam ubique ben tractato. Et in caso che i contrafacesse, li dicti avogadori debino senza alcun consiglio constrenzendo dicti piezi proveder ala satisfation de dicti pellegrini in quello cognoscerano per la mazor parte de loro esse sta essi pellegrini, fraudati, over non li esse sta el debito observado. Reservando etiam lofficio de cadauno de dicti avogadori de procieder a mazor pena contra li dicti patroni contrafazati.”

⁴⁶⁹ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, 5.

⁴⁷⁰ Schefer, *Voyage de la sainte cyté*, 99-100.

empty threat, the episode gives the impression that, at least in certain moments, the Venetian and Mamluk subjects disregarded the commands of their governments and cooperated at a local level at the expense of the pilgrims.

The pilgrims themselves worked against the restrictions imposed by the authorities of Venice and Cairo, often disguising their true identity for practical reasons. Bernardino Dinali recalled dressing as a crewmember in order to go ashore upon arrival in port rather than have to wait on board with the rest of the pilgrims for the safe-conduct. “I was quick to remove any suspicion that they [the Mamluks] might have formed about me; I carried some water barrels on my shoulders back to the boat. Having proved myself that way, I went to get fruit and other victuals. Finally, supplied with everything, we returned to the galley contentedly.”⁴⁷¹ In Alexandria, Arnold von Harff recorded that he avoided a payment of five ducats of pilgrim tribute by pretending to be a Venetian merchant; he also claimed that the Venetians themselves aided him in this and hosted him for a week at their *fontego*.⁴⁷² In a similar manner, Santo Brasca and Gabriele Capodilista advised pilgrims to dress humbly upon arrival in Jaffa “in order not to be recognized” and thereby avoid extortion from the local authorities.⁴⁷³ Pilgrims in this sense regarded their identity as temporary, mutable, and mediated by physical objects. In each of these

⁴⁷¹ Sabbatini, *La “Jerolomitana Peregrinatione,”* 69. “Li galeoti senza alcun timore in terra cominciorno a discendere per comprar cose al quotidiano victo necessarie e per fornir la galia di cose a quella oportune. Donde, essendo io desideroso di discender in terra, et ogni hora parendome mille anni di veder quei luoghi, con essi galeoti mi mescolai a la ventura, e per non esser sospetto a li mori, di vestimenti da galeoto mi vesti' e faceva in terra l'offitio de galeoto, perché guai al primo peregrino che solo dismantasi in terra avanti che tutti insieme dismantino. Essendo adomque iin terra fui circondato da una turba de mori, li quali sono generation sospetosisissima, allora io non fui lento a far l'offitio di sollicito galeoto per rimuovere da loro ogni suspicione che già di me havevano conceputa: posemi de le barile de aqua in spala e benché con gran sinestro le incominca' a portare in barcha. Et cosi havendoli cavati di suspecto, mi andai a fornire di fructi et di altre cose al victo oportune. Finalmente essendosi ogniun fornito, contenti ritornammo in la galia.”

⁴⁷² Letts, *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*. 93.

⁴⁷³ Lepschy, *Viaggio in Terra Santa*, 180, 129.

cases, the authors report that they used material goods to mask their identity and further their own interests, thereby thwarting Mamluk power and frustrating efforts at oversight.

The pilgrims' Venetian handlers sometimes participated in this sort of subterfuge, to their own benefit, as well. Agostino Contarini reportedly passed off some of his passengers as crewmembers in order to pay only half the Mamluks' expected tribute, allowing him to pocket the remainder for himself.⁴⁷⁴ In 1480, "he took fifteen of the pilgrims and presented them as servants from the galley: one a cannoneer, another a bowman, and some as galleyemen," recorded one passenger. "Some of the pilgrims passed for crew; the rest were refused and paid the full tribute . . . the patron earned a lot off of the ones who passed."⁴⁷⁵ Similarly, Bernardino Dinali reported that in 1492 his galley patron used the same ploy: the Mamluks registered the pilgrims as merchants, bowmen, cannoneers, and galleyemen so that "a lot of money was saved." Dinali expressed pleasure that the artifice allowed the pilgrims the freedom to travel around the port without Mamluk interference. "I would venture to say," he wrote, "that no pilgrims to Jerusalem ever enjoyed as much liberty as we did."⁴⁷⁶ These anecdotes conform to the general impression that authors provide for Venetian *patroni*, who sought to profit from bypassing official regulations, even when it meant jeopardizing the security of their passengers.

⁴⁷⁴ Schefer, *Voyage de la sainte cyté*, 66.

⁴⁷⁵ Schefer, *Voyage de la sainte cyté*, 66. "Et prit le patron quinze pellerins et les presenta en disant que c'estoyent des serviteurs de la gallée, l'ung cannonier, l'aultre arbalestrier, les aultres galiotz, affin qu'il ne payast pour eulx que demy tribut combien qu'il avoi reçu de chascun LV ducatz. Et aulcuns desdictz pellerins passerent pour serviteurs, les aultres furent reffusez et payerent plain tribut et n'y vallut riens la cautelle dudict patron combien qu'il gaigna beaucoup sur ceulx qui passerent."

⁴⁷⁶ Sabbatini, *La "Jerosolomitana Peregrinatione,"* 70-1. "La domenica matina, che fo a di xviiiij, tuti li peregrini fornirono di descendere in terra dove tuti furono scritti da marcatanti, alcuni da balestrieri, alcuni da balestrieri, alcuni da bombardieri et alcuni altri da galeoti, et in questo modo assai danari si sparmiavano al patrone imperò che li peregrini pagano tuti ducati xij per uno, li altri pagano chi cinque e chi quatro a echi tre ducati. . . Tuto quel giorno et el di seguente per la terra et per li luoghi circostanti a nostro arbitrio dove ci piaceva andamo discorendo. Et ardirò di dir questo: che forse mai ierosolomitani peregrini furono in tanta libertà quanto noi."

On the other hand, the costly nature of pilgrimage was well publicized and writers of travel narratives from this period appear to have been in general resigned to the fact that certain expenses were inevitable. The proverbial wisdom that many authors circulated advised potential pilgrims to bring three things on their journey: a sack of patience, a sack of faith, and, most importantly, a sack of money.⁴⁷⁷ The entire business of moving passengers to and from the Holy Land depended on cash payments, which writers described as “tribute” (*tributo*), delivered to Venetian mariners and Mamluk authorities. This word served as the blanket term for all payments for services or privileges that the pilgrims expected to pay to those who helped bring them to their destination, whether Muslim or Christian. The fact that the word *tributo* could be used in the contexts both of the Mamluks and of the Venetian sailors (where the words for fare, *nolo* or *naulum*, might seem more appropriate) suggests that observers saw the two groups performing the same basic role and profiting from their piety in effectively the same manner. Travelers evidently considered these payments legal or licit exchanges, given that pilgrim narratives acknowledge them as a pre-established, publicized, and unavoidable price incurred by traveling overseas.

Terminological analysis indicates, furthermore, that *tributo* likely carried a precise historical and biblical significance for the pilgrims. A consultation of the entry in Battaglia’s *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* reveals a persistent association with ancient kingly power and with the life of Christ.⁴⁷⁸ Medieval Italian literature regularly employed the word in

⁴⁷⁷ Paoletti, *Viaggio*, 171-2. “Tri sachi bisogna ad ciascuno vadi a questo viaggio del Sepulcro Dominico: uno saco da pientia, uno saco de dinari e uno saco de fede.” Cf. Newett, *Casola’s Pilgrimage*, 225.

⁴⁷⁸ Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1975), XXI “Tributo,” entry 1, 333. “Qualsiasi tipo di prestazione economic, in natura o, più spesso, in denaro, eseguita a favore del titolare del potere politico.” Cf. entries 4-7. “Ricompensa per un’opera, per un servizio prestato,” “Atto, comportamento, gesto o anche dono, rivolti, donati o dedicati come dimostrazione di fedeltà, di devozione, di ammirazione, di stima, di amicizia, d’amore nei confronti di una persona, di culto alla sua memoria;” “Attività votata al raggiungimento di uno scopo, all’adempimento di un compito.”

reference to Caesar, the Pharaoh, and the kings of Judea; that is, figures regarded as legitimate holders of royal authority in the Holy Land. Perhaps more importantly in the mind of a medieval writer who went on pilgrimage, the vernacular version of Jacob de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* described Joseph in Bethlehem searching for a means to "pagare il tributo per sé e per la Vergine."⁴⁷⁹ On an allegorical level, therefore, the pilgrims may have perceived these payments as a means of achieving their goal of following in Christ's footsteps.

In any event, these writers most often expressed an attitude of resignation rather than indignant outrage about the matter of *tributo*. Pietro Casola, in his characteristic sardonic style, wrote that the Mamluk governor came to Jaffa accompanied by such a large retinue "that it appeared as if there was an army there, preparing to make war, as was the case – at least on the purses of the pilgrims."⁴⁸⁰ Santo Brasca stated simply that one paid "li trabuti" and thereby gained access to the Holy Land and a plenary indulgence, as if in his mind a clear exchange value linked the payments to reciprocal holy rewards.⁴⁸¹ Lengherand, lamenting the poverty that the voyage entailed, listed tribute to the Mamluks and the dragoman alongside other ordinary travel expenses, such as lodging, food, and water.⁴⁸² In episodes where the expression "tribute" appears, therefore, it is free of negative commentary. In some respects, the pilgrims may have found these anticipated expenditures useful material to write about since their willingness to sacrifice money demonstrated their high level of devotion. In other words, in their minds undergoing tribulations (literally "the paying of tribute") would result in spiritual compensation.

⁴⁷⁹ Cited in Battaglia, *Grande dizionario*, XXI, 91.

⁴⁸⁰ Paoletti, *Viaggio*, 171, "El pariva fosse uno esercito che se paregiasse per fare guerra; e cossi era saltem a le borse de li peregrini." Cf. Newett, *Casola's Pilgrimage*, 224.

⁴⁸¹ Lepschy, *Viaggio in Terra Santa*, 64-5.

⁴⁸² Méniglaise, *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 147. "demouroit, en très grande povreté, ayant gardes à noz despens qui nous faisoient avoir vivres et aultres choses à nous nécessaires pour noz deniers, en payant de ce qui ne coustoit que deux le double avant, et en payant louage de la maison, payant tribut à icelles noz gardes, aussy au truceman dudit Gazera, et payant l'eauwe qui nous estoit apportée pour faire nostre cuisine et mettre en nostre."

Guidebooks often advised readers about the specific costs that one would likely encounter overseas. Nowhere was this important aspect of the journey laid out in more minute detail than in Suriano's *Trattato di Terra Santa*. A Venetian patrician and Minorite friar, Suriano carefully catalogued the payments that every pilgrim owed to each Mamluk office-holder upon arrival in Jaffa. He considered this a form of tribute (*tributo*) and listed it as a standard part of the ordinary expenses that the voyage to the Holy Land involved.⁴⁸³ Listing amounts as payable in ducats and *grossi* (1/24 of a ducat), he reported the following: a pilgrim could expect to owe seven ducats and sixteen *grossi* as "tributo del Soldano," one ducat to the sultan's dragoman, twenty-three and a half *grossi* to the gatekeepers of the Holy Sepulcher, three ducats for donkey and camel rides, one *grosso* at each of the six major holy sites of Palestine (Bethlehem, Bethany, the Mountains of Judea, the Mount of Olives, the Tomb of the Madonna, the Pools of Bethesda), one *grosso* for the guardians of the roads at eight places along the way, four *grossi* given at the house of Rama, one *grosso* for the guardians of the marina, three *grossi* for the lord of Rama, and one *grosso* for the lord of San Giorgio. Pilgrims interested in visiting Egypt, the center of the Mamluk bureaucracy, faced an additional set of expenses: six ducats to the amir of Alexandria, three ducats to the *nazir*, a half-ducats to the *dawadar al-thani*, one ducat each to the *dawadar al-kabir*, to the *wali* (deputy), to the *nakib* (captain), to the *nakib beg*, to the secretary of the amir, to the secretary of the inner port, to the pigeon-keeper of the gate, and to the port messenger, another four *grossi* to the messenger of the customs house and four *grossi* to the resident *muqaddam* (lieutenant), five *grossi* to the guardian of the port, two *grossi* to the guardian of the *fontego*, and one ducat paid as the price of a safe-conduct through Egypt.⁴⁸⁴ By comparison, Suriano recorded that merchants, sailors, household staff, and other servants paid only three and

⁴⁸³ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 16.

⁴⁸⁴ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 17-18.

a half ducats to the sultan and one ducat to the sultan's dragoman, plus the same rate for any pilgrimage sites they chose to visit.⁴⁸⁵ Franciscans and tertiaries, he added, paid no tribute (“non pagano tributo”) to visit these places.⁴⁸⁶ Because, like many of his contemporaries, Suriano rarely passed up an opportunity to disparage the Mamluks, it is significant that he chose not to do so in his chapter on tribute, and instead simply recorded the information without expressing any opinion. His lack of opinionated commentary on this subject may demonstrate that he did not see a purpose in objecting to tribute payments and essentially accepted them as legitimate.

Writers made a fascinating distinction between such licit exchanges of “tribute” and illicit, forced exactions, which they labeled extortion. Although the Minorite Friars enjoyed exemption from the pilgrim tax, they did make informal payments to the Mamluks and their Arab subjects as the price of living under Islamic rule, something which Suriano labeled “insufferable exactions, extortions, and impositions” (*manzarie et extorsione e graveze insopportabili*).⁴⁸⁷ Muslim visitors to the gates of the monastery of Mount Sion, he reported, frequently demanded food from the *frati* and used violence if they were refused.⁴⁸⁸ At times, hostile outsiders forced their way into the monastery itself, taking or demanding goods from the kitchens, offices, and cells. “And when they see a good slave-girl, they ask for her, and the brothers give her to them, so as not to displease them.”⁴⁸⁹ Suriano did not, of course, explain why a community of celibate friars owned female slaves in the first place, but it is worth noting that

⁴⁸⁵ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 17.

⁴⁸⁶ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 17.

⁴⁸⁷ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 117.

⁴⁸⁸ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 117.

⁴⁸⁹ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 117n1. Cf. Aערcke, *The Story*, 100: “They suffer very much from the rotten Saracens who often force their door and steal the food from their table, and the greatest lords are the ones who do this most often! And if they occasionally venture into town, the Infidel lords beat them and fleece them. . . These friars serve the pilgrims with great pleasure.”

he recognized that these illegitimate seizures of “property” could take a variety of forms including money, food, movable goods, and human beings.

Although it might be tempting to dismiss his accusations of extortion as the exaggerations of a devout Christian friar hostile to Muslims, several pilgrim authors corroborate Suriano’s information regarding such *manzarie*.⁴⁹⁰ Santo Brasca reported that, when traveling on pilgrimage in the company of the Franciscans of Mount Sion, they were stopped at Rama and forced to hand over “certain extortion payments” (*certe mangiarie*) by “those Saracen dogs.”⁴⁹¹ Upon encountering a group of Mamluks while visiting the church of Bethlehem, Lengherand wrote, he and his companions were forced to hand over a barrel of Malmsey wine and their “best cheese.”⁴⁹² In one particularly extreme instance of the exchange of human beings, Pietro Casola claimed that the Governor of Gaza demanded a thousand ducats from the Guardian of Mount Sion and the pilgrims in 1494 for the ransom of ten Cypriot prisoners whom he threatened to have flayed alive if they refused. “Finally he was brought down to a hundred and fifty [ducats], and the collection was made among the pilgrims, so that the prisoners were redeemed and taken naked and famished on board the galley.” At that point, Casola wrote, the governor brought in a Jewish and French prisoner and made the same demand, to which Agostino Contarini “told him he could do as he pleased.” The French “coward” denied Christ to save himself, Casola recalled,

⁴⁹⁰ Schefer, *Voyage de la sainte cité*, 63. “Nous entrasme à Rames à soleil levant et nous fist on descendre hors la ville, et feusme compez et mis en une maison et hospital ou demourent aucuns povres chrestiens soubz tribut.”

⁴⁹¹ Lepschy, *Viaggio in Terra Santa*, 117. “Martedì 8 augusti, in l’aurora, tolte le cose nostre, partissimo da Ierusalem, et acompagnati da li soprascripti patre guardiano et frati de monte Syon et da quelli cani saraceni, col nome de Dio drizassemo el nostro camino verso Italia, et facessemo la volta verso lo castello Emaus per vedere tute quele devotione che sono da Ierusalem a Rama, et che ne l’andare per carastia di tempo non haveamo potuto vedere, como di sopra ho recitato, et la sera gionsemo a Rama dove se dimorassemo per tuto lo giorno sequente per certe mangiarie che richiedeveno quelli saraceni.”

⁴⁹² Méniglaise, *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 145. “Mais nous là arrivez, trouvâmes l’église plaine de gens d’armes du Soudam tellement que à ceste cause nostre voyage dudit Ebron en fut rompu, et nous failly prendre aultre train, et fut nostre trucheman composé de eulx de huit ducas. Et ceste nuyt nous burent la pluspart d’un baril de Mallevisée et osté le meilleur frommage nous avions.”

and the Jewish prisoner was severely beaten, but the pilgrims went on their way.⁴⁹³ To be sure, these episodes may have been greatly distorted by any number of factors, from the witnesses' unfamiliarity with the language or customs to their perhaps innate hostility toward all Muslims without exception and the Mamluks even more so because they were believed to be Christian renegades.⁴⁹⁴ Be that as it may, the important issue to recognize in these cases is that the authors *perceived* the exchanges as unjust and unidirectional payments, rather than in more positive terms as tribute or reciprocal gift giving.

It is worth considering the possibility, moreover, that the Mamluks carried expectations about reciprocity that differed sharply from the Christian observers placed under their protection. When reading the travelers' accounts, one finds frequent clues that suggest certain conflicts arose from misperception and miscommunication over material objects. Casola scorned the fact that the governor of Rama sent a gift of food to the patron, Agostino Contarini, writing that the Mamluk only did this because he was "hoping to get something better in return." The author went on to disparage the much-needed offering, describing the fruit that was sent as "over-ripe" and the ox as "very thin."⁴⁹⁵ Incredibly, the author made no mention of a counter-gift from Contarini, and if one were not in fact delivered it might account for the poor treatment that Casola and his company received soon thereafter. It seems plausible to suppose that repeated breaches in gift giving etiquette could have thus jeopardized the success of a pilgrimage.

⁴⁹³ Paoletti, *Viaggio*, 178-9. Cf. Newett, *Casola's Pilgrimage*, 233.

⁴⁹⁴ Though some Mamluks were indeed Christian converts this was not universally true. An example of this type of error can be found in Aercke, *The Story*, 77, 118. On the western European misperception that all Mamluks were Christian renegades, see Ulrich Haarmann, "The Mamluk System of Rule in the Eyes of Western Travelers," *MSR* 5 (2001): 1-25.

⁴⁹⁵ Paoletti, *Viaggio*, 169, "El signore de Rama mandò uno presente al Magnifico Patrono de la galea, cioè uno manzeto negro, al casa nostra se dice uno iuco, asai magro, e certe pome e brugnone e ughe asai mature. Ucelando dal Patrono maiore facto." Cf. Newett, *Casola's Pilgrimage*, 223.

It also needs to be kept in mind that the Mamluks, as soldiers, were in fact performing a service by escorting the pilgrims on their journey, and therefore offering up a kind of gift. Although they often criticized them, western authors generally conceded that these men did not act as mere guides, but regularly went into armed battle against dangerous Arab raiders. During one attack, Casola wrote that the guards “were doing great things for our protection.”⁴⁹⁶ The Anonymous Parisian who went to the Holy Land in 1480 wrote that, when he was attacked, the Mamluks “me deffendirent bien diligemment.”⁴⁹⁷ Alvisé Contarini, writing of his company’s pursuit by Bedouins near the end of his journey, described the sudden and fortuitous arrival of a contingent of Mamluks who saved them from assault as a “miracle.”⁴⁹⁸ Viewed from this perspective, the seemingly unanticipated or arbitrary demands for payment that writers decried as extortions, or *manzarie*, may have sometimes been judged to be fair compensation by the Mamluks.

Pilgrim itineraries frequently cautioned readers that the threat of extortion or robbery from the sultanate’s Arab subjects tended to outweigh any danger posed by the Mamluks themselves. When they traveled without an escort, writers made it clear that travelers faced dangers from local people in many of the places they visited. The inhabitants of Jenin, warned Suriano, “are of Arab descent, and treat all travelers poorly, but particularly Christians, and western Christians most of all.”⁴⁹⁹ This poor treatment, he wrote, could include beatings, imprisonment, and extortion (*mangiarìa*). He pointed to the example of one Franciscan whom they beat, dragged to prison by his beard, and only released following a ransom payment of

⁴⁹⁶ Paoletti, *Viaggio*, 187. “Pariva facesseno de grande facende in subsidio nostro.” Cf. Newett, *Casola’s Pilgrimage*, 242. Grünemberg wrote that when attacked by Bedouins “if the Saracens and Infidels had not helped us, we would have had nothing left.” Aercke, *The Story*, 84.

⁴⁹⁷ Schefer, *Voyage de la sainte cyté*, 100.

⁴⁹⁸ De Sandoli, *Viaggio di Alvisé Contarini*, 314.

⁴⁹⁹ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 143.

eighty ducats.⁵⁰⁰ The authors of travel guides consistently differentiated between Mamluks and Arabs in terms of terminology and behavior, identifying the latter group as more dangerous to Christians and more likely to attempt extortion through threats of violence.⁵⁰¹

In other contexts, though, western observers identified material exchanges between Christians and Muslims as licit, freely given presents rather than acts of extortion. Personal connections with high-ranking officials could mean the difference between a successful or unsuccessful pilgrimage, and writers acknowledged that these bonds were often forged with such “gifts.” Suriano wrote that he gained access to two mosques supposedly situated upon Christian holy sites in Nablus through his friendship with the local *signor*. He described this interchange as having been materially negotiated and achieved through his knowledge of Mamluk practices of gift exchange, stating “I was welcomed and appreciated by the lord of the city . . . and I gave him a present of sugar, Frankish candies, and white wax, according to the custom of the country.”⁵⁰² Likewise, Lengherand advised that, when a service was not being held, a pilgrim could enter the mosque believed to be the House of St. Anne by making an offering to the custodians.⁵⁰³ The knights Von Harff and Guylforde as well reported the possibility of gaining access to the same building “by means of secret help and gifts.”⁵⁰⁴ Van Ghistele wrote that his company was even able to gain an audience with Sultan Qaytbay in Cairo by offering a gemstone they had bought in

⁵⁰⁰ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 143n2.

⁵⁰¹ The examples are numerous, but see, for example, Sabbatini, *La “Jerosolomitana Peregrinatione” Del Mercante Milanese Bernardino Dinali*, 133; Lepschy, *Viaggio in Terra Santa*, 112; *Le voyage de la sainte cyté*, 68, 99; Méniglaise, *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 132; De Sandoli, *Viaggio di Alvise Contarini*, 310; Letts, *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*, 134-5; Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 176; Péricard-Méa, *Le Voyage de Jean de Tournai*, 261-2.

⁵⁰² Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 142.

⁵⁰³ Méniglaise, *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 144.

⁵⁰⁴ Letts, *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*, 211. Cf. the comments made by Sir Richard Guylforde. Ellis, *The Pylgrymage*, “The Sarrasyns wyll suffre no man to come into this place but pryvely or for brybes, because it is theyre muskey.”

Venice. Afterward, Qaytbay repaid the gift with balsam and theriac.⁵⁰⁵ Whether this anecdote is true or not, it is nevertheless striking that the author thought it plausible that a precious commodity could be purchased in Venice, carried by a Flemish pilgrim, used to access the sultan's court, and then repaid with rare eastern drugs. Pilgrims understood that material objects could achieve tangible results, and where the *quid pro quo* relationship was readily apparent, they were more willing to identify transactions as “gifts” rather than extortions.

Ties of obligation created by favors and objects could sometimes develop and continue for decades. Although the reign of Qansuh al-Ghuri was characterized by persecution of both the pilgrims and the friars who assisted them, the Franciscans had previously succeeded in gaining the patronage of the Mamluks. Suriano reported being on good terms with both Qaytbay and his *amir kabir*, Ezbek min Tutukh, with whom the *frati* in Jerusalem exchanged gifts of food. He claimed that the friendship had been established in the 1460s when the monastery offered asylum to both men when the reigning sultan had persecuted and exiled them. As a result of this support, Qaytbay and Ezbek reciprocated, returning the favor by protecting the friars when they came to power later in the decade.⁵⁰⁶ Writing from the perspective of the early sixteenth century, Suriano could only look back wistfully at a time when the Franciscans and the Mamluk administration had been mutually obligated to one another.

Venetian intermediaries, who were likely more familiar with the Mamluk hierarchy's protocol of material exchange, themselves used gift giving in order to facilitate their part in the

⁵⁰⁵ Bauwens-Préaux, *Voyage en Égypte*, 22.

Theriac, or snake oil, was an ambiguous mixture of drugs (often including opium), and was thought to cure poisoning. Carla Nappi, “Bolatu's Pharmacy: Theriac in Early Modern China,” *Early Science and Medicine* 15, no. 6 (2009): 737-64.

⁵⁰⁶ Golubovich, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 113-14. Cf. Aercke, *The Story*, 100: “If the situation [for the Franciscans] becomes intolerable, they complain to an Infidel emir who resides in Allokeira (Cairo) with King Sultan, the so-called Ysenbeck [i.e. Ezbek min Tutukh]. This emir has the self-willed, malicious Infidel hacked in two, clean through the belly, and then the good friars can live again in peace for a while.”

pilgrim industry. The galley patron Agostino Contarini was witnessed on a voyage in 1480 sending Ezbek min Tutukh crystal vases (probably from Murano) to maintain good relations with the local administration and as an apparent means of gaining a safe-conduct for his passengers.⁵⁰⁷ Antonio da Crema recorded that in 1486 Contarini brought considerable quantities of “presents” in the form of cloth, glass lamps, brass candlesticks, barrels of wine, jars made of wood and earthenware, cheese, candies, along with cash, to the governors of Ramma, Jerusalem, and other officials. Da Crema totaled the amounts at twenty-eight boxes of candies, twenty-nine jars, twenty-seven lamps, twenty-five candlesticks, twenty-five pieces of cheese, and four barrels of wine divided among six individuals.⁵⁰⁸ “It was a great waste of time to please so many perfidious and obstinate thieves (for whom a better epithet does not exist),” he added with contempt for the Venetians’ generosity.⁵⁰⁹ Likewise, during Casola’s pilgrimage, the Milanese pilgrim observed that the patron gave “two boat-loads of different things” to the Mamluk governor in exchange for the safe-conduct “according to custom.”⁵¹⁰ The successful outcome of such gift-giving rituals obviously depended on the abilities of Contarini and his compatriots, whose experience with

⁵⁰⁷ Lepschy, *Viaggio in Terra Santa*, 63. “Circa le 20 hore gionsemo al dicto Giaffo; pur niuno peregrini descendete de galea perchè è gran pena a peregrini descendere in terra de mori senza el salvaconducto; ma subito el magnifico nostro patrono mandò el suo scrivano a Rama per annunciare li et in Ierusalem la nostra venuta, et per havere lo salvoconducto de descendere in terra. Mandoe etiam uno messo al Diodaro [i.e., Ezbek] in Damasco con presenti de certi vasi christalini adciò ne fosse propitio con li altri signori al nostro viaggio; et quivi se dimorassemo fine al lune aspetando la venuta de li signori de Rama et de Gazera con el salvaconducto, perchè senza loro ne serebbe facto grandi rincrescimenti da mori.”

In another instance of gift exchange between Venetian mariners and local Mamluk authorities, Grünemberg recorded a large sea turtle being given to his galley patron. Aercke, *The Story*, 76.

⁵⁰⁸ Nori, *Itinerario al Sancto Sepolcro*, 131-2.

⁵⁰⁹ Nori, *Itinerario al Sancto Sepolcro*, 94. “Mercore a di 9 agosto li patroni feceno presenti a li signori di Ramma e di Iherusalem et a mamluchi e a più offitiali di panno, vietro lavorato, cadini di terra, conche de ligno, candeleri di recalco, formazo, confetione et dinari ad alcuni, che fu uno gran perdere di tempo a contentare tanti perfidi et obstinati ladri, che più vero epyteton non si li pò convenire.”

⁵¹⁰ Paoletti, *Viaggio*, 178. “Nam siando andato el Patrono con due barcate de diverse robe per presentare quei mori, secundo l’usanza, per poterse levare.” Cf. Newett, *Casola’s Pilgrimage*, 232-3.

such affairs probably afforded them a level of savoir-faire that pilgrims may have occasionally lacked.⁵¹¹

Indeed, the writers sometimes provided evidence that they had failed to grasp the purposes served in Venetian-Mamluk gift giving rituals. As a case in point, consider Bernardino Dinali's curious account of a material exchange between the patron of his galley, Alvise Morosini, and the governor of Gaza: "the lord bought several pieces of cloth of scarlet, purple, and other colors. Since the lord made this purchase, the Venetian gentleman Miser Alvise Morosini presented him with candies made in the Venetian fashion, German candlesticks, and a few fine pieces of glass made in Murano."⁵¹² "When he examined the presents," Dinali continued, "the lord was very pleased and began to eat the candies." Here, rather than assessing the significance of the Venetian gifts, or recognizing that it probably contributed to securing a safe-conduct, the Milanese pilgrim instead drifted into a strange excursus on the Mamluks' bizarre eccentricities. "Then the lord called forth his jester, who, rolling around on the ground, opened his mouth, waiting like a baby bird. The lord, like the mother of this awful bird, threw some of the candies in his mouth and for fun the Moors threw dirt and salt in as well, all of which greatly pleased the lord. To us, however, for whom such idiocy seems foreign, it appeared despicable buffoonery."⁵¹³ The author's depiction thereby transformed the governor's ritual

⁵¹¹ Cf. Aercke, *The Story*, 113. "We had proven our friendly intentions and our gratefulness towards the *kalin*, the interpreter and their staff, by giving them presents upon our arrival and more tips. Their income from pilgrims' tips was considerable. So the *kalin* appointed a couple of Infidels to be our guides and to show us around at our pleasure."

⁵¹² Sabbatini, *La "Jerosolomitana Peregrinatione,"* 70. According to Ibn Iyas, the *na'ib* of Gaza at this time was Qânibak. Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 2, 306; Ibn Iyas, *Histoire des mamlouks circassiens*, 345. Dinali describes him as "tall, handsome, around fifty years old and with a red beard. He dwelt in two beautiful pavilions, one in which he ate and slept, the other in which he gave audiences with revelry and fame."

⁵¹³ Sabbatini, *La "Jerosolomitana Peregrinatione,"* 70-71. "Comprò adomque il signore alcuni pani di scarlato e di pavonazo et di altri colori poi chel signore ebbe facta la sua compra, miser Alovio Morosino, gentilhuomo venetiano, presentò a quello, confectioni facte a la venitiana, candelieri todeschi et alcuni belli pezi di vetro facti in Murano. El presente, uqando alhora posseti comprehendere, fo gratissimo al signore, el quale, incominciando a mangiar de le dicte confectioni, feze inanzi a lui venire un buffone el qual, gitandosi per terra alla

audience with the Venetians into a burlesque parody of the courts of European Christendom, playing on the trope of the “strangeness of the Orient” as an inversion of “Western normality.”⁵¹⁴ This fascinating episode reveals that Dinali, an outsider, could not appreciate the importance of cross-cultural gift giving, but could instead only use it as an example of Mamluk otherness.

The glassware that figured in the Venetian pilgrim business is a remarkable example of cross-cultural technological and cultural exchange. Venetian glass manufacture had a long history extending back for centuries and rooted in the city’s overseas connections in Middle Eastern ports. The earliest glassmakers in Venice undoubtedly learned their craft from Muslim masters, whose knowledge and technical skill was the *ne plus ultra* for most of the Middle Ages.⁵¹⁵ Yet the renowned artisans of the island of Murano, who had by the late fifteenth century become unrivalled masters of the craft, in turn surpassed Islamic glasswork, and their products dominated the foreign market in this period. The overseas demand for the glass produced in Venice was spurred in part by the invention of *crystallo*, a translucent yet highly malleable material similar in appearance to rock crystal, but which industry pioneers such as the Venetian Angelo Barovier molded into shapes of singular grace and beauty.⁵¹⁶ An impressive piece of this Murano *crystallo*, made around the year 1500 and on display at the Toledo Museum of Art

supina, apriva la bocha aspetando tuta volta come el novo ucelo la imbecchata. El signore, sì come madre di questo tal bestiale ucello, li gettava d’il confecto in bocha et alcuni circostanti mori li impivano per piacevoleza la bocha di terra, alcuni altri di sale, del che el signore pigliava non piccolo piacere. Ma a noi, li quali da queste simplicità siamo alieni, ne parveno buffonarie dispetose.”

⁵¹⁴ Consider also the juxtaposition Felix Fabri employed in comparing Cairo and Venice. “Aestimo enim me vidisse totum universum in duplici speculo, secundum mundi duplicem considerationem. Consideratur enim mundus primo sub quadam confusione, secundo sub quodam ordine. Primo modo vidi mundum Cayri, secundo modo vidi eum Venetiis, in qua ordinatissime convivunt homines.” Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 403-4. Cf. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 48ff.

⁵¹⁵ Rosa Barovier Mentasti and Stefano Carboni, “Enamelled Glass between the Eastern Mediterranean and Venice,” in *Venice and the Islamic World*, 253 ff.

⁵¹⁶ Jutta-Annette Page and Ignasi Doménech, *Beyond Venice: Glass in Venetian Style* (Corning: Hudson Hill Press, 2004), 5.

(Figure 7), is likely representative of the type of product that the commanders of the pilgrim galleys used to facilitate their dealings with Mamluk authorities.



*Figure 7: Glass Serving Flask, Cristallo, Late Fifteenth or Early Sixteenth Century*⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁷ Italian (Venice), *Serving Flask*, Late 15th- Early 16th century. Toledo Museum of Art (Toledo, Ohio). Used with Permission. Photo Credit: Italian (Venice), *Serving Flask*, Late 15th- Early 16th century, Colorless glass;

A third important category of exchange that pilgrims wrote of was “courtesy” (*cortesia*). This occupied a middle ground between acts of extortion and gift giving, and which writers identified as a kind of unofficial but expected form of “little” or “secret” gifts paid in exchange for a service. After paying two ducats for a Mamluk escort to travel from Cairo to Mount Sinai, von Harff wrote that he made a further payment of “secret presents, which are called in their language courtesies.”⁵¹⁸ Pietro Casola reported that his Venetian patron advised him to give an extra ducat to his muleteer as *cortesia* to ensure good service on the trip from Jaffa to Jerusalem. Although this payment to the drivers was not obligatory, he informed his readers that “otherwise they cause you many annoyances, and are very disagreeable.”⁵¹⁹ Georges Lengherand wrote that he and his companions paid *courtoisies* to the grand dragoman Taghriberdi in exchange for his assistance traveling through Egypt.⁵²⁰ Courtesies appear to have always taken the form of small cash payments given in return for or in expectation of some minor assistance.⁵²¹ As a kind of gratuity, they were not obligatory in a strict sense, but functioned rather as a necessary if unofficial means of facilitating a business arrangement. Once again, therefore, the sources point

blown, applied, tooled, enameled, gilded, H: 34.6 cm (13 5/8 in.), Toledo Museum of Art (Toledo, Ohio), Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1948.225.

⁵¹⁸ Letts, *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*, 134.

⁵¹⁹ Paoletti, *Viaggio*, 182. “Bisogna che li peregrini faciano qualche cortesia a li patroni de le bestie, aliter ve fano de molti dispiacere, e sono molto recrescevoli.” Cf. Newett, *Casola’s Pilgrimage*, 236.

Antonio da Crema offered similar advice. Nori, *Itinerario al Sancto Sepolcro*, 94. “E poi a boca si dolseno di mali tratamenti faceano in li anni pasati li mucari, che sono li asinari, a li peregrini in darli triste cavalature e baterli cum pugni, bastoni et predi e de piglarli li dinari.”

Konrad Grünemberg offered the same advice, writing that his driver “demanded a tip. I gave him two *marcelins*. . . he was very satisfied, and he kissed my hand and took care of me. Our *padroni* had told us before we mounted the donkeys not to give tips, but whoever followed their advice was beaten so soundly by the Infidels that he preferred to pay up after all. When we wanted to get going, the donkeys began to kick and skip, and I believe the Infidels were pricking the beasts with something, and if you were thrown off, you were likely to lose your bag or something else so that you had to give more money to get back your stuff and, on top of that, a tip to get helped into the saddle again.” Aercke, *The Story*, 79.

⁵²⁰ Méniglaise, *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 182.

⁵²¹ It should be noted, however, that “courtesy” was much more ambiguous and bivalent than the terms *manzaria*, *tributo*, or *presente*. Sometimes, *cortesia* could refer to outright extortion, as when Georges Lengherand wrote of forced payments to Bedouins “pour courtoisie. Méniglaise, *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 152, 156.

toward the existence of a sliding scale of perceiving exchanges that ranged from categories of licit transfers of “gifts” into illicit transfers of “extortion.”

Yet the seemingly random identification of certain transactions as licit and others illicit prompts several questions. In particular, how did one distinguish between a voluntary act of generosity and a forced act of extortion? Why did Suriano, for example, write of *presenti* in one instance and *graveze et manzarie* in another? A viable approach to this conundrum comes from anthropological theory on the economics of giving. As shown above, expectations of reciprocity made an enormous difference in whether or not a pilgrim identified a material exchange as possessing positive connotations of gift giving or negative connotations of extortion. Bronislaw Malinowski argued in his groundbreaking study of the Trobriand islanders’ practice of *kula* that presents are never altruistic, but rather serve as politically motivated economic mechanisms that secure “definite ties of reciprocal obligations.”⁵²² Building off of Malinowski’s work, Marshall Sahlins suggested that societies share in a spectrum of transactions that run the gamut from pure gift to pure barter, writing “it seems possible to lay out in abstract fashion a continuum of reciprocities based on the ‘vice-versa’ nature of exchanges . . . The stipulation of material return,

⁵²² Malinowski, *Argonauts*, 527. See also *ibid.*, 188. “I have on purpose spoken of forms of exchange, of gifts and counter-gifts, rather than of barter or trade, because, although there exist forms of barter pure and simple, there are so many transitions and gradations between that and simple gift, that it is impossible to draw any fixed line between trade on the one hand, and exchange of gifts on the other. Indeed, the drawing of any lines to suit our own terminology and our own distinctions is contrary to sound method. In order to deal with these facts correctly it is necessary to give a complete survey of all forms of payment or present. In this survey there will be at one end the extreme case of pure gift, that is an offering for which nothing is given in return. Then, through many customary forms of gift or payment, partially or conditionally returned, which shade into each other, there come forms of exchange, where more or less strict equivalence is observed, arriving finally at real barter. In the following survey I shall classify each transaction according to the principle of its equivalence.”

Although he initially posited the existence of a category of exchange of the “pure gift,” he later abandoned this idea and developed the notion of reciprocity in gift giving. On Malinowski’s work and its elaboration by Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss, see Chris Hann, “The Gift and Reciprocity: Perspectives from Economic Anthropology,” in *Handbook of the Economics of Giving, Altruism and Reciprocity: Foundations*, ed. Serge-Christophe Kolm et al. (London: Elsevier, 2006), 211.

Carrying this a step further, Weiner has suggested the stability of relationships involving persons and objects involves the establishment of “norms of reciprocity” as one part of her model of “reproduction.” Annette B. Weiner, “Reproduction: A Replacement for Reciprocity,” *American Ethnologist* 7 (1980): 71-85.

less elegantly, the ‘sidedness’ of exchange, would be the critical thing.”⁵²³ My own analysis of the transactions described by the pilgrim narratives challenges and modifies this model by shifting emphasis from the concepts of “barter” and pure gift” and focusing instead on the subjective, constructed nature of these categories.

Far more important than whether the Mamluks, pilgrims, and Venetians participated in some objectively equitable form of *quid pro quo* was the issue of whether they *agreed* that reciprocity occurred. Arriving at a consensus on that point required participants to feel that they were being presented with more than one viable option, as was the case with *cortesia*. Although as Mauss believed, all offerings are in a sense obligatory and unavoidable, since refusal to participate could amount to a form of social death, they nonetheless involve a certain illusion of choice.⁵²⁴ On the other hand, as seen in these pilgrim narratives, a perceived element of coercion produced a sense of absence of choice and so induced observers to label a transaction as extortion. But the decisive factor in determining the identification of an exchange as licit or illicit was not the notion that one could choose to give or not to give, but rather that giving would be more beneficial to the donor because it ensured reciprocity. Where the transaction appeared mutually beneficial, and where it was clear that the act of giving would obligate the recipient to the donor with some specific form of counter-offering, it became a “gift.” Where the bond of obligation was not sufficiently apparent the act became one of “extortion.” In short, Christians and Mamluks only managed to cooperate and to avoid generating feelings of hatred in those cases where they arrived at a consensus on reciprocity, in which both parties shared a sense of mutual benefit.

⁵²³ Sahlins, “On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange,” 146. In Malinowski’s terms, this would be a graduated scale from a true “gift” (*mapula*) to a self-interested “barter” (*gimwali*).

⁵²⁴ On the obligation to reciprocate, see Mauss, *The Gift*, passim, but see for example page 53, “A gift is received ‘with a burden attached;’ 94, “just as these gifts are not freely given, they are not really disinterested.”

Aside from the high degree of subjectivity involved in the process of labeling, this analysis suggests that the portrayal of many of the exactions denounced by western visitors to the Mamluk Sultanate resulted from a lack of consensus about what an exchange meant rather than intercultural antagonism. Although Christians came to the Holy Land primed in advance with hostility toward Islam, and the Mamluks had inherited a proud legacy of victory over the crusaders, at no point was material conflict inevitable between members of these two different societies. To be sure, pilgrims, who arrived opposed to Muslim rule and possession of the Holy Land and who wrote for a pious audience that shared this viewpoint, readily inserted material that supported the venerable thesis of Islamic misrule in the east. These writers could nevertheless concede that, when the reciprocity was tangible, some material transfers were acceptable, admitting for example that certain dues, or tribute, had to be paid upon arrival. Yet in most cases, they largely refused to come to terms with the second, informal system of payment for protection that existed alongside it, and were unable or unwilling to recognize as gifts the services the Mamluks rendered them in exchange for cash or commodities. Their Venetian patrons, who possessed much more experience working with the Mamluks, arrived at a consensus about reciprocity more easily, and typically achieved better results in successfully negotiating mutually beneficial exchanges of gifts than their pilgrim clients.

On the macro-level of Mediterranean geopolitics, the interests of the Signoria of Venice and the Sultanate of Cairo pass by unnoticed by the writers of pilgrim guides. These authors, including even the highly astute Francesco Suriano, neglected the very real problems that the pilgrim traffic posed to both states. Cairo and Venice alike regarded the industry, on the one hand, as a source of limited political and economic capital, but on the other hand as a source of intractable disputes and scandal that jeopardized their relations with the courts of Christian

Europe. The regimes attempted to minimize the damage to their international prestige by trying to control pilgrimage to the Holy Land, only to see those attempts at regulation thwarted by the unscrupulous activities of Venetian citizens, the sultan's subjects, and the pilgrims themselves. Again it must be emphasized, however, that conflict over material goods was only in part precipitated by the self-interested behavior of individual actors, and that it was instead more heavily dependent on miscommunication and failure to arrive at a consensus about the reciprocity that each exchange entailed.

Ultimately, the phenomenon of European pilgrimage to the Holy Land collapsed in the sixteenth century. The note of decline is apparent in the final documents of the *Cattaver*, in which the last recorded pilgrim complaint dates from 1512.⁵²⁵ Thereafter, the Ottoman conquests of Palestine in 1516 and Rhodes in 1522 contributed to the proliferation of Muslim piracy in the eastern Mediterranean and made voyages to Jerusalem increasingly unsafe.⁵²⁶ North of the Alps, meanwhile, the critiques of Protestant reformers encouraged the pious to turn inward and away from external acts of devotion.⁵²⁷ That is, the journey to the celestial Jerusalem replaced the journey to the earthly Jerusalem at precisely the same time that the stability of Christian searoutes in the Mediterranean underwent crisis. The Venetian Republic, losing much of its maritime empire to the Turks, including finally Cyprus in 1571, also slowly lost its relevance as a point of embarkation for western travelers. Yet an English voyager visiting Venice in 1595 ignored these issues, and instead simply explained that pilgrims no longer sailed regularly from Venice to Jaffa

⁵²⁵ ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 104 v. This episode did not involve the negligence of a galley patron, moreover, but rather the fact that the pilgrims' travel expenses had led them into debt.

The last record in the *Cattaver* concerning pilgrims was a shipwreck in 1546. ASVe, *Ufficiali al Cattaver*, busta 2, fol. 105 r.

⁵²⁶ Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 1, 130-1.

⁵²⁷ Martin Luther, in his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, and John Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, for example, both condemned pilgrimage to Jerusalem as a useless pretense. Noonan, *The Road to Jerusalem*, 85.

because of “the Turkes imposing great exactions” on visitors.⁵²⁸ Ironically, although the world of pilgrimage that the Venetians and Mamluks had maintained and exploited no longer existed, therefore, the trope of extortion in the east endured.

⁵²⁸ Fynes Morison, *An Itinerary Written by Fynes Moryson Gent: First in the Latine Tongue, and Then Translated by Him into English: Containing His Ten Yeeres Travell Through the Twelue Dominions of Germany, Bohmerland, Sweitzerland, Netherland, Denmarke, Poland, Jtaly, Turkey, France, England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London: Beale, 1617), I, 447.

Chapter Four:

Between Thrift and Largesse: The Role of the Consuls in Mamluk-Venetian Material Exchanges

The past three chapters have revealed that material exchanges significantly influenced the nature and outcome of encounters between merchants, diplomats, pilgrims, and Mamluks in the eastern Mediterranean. At the axis of such encounters stood another type of traveler to the region who occupied an especially liminal position within the hierarchy of the sultanate. Throughout the period 1480-1517, Venice's resident consuls brokered negotiations between the Serenissima, its citizens, the sultan, and his subjects, fostering cooperation and working to prevent conflict between them. Transfers of liquid capital and tradable commodities shaped the patterns of those interactions, which frequently concerned the satisfaction of outstanding debts and disputes over property between members of the two communities. Answerable to both the Venetian home government and the Egyptian administration, the consuls sought to manage and resolve those conflicts as necessary. Yet their involvement in material disputes and their efforts to mediate between competing interests also propelled them into problems of liability when exchanges went wrong, and thereby exposed them to the threat of Mamluk retribution. Consuls were neither purely ambassadors nor purely administrators, but rather a hybrid type of frontier agents who fought against the material constraints that their office imposed upon them in order to guarantee a stable rapport between the subjects of Venice and Cairo.

Much has already been written about the Venetian consular system, both in early modern Egypt and elsewhere, but little attention has been paid to its importance in brokering material

exchanges across cultures.⁵²⁹ The relative paucity of scholarly attention to the subject is all the more striking given that the original purpose of the office of consul was to arbitrate and regulate trade. Before undertaking a close examination of specific examples of consuls' involvement in this major aspect of Mamluk-Venetian relations, though, it is first necessary to provide a fuller outline of their quite expansive range of duties. As witnessed in previous chapters, the consular office had gradually come to possess a critical, mediatory character over the course of generations of commerce between Venice and Cairo, eventually functioning as a pivotal point for encounters between a diverse set of interests. Though these officials served an increasingly crucial function in the late 1400s, when trade in the eastern Mediterranean underwent a period of crisis, Venetian consulates in Egypt and the Levant existed in the era of the Crusades and in fact predated the emergence of the Mamluk regime.⁵³⁰ The practice of maintaining a resident consul at the Alexandrian *fontego* began in the early 1200s, decades before the coup that toppled the Ayyubids and led to the ascendancy of the first Mamluk ruler Aybak. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Signoria established another consulate in Damascus as well as ancillary "vice-consulates" in Tripoli, Beirut, Aleppo, and Damietta with the cooperation of first the Bahri

⁵²⁹ The foundational study of Levantine commerce, including the consular system, remains Wilhelm von Heyd's magisterial two-volume *Histoire du Commerce du Levant au Moyen-Âge* (Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1967). In the twentieth century, Ashtor made significant contributions to the earlier work carried out by Heyd on this topic in *Levant Trade in the Middle Ages*. One of the few historians to have explored consular involvement in material exchanges in the Mamluk Sultanate is Georg Christ, both in his monograph *Trading Conflicts* and in his article "The Venetian Consul and the Cosmopolitan Mercantile Community of Alexandria at the Beginning of the Ninth/Fifteenth Century," *Al-Masaq* 26, no. 1 (2014): 62-77. Major scholarly studies of the consular system of Venice more generally abound. See, for example, Constable, *Housing the Stranger*; Fusaro, *Political Economies of Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean*. In particular, the role of the consul (*consulo*, *consule*, or *bailo*) within the Ottoman Empire has received considerable attention. Cf. Maria Pedani, "Egyptian Consuls in Egypt and Syria in the Ottoman Age," *Mediterranean World* 18 (2006): 7-21; Yutaka Horii, "The Role of the Venetian Consul in Early Ottoman Egypt," *Mediterranean World* 19 (2008): 207-16; Eric R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

⁵³⁰ For an overview of the office of the consul among western merchant communities in the Levant, see Constable, *Housing the Stranger*, 133-137, 282-286.

and later the Burji sultans.⁵³¹ Consuls of other European trading nations also served their communities in these locales, but the sheer predominance of Venice's maritime commerce guaranteed that the Venetian consuls became one of the primary European points of contact with the Mamluks.⁵³²

Given the political and economic weight that consuls carried, the republic tried to choose and control the men who filled this office carefully. Venice's *Maggior Consiglio* elected the consuls from among the members of the patriciate, imposing considerable restrictions upon them for the duration of their two-year terms. During their tenure, they were forbidden from engaging in commerce, had to leave their wives and children behind, and were allowed to keep only a modest household staffed by male retainers.⁵³³ As well as corresponding regularly with the

⁵³¹ David Jacoby, "Les Italiens en Égypte aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles: du comptoir à colonie?," in *Coloniser au Moyen Âge*, ed. Michel Balard et al. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1995), 79; *ibid.*, "Le consulat vénitien d'Alexandrie d'après un document inédit de 1284," in *Chemins d'outre-mer: études d'histoire sur la Méditerranée offertes à Michel Balard*, ed. Damien Coulon et al. (Paris: Publ. de la Sorbonne, 2004), 462. Two Venetian *fonteghi* existed in Alexandria, known as the *fontego magno* and *fontego piccolo*. This terminology is found, for example, in ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, busta 180, Dolfin Biagio quondam Lorenzo, pergamene, 21 II. Suriano, *Trattato*, 188. Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 555-9. The consuls of Damascus and Alexandria were independent of one another and bore the title of consul. Those of Beirut, Aleppo, Tripoli, and Damietta were vice-consuls, and answerable either to their respective consuls in Alexandria and Damascus.

⁵³² In the fifteenth century, other trading nations included French (mostly Provençal), Catalan, Genoese, and Florentine merchants. They did not maintain as continuous a presence in most cities as the Venetians. Florentine efforts at establish a trading colony in Alexandria, spearheaded by the Medici, were abortive and ultimately unsuccessful. Based on Emmanuel Piloti's observations, acts of piracy against the Mamluk littoral conducted by French, Provençals, and Genoese mariners (under Jean le Maingre "Boucicaud") as well as Catalans (under Incoterès Catalan) in the early fifteenth century greatly undermined the stability of these nations' trading colonies. It is perhaps revealing that a Burgundian pilgrim traveling in the Levant in the 1430s described interacting with merchants from several nations, but only mentioned one consul, that of Venice. Schefer, *Le Voyage d'Outremer*, 58-67. For contemporary commentary on the effects of the raids by Boucicaud upon the merchant communities in Egypt, see Dopp, *Traité*, 199-201. On Incoterès and the impact of Catalan piracy, see *ibid.*, 139, 227 ff. For an overview of the decline of (non-Venetian) trade between the Mamluks and western merchants, see Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 490-99. According to Breydenbach, Alexandria also had *fonteghi* for Mongols, Maghrebi, and Ethiopians. Breydenbach, *Peregrinationes*, 243. The Jewish voyager Obadiah Jare reported that there were consuls from Venice, Catalonia, Genoa, and Ancona in Alexandria when he visited in 1487. Juda David Eisenstein and Elkan Nathan Adler, eds. and trans., "The Letters of Obadiah Jaré da Bertinoro," in *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 223.

At times, the Catalan consuls in Alexandria played an important part in receiving and guiding western pilgrims. Cf. Breydenbach, *Peregrinationes*, 239.

⁵³³ They were barred from engaging in commerce because it would be a conflict of interests with their office. For one example of the consular prohibitions on trade, see ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 17 f. 73 v

leadership in Venice, they were required to consult with a local “Council of Twelve,” whose members came from the oldest and most prosperous merchants in their assigned city.⁵³⁴ Together with the home government, this committee voiced mercantile concerns and influenced consular interactions with Mamluks and Venetian citizens.⁵³⁵ In that regard, the consular officeholder found his freedom to act considerably constrained, on the one hand, by the rulers of the republic, and, on the other, by his countrymen within the expatriate merchant community.

As the directors of the local *fontego* and the official representatives of their nation, the consuls served the Venetian colony to which they were assigned in numerous materially oriented ways. In the first place, together with their Council of Twelve, they reviewed and settled

(17 July 1509); *ibid.* reg. 16, f. 161 v (7 June 1507); *ibid.*, reg. 12 f. 170 r (13 April 1488), “El non e alcuna chossa che mazormente possi conferir ai marcadanti nostri che trafegano in Soria, et etiam ad honor de la Signoria nostra, cha proveder et prohibire chel consolo nostro de Damasco sia libero da ogni pensiero e comercio de marcadantia perche el el comercio et el far de marcadantia del consolo nostro predicto redonda in grandissimo preinditio et danno di mercadanti nostri.”

In previous centuries no such prohibitions existed. In 1281, the *Maggior Consiglio* expressly gave the consul of Tunis permission to engage in trade: “possit portare secum mercatum et ducere et mittere sicut ei placuerit per illum annum.” Cessi, *Deliberazioni del Maggior Consiglio*, II, 128. It should be noted, in addition, that consuls in Egypt and Syria were allowed to participate in the commerce of precious stones (*zoie*). ASVe, *Maggior Consiglio, Deliberazioni*, reg. 25, f. 57 v (17 July 1519).

They were required to leave their wives and children behind in Venice. They did however keep Christian slave-girls and concubines, taken mostly from the Balkans or Eastern Europe. Based on his assessment of notarial records, Ashtor reasoned that “those few free European women who were to be found in the Levantine towns were mostly widows of innkeepers and old women.” Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 407-8. On the consul’s children, however, see ASVe, *Senato, Deliberazioni Misti*, reg. 59, f. 130 v. (12 September 1435), which mentions the possibility that a consul would have his sons with him.

⁵³⁴ ASVe, *Senato, Deliberazioni Misti*, reg. 59, f. 130 v. (12 September 1435). In the early sixteenth century, however, the Senate took on the responsibility of choosing the consuls, and the decision was only approved by the *Maggior Consiglio*. ASVe, *Maggior Consiglio, Deliberazioni*, reg. 25, f. 68 r. ff. (16 August 1510). “Fu deliberato de non far el dicto consolo á Damasco piu per scrutinio cussi al presente appropinquandosi la nova election del predicto é da far provisione de haver al dicto consolato un zentilhomo nostro pratico et facendosi solum per electione potria occorrer che quelli che seriano optimi á questo, non fusseno nominati, perho, landera parte chel consolo de Damasco da esser electo et quelli che per tempo se elezerano siano creati nel nostro consiglio per scrutinio del consiglio del pregadi et quatro man de electione come fu facto el consolo de Alexandria cum tuti li modi, salario, et utilita consuete. Et similiter elezer se deba el consolo de Alexandria alli tempi se elezera. La qual parte non se intendi presa se la non sera posta, et presa nel nostro mazor consiglio.”

⁵³⁵ ASVe, *Senato, Deliberazioni Mar*, reg. 11, f. 115 r (19 May 1481). The Council of Twelve also had the authority to influence decisions about spending money in the *cottimo*.

commercial disputes between citizens over property and payment.⁵³⁶ The *fontego* that they administered, moreover, typically included a compound with a bread oven, tavern, church, warehouse space, and secure walls – precious physical resources at the disposal of Venetian visitors.⁵³⁷ Furthermore, the consul’s chaplain offered spiritual and notarial services to the community, and a dragoman, doctor and barber were kept available on site.⁵³⁸ Finally, from his seat at the *fontego*, which functioned as a combined trading post and inn, the consul provided a measure of mercantile oversight and upheld Venetian laws.⁵³⁹ The state expected him to inspect incoming and outgoing merchandise, supervise the collection of commercial duties on cargo, and prevent the shipment of contraband goods (i.e. commodities for which duties had not been paid,

⁵³⁶ See, for example, ASVe, *Giudici di petizion, Sentenze a giustizia*, 186, fol. 127 v - 130 v, in which the Council of Twelve in Beirut adjudicated outstanding debts following the death of the merchant Marc Antonio Querini in 1489.

⁵³⁷ In 1302, the Sultan An-Nasir Muhammad granted the Venetians the right to a *fondaco* in Alexandria equipped with an oven and cistern. George Martin Thomas, *Diplomatarium Veneto-Levantinum, Sive acta et diplomata res venetas graecas atque levantis illustrantia* (Venice: Deputazione Veneta di Storia Patria, 1880) I, 1300–1350, 5. The taverns are mentioned in governmental acts from the thirteenth century on. The consul apparently enjoyed the right to the profits of the tavern, for which see ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Misti, reg. 46, f. 95 r (20 July 1403). Piloti described the security of the *fondaco* in detail, noting that the Venetians were able to barricade themselves within when they felt threatened. Piloti, *Traité*, fol. 59 r - fol. 59 v.

Churches, which the consuls used as a place to post announcements, are mentioned in ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 15, f. 158 r (29 October 1502).

⁵³⁸ These figures are frequently mentioned in governmental records, and apparently received a handsome salary comparable to that of the consul himself. Cf. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 20 r (10 June 1513).

Bertrandon de la Broquière reported in the 1430s that the consul’s chaplain heard the confession of Venetian merchants and regulated their affairs. The chaplain also claimed full knowledge of the Quran, and composed a *Life of Muhammad*, which he gave to the French pilgrim. Schefer, *Le Voyage d’Outremer*, 58.

Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 32. “Dominus consul Alexandrinus Venetus, qui habebat barbitonsorem; in ejus habitaculum ingressi sumus, et capita lavimus, et comam ac barbam mundavimus et composuimus. . .induxit deinde nos in capellam suam et calicum aureum ostendit, librum et alia paramenta missae, offerens capellam suam et omnia in usum nostrum.”

⁵³⁹ This included laws concerned with mercantile, criminal, and civil matters. In 1367, for example, when the Council of Ten banned games of cards and dice in Venice, it instructed the same law to be upheld in the territories and wherever consuls were present. ASVe, Signori di notte civil, busta 1 bis, “Capitolari,” fol. 68 v.

For some fifteenth-century examples of the consul and vice-consul’s role in arbitrating mercantile disputes, often between merchants in Venice and their factors overseas, see ASVe, Giudici di petizion, Letter missive, busta 4.

or materials prohibited for export to Islamic lands).⁵⁴⁰ Though the office had initially been created only to serve the Venetian nation, in practice the range of consular duties grew to extend well beyond this original intention.

For example, Venetian consuls looked after other Europeans besides their own compatriots. As overseas representatives of the Serenissima, whose role in the pilgrim traffic had increased considerably in the fifteenth century (see Chapter Three), they were called upon to safeguard the interests of western Christian travelers. Sometimes, this amounted to simple hospitality; in Alexandria, Felix Fabri and Arnold von Harff recorded taking respite at the *fontego* of the Venetians in the 1480s.⁵⁴¹ In Damascus, pilgrims could expect to find similar support, calling, for instance, on the consul's resident chaplain to hear their confessions.⁵⁴² Georges Lengherand and his party stayed with the Venetian vice-consul in Damietta, who offered them food and lodging.⁵⁴³ At other times, though, consular officials might take a more active role in assisting foreign visitors. On one occasion, when a Burgundian pilgrim traveling through Syria suffered an unexpected arrest and imprisonment, he turned for aid to the Venetian consul, who successfully intervened with the governor of Damascus and secured his release from captivity.⁵⁴⁴ The consuls in this respect served as both benefactors and vital interlocutors with Mamluk authorities even in cases that did not directly concern Venetian citizens. Consuls thus

⁵⁴⁰ On the consul's duties in inspecting and recording imports and exports, as well as preventing fraud, see ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, busta 947, "Liber del cotimo di Damasco," fol. 3 v. Since the thirteenth century, the *Maggior Consiglio* had called on consuls in the Levant and Egypt to prevent the importation of timber, iron, and other material of war, in accordance with papal prohibitions on trade with the infidel. Cessi, *Deliberazioni del Maggior Consiglio*, III, 111. "Item, quod ipsi Consilarii Accon teneantur inquirere et invenire de omnibus nostris fidelibus, qui portassent vel portarent ignamen vel ferrum in Egyptum, et eos condemnare et punire ante complementum sui regiminis. Et addatur tam in eorum capitulari, quam in capitulari Baiulorum, qui de cetero ibunt, et illi, qui nunc est, mittatur precipiendo, sub debito sacramenti."

⁵⁴¹ Letts, *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*, 93; Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 161 ff.

⁵⁴² Schefer, *Le Voyage d'Outremer*, 58.

⁵⁴³ Méniglaise, *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 183.

⁵⁴⁴ Schefer, *Le Voyage d'Outremer*, 67.

acted not only as functionaries belonging to Venice's civil service, but also as legal defenders for Christian voyagers coming from the west.

Their duties did not end there, since aside from aiding Venetians and other westerners, consuls also functioned as passive intelligence agents for the home government. Embedded in one of the major cities of the Mamluk Empire and connected to the Serenissima via the republic's vast long-distance postal service, they kept their superiors regularly updated about the political vicissitudes of the sultanate.⁵⁴⁵ Consuls tracked the sultan's foreign policy, knew when representatives of the regime traveled abroad, and reported on military strength, troop movements, and the outcomes of battles.⁵⁴⁶ Consuls held private meetings with foreign ambassadors and passed on letters to the doge from other powers.⁵⁴⁷ When uncovered, such clandestine behavior did not endear them to the rulers of Cairo and undoubtedly contributed to the hostility that they frequently experienced from the Mamluk oligarchy. Indeed, this was precisely what led to the 1510 arrest of Consul Pietro Zen, whom Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri had brought in chains to Cairo where he later denounced him publicly as "not a consul, but a spy" (the Egyptian ruler, unlike the Serenissima, apparently regarded the two as mutually exclusive).⁵⁴⁸ One can safely conclude that the Venetian government expected the men they

⁵⁴⁵ On the origins and functions of the Venetian post in the early modern period, see Eric R. Dursteler, "Power and Information: The Venetian Postal System in the Mediterranean, 1573-1645," in *From Florence to the Mediterranean: Studies in Honor of Anthony Molho*, ed. Diogo Ramada Curto et al. (Florence: Olschki, 2009), 601-23.

Consuls on occasion corresponded with the Serenissima concerning matters sensitive enough that they were written in code. See, for example, ASVe, Collegio, Relazioni finali di ambasciatori e pubblici rappresentanti, busta 31, no. 2.

⁵⁴⁶ In 1509, for example, Pietro Zen reported on various matters, including the defection of some Mamluks to the Persian army, the status of the Mamluk fleet in the Red Sea, and the arrival of the *dawadar thani*, who was being sent to the Ottomans as an ambassador of Qanush al-Ghuri. Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 4 v, fol. 6 r, fol. 7 v, fol. 15 r.

⁵⁴⁷ Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 2 r – 3 v. Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 269.

⁵⁴⁸ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 207. "Non era consolo, ma spia."

elected to exploit their position in order to gather intelligence that could serve the republic and, when necessary, to put the interests of the state ahead of their own safety.

At the same time, however, consuls found themselves acting as servants of the sultan and junior colleagues of his lieutenants. Venetian consuls met regularly with the local governors of their towns regarding commercial matters and helped orchestrate the scheduling of the *muda* convoys so as to coincide with the flow of spices and other merchandise coming out of the Indian Ocean.⁵⁴⁹ When directed to do so by the home government, they also provided members of the oligarchy with useful information on foreign affairs (in itself a valuable if less tangible form of gift).⁵⁵⁰ In spite of the useful services that consuls rendered, however, the Mamluks did not hesitate to hold them to the fire when political or commercial crises arose, such as the timing of shipments and payments.⁵⁵¹

These materially based crises, which greatly affected consular safety within the sultanate, could occur for a variety of reasons. It has already been seen that after the republic's annexation of Cyprus in 1489 lapses in deliveries of tribute from the island became a recurring and especially problematic issue that the consuls had to explain to the regime in Cairo.⁵⁵² Additionally, when Portuguese incursions rendered pepper scarcer and dearer in the sultan's dominions during the reign of Qansuh al-Ghuri, foreign merchants' unwillingness to pay higher

According to Ibn Iyas, the letters purportedly contained instructions from Shah Ismail to the consuls requesting them to write to the kings of Europe and send fleets to attack the Mamluks. Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 4, 205; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un Bourgeois*, 199.

⁵⁴⁹ See, for example, the letter from Consul Alvise Arimondo of Alexandria of September 1502, in Sanudo, *Diarii*, IV, 492. In 1504, the vice-consul of Alexandria consulted with the Mamluk administration and Muslim merchants in Alexandria on the arrival of the next *muda*. In 1509, the consul of Damascus wrote to the home government regarding his difficulties with the timing of the *muda*. Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 5 v.

⁵⁵⁰ In 1503, for example, the Senate decided to order the vice-consul in Alexandria to inform the Mamluk administration about the successful return of a Portuguese fleet from the Indian Ocean carrying spices. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 16, f. 35 r (7 October 1503).

⁵⁵¹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, III, 1122;

⁵⁵² Sanudo, *Diarii*, III, 476, 1198; *ibid.*, V, 338.

prices became yet another cause for grievance regularly brought against the consuls.⁵⁵³ At times, the sultan summoned the Venetian officials to his citadel to voice his complaints directly, using their captivity at his court to exert added pressure on the Signoria. In more severe cases, Venetian records indicate that the consuls could expect to suffer house arrest, imprisonment, and even physical injury.⁵⁵⁴ It was a singularly difficult station, and it is a testament to the job's unique character that the Mamluks referred to the holder of this office as the "Qahnsul" (pl. "Qin'asil"), using a Latin transliteration instead of a word from their own vast civil service lexicon.⁵⁵⁵ The office was unique, with the men elected to it placed in an exceptional position and facing the unenviable prospect of being punished over material conflicts sometimes well outside their control while serving the interests of multiple, competing parties. It is then unsurprising that those elected sometimes refused to accept, opting instead simply to pay a fine and remain in Venice.⁵⁵⁶

Those who agreed to the appointment and took up residence in the sultanate were forced to walk a very fine line. Aside from the sultan, the consular relationship with local Mamluk authorities could be equally tense. Sometimes, materially based conflicts arose between consuls and local governors over attempts to seize Venetian property, particularly in periods of unrest. One notable example from Benedetto Sanudo's tenure as consul in the late 1490s highlights the extraordinary difficulties that could arise in the absence of a strong central authority. During the

⁵⁵³ In 1506, al-Ghuri arrested the consul of Alexandria, Alvise Contarini, in part, because of the decrease in convoys from Venice and the departure of Venetian merchants from his country. Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 321, 466. In 1515, Consul Tomà Contarini was summoned to Cairo to explain the failure of the trade galleys to arrive in Alexandria. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XX, 169.

⁵⁵⁴ This is discussed in greater detail below, but see, for example, Sanudo, *Diarii*, II, 1039-41 (imprisonment); *ibid.*, III, 1122 (beating of a consul); *ibid.*, VI, 466 (threats); *ibid.*, XII, 153-5, 237 (imprisonment, house arrest).

⁵⁵⁵ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 4, 205.

⁵⁵⁶ See, for example, ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 15, f. 165 v (12 December 1502); in August 1515 the Senate lamented that no one was willing to accept a commission to the consulate in Alexandria. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 90 v (7 August 1515).

civil wars that followed Qaytbay's death, the rebel governor of Damascus tried to extort from Consul Sanudo the cannonry of the Venetian ships that were anchored in Beirut.⁵⁵⁷ Sanudo duplicitously agreed, but claimed that the fleet had in all likelihood already set sail. He then dispatched a message to the galleys, which, as he knew, were still in port, and instructed the captains to leave for Venice immediately. According to the chronicler Malipiero, the consul had to deceive and disobey this Mamluk governor because the leader of the rival faction in Egypt would have executed Venetian merchants in reprisal if it became known that one of their consuls had given cannons to his enemy.⁵⁵⁸ The consul, who eventually returned to Venice after a period of imprisonment in the dungeons of Damascus, therefore risked his life to prevent harm to his compatriots. It makes sense that such an incident would arise over gunpowder weaponry, given that it was the single most important strategic resource of the early modern period and the Mamluks' inferiority in this area of modern warfare was well known.⁵⁵⁹ Though these threats more often stemmed from conflicts over property of a commercial rather than military nature, they were hardly unusual. It would be no overstatement to say that the Mamluk administration continually defined and dictated consular welfare in material terms.

These officeholders therefore existed in a "middle ground" in which political and commercial exchanges of goods, cash, and even information shaped cross-cultural interaction.⁵⁶⁰ The evidence presented in this chapter likewise demonstrates that a total reappraisal of the consular office, at least within the context of the later Burji sultanate, is in order. Whereas Ashtor

⁵⁵⁷ Malipiero, *Annali Veneti*, vol. 3, 647.

⁵⁵⁸ Malipiero, *Annali Veneti*, vol. 3, 647. Cf. Sanudo, *Diarii*, 1040. The diarist remarked that there must have been a bad alignment in the heavens when his relative took office in Syria. The consul ultimately went to prison in Damascus and was later ransomed.

⁵⁵⁹ Brumett, *Ottoman Seapower*, 2. "The sixteenth century was indeed a pivotal period in which shipping and gunpowder technologies along with accumulations of wealth brought the achievement of world hegemony closer to realization for a select few monarchs."

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. White, *The Middle Ground*, 3-7.

once compared consuls to ambassadors, these examples show that these men occupied a much more precarious position than normal foreign envoys.⁵⁶¹ Though they represented the Venetian government abroad and could gather intelligence as ambassadors did, unlike ambassadors they possessed no form of what a modern observer would call “diplomatic immunity.” On the contrary, consuls often functioned as targets of the sultan’s anger with the Serenissima, and reports of Qansuh al-Ghuri’s conversations with the Venetian ambassador in 1512 suggest that he may have even regarded consuls as his personal property.⁵⁶² This would certainly correspond with the treatment that they received: from 1480 to 1517, there are at least six attested cases in which Venetian consuls were imprisoned or beaten on the orders of a Mamluk ruler.⁵⁶³ Rather than classify the consuls as a type of resident diplomat, therefore, it is more fitting to describe them as a kind of trans-imperial frontier agent.⁵⁶⁴ Scholars should move away from viewing the consuls through the purely national lens that Ashtor used, and instead treat them as links in intersecting chains of exchange, given that they occupied important niches in overlapping local

⁵⁶¹ The consuls of the European trading nations were highly respected dignitaries; in fact, they also fulfilled the task of resident ambassadors of their governments. Consequently, they enjoyed some of the privileges conceded to diplomats." Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 414.

⁵⁶² Consuls of other trading nations fared no better. See, for example, Emmanuel Piloti’s report of the arrest and beating of the consul of the Catalans in the early fifteenth century. Piloti, *Traité*, fol. 67 v.

See the letter from Marc’Antonio Trevisan describing the release of the imprisoned consul, preserved by Marin Sanudo. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, “Il Soldan disse: ‘Mi è stà dito che tu è stà ambador a pur assè signori, et che da tutti è parti tu è parti ben contento. Voglio che da mi tu te parti con el tuo cuor più satisfato che da niun altro Signor che tu sia stà. Te dono el consolo de Damasco per tuo schiavo; fa quel che te piace di fati soi, che tutto è remesso a ti solo.’” Of course, Al-Ghuri may have been speaking hyperbolically or the Venetian witness may have here exaggerated the sultan’s statement.

⁵⁶³ Sanudo, *Diarii*, II, 1039-41; III, 1122, 1198; VI, 149, 466; XII, 153-5; ASVe, Procuratori di San Marco, *citra*, busta 197, letter 15, fol. 2 r-2 v (the local *na’ib* punished the vice-consul of Aleppo for the merchants’ refusal to give him a loan of 3,000 ducats). Cf., Vallet, *Marchands*, 289-90. Sanudo, *Vite dei Dogi*, II, 606-7 (Qaytbay had the consul of Damietta arrested following Venice’s annexation of Cyprus). See also the letter from the sultan reproduced in Rossi, ed., *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 235, in which Qaytbay promised that consuls could not be beaten.

⁵⁶⁴ In Georg Christ’s words, as “simultaneously a Venetian, a local-diasporic, and Mamluk (i.e. imperial) official.” Christ, “Venetian Consuls,” 64.

and global networks.⁵⁶⁵ Indeed, an analysis of consular involvement in exchange patterns reveals some of the weaknesses inherent in models of cultural contact in the early modern Mediterranean that overemphasize impermeability of boundaries or national affiliations and which consequently risk reifying borders between different cultural zones in a distorted and decidedly ahistorical way.⁵⁶⁶ The person who held a consular post served at the intersection of Mamluk and Venetian imperial spaces, and the many material crises he confronted reflected that uniquely liminal position.

It must likewise be emphasized that, although they may have led a trans-imperial existence, by no means should one interpret these men as unfettered agents who could fluidly navigate the intercultural milieu to which they were assigned.⁵⁶⁷ In contrast to the evidence found in other case studies of hybridity, the interstitial position of these particular individuals did not afford them a significant degree of freedom nor help them to prosper readily from their situation by somehow “reinventing” their identity to suit the exigencies of the moment.⁵⁶⁸ In general, they appear to have focused on survival, falling back on temporary expedients that would serve until their two-year terms had expired. Consequently, and as the Senate often

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁵⁶⁶ See the important observations raised by Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 23-5.

⁵⁶⁷ On this term, see Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

⁵⁶⁸ Writers engaging with postcolonial criticism have sometimes argued for the role of cultural liminality (or transnational experiences in general) in enabling both individual and collective resistance to imperialism and as a way to locate historical agency among the subaltern. Research in this vein has generally built on the theoretical framework of hybridity developed in Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994). Cf. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008); Denise Mary MacNeil “Empire and the Pan-Atlantic Self in the *Female American*; or, *The Adventures of Unca Eliza Winkfield*,” in *Women’s Narratives of the Early Americas and the Formation of Empire*, eds. Mary McAleer Balkun et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 109-22; Carl T. Smith, “Abandoned into Prosperity: Women on the Fringe of Expatriate Society,” in *Merchants’ Daughters: Women, Commerce, and Regional Culture in South China*, ed. Helen F. Siu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 129-42. Interstitiality did not necessarily entail mobility, however. Though a correlation may have often existed between an interstitial position and the ability to exert oneself as a historical actor, this was clearly not the case for Venetian consuls in the Mamluk sultanate.

lamented, consuls rather often incurred great expenditures by acceding to Mamluk demands all too willingly. Far from being ambassadors or footloose free-agents, therefore, consuls were captives both of the sultanate and their fellow countrymen: their safety and sometimes their very lives depended on the goodwill of the Egyptian administration, the good behavior of the other members of their nation, and the demands of the home government.⁵⁶⁹ Caught in a chaotic contact zone of mixed loyalties and blurred ideological boundaries, they could only carry out their broad range of duties in a highly restricted manner.⁵⁷⁰ It was ultimately their relationship to material exchanges, moreover, that dictated the consuls' ability to carry out the requirements of their office.

The consuls' mixed sources of material support highlight the conflicted nature of their office. They drew a portion of their salary, on the one hand, from dues paid by the Venetian merchants who did business within their jurisdiction, while the rest, on the other hand, they took from the royal treasury of the sultan.⁵⁷¹ This latter payment they called the *zemechia* (Ar. *jāmakīyya*), the same term used for the monthly wages paid to Mamluk soldiers.⁵⁷² It was this

⁵⁶⁹ Constable commented that "consuls found themselves in the difficult position of working for two masters, their own home governments and the Mamlūk state, and both entities expected fiscal returns and other commercial benefits." Constable, *Housing the Stranger*, 286.

⁵⁷⁰ Cf. Mary Louise Pratt, who defines contact zones as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination." Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4. See also E. Natalie Rothman's invaluable comments on Pratt in her essay "Genealogies of Mediation." Rothman emphasizes that Pratt recognized that interactions did not occur between "well-bounded and fixed entities, but through the practices of subjects, embedded in particular institutions and genres of interaction, all of which shape and emanate from contact zones." Natalie Rothman, "Genealogies of Mediation: Çulture Broker' and Imerial Governmentality," in *Anthrohistory: Unsettling Knowledge, Questioning Discipline*, eds. Edward Murphy et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 67.

⁵⁷¹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 16, f. 161 v (7 June 1507); *ibid.*, reg. 18, f. 90 v (7 August 1515). In this period, the salary usually amounted to two hundred ducats from the *cottimo* and two hundred from the sultan, although the amount fluctuated over the course of the fifteenth century. Cf. Marin Sanudo, *Diarii*, VIII, 541.

On the *consolatium* paid by merchants in the Levant, which was a percentage of the value of merchandise paid to the consul, see Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 427.

⁵⁷² Also sometimes referred to as *gemechie*, *zemichia*, or *zunichia*. Heyd, *Histoire*, II, 455n1. Heyd wrote that, "Cette rémunération, attribuée par le sultan aux représentants des puissances commerciales de l'Occident, était la preuve palpable du prix qu'il attachait au maintien de ses relations avec elles, d'ailleurs si avantageuses pour lui."

salary that prompted the sultan to regard the consuls as his hostages, upon whom he could impose retribution for any injuries committed against him or his subjects.⁵⁷³ Indeed, this monetary dependence on the sultans appears to have been a fatal flaw in the consular system because it jeopardized their safety and consequently reduced their freedom to act effectively at critical moments. By accepting annual payments from Cairo, consuls transformed themselves from Venetian citizens into low-ranking members of the Mamluk hierarchy.

Another important material symbol of the consuls' precarious interstitial position was the robe of honor (Ar. *khil'a*), which the sultans regularly consigned to them.⁵⁷⁴ Originally a piece of clothing worn by a ruler and offered to the recipient from his own body, by around the fourteenth century the *khil'a* had in effect become a customary gift that symbolized the act of investiture with an office.⁵⁷⁵ In addition to members of the Mamluk elite, the sultan gave such garments to Venetian consuls at official audiences and on special occasions. In 1500, Sultan Janbulat invested Hieronimo Tiepolo, consul of Alexandria, with a robe of honor, and sent him away with a stern warning to secure the delivery of the Cyprus tribute.⁵⁷⁶ In 1507, when the new consul of Alexandria arrived in port, Qansuh al-Ghuri had a robe of honor sent for the local governor to consign to him.⁵⁷⁷ Upon the conclusion of diplomatic negotiations in 1512, al-Ghuri personally dressed Consul Thomà Contarini in a robe, together with the ambassador Domenico Trevisan

These soldiers, it should be added, were technically the property of the sultan (the term *mamluk* itself denotes the status of being owned).

⁵⁷³ Heyd, *Histoire*, II, 455.

⁵⁷⁴ In a recent article, Christ has called attention to this fascinating aspect of Venetian-Mamluk relations, noting the need for further research into the significance of consular robing in the sultanate and examination of how this piece of clothing linked the regimes of Venice and Cairo. Georg Christ, "The Venetian Consul and the Cosmopolitan Mercantile Community of Alexandria at the Beginning of the Ninth/Fifteenth Century," *Al-Masaq* 26, no. 1 (2014): 24.

⁵⁷⁵ Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, 56.

⁵⁷⁶ Sanudo, *Diarii*, III, 1526.

⁵⁷⁷ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 182. According to Sanudo, the consul was Marin da Molin. He was accompanied by the dragoman Taghriberdi, who was returning from his mission to the Signoria.

and his son (and denied the gift to the disgraced consul Pietro Zen).⁵⁷⁸ When Consul Tomaso Venier traveled to the royal citadel in Cairo in 1516, it was written that the sultan honored the Venetian with a robe “as usual.”⁵⁷⁹ Upon his visit to Damascus in 1516, al-Ghuri gave the consul Andrea Arimondo and his dragoman Zorzi robes, one made of cloth of gold lined with ermine and the other of green fabric.⁵⁸⁰ In all likelihood, Venetian merchants had imported many of the materials that went into such garments, and a complicated network of commodity exchange was at work in the production and exchange of these presents.⁵⁸¹ Created from precious goods gathered from far-flung sources through cross-cultural commerce, the gifts functioned as a wearable symbol of the consular office, an office that existed to serve both Venice and Cairo.

These robes were works of art designed to meet the demands of high luxury, and they thereby conveyed strong messages about the power of the donor and the recognition earned by the recipient. It would be useful to know how the design of consular robes of honor compared to those given to ambassadors or Mamluk officials, but it is, unfortunately, difficult to speak with any certainty of a standard type of *khil'a* given to foreigners at all, though Venetian witnesses generally described the vestments as very similar to those of the sultan's lieutenants: typically silk, trimmed with fur, and designed in a “Turkish (i.e. eastern) fashion.”⁵⁸² They came in an

⁵⁷⁸ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 38-9.

⁵⁷⁹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 180. “Lo fe' vestir una vesta al solito.”

⁵⁸⁰ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 587. “La sua vesta fo de quelli lavori d'oro fodrà de armellini; quella de sier Zorzi turziman fo de comaso verde.”

⁵⁸¹ As discussed in previous chapters, it is useful to recall that these trading networks extended well beyond the Mediterranean. As Brumett has noted, “Mamluk commercial interests. . . were only part of the complex network of economic exchange which transferred goods from the Indian Ocean to northern and western Europe.” Brumett, *Ottoman Seapower*, 9.

⁵⁸² Rossi, ed., *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 220. “La vesta è de seda cum oro ala turchescha, fodrata de armelini.” Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 207. “Fo vesti sier Tomà Contarini consolo di Alxandria et lui fiol di l'orator, de una medesima sorte di veste de alcuni panni di seda fati a Damasco di opere variade con letere rabesche prefilade d'oro, fodrate de vari e dossi.”

On the variety of costumes used in the Mamluk hierarchy, see Irene A. Bierman, “Art and Architecture in the Medieval Period,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, ed. Carl Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 339-374.

assortment of colors and patterns, and sometimes bore elaborate needlework with Arabic inscriptions or other complex embroidery.⁵⁸³ Thus, the *khil'a* was not simply a piece of clothing, but a piece of art that brought together political power, high fashion, expert craftsmanship, and international commerce.⁵⁸⁴ The Venetians, who shared in a similar culture of ceremonial robing and investiture inherited from the Byzantines, recognized this.⁵⁸⁵ From the great attention shown to the beautiful, sumptuous quality of the robes in Venetian sources, it is apparent that they regarded receiving a Mamluk *khil'a* as a great honor.

Like many presents handed out by the powerful, these robes could carry not only prestige, but also potential dangers. This gift from the sultan to the consul is in fact an excellent example of an ambivalent exchange, one which participants could choose to read in different ways. On the most superficial level, for the consuls as for others, ceremonial robes merely served as ritual presents that linked the recipient to the ruler, but the ambiguous semiotics of this type of gift would have likely allowed for multiple and perhaps conflicting interpretations. As mentioned above, the sultan traditionally gave a *khil'a* to members of the Mamluk oligarchy, and the exact style of the vestment reflected the wearer's status.⁵⁸⁶ In this context, the robe signified a bond of mutual obligation of safety and security, if perhaps also implying recognition of the donor's

Mayer remarked that "it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to say what constitutes a *khil'a*. . . Such details as we find in the sources seem to suggest that the robe of honour was never of a special cut, but looked, so far as its shape was concerned, like any ordinary garment, except that it was made of, or lined or hemmed with, costly material." Mayer, *Mamluk Costume: A Survey*, 57.

⁵⁸³ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 39. Pagani compared the markings to the stripes of a painted fish. "Fu ancora vestito il Magnifico Console di Alessandria ed il Magnifico Messe Marc'Antonio figliuolo del Clarissimo Oratore, di due vesti di una sorte, come sarche dipinte."

⁵⁸⁴ On which, see the important commentary made by Stewart Gordon on the uses of honorific investiture. Gordon, "A World of Investiture," in *Robes and Honour*, 1-5.

⁵⁸⁵ Deborah Howard commented that "a hybrid culture of luxury ceremonial robes extended across the eastern Mediterranean from Italy to Persia." Howard, "Cultural Transfer between Venice and the Ottomans in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," in *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, vol. 4, ed. Heinz Schilling et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 144. Cf. the observations on robing and investiture in Venice made by Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 39, and Lane, *Venice*, 270-71.

⁵⁸⁶ Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, 56-7.

superior position and authority.⁵⁸⁷ Yet sultans also gave robes to ambassadors at the completion of their missions, and to other guests as tokens of friendship or gratitude; although the gift may have here conveyed hierarchy, it was likely free of connotations of personal possession or ownership, at least from the perspective of the recipient, since ambassadors of sovereign rulers would probably have refused such a present if it symbolized submission.⁵⁸⁸ By contrast, and judging from the treatment that consuls received, it appears that the sultans instead regarded the robes they gave to consuls, to be, like the *zemechia*, a mark of subjugation and power over the recipient. The Venetian consuls who boasted proudly of their new vestments perhaps failed to recognize the extent to which these presents symbolically bound their lives to the disposition of the Egyptian ruler. These objects in other words transformed the recipients into material possessions of the sultan.

While the salary and gifts of ceremonial robes complicated the parameters of the office, troubles arose over the consular role in mediating between Venetian merchants and Mamluks. Merchant debts, in particular, constituted an issue that greatly strained their relationship with the Mamluks.⁵⁸⁹ One of their most important and continually problematic duties was to oversee the *cottimo*, or common fund. As discussed in Chapter Two, all Venetian merchants doing business in Egypt or Syria (at least in theory) paid into this pool of liquid capital, which served as a source of emergency cash for extraordinary expenses. The Signoria had instituted a *cottimo* in

⁵⁸⁷ Petry, “Robing Ceremonials in Late Mamluk Egypt,” in *Robes and Honour*, 354; Hambly, “From Baghdad to Bukhara, in *ibid.*, 195-203.

⁵⁸⁸ For example, in 1507, Qansuh al-Ghuri gave a *khil’a* of velvet with sable lining to the Ottoman ambassador Ibn Iyas, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i’ al-duhūr*, vol. 4, 119; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d’un Bourgeois*, 115. In 1509, he gave the representative of Cyprus who brought him the tribute for the island a *khil’a*. Ibn Iyas, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i’ al-duhūr*, vol. 4, 146; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d’un Bourgeois*, 142. When al-Ghuri recovered from an illness, he awarded his physician a *khil’a*. Ibn Iyas, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i’ al-duhūr*, vol. 4, 149; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d’un Bourgeois*, 145.

⁵⁸⁹ Cf. Trivellato, who has argued against the notion “that the ability to lend money and delegate decisions to strangers was naturally coupled with the dissolution of corporate boundaries, the rise of individualism, and more tolerant attitudes.” Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 2.

Alexandria and Damascus, and others existed wherever a sizable population of Venetian traders did business. One of the most vital expenses that the fund covered was the cost of ambassadorial missions sent from Venice to Cairo, which included the often-lavish diplomatic gifts brought before the sultan.⁵⁹⁰ The *cottimo*'s primary function, though, was to act as a communal insurance fund that could compensate individual merchants for unexpected losses incurred, for example, through unlawful seizures by local authorities. While useful in principal, it caused no end of trouble for the consuls.

In spite of the government's continual insistence on the necessity of this common fund, it suffered from grave structural problems. Venetian merchants routinely sought to avoid payment into it, but they were (predictably) much less reticent about making withdrawals. Deficits accumulated partly as a result of the sultan's forced pepper purchases: when Venetian merchants did not have enough cash on hand to buy the amount required by the Egyptian ruler, the balance came out of the *cottimo*.⁵⁹¹ Still another substantial portion of these withdrawals seem to have been fraudulent; according to the Senate, they had been illegally justified with false claims about merchandise lost to the Mamluks for goods that had actually been freely given as gifts in return for favors.⁵⁹² The system in both Syria and Egypt was, resultantly, in almost perpetual debt

⁵⁹⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg.44, f. 87 r (12 November 1511). The Senate recorded that 3,000 ducats would be allotted from the *cottimi* of Damascus and Alexandria to pay for the gifts brought by Ambassador Domenico Trevisan.

⁵⁹¹ I offer my sincere thanks to Dr. Yutaka Horii for bringing this to my attention. Regarding this topic, see his article "The Mamluk Sultan Qansuh al-Ghawri (1501-16) and the Venetians in Alexandria," *Orient* 38 (2003): 178-199.

⁵⁹² ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 24 v (11 August 1513). "Non resta mai le signorie de Damasco de cercar occasion di esser appresentate dal consulo et nation nostra. . .et questo fra le altre cause per che andando el danno al monte di cotimo particular. . .Per molti particular respecti li nostri mercadanti de la Soria et precipue damaschini favorissenno molte volte li garbugli et li doni da esser facti a diversi signori de la Soria si per star in gratia de esse signorie, come etiam per smaltir de le sue mercadantie come pani de seda, scarlati et altro." ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 92 r (29 August 1515). "E tanto cresciuta la liberta che si togliono i consolo nostri de la Soria et Alexandria cum i consigli de lí, in donar et far prender di accettar manzarie in particular beneficio, servendosi luno laltro che non mettendoli freno, vana seria ogni altra provision nche si facesse á beneficio de li cotimi notri, et perhó landera parte che per i consoli nostri predicti cum i consigli delí, non possa esser donato

throughout the period of 1480-1517.⁵⁹³ The deficit in some years ran extremely high, and at times surpassed 200,000 ducats.⁵⁹⁴ Consuls, who were expected to manage the *cottimo* responsibly, seem to have been in general reluctant to pursue long-term solutions with much zeal.⁵⁹⁵ This is not surprising given that they only needed to fulfill a two-year term before returning home, at which point they could simply wash their hands of the situation and move on in their careers.⁵⁹⁶ In these circumstances, consuls employed stopgap measures and turned to an unlikely source, the Mamluks and their Arab subjects, to extend credit to the *cottimo*.⁵⁹⁷

The practice of relying on Muslim moneylenders in Egypt and Syria greatly exacerbated Venetian tensions with the sultanate. Ironically, the *cottimo*, originally intended to provide restitution to merchants whose property the Mamluks had seized, came to be financed by the Mamluks, who saw the debt as an opportunity to profit by charging interest. In a strange reversal of roles, the Venetian merchants' continual withdrawals from the *cottimo* made them its debtors, just as Mamluk financiers' loans to the *cottimo* made them its creditors. When they had liquid capital at their disposal, these Mamluk officials could choose to deposit it into the Venetian

ad alcuna persona ne accettara manzaria particular di alcuno nostro che monti piu de ducati 50 in una fiata. Ma occorrendo acceptar mazora manzaria siano mandate de qui le scripture in quel proposito da esser proposte á questo consiglio et deliberato quanto se haverá ad far. Ne possa esser altramente acceptata tal manzaria sotto pena al consolo che contrafacesse de pagar del suo proprio, da esserli tolto per i proveditori nostri de cotimo al ritorno de essi consoli et applicato á beneficio de quelli cotimi che havesseno havuto el danno. Tolendoli x per cento de pena, quali siano de essi proveditori da esser divisi secundo li ordeni del officio suo.” See also ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 20, f. 50 r ff (26 September 1502). For my discussion of this legislation, see Chapter Two.

⁵⁹³ In Alexandria, the problem of financing the *cottimo* extended back at least to the early fifteenth century, however. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 81.

⁵⁹⁴ In 1509, for example, the Senate estimated the debt of the *cottimo* of Damascus at 240,000 ducats. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 17, f. 82 v (6 December 1509). In 1516, it estimated the debt of the *cottimo* of Alexandria at 50,000 ducats, 40,000 of which were owed to Muslim lenders. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 126 v (14 June 1516). Pietro Zen mentioned in a letter to the Signoria that the *cottimo* of Alexandria was in debt for about 270,000 ducats in 1510. Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 15 r.

⁵⁹⁵ Hence the Senate's lamentation that consuls too readily agreed to pay *manzaria* payments to Mamluk lords. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 92 r (29 August 1515).

⁵⁹⁶ Christ described this as an “après moi le déluge” mentality. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 81.

⁵⁹⁷ See, for example, ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 92 r ff. (29 August 1515), which mentions that 80 % of the debt of the *cottimo* of Damascus at this time had been financed “da Mori.”

merchants' fund, where it would gather interest until they chose to collect.⁵⁹⁸ Sometimes, Mamluk creditors to the *cottimo* gave or bequeathed their share of the Venetians' debt to the sultan, who could then take it upon himself to press for payment from the consul.⁵⁹⁹ A crisis occurred, naturally, when a powerful Mamluk seeking to collect on his loan found insufficient funds on hand in the *cottimo*. Atop this tangle of conflicting economic obligations stood the consul, who could only try to minimize his compatriots' indebtedness to the fund and to satisfy debts to Muslim moneylenders to the best of his ability.

The finances of the *cottimo* generated recurring discussion of tensions and even direct conflict between the consul, his merchants, and Mamluk subjects in the Senatorial records. To alleviate this, the home government on occasion sent large sums of bailout money intended to reduce the merchants' collective debt, an altogether shortsighted and ineffective solution.⁶⁰⁰ In the early sixteenth century, the exasperated Senate authorized the consuls to use any means necessary to recover the sums owed by Venetian merchants.⁶⁰¹ Problems continued, and outstanding debts to Mamluk lenders eventually induced the Senate in 1515 to command that the consul end the practice of borrowing altogether, pointing out that usury had in any event already long been "prohibited by God."⁶⁰² The government further required that the consuls raise the

⁵⁹⁸ The Senate denounced the practice in an act from 1515. "Se attrova el cotimo nostro da Damasco tanto al presente gravato de debiti, che ultra el credito de nostri che e de ducati 50m ne sono etiam tolti da mori ad usura ducati 40m et piu et de usure corse da sei in otto millia ducati quali vano alla giornata crescendo. . . et perche per la liberation di esso cotimo da la supradicta graveça niuna cosa si die lassar intenta, sia commesso al consolo electo che iuncto de lí cum le presente galie, cum quelle vie et modi che piu li parera al proposito convenirse, deba procurar cum mori che le usure da lhora á driedo cessino, come apresso essi mori per la rason de Dio e prohibito, et secundo i comandamenti del signor soldan." ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 92 r ff. (29 August 1515).

⁵⁹⁹ Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 3 r.

⁶⁰⁰ In 1502, the Senate voted in favor of giving the newly elected consul of Damascus 30,000 ducats to put into the *cottimo* there. ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, busta 947, "Liber del cotimo di Damasco," fol. 15 r.

⁶⁰¹ ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, busta 947, "Liber del cotimo di Damasco," fol. 41 r.

⁶⁰² "Et perche per la liberation di esso cotimo da la supradicta graveça niuna cosa si die lassar intenta, sia commesso al consolo electo che iuncto de lí cum le presente galie, cum quelle vie et modi che piu li parera al proposito convenirse, deba procurar cum mori che le usure da lhora á driedo cessino, come apresso essi mori per la

cottimo tax from eleven to fifteen percent, direct all revenue generated exclusively toward paying off outstanding loans, and imposed a penalty of five hundred ducats on any officeholder who failed to comply.⁶⁰³ Even so, these measures proved insufficient, and Syrian and Egyptian lenders sometimes firmly pressed the consul to make his countrymen satisfy their debts. Although much lamented in Venetian sources, such insistence was not entirely unreasonable, especially given that these lenders could have their own debts to the sultan that they needed to pay. The ties of mutual obligation through credit and debt, in fact, raise an important question of how often the Mamluks, whom the Venetians so readily accused of extortion and tyranny, were in actuality attempting to recover their own money, either in cash or in kind. Despite aggressive attempts to fully resolve the situation by some dedicated consuls, such as Pietro Zen, merchant debts remained an ongoing difficulty even after the Ottoman conquest.⁶⁰⁴

The issues that occurred during the tenure of Zen, who served as consul of Damascus

rason de Dio e prohibito, e secundo i comandamenti del signor soldan.” ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 18, f. 92 r ff. (29 August 1515).

⁶⁰³ “Landerà parte, che si come al presente se serra el cotimo nostro general predicto á xi percento, cusi decetero serrar se deba á xv percento, da esser exborsadi nove in contadi. E sie in sconto di suo di quelli pagerano come de altri, e di quel tuto che de dicta rason se traçera in contadi insieme cum le tre percento che se pagano in contadi de le merçe, e le cinque percento de deposito, quale continuar debano, come fin hora hano facto iuxta le parte presa in questo consiglio. E quello etiam che se pagera de cotimo particular da Damasco, qual se habia ad pagar de contadi prima le viii percento che se pagano de contadi al serenissimo signor Soldan, dei sopradicti danari contadi, tuto el restante sia applicato al francar dei cavedali e usure predicte sotto pena al consolo. . .ne possano i sopradicti denari contadi o parte de essi esser in altro convertidi cha nel francar de dicti cavedali e usure ut sopra sotto pena al consolo che contrafacesse de ducati 500 d’oro nei sui proprii beni.”

⁶⁰⁴ In 1518, the Senate expressed its hope that the Turkish conquest would help create a clean slate, and that future unnecessary expenses would be avoided now that the Mamluks were gone. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 19, f. 50 r ff. (2 January 1518). “Se ha visto per effecti grandissimi quanto siano sta le grandissime provision facter per questo consiglio per sublevation del cotimo de Damasco, hora trovandose el dicto cotimo in malissimo termine, per le mançarie grande et intolerabel spese e desordeni che sono seguiti e de continuo segueno cum gravissimo danno de esso cotimo, per la grandissima somma de danari el se ritrova debito, si á usura in mori, come debito in nostri, et e redutto da novo nel pristino et pericoloso stato. Per il che e necessario far prestissima provision, per la qual non se incorri piu ne li errori passati. Hora havendo mirabel occasione di farlo, essendo el Serenissimo Signor Turcho facto signor pacifico de tuta la Soria, e pacificamente possieder el stado di schiavio, ita che per li advisi se hano el prefato summo signor Turco non permete simel manzarie per il che se die presumer che ditte spese extraordinarie et manzarie siano al tuto anichilate, se dali proprii nostri seguendo il stillo consueto, non li sia data la via et il modo di farlo incorer ne li errori, come per il passato é sta fatto.” Cf. ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, busta 947, “Liber del cotimo di Damasco,” fol. 49 v.

from 1508 to 1510, shed light on some of the basic problems inherent in the office, and it is therefore worth dwelling upon his example at some length. It is important to recognize that Zen was strongly suited to a career in the Middle East and a person who, at least on paper, should have been able to perform his duties in Syria effectively and without incident. Members of Ca' Zen had served the republic in Islamic lands for centuries, and one of Pietro's ancestors had even been the ambassador responsible for restoring trade relations with the Mamluks in 1344. His father, moreover, had earned fame for the family as an accomplished navigator and diplomat, having conducted ambassadorial missions in Persia. His maternal grandfather, the lord of Naxos and Duke of the Archipelago, belonged to the Crispo family, who had a proud history of successes in the eastern Mediterranean. Entering middle age upon his arrival in Damascus in 1508, reports from witnesses give the impression of Pietro Zen as a man who possessed a confident, shrewd, and strong-willed personality. If his curriculum vitae alone is any indication, Zen was a capable negotiator skilled at succeeding in hostile foreign environments.⁶⁰⁵

Unfortunately for him, he was also stubborn and headstrong in his relations with the Mamluks.

During his consulate, Zen took it upon himself to reduce the debt of the *cottimo* and put an end to unnecessary expenses, but ambivalent exchanges, once again, acted as a catalyst for conflict with Mamluk authorities. In 1509, he wrote to the Senate explaining that, since the debts of the *cottimi* of Egypt and Syria had always caused serious trouble for the Venetians, it was his intention to settle the problem, at least in Damascus, permanently.⁶⁰⁶ Zen explained in his correspondence with the home government that Mamluk creditors had met with him repeatedly

⁶⁰⁵ Zen continued on to enjoy an illustrious career in Venice's foreign service. After serving as consul in Damascus, the Signoria entrusted him with a vital diplomatic mission to the Ottoman Sultan in 1523, for which he wrote a *relazione* to the Senate preserved by Marin Sanudo. Afterward, he held the office of vice-bailo in Constantinople for eight years, and in his old age he served again as an ambassador to the Ottomans, finally dying in Sarajevo in 1539. Lucchetta, "L'affare Zen," 109-117.

⁶⁰⁶ ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, busta 947, "Liber del cotimo di Damasco," fol. 24 v.

and pressed for repayment of their loans.⁶⁰⁷ As the resident consul, he complained about his lack of real power to compel his compatriots to satisfy outstanding debts (even expressing a desire to have Venetian debtors imprisoned in the local citadel).⁶⁰⁸ He pointed out that some 12,000 ducats of the *cottimo*'s debt was owed to "persons of grand authority," and expressed an understandable concern that this could seriously affect the stability of commerce between Syria and Venice in the near future.⁶⁰⁹ In spite of his lament on the difficulties in paying off the *cottimo* of Damascus, Zen's parsimony and persistence did lead to a significant (if temporary) reduction in the system's overall debt, for which the government in Venice commended him.⁶¹⁰

By the same token, however, the consul's hardline approach to reducing expenses also involved intransigence in the face of customary gift-giving practices with local officials. Zen refused outright to curry favor with the authorities through the consignment of presents paid for out of the *cottimo*, denouncing the practice as a policy of extortion. In one example of an especially ambivalent exchange open to interpretation, Zen wrote to the Signoria and explained that he had run afoul of a local Mamluk official who had demanded "gifts" from him. In April 1509, the new castellan of the citadel in Damascus summoned the consul and told him he wanted "presents," explaining that the previous commander had received many splendid offerings from the Venetians.⁶¹¹ "I made him understand, not without great anger, that I had come in the name of the Signoria under surety of the agreements made with the Sultan," Zen wrote. When the castellan took offense, "I suggested that if he were going to use violent language with me he should have a command from the sultan to do so, but that if he were speaking for himself, and

⁶⁰⁷ Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 4 r.

⁶⁰⁸ Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 8 r.

⁶⁰⁹ Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 5 r.

⁶¹⁰ ASVe, Maggior Consiglio, Deliberazioni, reg. 25, f. 57 r (16 July 1509). Zen himself claimed in April 1509 that he had reduced the debt of the *cottimo* by 50% since his arrival in Damascus.

⁶¹¹ Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 5 r.

wanted to take from us by force in this way, that he was unfit hold the citadel. I said that I wanted to write to the Sultan so that I might leave the country. He let me go, and over the next three days I made peace with him. From then on, he has been good to me.”⁶¹² Such remarks indicate that Mamluk officials expected consuls to provide them with gifts, and evidently regarded this as a routine aspect of their normal interactions with them. Zen, whose tenacious personality is apparent in this account, avoided furnishing the castellan with presents with bluffs about contacting Cairo directly or going so far as to retire from his office. Yet in the long run, his refusal to participate in such “gift giving” practices with the Mamluk authorities likely engendered great hostility against him.

Ultimately, Zen was unable to avoid arrest and imprisonment. When his involvement in diplomatic contacts between the Signoria and Shah Ismail of Persia came to light, the governor of Damascus wasted no time in having him arrested and reported to the sultan, who summoned him in chains to Cairo.⁶¹³ Personal property he had acquired during his tenure was surrendered to al-Ghuri, including a pet leopard that went to live in the sultan’s royal menagerie in an act of forfeiture fittingly symbolic of the ruler’s reassertion of authority.⁶¹⁴ Zen’s confrontational attitude in subsequent audiences with al-Ghuri in Cairo, where he roundly denied his guilt and

⁶¹² Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 5 r. “Gli feci intender non senza gran colera che Io era venuto per nome dela excelentissima Signoria nostra, sotto la fede deli capitoli per el Signor Soldan rebetati, e che vedendo usar queste violentie de directo incontrario mi pensava chel dovesse haver comandamento dal Soldan, chel dovesse usar simili termini, ma che sel faceva di sua testa, per voler per questa via tor il nostro per forza, non facta la officio per el soldan da fedel castellan, et altre parole, dicendo voler scriver al Signor Soldan, e lassar el suo paese. Mi lasso, e dipoi zorni 3 cerco pacificarse meco. Del qual tempo in qua mi fa bona compagnia.”

⁶¹³ The Venetian overtures to Shah Ismail make sense in light of Persia’s significance to the geopolitical situation at the time. “Shah Ismail, who, like the Ottomans, was interested in controlling the revenues of the eastern trade, was the lynchpin of early sixteenth-century Levantine diplomacy. He negotiated with the Portuguese, Venetians, the French, the Holy Roman emperor, the pope, and the Mamluks, in pursuit of his own claims to universal sovereignty.” Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower*, 11.

⁶¹⁴ Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 32.

asked to be released from his chains, only worsened his position.⁶¹⁵ During the ambassadorial mission of Domenico Trevisan, the sultan called for the execution of the disgraced consul, who very narrowly escaped with his life through Trevisan's nimble intercession. Upon the conclusion of the diplomatic mission, al-Ghuri gave Zen, wearing a chain attached to his throat, as a slave to the Venetian ambassador.⁶¹⁶ Perhaps if Zen had taken a more flexible attitude toward gift exchange with the local Mamluk authorities, the governor of Damascus would have been so quick to turn him over to the sultan. Having staunchly refused to participate in ritual giving, in the end the consul himself became a diplomatic gift.

Sometimes, though, exchanges could go awry for the consuls unintentionally, with munificent gestures of largesse leading to undesired results. In 1516, on his way to do battle against the invading Ottoman army led by Selim I, the Mamluk sultan made a final visit to Damascus where he met the consul Alvise Arimondo.⁶¹⁷ This Venetian official, in contrast to his predecessor Pietro Zen, spared no expense on finding magnificent gifts for the Mamluks. According to a letter from Beirut preserved by Marin Sanudo, Arimondo had twenty-four great torches lit and hundreds of meters of white cloth and silk laid out in anticipation of al-Ghuri's arrival. As the sultan approached, the consul began tossing fistfuls of coins into the air. The sultan, suddenly realizing what was happening and the chaos that was imminent, halted on his horse and ordered him to stop, but it was too late: as the consul began moving backward,

⁶¹⁵ Zen stated in 1511 that "some want me to beg pardon for whatever wrong any of us have done. I do not, because I know of no fault on our part." Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 238. Domenico Sparlarga, Venetian Merchant in Cairo noted that "Zen refuses to admit any guilt. All of his merchants are of the contrary opinion." Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 214.

He used "lofty words" according to the account of one witness. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 211. Zen himself wrote that he had spoken to al-Ghuri "liberamente, senza alcun segno di timidità."

⁶¹⁶ According to two reports, the sultan required Trevisan to personally place the chain on Zen's neck. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 200; Pagani, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 31.

⁶¹⁷ The same Arimondo had served as consul in Alexandria in 1500, and had negotiated with the grand dragoman Taghriberdi during his visit to Venice in 1506-7. Sanudo, *Diarii*, IV, 10; Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 85.

throwing gold and silver pieces in front of al-Ghuri, crowds of onlookers rushed forward to collect the money.⁶¹⁸ According to Ibn Iyas, who corroborated this episode in his history of the sultanate, the horse's hooves became tangled in the fabrics laid in its path, and the sultan was nearly thrown to the ground. The scene must have been one of violent pandemonium, with people fighting one another for money, the guards trying to restore order, and al-Ghuri almost crashing down into the crowd, all of which had been caused by Consul Arimondo's desire to honor him.⁶¹⁹ It certainly would have lent an inauspicious and perhaps even burlesque tone to the beginning of what was supposed to be the start of a glorious military campaign against the Turks. Eventually, the Egyptian ruler was brought away from the turmoil, and he afterward issued a stern command that neither money nor textiles were to be used in future processions held on his behalf.⁶²⁰ The unfortunate outcome of the consul's reception of the Egyptian ruler may explain his subsequent behavior, in which he attempted to perform an even greater act of largesse.

A few days after the debacle at Damascus, the consul visited the sultan and brought with him members of the merchant community who carried an enormous quantity of elaborate presents. The fantastic pageantry of their arrival and presentation created a second, more tranquil public spectacle and attracted great attention from the sultan's retinue, and successfully restored a positive relationship between al-Ghuri and Arimondo in the final days of the sultan's life. According to the information provided in a letter by a Venetian merchant in Beirut, the first gifts arrived on two tables covered in satin cloth, upon which rested two great crimson satin bags decorated with purple flowers containing five hundred ducats each. These were followed by

⁶¹⁸ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 583-6.

⁶¹⁹ The act of throwing money during ceremonial processions was common to both Venetian and Mamluk processions. In Venice, the doge threw coins to the crowds on the day of his coronation, and the guards of the sultan did the same in Cairo to mark festive occasions. Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 282-5; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and Its Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 30.

⁶²⁰ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 5, 53; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un Bourgeois*, vol. 2, 52.

seven tables piled with scarlet and purple cloth, ermine and rabbit pelts, four tables with castles made of sugar, a platter of sugared fruits, a sugar chess set complete with candied soldiers and horses, three tables with pots full of syrups, and five tables bearing marzipan, fritters, and sweetmeats.⁶²¹ Through the use of these luxury products, composed primarily of elaborate dessert items, Arimondo brought a sweet conclusion to the relationship between the Venetian merchants and Mamluk sultans, a relationship that had so often been marred by bitterness.

The effects of Arimondo's munificence reveal much about the interstitial consular role in Venetian-Mamluk relations. Through his dragoman Zorzi, the consul begged that al-Ghuri might receive his "humble offerings." The translator, "that font of eloquence," asserted that they were not fit for such a great lord, but that they were the best the Franks could provide at a time when their business had collapsed and ships from the west no longer cast anchor in Mamluk ports. The sultan replied, "I know that there is little business, dear Consul, because my country extorts your merchants." Al-Ghuri added that, although Arimondo did not need to give him anything, he would gladly repay the gesture. "This consul is a discrete and valuable man, and his happy countenance makes him seem to be always laughing. I like him greatly. He reminds me of the consul of Alexandria. All good men are like this." He then commanded that Arimondo and Zorzi be vested with robes of honor. Dressed in his new Mamluk attire, a *khil'a* made of cloth of gold, the consul kissed the ground in front of the sultan, and al-Ghuri had him given a horse. Arimondo then departed, entering the gates of Damascus and riding through the bazaars

⁶²¹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 586 (summary of a letter from Beirut by Andrea Morosini for his brothers in Venice, dated 19 July). "Sabato seguente, el consolo andò a portar el presente, e lo portò con tanto ordine che ogniun coreva a veder: era tabolie 25, zoè su do tabolie ducati 1000 per tabolia di maidini, et da poi 7 tabolie fra panni scarlati, paonazi, damaschini, veludi alti e bassi e piani, armelini e conii, et 4 tabolie con 4 castelli de zucharo et una de frutti di zucharo, et uno scachier, et cavalli, et homeni, et tre tabolie de siropi in pignate, et el resto marzapani, pignochade, fongi e altro." I have chosen to translate the term *fongi* as "sweetmeats" rather than "mushrooms" (*funghi*), because, in this context, it likely referred to *fongi di Savonia*, a dish made of sugar, starch, and rosewater. Cf. Labalme, *Venice: Città Excelentissima*, 304n59.

accompanied by the Venetian merchants and a band of Moors on foot as trumpets and drums played and coins again were cast to the crowds (more than a little startling given the results of his earlier attempt at public generosity).⁶²² For the consul, the expense of the gifts – doubtlessly charged to the *cottimo* – was offset by the “honor” his presents earned for him and for Venice in the eyes of the Mamluks, their subjects, and his fellow citizens.⁶²³ In spite of the potential for conflict and the chance of the gifts “going wrong,” the two parties ultimately succeeded in honoring one another and fostering a brief moment of trans-imperial amity. These final materially based interactions between al-Ghuri and Arimondo serve as a fitting epitaph to the story of Mamluk-Venetian interactions, in which gift giving served to help normalize oft-strained relations.

Yet this last instance of material exchange between Venetians and Mamluks differs in several important respects from those discussed in previous chapters. Unlike other diplomatic presents to sultans, the consul here made extensive use of sugar as the primary gift to the ruler. The predominance of sugar sculptures, syrups, and confections in this instance is singularly striking and served as a central aspect of this encounter that was perfectly suited to the tastes of the Mamluk sultan. Sugar, for a variety of reasons, was in the early modern period the luxury commodity par excellence. It was a mark of wealth and power, and was believed to possess medicinal qualities, which consequently made it well suited to the role of diplomatic gift.⁶²⁴ Sculpted sugar was particularly prized, and it was not uncommon for gift-givers in Europe and Asia to make use of these intricate consumable artifacts to inspire wonder and respect before the public. An important aspect of gifts made of sugar, like any consumable, of course, is their

⁶²² Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 587.

⁶²³ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 587, “e con tal honor el vene a caxa.”

⁶²⁴ Marina Belozerskaya, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 245.

impermanence. Much like modern ice sculptures, the amount of time and energy involved in crafting works of art from this material distinctly contrasted with its expendable and short-lived nature, which only increased the sense of value and wonder that they conveyed. Sugar castles and figurines in particular were traditional items of pageantry in medieval Egypt. As early as the eleventh century, the Fatimid rulers had made use of vast quantities of sugar for candied castles, soldiers, and other decorations in public parades held to proclaim the power and authority of their caliphate.⁶²⁵ The consul was not therefore merely giving a luxury food item, but one that had been crafted in a visually stunning way that would have had special resonance for members of the Cairene elite.

The chess set made of sugar, in particular, served an especially meaningful purpose in the consul's overture to the sultan. Although it was not an unknown gift in early modern diplomacy, this is the only recorded example of its kind from Venetian-Mamluk exchanges and consequently deserves special consideration here. Chess was an important aspect of eastern Mediterranean culture, and the chronicler Ibn Taghriberdi mentioned its popularity in Egypt and Syria in the fifteenth century. As in Europe, this pastime signified and reinforced the player's adherence to a concept of chivalry (Ar. *furusiyya*) in which noble warriors cultivated both mental and martial prowess.⁶²⁶ Al-Ghuri took an interest in the game, and a group of Venetians had at one point considered selling him a chess set made of gold, silver, gemstones, and crystal worth an estimated 5,000 ducats.⁶²⁷ The sugar set that Arimondo brought him was therefore a carefully

⁶²⁵ T. Sato, *Sugar in the Social Life of Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 58 ff.

⁶²⁶ David Ayalon, "Notes on the Furusiyya Exercises and Games in the Mamluk Sultanate," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 9 (1961): 31-62.

⁶²⁷ According to Sanudo, this chess set was never delivered. In 1527, the Senate discussed buying it from the Venetian who owned it and sending it as a gift to the Ottoman sultan. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XLIII, 599. "Noto. Questa matina vidi in la sala di Pregadi una bella cossa; uno scachier grande bellissimo in tondo et alto lavorato d'arzeno et d'oro con calzedonie, diaspri et altre zoie, et li scachi di restallo finissimo, fo di sier Giacomo Loredan qu. sier Piero da Santa Maria Formoxa, qual dete in dota a do sue fie maridate in sier Christofal et sier Marco Donado qu.

chosen gift that was ideal for the Mamluk sultan.⁶²⁸

The episode is also exceptional in terms of the paucity of the sultan's counter-gifts. It may seem at first glance as though al-Ghuri's parsimony was a reflection of the limited means available to him: he was on a military campaign and he would make his final, desperate stand against the Ottomans on the plains of Marj Dabiq only a few weeks later. Hence one might think he would have been unable to provide the consul with more than a *khil'a* robe, a horse, and the honor of a triumphal procession through Damascus. Ibn Iyas recorded however, that the sultan had brought much of his treasury with him, and that his movements north from Cairo to Syria were occasioned by great displays of pomp and grandeur.⁶²⁹ It is more likely, then, that the sultan regarded the Venetian gifts as a form of compensation for the disastrous outcome of his reception in Damascus, and so felt less obligated to demonstrate his munificence. One is reminded of Derrida's suggestion that there is a "command to forget that is uttered with every gift."⁶³⁰ When the consul's first offering went awry, he redressed the unfortunate episode with a larger display of munificence, that led to mutual forgetting. In focusing their attention on the successful second exchange rather than the humiliating first encounter, both the sultan and the consul cooperated in helping one another save face.

Surprisingly, it seems as well that at least some of these presents accompanied the

sier Andrea da San Polo. Il qual fo portato perchè sier Piero Lando suo barba lo volse monstrar al Serenissimo et al Collegio si volevano comprar per mandarlo a donar al Signor turco con sier Marco Minio va orator a Costantinopoli, qual fu fatto per mondarlo a vender al soldan Gauri. Et dimandano di questo ducati 5000."

⁶²⁸ The conspicuous abundance of sugar and sweets in this final episode of gift exchange seems especially prominent given the purported decline of the Middle Eastern sugar industry at this time. As seen in Chapter One, in prior ambassadorial missions to Cairo, it had always been the sultan who gave sugar to the Venetians, not the other way around. If the arguments made by Ashtor and others that the sugar manufacturing industry declined over the course of the fifteenth century, then the Mamluk court's reliance on foreign providers in the final years of the sultanate may be symptomatic of that broader trend. Cf. Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 323.

⁶²⁹ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 5, 31-49; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un Bourgeois*, vol. 2, 30-47.

⁶³⁰ Jacques Derrida, and Peggy Kamuf, trans., *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 56.

Egyptian sultan in his campaign against the Ottomans, where they again served as diplomatic gifts. Though it is impossible to say with complete certainty, based on Mamluk sources, news of the sultan's sweet cargo seems to have reached the enemy camp shortly after his meeting with Arimondo. According to Ibn Iyas, when Selim I and Qansuh al-Ghuri parlayed before going into battle, the Ottoman ruler requested a gift of sugar and candy (*sukar wa halwa*).⁶³¹ The Egyptian ruler complied and sent over one hundred quintals of assorted sweets loaded into large boxes, apparently in the hope of still reaching a negotiated settlement with the Turkish leader. Ibn Iyas, however, claimed that the request was simply a delaying tactic designed to dampen al-Ghuri's fighting spirit and to suggest the continued possibility of avoiding war.⁶³² Although that illusion was quickly shattered at Marj Dabiq, where the sultan died in battle against the Turks, it is fascinating that the Mamluk leader apparently tried to re-gift a portion of his Venetian presents in his diplomatic overtures to Selim. Whereas the consul had used the candies and sugar to show deference to al-Ghuri, the latter in turn used them to show deference to the more powerful Ottoman ruler.

This chapter has underscored the manifold ways in which consular engagement with the Mamluks revolved around material exchanges. Attempts to seize Venetian property and to collect on outstanding debts heightened tensions between the Signoria and the sultanate, and the consequences often landed upon the resident consul. Not all exchanges between Mamluks and consuls were fraught with difficulty, however, and the last recorded interactions between the Consul Arimondo and Qansuh al-Ghuri in Damascus serve as a case in point. While, on the one

⁶³¹ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 5, 60; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un Bourgeois*, vol. 2, 58. "و كل هذا حيل و خداع حتى يبطل همة السلطان عن القتال و يثني عزمه عن ذلك, قد ظهر مصداق ذلك فيها بعد. و من جملة خادعة ابن

عشان إلى السلطان أنه أرسل يطاب منه سكر و حلوى فأرسل اليه السلطان مائة قنطار سكر و حلوى في علب كبار, و كل ذلك حيل منه."

⁶³² According to Ibn Iyas, Selim also informed al-Ghuri that he had taken the field to lead his forces against the Persians, and that he hoped they might combine forces. The Mamluk chronicler repeatedly condemned the "trickery" (*hiyal*) of Selim. Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, vol. 5, 60; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un Bourgeois*, part 2, 58.

hand, disputes over the transfer of goods and liquid capital often precipitated conflicts, on the other hand successfully negotiated gift exchanges facilitated moments of cooperation. Regardless of the tactics that they employed in their dealings with the administration of the sultanate, though, consuls occupied a difficult, liminal position that greatly undermined their ability to succeed in their duties.

As Zen's example indicates, significant differences distinguished consuls from ambassadors. The consul did not enjoy the same protections afforded to ambassadors, and, unlike other government agents, received a salary from both the government of Venice and the sultan in Cairo that compromised his independence. The delicate situation of serving two regimes could sometimes produce spectacularly disastrous results for the men elected to this office. Yet, despite the problem of being caught in a web of multiple, overlapping obligations, some consuls navigated the complex channels of Mamluk-Venetian relations with alacrity and succeeded in achieving positive results in their exchanges with the sultans and their lieutenants. Their willingness to participate in gift exchange seems to have been a critical factor in determining how well the consul ingratiated himself with the Mamluks, and, consequently, avoided arrest and imprisonment. Pietro Zen and Benedetto Sanudo avoided injury and expense to the nation by refusing to give to the Mamluks, but this intransigence led to their personal harm. Alvise Arimondo, by comparison, lavished fabulous gifts on al-Ghuri at great cost to the *cottimo*, but earned esteem from both Muslims and Christians and received the coveted *khil'a* robe from the hands of the sultan himself. The consuls of this period seem not to have been able to find a middle path between the two extremes that adequately combined a conservative spending policy with the need to participate in material exchanges with the Mamluks.

In the years following Zen's hasty departure from Syria, the *cottimo* returned to the status

quo and debt again became the norm. At the time of the Turkish conquest in 1517, a *grandissima summa de danari* was owed in Damascus alone, and Consul Alvise Arimondo thanked God that none of the former creditors, the Mamluk “slaves,” had attacked the Venetians or succeeded in recovering their money before the collapse of the sultanate.⁶³³ It is altogether fitting that Arimondo, the last Venetian to engage in material exchanges with a Mamluk ruler, would also be the first Venetian to reach out to the new ruler of Syria, offering 1,500 ducats worth of gifts upon Selim’s arrival in Damascus.⁶³⁴ Ambassadors were subsequently dispatched to the Ottoman leader, thereby hammering out the details of continuing Venice’s commerce in Egypt and Syria as well as payments of the Cyprus tribute.⁶³⁵ As for the debts, following the Turkish annexation of Egypt and the Levant the Senate could rejoice that the debts of the *cottimi* had been “miraculously” erased by the arrival of the Ottomans and the fall of the Mamluk “slave state,” expressing a hope that the new regime would end the problems with extortions (*manzarie*).⁶³⁶ “It is known,” wrote the Senate, “that the Lord Turk by custom does not allow *manzarie*, through which extraordinary expenses occur, and the bad practices and even worse *manzarie* will be halted.” “Nor,” the senators assured themselves, “will our *cottimo* incur inconvenient costs running into the thousands, as once happened.”⁶³⁷ In the years that followed, however, the *cottimo* and its expenses would remain an issue for the Venetian consuls, despite the

⁶³³ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXIII, 421. ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, busta 947, “Liber del cotimo di Damasco,” fol. 49 v (January 1518).

⁶³⁴ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXIV, 20.

⁶³⁵ The records of this embassy, led by Alvise Mocenigo and Bartolomeo Contarini, can be found in Eugenio Albèri, ed., *Le Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto*, vol. 3 (Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 1855), 51-68.

⁶³⁶ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 19, f. 50 r ff. (2 January 1518). cf. ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, busta 947, “Liber del cotimo di Damasco,” fol. 49 v (January 1518).

⁶³⁷ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 19, f. 50 v (2 January 1518). “Se intende el prefato Serenissimo Signor Turco come e de suo costume non permette simel manzarie per la qual cosa le spese straordinarie, le male usanze, e pessime manzarie seranno cessate. Se da li proprii nostri, seguendo la mala consuetudine, non sera dato modo di far incorrer il cotimo nostro in mille inconvenienti, come esta facto per el passato.”

administrative change, and, as in the Mamluk era, Venice's officials continued blaming the rapacity of local authorities for their difficulties.⁶³⁸ Yet in reality the role in mediating conflicts played by the consuls, embedded in overlapping networks of exchange and obligation, was far more complicated than a singular focus on the extortions of the local administration would seem to indicate.

One of the problems troubling Mamluk-Venetian relations was the ineffectiveness of the consulates, but these men were set up for failure. In general, their difficulties stemmed from the enormous range of responsibilities imposed on them. They functioned not only as governmental officials in the employ of Venice's civil service, but also as mediators between Europeans and Mamluks. Yet their material dependence on the sultans, based on their *zemechia* salary and symbolized by their *khil'a* robes, eroded their status as Venetian citizens and converted them into Mamluk subjects. In addition, the Signoria called on consuls to act as intelligence agents, engaging in espionage and holding clandestine rendezvous with representatives of foreign powers, which antagonized their hosts and propelled them into direct conflicts with the sultanate. Their responsibility for the *cottimo*, meanwhile, forced them to mediate their countrymen's debts to Mamluk lenders and made them liable for unpaid loans. Required to look simultaneously to Venice, Cairo, the local administration, and their own merchant community for direction, while being obligated to all of these groups in different ways, the duties of consul were incredibly difficult to fulfill.

⁶³⁸ Some examples of these issues and accompanying sentiments can be found in the consular dispatches preserved in ASVe, Collegio, Relazioni finali di ambasciatori e pubblici rappresentanti, busta 31.

Chapter Five:

Translation and Betrayal: Dragomans in the Service of Venice and the Mamluks

“Traduttori, traditori” – Italian proverb

Just as exchanges shaped the course of Venetian-Mamluk relations, translators shaped the language by which such exchanges were understood. The past four chapters have explored the influence of goods and monetary exchange in determining many essential aspects of contentious coexistence, but the crucial role of dragomans has yet to be addressed in full. Since the process of labeling an exchange as a gift, extortion, payment, or bribe dictated the degree of collaboration ultimately achieved, accounting for the overall impact of translators helps further untangle the web of material connections that linked the people of Venice to the Sultanate of Cairo. Venetian and Mamluk subjects depended on competent dragomans, not only to surmount the language barrier, but also in order to come to an agreement that their exchanges of goods were mutually beneficial. Trade, payment, and even gifts failed when miscommunication occurred, because conflicting interpretations could easily make an exchange appear too one-sided. The past four chapters have shown that this would lead to refusal to trade, confiscation of goods, arrest, or physical danger. By the same token, the most successful dragomans were those whose efforts allowed people to arrive at a shared view of an exchange as being mutually beneficial to both parties.

This project has already shed light on the great variety of material interactions that foreign travelers to the Mamluk Sultanate conducted, but the influence of interpreters has still to be discussed. In all of these negotiations, the most immediate and basic of barriers was that of language. Thus, in each of the four areas previously examined – diplomacy, commerce,

pilgrimage, and consular administration – dragomans played a central part in determining the success or failure of material exchanges. These translating agents brokered all negotiations between Mamluk subjects and outsiders, and in consequence their actions made an impact on the records concerning such episodes. They influenced the very perceptions of the dealings that they mediated, and in shaping the discourse they affected observers’ impressions about the fairness of negotiations.⁶³⁹ The power of the dragomans, although not always recognized by observers, was considerable. Translators were in a position to make or break a successful encounter between Venetian and Mamluk subjects, as they governed the very language with which material exchanges were understood. Whether a dragoman presented the payment of a bribe as the offering of a “gift,” or softened an act of extortion by framing it as the consignment of “tribute,” had great bearing on whether participants perceived such interactions positively or negatively. For example, the Venetian friar Francesco Suriano exhibited a compliant attitude toward the payment of what here called “tribute” (*tributo*), which he understood to be a kind of legitimate tax on pilgrims. Yet he demonstrated extreme hostility toward “extortions” (*estorsione*) and other “impositions” (*graveze*) that were, for him, uncustomary and “intolerable.”⁶⁴⁰ Suriano’s contemporary Pietro Casola wrote that he had been instructed to give “courtesies” to the natives of the Levant to ensure their goodwill.⁶⁴¹ The language that intermediaries chose in labeling such offerings therefore mattered a great deal. In an effort to please, these agents engaged in an artful linguistic dance, offering their clients flexible, if not always the most precise, interpretations of the transactions they mediated.

⁶³⁹ Natalie Rothman, “Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 4 (2009): 772.

⁶⁴⁰ Golubovich, ed., *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, 117.

⁶⁴¹ Paoletti, ed., *Viaggio*, 182. “Bisogna che li peregrini faciano qualche cortesia a li patroni de le bestie, aliter ve fano de molti dispiacere, e sono molto recrescevoli.” Cf. Newett, ed. and trans., *Casola’s Pilgrimage*, 236.

Indeed, translators routinely tailored their work to match the varying expectations of their different audiences, a fact that studies of bilingual Muslim-Christian treaties have amply demonstrated.⁶⁴² Yet the dragomans' love of ambiguity over literalism must not be wrongly categorized as mere deception or trickery. For in a period when concepts of truth and objective accuracy were relatively fluid, it hardly makes sense to cast blame for such discrepancies on the translators themselves.⁶⁴³ They were engaged in a conscious effort to arrive at a workable solution agreeable to both parties, not just committing errors or mistranslating. Dragomans were flexible when it came to producing written translations of treaties and other diplomatic documents, and they were equally willing to embrace ambiguity when it came to translating spoken negotiations. Their ability to exploit the uncertainties resulting from translation, part of an effort to avoid conflict and lead both sides toward a positive consensus about the meaning of an exchange, was instrumental in determining whether or not interactions succeeded or failed.

This chapter therefore complements and expands upon the preceding sections by assessing dragomans' impact on Venetian-Mamluk material relations. To do so, it first explores the range of duties that translators in the sultanate fulfilled, and then describes the varieties of services that they offered ambassadors, merchants, pilgrims, and consuls. Examining the role of linguistic brokers in depth highlights the significance of these seemingly marginal agents within the many webs of material encounters that have already been discussed. Whereas earlier chapters considered the importance of gift giving, extortion, and related exchanges in influencing conflict

⁶⁴² John Wansbrough, "Diplomatica Siciliana," *BSOAS* 47, 1 (1984): 18; John Wansbrough, "The Safe-Conduct in Muslim Chancery Practice," *BSOAS* 34, no. 1 (1971): 24; V. L. Ménage, "The English Capitulation of 1580: A Review Article," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 3 (1980): 373-83. Cf. Paul E. Chevedden, "The Al-Azraq Treaty: Arabic Text and Analysis," in *Negotiating Cultures: Bilingual Surrender Treaties on the Crusader-Muslim-Crusader Spain under James the Conqueror*, edited by Robert I. Burns et al. (Boston: Brill, 1999), 59-60.

⁶⁴³ For which see the insightful commentary on the "loyalty" of translators offered by Karen Newman and Jane Tylus, Introduction to *Early Modern Cultures of Translation* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 1-24.

and coexistence between Venetian and Mamluk subjects, the following pages focus on a set of specific actors who were of central, though sometimes inconspicuous, importance. The career of one particularly influential translating agent, Taghriberdi ibn ‘Abdullah, is especially relevant here. Taghriberdi, who served as grand dragoman to the sultans for thirty years and visited Venice as an ambassador in 1506, made a tremendous impact on multiple points of contact between Venetians and Mamluks during this time. Because he had a hand in negotiations, and because he enjoyed unique relationships with ambassadors, merchants, pilgrims, and consuls, his activities deserve close scrutiny. Exploring dragomans in general, and the impact of this particular individual on Mamluk-Venetian material exchanges in particular, elucidates how the subtleties of language and interpersonal relationships could affect commerce and politics between Venice and Cairo.

The preceding chapters have already made the importance of translators and translation in material exchanges apparent, but their absolute dependence on dragomans deserves to be underscored. Regardless of the exact nature of their business in the east, visitors to the Mamluk Sultanate typically expressed concern about learning useful phrases and with securing support from a qualified, reliable dragoman.⁶⁴⁴ Such preoccupations are understandable, given the role of language in identity construction: language serves as a salient marker of otherness, and the concomitant need for the concealment of signs of difference (passing) to avoid humiliation or danger might require the assistance of an interpretive agent.⁶⁴⁵ Even for travelers familiar with

⁶⁴⁴ Several pilgrim guides include brief lists of useful terms, phrases, and alphabets. See, for example, Bernhard von Breydenbach, *Peregrinatio Ad Terram Sanctam ex Bernhardo Breitenbach Ecclesiae Maguntinae Decano et Camerario* (Wittenberg: Nickel Schirlentz, 1536), 121 ff; Eberhard von Groote, ed., *Die pilgerfahrt des ritters Arnold von Harff von Cöln durch Italien, Syrien, Aegypten, Arabien, Aethiopien, Nubien, Palästina, die Türkei, Frankreich und Spanien, wie er sie in den jahren 1496 bis 1499 vollendet, beschrieben und durch zeichnungen erläutert hat* (Cologne: J.M. Heberle, 1860), 112 ff.

⁶⁴⁵ Elaine K. Ginsberg, “Introduction: The Politics of Passing,” in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, edited by Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 16-20.

Arabic, a dragoman could help one avoid the risk of mistranslation and provide guidance at critical moments in navigating paths through unfamiliar cultures. As anyone who travels widely comes to realize, mistranslation is an all too easy accident, and sending the *wrong* message can sometimes be much worse than sending no message at all.⁶⁴⁶ Such concerns would have mattered not only to official dignitaries, such as consuls and diplomats, but also to the more common traders and pilgrims who flocked to Mamluk ports each year.

Dal	Dal	Feh	hca	hca	Tech	Te	Be	Alph
>	>	ز	ح	ح	ط	ث	ب	ا
Am	Daas	Ta	ca	ca	ca	ca	ca	ca
ع	ب	ب	و	و	ل	ل	ز	س
hca	Am	My	lam	lam	cap	Enb	ffa	ca
و	ل	ع	ا	ح	ط	ث	ب	ا
ca	ye	lam	ca					
ca	ب	ح	و					

Figure 8: Table of the Arabic Alphabet, Woodcut, from *The Pilgrimage of Bernard Breydenbach, 1486*⁶⁴⁷

Despite their important role, in a number of sources a tone of uncertainty, if not outright hostility, surrounded the figure of the dragoman. A theme cutting across the writings of different voyagers to the Mamluk dominions was a concern over trustworthiness, and the men who relied

⁶⁴⁶ Michael Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), 2.

⁶⁴⁷ Hugh W. Davies, *Bernhard Von Breydenbach and His Journey to the Holy Land 1483-4: A Bibliography* (London: J. & J. Leighton, 1911), Plate 39.

upon them continually cast the loyalties of translators into doubt.⁶⁴⁸ Authors of pilgrim guides took care to identify the standard amount paid while also cautioning about the probability that translators would try to get more money out of their clients wherever possible.⁶⁴⁹ One of the most cautionary voices, the Dominican friar Felix Fabri, warned readers that “when these dragomans are good and upright men, all goes well with the pilgrims; but when they are not, it is all over.”⁶⁵⁰ In part, the liminal aspect of the translators’ profession likely encouraged this cautiously skeptical attitude.⁶⁵¹ The nature of the job demanded men whose identities were, to a degree, fluid, and it may have been a short leap to assume that their loyalties were also variable.

Such anxieties, however, probably reveal more about the psychology of the travelers than the loose business ethics of the dragomans.⁶⁵² Traveling in a foreign environment could easily produce feelings of frustration and confusion, so it is therefore unsurprising if such difficult conditions induced some writers to place blame on their guides. Even so, although they could become targets of suspicion or contempt, dragomans nevertheless had real influence over their

⁶⁴⁸ On the importance of trustworthiness among translators, see Stephen Ortega, *Negotiating Transcultural Relations in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Ottoman-Venetian Encounters* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004).

⁶⁴⁹ Santo Brasca, for example, stressed the importance of finding a “good dragoman” to his readers. Lepschy, *Viaggio in Terra Santa*, 144. Fabri wrote of the tendency for extortion by dragomans in more specific terms. Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, f. 222 a. Cf. Stewart, trans., *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, vol. 2, 105.

⁶⁴⁹ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, f. 218 b. “Incepimus ergo tractare de peregrinatione montis Synai cum dominis, qui quidem tractatus fieri necesse est ante recessum patronorum et comperegrinorum in praesentia patronorum et aliquorum expertorum peregrinorum et patris Gardiani, eo, quod post recessum confratrum pagani remanentes peregrinos pro voto et libitu suo circumvenientes nimis gravarent et angariarent in pecunia solvenda.” Cf. Aubrey Stewart, trans., *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, Vol. 2 (part 1), (London: The Library of the Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society, 1892-3), p. 93.

⁶⁵⁰ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, f. 222 a. “Et quando illi Trutschelmanni sunt recti et probi, bene stant peregrini; sed quando secus est, tunc sunt peregrini perditii, sicut patebit in processu.” Cf. Stewart, trans., *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, vol. 2, 105.

⁶⁵¹ On the liminality of translators, see David Johnston, “Mapping the Geographies of Translation,” in *Between and Between: Place and Cultural Translation*, ed. Stephen Kelly et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 256.

⁶⁵² It is interesting to note that a similar atmosphere of mistrust prevailed in the Venetian government’s attitude toward its dragomans in Constantinople as well. Dursteler notes the Senate and the baili “feared that their most intimate discussions might be compromised, or that the dragomans might be intimidated because of their status and their exposed position as Ottoman subjects. Another common concern was linguistic ineptitude.” Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 36.

clients. These brokers, frequently originating from positions of captivity or weakness at the margins of Mediterranean society, found opportunities for wealth and power by acting as interpreters. However constrained they may have initially been by the vicissitudes of fortune, dragomans managed to exercise a degree of agency for themselves through their role as intermediaries.

Relatively little has been written about the role of dragomans in framing Mamluk relations with the west.⁶⁵³ This is peculiar, since a growing body of scholarship has underlined the fact that interpreters were an essential part of travel, diplomacy, and commerce in the early modern Mediterranean, while attention to the history of translation in general has increased in the last several years.⁶⁵⁴ Ironically, though ambassadors, merchants, pilgrims, and consuls displayed a keen awareness of the importance of dragomans, the full extent of their historical impact in mediating Venetian-Mamluk relations has for a long time been neglected. Too often, perhaps, the trend has been to dismiss these figures as humble intermediaries of only slight importance, and to instead devote attention to diplomats or other more overtly high-profile individuals.

The dragoman in the Venetian-Mamluk context was no mere clerical functionary assigned to mundane linguistic tasks. Although the Italian word *dragomano*, and its Arabic root, *turjiman*, did literally mean interpreter, people bearing these titles in fact did much more than translation.⁶⁵⁵ There were different types of dragomans operating within the Mamluk dominions

⁶⁵³ Stephen Ortega, *Negotiating Transcultural Relations*; Carmine Di Biase, ed., *Travel and Translation in the Early Modern Period* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006); the issue of the *Journal of Early Modern History* (1385-3783), 19 (2/3), is entirely devoted to translators and other mediatory agents in the early modern period.

One of the most important studies concerning dragomans in Venetian-Mamluk relations is Wansbrough, "A Mamluk Ambassador to Venice," 503-530.

⁶⁵⁴ Rothman has organized a digital project on dragomans, "The Dragoman Renaissance Research Platform," <http://digitalscholarship.utoronto.ca/projects/dragomans/>.

⁶⁵⁵ Alternative spellings included *truciman*, *turciman*, and *trutschelman*.

who performed various functions depending on the needs of their clientele. Unlike the situation of the later sixteenth century, when the Ottomans and Venetians had systematized the practices for the recruitment and training of a veritable diplomatic corps of translators, the rules governing dragomans involved in Venetian-Mamluk relations during this earlier period were less tightly regulated, as they were often recruited on an ad hoc basis.⁶⁵⁶

The sheer variety of people who could serve as dragomans belies the simplistic notion of uniformity that this single label would initially suggest. The most powerful interpreters were the grand dragoman and his junior colleague, who held influence in the sultan's inner court and were called upon to broker affairs involving foreigners. Like other Mamluks, these high officials were generally converts to Islam recruited from the ranks of foreign-born slaves. In addition to the sultan's dragomans, moreover, the provincial administrations in major commercial hubs such as Alexandria and Damascus had their own translators who worked with the Venetian merchants.⁶⁵⁷ Others, however, directly served the Venetian government and were appointed to accompany ambassadorial missions; they were often colonial subjects of the *stato da mar*, and owed at least nominal allegiance to San Marco rather than to the sultanate.⁶⁵⁸ Still others served the resident consul overseas in a Mamluk city, were recruited locally, and were paid out of the Venetians' common fund (*cottimo*). Yet another, fourth category of freelance dragomans found employ as guides and interpreters for Christian pilgrims, and were hired either upon arrival or in one of the ports visited en route, such as Rhodes.⁶⁵⁹ Those procured in the Mamluk dominions were

⁶⁵⁶ On dragomans in the service of the Venetian *bailo* of Constantinople, see Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 36. See also Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 163-186.

⁶⁵⁷ ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, prima serie, b. 868, "Tariffa d' Alexandria," fol. 37 v., mentions that one ducat needed to be paid to the "turziman de lo armiragio" in Alexandria.

⁶⁵⁸ Rothman has pointed out that Venetian colonial policy involved the recruitment and relocation of dragomans from different subject populations. Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 166.

⁶⁵⁹ Pietro Casola, for example, recorded that their dragoman had been hired at Rhodes. Paoletti, *Viaggio*, 165; Newett, *Casola's Pilgrimage*, 218. Others, such as Santo Brasca, hired their dragoman upon arrival. Lepschy,

officially licensed, having received an official dispensation to guide pilgrims, both Jewish and Christian, from the sultan.⁶⁶⁰ Dragomans thus served many different masters, and their profession was a highly heterogeneous one. In fact, other than their multilingualism and a designation in the sources as *dragomani*, there was no single, common attribute that neatly linked these various agents to one another. Aside from the elite dragomans of the Mamluk regime, who were Muslim (or Muslim converts), there is no indication in any of the sources that religious affiliation mattered: one finds mention of Catholic, Orthodox, Syriac, Muslim, and Jewish translators in this period.⁶⁶¹

Of all the categories of traveler addressed in prior chapters, pilgrims were perhaps the most dependent on dragomans, whom they hired to lead them along their route through the Holy Land. Constrained by the considerations of their carefully timed spiritual itineraries, they did not enjoy the luxury of being able to choose the translator they wanted, nor could they simply dismiss an individual who caused them problems. Arriving often for the first time in the east, pilgrims sometimes turned to their galley patron or to the Franciscans of Mount Sinai to help

Viaggio in Terra Santa, 70. Bertrandon de la Brocquiere relied on a Jewish translator at Jaffa “qui parloit bon tartre et ytalien.” Schefer, *Le Voyage d’Outremer*, 63.

⁶⁶⁰ Hassler, ed., *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, fol. 222 a. “Sunt enim in qualibet civitate aliqui, quibus Soldanus concedit, ut Christianos per terram ducant et eos protegant, et sunt magistri officiales de curia domini Soldani et dicuntur Trutschelmanni. Sic etiam Judaei habent suos Trutschelmannos sive Calinos. Et in locis, ubi est magnus et frequens adventus peregrinorum, sunt duo Calini, major et minor, sicut in Jerusalem et in Chayro. Et illi duo sunt subordinati, et minor recipit stipendium a majore, major autem extorquet ea a peregrinis.”

Hassler, ed., *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, fol. 249 b. “Rex Aegypti, Soldanus, est ibi dominus, et praeponit populo terrae praefectos, et peregrinis et advenis Christianis et Judaeis Trutschelmannos, et bellatoribus Mamaluccos; et ita potentiali civili regit populum, quasi regimine despotico.” Stewart, trans., *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, vol. 2, 105, 226. “The King of Egypt, the Soldan, is lord there, and he appoints governors to rule the people of the land, dragomans to rule strangers and pilgrims, both Christian and Jewish, and Mamelukes to rule the men of war; thus he rules the people with a civil power which is despotic.”

⁶⁶¹ Joos van Ghiste recorded that the Venetian dragoman in Alexandria in 1482 was a Jacobite Christian. Bauwens-Préaux, *Voyage en Égypte*, 144. Obadiah Jaré recorded that in 1487 the Venetian dragoman was a Jew named Moses “Grasso.” Eisenstein, “The Letters of Obadiah Jaré,” 220. A record from the Senate’s *Mar* deliberations indicates that the Venetians’ dragoman in Damascus in 1487 was a Muslim (*moro*) named Marin. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12 f. 120 v (31 August 1487). Pierre Barbatre described the dragomans he encountered as “Sarrazins, de Mammellus, de Christiens de la saincture, et aultres christiens lesquieulx sont truchemens.” Tucoo-Chala, *Le Voyage de Pierre Barbatre*, 128.

them find a reliable guide. If, on the other hand, as was usually the case, the pilgrims arrived first in Jaffa, it was the Mamluk dragoman of Jerusalem's responsibility to provide someone to accompany them and to arrange a contract that outlined the services to be rendered.⁶⁶² According to the terms laid out in these documents, the pilgrims' appointed dragoman usually promised to lead them a certain distance (potentially as far as Cairo), to provide transportation, and to protect them from danger.⁶⁶³ Actual translation was an ancillary part of the job, and it is revealing that Felix Fabri explained that the term dragoman meant "protectors, conductors, or guardians of the Christian pilgrims," instead of identifying them as "interpreters."⁶⁶⁴

Pilgrims and dragomans bargained out a relationship of interdependence. Christians had to pay for their documents of safe-conduct, tolls, lodgings, and also provide food for their dragoman, who would keep them safe and lead them to their destination.⁶⁶⁵ Despite this mutual reliance, trust was constantly an issue. In general, the pilgrims who produced records of their experiences in the years 1480-1517 left behind fairly ambivalent impressions of their guides. On the one hand, the pious travelers needed such individuals to achieve their goal of visiting the holy sites of the east. On the other, though, they often regarded any efforts to procure payment as extortion, and expressed doubts about whether the agents had acted in their best interest as they led them on their journeys. As Fabri contended, dragomans depended on exploitation, having to "wring" their charges dry in order to make a living.⁶⁶⁶ He complained, for example, that the leading Mamluk dragoman of Jerusalem was "hard upon the pilgrims, ever hurrying them from place to place," and that he "exacted money from them grievously." Worse still, "he did not keep

⁶⁶² Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, f. 218 b. Cf. Stewart, *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, vol. 2, 93.

⁶⁶³ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, f. 218 b – f. 219 a. Stewart, *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, vol. 2, 93-5.

⁶⁶⁴ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, fol. 222 b. "Trutschelmanni, i. e. defensores et ductores, sive provisores Christianorum peregrinorum." Cf. Stewart, *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, vol. 2, 105.

⁶⁶⁵ Stewart, *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, vol. 2, 95; 103.

⁶⁶⁶ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, fol. 222 a. "Extorquet ea a peregrinis." Stewart, trans., *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, vol. 2 (part 1), 105.

his contracts well, and broke many of his promises, yet he protected us.”⁶⁶⁷ It is striking that even though this figure earned recognition in safeguarding the pilgrims, in Fabri’s estimation his payment was still an unjustified act of extortion. That is to say, although the friar acknowledged that reciprocity and mutual benefit characterized the relationship, he nevertheless perceived his company’s material interactions with the dragoman as unjust.⁶⁶⁸

Fabri also had unfavorable observations to make about his experiences with the interpreters in Egypt, such as “Shambeck” and “Halliu” (Shambeg and Ali), the Mamluk dragomans of Alexandria. The friar claimed that Halliu, whom he labeled a “traitor,” “most untrustworthy,” and a “bad man,” worked constantly to cheat the pilgrims out of their belongings and money.⁶⁶⁹ In Alexandria, Fabri wrote, he had convinced one of the pilgrims to entrust his medal of St. Christopher to him for safekeeping, then later refused to return it unless he was paid an exorbitant sum.⁶⁷⁰ Schambeck, meanwhile, demanded thirteen ducats from each pilgrim he guided as his special “tax” (*thelonium*), and when informed that the pilgrimage guidebooks advised that they would never need to pay more than six ducats, he told them simply: “I care not for what is written in your little books; I have my own books to put in order,”⁶⁷¹ and cautioned

⁶⁶⁷ He identified this figure by the name “Sabathytanco.” Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, fol. 222 a. “Peregrinis durus in continua ductione et gravis in pecuniarum mulctatione, et non satis bene tenuit compactata et in multis promissis cessit; satis fideliter tamen nos defendit, et in quibus eum invocavimus, diligenter adjuvit.” Cf. S Stewart, trans., *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, vol. 2 (part 1), 105-6.

⁶⁶⁸ Fabri expressed much greater esteem for the dragoman who accompanied the pilgrims through the Sinai, whom he depicted as virtuous and reliable. This particular figure, the friar wrote, had once been kidnapped and brought to Rome, where he was implored to convert to Christianity, refused, and was eventually able to return to Cairo via Venice, bringing with him rich gifts from Emperor Frederick III and Pope Nicholas V and praising the liberality of the Franks. Regardless of its veracity, the incident of captivity further demonstrates the enduring image of dragomans as resiliently adaptive characters who not only escaped but also thrived in adverse situations such as foreign imprisonment. It was this dragoman’s apparent strength and perceived dependability that made him stand out to the friar. He called this dragoman “Elphahallo.” Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, fol. 222 a. “Rectus Sarracenus, et multa pollens morali virtute. . .et tanto affectu Christianis transmarinis afficitur, quod vitam suam illis perderet, immo, pro eis se mortis periculis exponit.” Stewart, trans., *The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*, vol. 2 (part 1), 106.

⁶⁶⁹ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 126 a-b.

⁶⁷⁰ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 126 b.

⁶⁷¹ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 127 b.

the pilgrims sternly that unless he was paid, he would have them all thrown in prison.⁶⁷²

Although Ashtor suggested that the Mamluks of Syria enjoyed a freer hand to take advantage of foreigners than their counterparts nearer to the administrative center of Cairo, this was clearly not the case with dragomans and pilgrims.⁶⁷³ Influential and connected to figures of authority, the pilgrims' guides wielded real power over those in their custody, and the potential for material exploitation was consequently considerable.

The merchants of Venice, though perhaps less vulnerable to manipulation than pilgrims, nevertheless struggled with the interpreters that they hired as well. These dragomans were retained in the service of the Venetians in Alexandria and Damascus, who financed them out of their common fund. The records of the Senate's *Mar* deliberations reveal relations between the merchants and the interpreters to have been at times quite fractious, owing to bad business deals, exploitation of the common fund, and immorality. In 1487, the dragoman of the Venetian community in Damascus, Marin, was dismissed and barred from further dealings with the republic's citizens for outstanding debts he allegedly owed to three patricians.⁶⁷⁴ In 1488, the Senate declared that Marin's replacement, Zanet, a man of "bad standing" who was receiving a very large annual salary of 200 ducats, be removed from office immediately. The consul was instructed to dispense with Zanet's service and to see to it that his replacement receive a more reasonable pay of at most sixty ducats.⁶⁷⁵ His successor did little better in the eyes of the Senate,

⁶⁷² Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol 3, 128 b. Fabri claimed that this happened because Taghriberdi had written to Halliu and Schambeck from Cairo, encouraging them to extort the pilgrims. Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 127 b.

⁶⁷³ Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 121.

⁶⁷⁴ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12 f. 120v (31 August 1487). Ambrogio da Molin, Alvise Priuli, and Marc'Antonio Contarini.

⁶⁷⁵ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 12 f. 157 v (4 November 1488). The consul is identified in this document as Zuan Mocenigo.

for in 1494 they threatened the new dragoman with dismissal for prostituting a woman to visiting Venetian merchants.⁶⁷⁶

Yet some Venetian translators served for long periods, proving themselves through years of faithful service to merchants, consuls, and other citizens. Zorzi, who acted as the Venetians' dragoman in Damascus for two decades, earned the esteem of Pietro Zen, who called him "most trustworthy" (*fidelissimo*), and relied upon him during negotiations with both the Mamluks and the Persians between 1508 and 1510.⁶⁷⁷ Zorzi also translated for Consul Andrea Arimondo during a meeting with Qansuh al-Ghuri at Damascus in 1516, where he won the admiration of the Venetian merchants as a "font of eloquence," and from the sultan, who awarded him a green robe of honor.⁶⁷⁸ Other archival evidence further illustrates this particular dragoman's persuasiveness and popularity among Venetian officials. When, as part of an ongoing campaign to cut expenses from the *cottimo*, the Senate decreed that a dragoman could receive a maximum annual salary of 50 ducats, Zorzi came to Venice and pled his case. The Senate, who heard a broad body of supporting testimony from ex-consuls, identified him as a precious example of a loyal and talented translator whose services were invaluable. The government therefore agreed that Zorzi could keep his high salary of 200 ducats and also awarded him a lifelong guarantee of his position as dragoman to the merchant community in Damascus.⁶⁷⁹ This individual was bold, influential, and willing to advocate on his own behalf when his livelihood was in danger; such virtues must have helped him achieve much success in his field. It is especially revealing,

⁶⁷⁶ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 14, f. 41 r (8 August 1494).

⁶⁷⁷ Museo Correr, MS Dandolo PD C 975/51, fol. 16 v. Cf. Lucchetta, "L'affare Zen," 188. Zen referred to him as "fidelissimo," and noted that he "meritava ogni bene."

⁶⁷⁸ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 586-7.

⁶⁷⁹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 19, f. 110 v (31 May 1519).

however, that in praising the dragoman, the Venetians also implicitly acknowledged the difficulties and untrustworthiness common among other members of the profession.

Nor was Zorzi alone in this ability to persuade. Another high-profile interpreter in the Serenissima's employ, Iotino, displayed a similar willingness to enumerate his merits in the hope of gaining the government's favor. When he was charged with murder by the rectors of Cyprus in 1507, he penned a lengthy letter in which, rather than arguing his innocence, he emphasized the many triumphs of his career as a Venetian dragoman. He noted, first, that he had spent eleven months in Cairo translating between the representatives of Cyprus and the sultan over the matter of tribute. There, his personal connections, he claimed, had allowed him to dispose of a shipment of poor-quality presents that al-Ghuri rejected, selling the gifts on the open market and thereby recovering a great deal of money for the state. In Cyprus, he asserted that his knowledge of Turkish had enabled him to unmask an Ottoman spy. Finally, though he admitted his guilt, he pointed out that his crime, murdering two men he had discovered nude in his wife's bedroom, was no crime at all. Iotino argued that he had selflessly devoted much of his life to matters of the greatest importance to the state, and thus he should be forgiven for one unfortunate event. The ultimate outcome of this dragoman's fate has been lost, but a record does exist of the Senate's agreement to grant a one-year reprieve until the matter could be reviewed in greater detail.⁶⁸⁰ Thus, although less powerful than the translators who worked with pilgrims, the dragomans of the *cottimo* clearly possessed the influence and the ability to adroitly navigate Venetian channels of power in their own interest.

Above all these varieties of lower ranking translators, however, stood the grand dragoman of the sultan, who continually intervened in Mamluk interactions with ambassadors,

⁶⁸⁰ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, 134 r. ff. (6 April 1507).

merchants, pilgrims, and consuls. For most of the period from 1480 to 1517, it was Taghriberdi ibn ‘Abdullah who held this office. Who, exactly, was he? First appearing in the documentary record in 1481 and last mentioned in 1513, Taghriberdi had converted to Islam and become a Mamluk after leaving his home in the western Mediterranean. Conflicting accounts of his origins circulated in European sources and make it impossible to pinpoint with any certainty: Felix Fabri claimed he was a Jewish convert from Sicily, Rabbi Meshullam ben Menahem described him as a Sephardic Jew who fled persecution in Spain, Georges Lengherand called him Castilian, and the diplomat Pietro Martyr said that he was a Christian sailor from Valencia who had been sold into slavery by pirates.⁶⁸¹ The truth is perhaps less important than this evidence of his versatility and brilliant capacity for self-fashioning, which contributed to his success and influence. He thus embodied the fluid nature of identity in the fifteenth-century Mediterranean. In a 1963 article, John Wansbrough pointed out that “the fact that Taghri Berdi was a polyglot combined with the experience gained from his frequent contacts with the cosmopolitan world of diplomats, merchants, and travellers, probably enabled him to pass as a national of any group he might

⁶⁸¹ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 80b ff. “Interea cunctis paganis adhuc soporatis, venit secreta ad nos unus gemmarius et aurifaber de Mechilinia, Christianus catholicus, teutonicus, nomine Franciscus, qui viderat in nocte ingressum nostrum in sua patega, quia residet ibi negotians; hic adjuravit primo nos, ut hoc, quod nobis dicere vellet, celatum habere vellemus, ne ad aures Tanguardini deveniret, dicens: ecce domini peregrine, in domo dolosi hominis et spoliatoris estis, nec, ultra hunc diem si manseritis, non exhibitis nisi excoriate et spoliati, non manifeste, sed fraudulenter et dolose; suadeo vobis omnibus modis, ut non maneatis in hac domo, ego providebo vobis, inquit, de secure et bono hospitio, et addidit, nobis recitans statum Tanguardini hospitis nostril satis terribilem, dicens: homo iste natus Judaeus est de Sicilia et Rabbi in Iudaismo factus, derelict autem Judaeorum errore ad ecclesiam Christi convolvit et scholas frequentans doctus in latina lingua factus est, fuit et in theologia instructus, ad clericatum pervenit, in quo per tempus officio functus aufugit et ad Sarracenos se contulit et abnegate fidei Christi Machometo juramentum praestitit et ad curiam Soldani receptus factus est dives et potens Mamalucus et emit a Soldano omnes Judaeos et Christianos in terras suas venientes, quos excoriate astutiis et calliditatibus et mirabilibus adinventionibus (81a). Recipit enim pecuniam per fas et nefas et scit mira suavitate affectum peregrinorum sibi attrahere, ut possit ex consequenti eorum bursas evacuare et de sic male acquisitis pecuniis ditatus est homo et emit curiam istam et emit pulchras uxores et emit official aliqua reipublicae et in malum suum factus est fortunatus.”

Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, *De rebus oceanicis et novo orbe, decades tres* (Cologne: Gervinus Calenius, 1574), 396. Juda David Eisenstein and Elkan Nathan Adler, eds. and trans., “Rabbi Meshullam Ben R. Menahem of Volterra (1481),” in *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 167. Méniglaize, ed., *Voyage de Georges Lengherand*, 175. Marin Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, identified him as Spanish.

Taghriberdi’s inclination to conceal his Jewish origins from Pietro Martyr, an envoy of the Spanish crown, is understandable given the climate of intense anti-Semitism in Iberia at this time.

choose within the medieval Mediterranean world.”⁶⁸² Considering, moreover, that Taghriberdi prospered for three decades at the Mamluk court in Cairo, retaining his position as grand dragoman even after the tumultuous civil wars that followed Qaytbay’s death in 1496 and surviving imprisonment under Sultan al-Ghuri, indicates that he was a shrewd and tenacious individual well versed in the arts of realpolitik.

Venetian sources first noted Taghriberdi in 1489 during the outbreak of conflict between Cairo and Venice over control of the island of Cyprus. In Marin Sanudo’s *Lives of the Doges*, the grand dragoman is said to have been instrumental in bringing the republic’s annexation of the kingdom to the sultan’s attention, and thereby “revealed himself as a great enemy to the Venetians.”⁶⁸³ Despite Sanudo’s opinions, the assistance of this enigmatic, powerful, and influential figure could mean the success or failure of a diplomatic mission. During the Venetian embassy of 1489, Ambassador Pietro Diedo lauded Taghriberdi’s assistance, and relied on him to help safeguard the costly array of presents for the Mamluk court as they were transported from Alexandria to Cairo.⁶⁸⁴ The Senate had, in fact, instructed Diedo about Taghriberdi in its letter of commission, writing that “there is a dragoman of the Lord Sultan named Tanzer Baid, whom we understand to be a man of authority, very astute and experienced; the type of man one should keep close. We want you try to make him as benevolent and inclined to facilitating your mission

⁶⁸² Wansbrough, “A Mamluk Ambassador,” 504.

⁶⁸³ Sanudo, *Vite dei Dogi*, II, 605-6. “Al Chayro uno, ditto Marchiò, de nation cathelan, vegniva de Cypro, el qual trovado Tangavardi, turziman grando dil Soldan, a quello disse: ‘Come puol esser che ‘l Signor Soldan patirà che la sua Regina sia stà mandata de Cipro a Veniexia per forza, con pianti e lachrime, e lassar levar San Marco su quella ixola, e quella tuor con tanto incargo dil Soldan, e che quel maistro Rizo de Marin, suo ambassador, sia stà cussi mal tratado da Venitiani, sapiando ditti Venitiani quello esser ambador dil Soldan. In verità, me ne meraveglia assai, et anche voi doveresti far ogni poder, che questi Venitiani fusseno scaziati di ditto regno,’ allora Tangavardi se mostrò grande nemico de’ Venitiani, e questo fese per sottrazer più cosse dal ditto Marchiò, el qual dapoi disse molte parole in questo proposito.”

⁶⁸⁴ Rossi, ed., *Ambasciata Straordinaria*, 75-6.

as possible through secret presents, offerings, and good cheer.”⁶⁸⁵ Although he received rather humble presents during the official gift giving ceremony in the sultan’s citadel amounting to two pieces of cheese and fifty ducats, Taghriberdi was later offered another 300 gold pieces, and it is likely that other “secret presents” were also given to secure the grand dragoman’s assistance.

Such generosity paid off, for Diedo and his secretary Giovanni Borghi doled out high praise to Taghriberdi for his help in negotiating with Sultan Qaytbay. Diedo reported in a dispatch to the doge in December 1489 that Taghriberdi “comports himself better than any of us; he deserves the utmost commendation and is valuable because he desires to serve you well.”⁶⁸⁶ Borghi later claimed that Taghriberdi had risked the enmity of high-ranking officials in advancing Venice’s cause, and had proven himself to be a partisan of “our nation.”⁶⁸⁷ It is difficult to reconcile the impression created by these two observers with Marin Sanudo’s denunciation of the grand dragoman as having incited the sultan against the Venetians just a few months previously. Quite possibly, Sanudo inserted his criticisms into his text years later, after the dragoman’s reputation in Venice had soured.⁶⁸⁸ Regardless of the cause of this discrepancy, though, it is important to note that the earliest evidence in the documentary record shows that Taghriberdi involved himself closely in Venetian affairs of a material nature and was perceived by at least some of the republic’s officeholders as an indispensable ally whose help was secured with gifts.

Other records demonstrate that the grand dragoman was also involved in resolving international disputes over property or prisoners. Throughout the thirty-year period in which he

⁶⁸⁵ Rossi, ed., *Ambasciata Straordinaria*, 264.

⁶⁸⁶ Rossi, ed., *Ambasciata Straordinaria*, 152.

⁶⁸⁷ Rossi, ed., *Ambasciata Straordinaria*, 202.

⁶⁸⁸ Sanudo began writing his *Lives of the Doges* as early as 1493, before beginning work on his *Diaries*. However, the earliest surviving manuscript dates from the sixteenth century. Thus, how much of the information he presents dates from the 1490s, and how much was inserted later, remains an open question. Cf. Angela Caracciolo Aricò, introduction to *Le Vite dei Dogi*, vol. 1 (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1989), xi-xii.

was active, one finds that Taghriberdi used his interpersonal skills to secure the well-being and release of captive possessions and people at multiple pivotal moments in Mamluk-Venetian diplomacy. In 1489, he repeatedly pressed the Venetian ambassador for the return of cargo seized by Rhodian pirates at Korčula. Although much of this material consisted of weaponry, Taghriberdi assured the Venetians that these were just “little blunt lances that slaves break against one another to entertain the sultan.”⁶⁸⁹ The Venetian ambassador was in the end unable to return the stolen merchandise, having lobbied his superiors in Venice on the dragoman’s behalf to no avail.⁶⁹⁰

Sometimes Taghriberdi met with greater success in his efforts to recover lost cargo. In the summer of 1506, traveling under safe-conduct, he visited Rhodes and there presented the grandmaster of the Hospitallers, Amery d’Amboise, with gifts. Through his efforts, he managed to obtain the release of Maghrebi merchants and their merchandise for a sum of fifty thousand dinars.⁶⁹¹ According to Girolamo Priuli, the Venetians were extremely concerned about the entire enterprise, fearing that the Knights might take the dragoman himself prisoner. There was some speculation that the interpreter was in such bad standing with the sultan that it would hardly matter if he was enslaved by the Knights of Rhodes, but it was generally agreed in Venice that the failure to safeguard al-Ghuri’s ambassador would represent a serious debacle that would lead to further persecution of their merchants in Egypt and the Levant. To their great amazement, however, Taghriberdi was well received, succeeded in his task, and was eventually escorted by

⁶⁸⁹ Rossi, ed., *Ambasciata Straordinaria*, 91.

⁶⁹⁰ Rossi, ed., *Ambasciata Straordinaria*, 90-91, 93. In a letter dated 24 November 1489, Diedo suggested to the Council of Ten that at least a portion of the value of the cargo be returned. There is no evidence that the council complied.

⁶⁹¹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 356; Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 2, 425; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d’un Bourgeois*, 161.

d'Amboise back to his awaiting Venetian transport, the galley *Contarina*.⁶⁹² Two years later, when a Rhodian fleet entered the harbor at Alexandria demanding ransom for a group of Muslim prisoners, it was once again the grand dragoman who negotiated the release. Taghriberdi paid thirty-two thousand ducats, plus another 250 as a personal present to the Rhodian commander, an enormous sum that reportedly outraged the sultan.⁶⁹³ Still, because the Mamluks presented themselves to the world as the guardians of the Holy Cities and defenders of the Caliphate, they needed to use captive redemption to bolster their image as protectors of Islam. In this sense, Taghriberdi performed an extremely important task in gaining diplomatic capital abroad by acting as a negotiator and redeemer rather than as a translator.

Beyond Muslim hostages, the grand dragoman also made repeated efforts to liberate Venetian captives from captivity in Egyptian dungeons. For the consuls and merchants, who in the first decade of the sixteenth century were repeatedly imprisoned by al-Ghuri, Taghriberdi's aid could be immensely valuable. As seen in Chapter Four, consuls occupied a precarious position at the boundaries of the Venetian and Mamluk empires and frequently used local support networks facilitated by gift giving practices in times of difficulty. This was especially true for Mamluk dragomans, who, like consuls, were intermediaries routinely required to defuse conflicts. When Qaytbay had the vice-consul of Damietta imprisoned for his role in the Venetian annexation of Cyprus, Taghriberdi freed him and hosted him at his house in Cairo because of their strong "friendship."⁶⁹⁴ According to Malipiero's annals, the consul would have suffered a

⁶⁹² Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 2, 429. In Cyprus, he told the Venetian rectors that funds given by the Knights of Rhodes to the Church of Cyprus should be used to pay for the damages their acts of piracy caused to Muslim shipping. Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 356.

⁶⁹³ Sanudo, *Diarii*, IX, 712.

⁶⁹⁴ Sanudo, *Vite dei Dogi*, II, 606-7. "È da saper che Piero di Piero, Consolo nostro in Damiata, scorse gran pericolo di la vita, perhò che il Soldam avé lettere da uno, chiamato Zorzin, erra scrivan di Rizo de Marin, el qual Zorzin, quando fu preso Rizo e Tristam di Zilibeto per il Zeneral fu lassato in libertà, qual, zonto a Rhodi, scrisse in rabesco al Soldan come Rizzo de Marin erra stà retegnudo e preso dal nostro Zeneral, e questo per letter d'aviso

miserable end had it not been for the grand dragoman's intervention.⁶⁹⁵ Again in 1500, after the sultan had Consul Hieronimo Tiepolo and his merchants thrown into the dungeons, it was the grand dragoman who liberated them from captivity and brought them to his house in Cairo.⁶⁹⁶ In July 1505, likewise, in the midst of an epidemic, Taghriberdi secured the release of the merchant community from the dungeons of Massara in Cairo.⁶⁹⁷ They had been languishing there for months and the consul and chaplain had already succumbed to the plague when the grand dragoman brought them out and hosted them in the safety of his own home.⁶⁹⁸ He therefore served as an important source of assistance to Venetian consuls and merchants from within the Mamluk court. Reports of this magnanimity do much to undermine the depictions of this figure as an enemy that one encounters elsewhere in western sources.

Other accounts of material interactions between the dragoman and foreign visitors found in western pilgrim literature provide an even more complex image of Taghriberdi. Although the rabbi Meshullam ben Menahem wrote favorably of him, noting that he lent his assistance to Jewish travelers going from Egypt to Jerusalem, Felix Fabri left a far less favorable commentary.⁶⁹⁹ Calling him a “wolf in sheep's clothing” who worked under the false guise of friendship, he portrayed the dragoman as an exploitative, nefarious, and petty impresario rather than a reliable guide.⁷⁰⁰ In the narrative of the *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti*

scritte per il Consolo nostro di Damiata, sopraditto. Et per questa causa il Soldan mandò a far retegni im prexon el ditto Piero di Piero, Consolo in Damiata, et per amicitia lui haveva con Tangavardi, menato al Cayro, lo tene in caxa sua, e stava in gran miseria.”

⁶⁹⁵ Malipiero, *Annali Veneti*, vol. 3, 610.

⁶⁹⁶ Sanudo, *Diarii*, III, 1526. Other reports from visitors to his home suggest that he occasionally helped other westerners escape back to Europe as well. Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 26. Fabri reported seeing a Catalan and a Genoese fugitive at the dragoman's home.

⁶⁹⁷ Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 2, 381. They had been arrested in reprisal for the departure of the Venetian fleet from the harbor of Alexandria without permission. According to Priuli, the consul Stephano Malipiero and his chaplain Zuam Alvixe Bragadin both died of the plague while still in prison.

⁶⁹⁸ Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol., 2, 381; Sanudo, *Diarii*, 195.

⁶⁹⁹ Eisenstein, “Rabbi Meshullam Ben R. Menahem of Volterra (1481),” 173.

⁷⁰⁰ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, 143.

Peregrinationem, Taghriberdi first lured Fabri's company to his house and promised them his protection and guidance, then intimidated them to stay, and in effect held them captive as he charged ever more for his "services."⁷⁰¹ Rather than leave any doubt in the minds of his readers, Fabri cited numerous examples from his experiences during pilgrimage to support this portrayal of Taghriberdi as an enemy of Christians.

When it came time for his company's departure from Cairo, the friar claimed, the dragoman insisted on additional payments. He required six ducats per person as the payment pertaining to his office, six ducats for the riverboats that would bring the party from Cairo to Alexandria, plus an additional "farewell" present for his wives. In addition, the dragoman informed the pilgrims that they would be unable to travel safely without a written safe-conduct from the sultan, which he could conveniently procure for an added price of four ducats.⁷⁰² After receiving this added pay, claimed Fabri, Taghriberdi then led them on a slow, circuitous journey through the city rather than to the port. As the frustration mounted, one of the Mamluk escorts informed the Christians that the dragoman required further "courtesies and tips" (*curtosias vel bibales*) as a final reward to the members of the household who been so hospitable to the pilgrims.⁷⁰³ After providing further compensation to the grand dragoman, Fabri's company was at last led to the riverboats that eventually brought them up the Nile to Alexandria. It was then discovered that they had been betrayed: Taghriberdi had not paid the boatmen (who now demanded money), the safe-conduct they had been sold was meaningless to the local guards, and furthermore, Fabri suggested, Taghriberdi had written to his colleagues in Alexandria and

⁷⁰¹ He showed them a chained Christian slave who begged the pilgrims to buy his freedom, but alleged this was all a ruse of the dragoman, because he later saw the same man walking freely through Cairo. Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 26.

⁷⁰² Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 111 a-b.

⁷⁰³ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 111 b. As it was explained to the pilgrims, "if you wish to have a well-disposed master and leave in peace, open your purses."

advised them to take advantage of the gullible pilgrims as much as possible.⁷⁰⁴ The figure of the grand dragoman serves as the great antagonist of the narrative and epitomizes the stereotype of a disloyal, greedy Mamluk.

To be sure, the veracity of Fabri's claims must be treated with caution. A preacher, a master of theology, and a devout member of the Dominican Observant reform movement, he had little patience for nonbelievers.⁷⁰⁵ His overall attitude toward Mamluks, whose ancestors had ejected the crusaders from Acre in 1291, and whom he (erroneously) believed were apostate Christians, was especially venomous. It is in this respect worth noting that Fabri claimed to have first begun to doubt Taghriberdi upon hearing rumors that he was originally Jewish.⁷⁰⁶ Put simply, the friar from Ulm, far removed from the more cosmopolitan world of the Venetians, would have been strongly inclined to use figures such as the grand dragoman, who had ascended to an influential position in the Mamluk hierarchy, as an example of the malign wrongness that prevailed in Islamic lands. Suffering at the hands of pagan tyranny served, furthermore, as a convenient literary device to demonstrate the piety of his sacred pilgrimage to his readers.⁷⁰⁷ Although Taghriberdi may have very well perpetrated unjust extortions, Fabri nevertheless was well inclined to exaggerate the severity of his mistreatment to his western audience.

Perhaps what is more startling than the variety of roles that Taghriberdi fulfilled is the variety of opinions that different writers expressed about him. Fascinatingly, whereas Venetian

⁷⁰⁴ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 114 a, 127 b. When Fabri's company showed their dragoman in Alexandria their safe-conduct, he derided it and advised them not to show it, since it would only encourage the authorities to seek more money from them. Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 123 b.

⁷⁰⁵ Kathryn Beebe, *Pilgrim and Preacher: The Audiences and Observant Spirituality of Friar Felix Fabri (1437/8-1502)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Fabri authored at least one sermon criticizing eastern monasticism. Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 2, 506-7.

⁷⁰⁶ Hassler, *Evagatorium*, vol. 3, 80b ff.

⁷⁰⁷ Frederick Jones Bliss, *The Development of Palestine Exploration* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1906), 124. Fabri's "fondness for finding a parallel between his own experiences and those of Biblical characters is further illustrated by his account of the terrible thirst experienced by the Pilgrims in the Wilderness of Sinai."

opinions of him were initially far more favorable, especially in comparison with Fabri's, they became increasingly hostile over time. This strange transformation had much to do with a series of bad exchanges between Venice and the Mamluks. The collection of tribute payments and other trans-imperial exchanges was the special province of the grand dragoman. Most importantly, Taghriberdi played a particularly central role in overseeing the management of the Cyprus tribute, an assortment of cash and commodities that, after 1489, the sultan expected the Republic of Venice to regularly pay him in exchange for Venetian occupation of the island. So on 11 March 1490, the grand dragoman supervised the collection of the first tribute payment of silver plates (*piatine d'arzento*) and 4,000 ducats, which went according to schedule. Yet by the end of the decade, problems had begun to manifest openly. In 1499, the short-reigned Sultan Qansuh Qansuh (r. 1498-1500) expressed displeasure about the delay of tribute payments, noting in a letter to the doge that he would wait a few more months only because of the "great prayers" and "great promises" of Taghriberdi.⁷⁰⁸ The sultan went on to threaten, however, that if the tribute did not arrive in the next five months, he would have the Venetian consuls of Damascus and Alexandria arrested and imprisoned together with Taghriberdi.⁷⁰⁹ The grand dragoman, who since 1489 had assumed responsibility for the exchanges concerning Cyprus, thus found his fate tied to the cooperation of the Venetians for whom he had vouched.

Taghriberdi wrote to the Venetians directly in 1500 and explained to the consul of Alexandria, Hironimo Tiepolo, that either the tribute or an ambassador would have to be sent to Cairo immediately.⁷¹⁰ By the fall of that year, the Mamluk leadership threatened to take the value of the as yet undelivered tribute from the Venetian merchants in Alexandria if no payment were

⁷⁰⁸ Sanudo, *Diarii*, II, 614.

⁷⁰⁹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, II, 614.

⁷¹⁰ Sanudo, *Diarii*, III, 476.

received. Taghriberdi, whose own fortunes were now inextricably tied up with the affairs of Cyprus, insisted to the sultan that the Venetians did not have a ducat to spare, but he was rebuffed.⁷¹¹ In December, the sultan summoned Consul Tiepolo and at a formal robing ceremony warned him and the grand dragoman against further delays in the Cyprus tribute.⁷¹² It is striking that the conferment of a robe of honor was here used as an occasion to admonish a Venetian representative and his Mamluk counterpart, a clear indication that investiture rituals helped the donor claim power and authority over the recipients. Taghriberdi and Tiepolo thereupon returned to Alexandria and worked to raise money for the Cyprus tribute from the Venetian merchants of Egypt and Syria. The overthrow of the sultan shortly thereafter, however, afforded a reprieve, since the matter was dropped until the ascent to the throne of Qansuh al-Ghuri.⁷¹³ Almost two full years would pass before the first delivery of the tributary payments.

It is difficult to imagine the anger and humiliation Taghriberdi must have experienced in 1502, when a quantity of shabby cloth, the long-anticipated “tribute” from Cyprus, finally arrived in Cairo after such a lengthy delay.⁷¹⁴ Qansuh al-Ghuri complained openly in writing that the quality of the camlet was “not too good,” calling it coarse and insisting that the affront be rectified.⁷¹⁵ When Benedetto Sanudo arrived in Cairo as an ambassador of the republic the following year, seeking to redress the obvious insult caused by the tribute, it is not surprising that he found the grand dragoman poorly disposed to him. The consul in Damascus had, likewise, observed his recent behavior as being hostile and even declared him “a great enemy of our

⁷¹¹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, III, 924.

⁷¹² Sanudo, *Diarii*, III, 1526.

⁷¹³ The consul’s letter dated 3 December 1500 indicates that they apparently planned to raise the funds by selling the sultan’s remaining deposits of pepper to the Venetian merchants at a higher than normal rate. The consul noted that Taghriberdi did not want to see the spices fall into the hands of foreigners. Sanudo, *Diarii*, III, 1526-7.

⁷¹⁴ Hieronimo Giustinian brought the tribute to Cairo from Cyprus in the first half of 1502. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni secreti, reg. 39, f. 19 v.

⁷¹⁵ Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 114.

nation” in a letter to the home government.⁷¹⁶ The Signoria, taking a cue from this source, had gone so far as to warn the Venetian ambassador about the grand dragoman in advance, noting in its letter of commission to him that “Taghriberdi is, as far as we are informed, a great enemy to our nation.”⁷¹⁷ It could not have helped that Sanudo did not bring Taghriberdi any gifts. Upon the ambassador’s departure, the dragoman brought the point up, saying that he had accompanied the embassy from Cairo to Alexandria and still had not received the presents he merited.⁷¹⁸

Taghriberdi insisted that he deserved four hundred ducats, and according to a Venetian witness, when he was refused, he made threats and left in a fury.⁷¹⁹ Venetian mismanagement of the Cyprus tribute, which culminated in a series of personal insults to Taghriberdi manifested in the ambassador’s refusal to give, must have engendered a certain degree of newfound personal antipathy toward the republic’s cause. Between the 1489 and 1503, errors in material relations had allowed a powerful and influential Mamluk official to become alienated from the Venetian camp.

How ironic, then, that Qansuh al-Ghuri chose Taghriberdi to lead an ambassadorial mission to Venice two years later. The sultan charged the grand dragoman with the task of negotiating a new trade arrangement that would fix pepper prices and guarantee regular spice purchases by Venetian merchants in his dominions. Departing Alexandria in March 1506, he visited Cyprus, Rhodes, and Crete before arriving in Venice with a company of twenty-five retainers, two ceremonial mace-bearers, and a plethora of gifts, on Thursday, 17 September

⁷¹⁶ Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 338.

⁷¹⁷ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Secreti, reg. 39, f. 57 r (25 October 1502).

⁷¹⁸ Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, 338.

⁷¹⁹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, 827.

1506.⁷²⁰ An official delegation of citizens dressed in scarlet cloth – composed mainly of Venetians who had practiced commerce in Alexandria and Damscus – met him at the Lido and conducted him on a gilt boat to the Giudecca. There, he was given a house that had been opulently decorated in a magnificent façade of cloth of gold. These honors and other expenses, financed out of the merchants’ *cottimo*, seem not to have measured up, for Sanudo noted that Taghriberdi subsequently complained that the Venetians had not deigned to receive him with the *bucintoro*, the ceremonial ducal barge used for state rituals of the highest importance, and that the food had been provided upon arrival was wholly unacceptable.⁷²¹

Setting aside these complaints, it is obvious from the extant records that pageantry and material excess characterized the Mamluk mission to Venice throughout the grand dragoman’s stay in the lagoon. Three days after his arrival, Taghriberdi enjoyed his first meeting with Doge Leonardo Loredan when, on Sunday morning 20 September, a delegation of forty citizens arrayed in silks and scarlet cloth was sent to escort Taghriberdi and his retinue to the ducal palace. He rode across the Grand Canal with his company, heralded by his mace-bearers, and, according to Sanudo, the whole of St. Mark’s Square was filled with throngs of onlookers eager to see the Mamluk ambassador and his company.⁷²² Once in the palace, the grand dragoman

⁷²⁰ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 419. “La matina gionse a Lio, Tagavardin, orator dil soldan, con zercha persone. . . , et Alvise di Piero, stato cogitor con Alvise Sagudino, secretario nostro, che li al Chajaro morite; et vene con la galia, soracomito sier Francesco Pasqualigo, *quondam* sier Cosma. Et inteso questo, la Signoria comandò a li zentilhomeni deputati dovesseno andar vestiti di scarlato fino a Lio a riceverlo, et insieme con la galia condurlo a la Zudecha.” Cf. Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 2, 421-2. “Avendo il signor Sultam uxatto tanta violentia versso il Statto Venetto, et li marchadanti per molti respecti et per pacificarsse li parsse di mandar uno ambasator al Statto Veneto, et chussi mandava per suo ambasator uno armilagio de lanze 40, chiamato Tangavaro turzimam, *cum* schiavi 25, zoè servitori 25 et duo mazierii *cum* assai presenti.” Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 354, instead recorded that Taghriberdi traveled with 20 people.

Richard Guylforde mentioned seeing Taghriberdi in Crete in July 1506, as he was on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. “There was a grete Ambasset of the soldans towards Venyce, that hadde in his companye many Mamolukes.” Ellis, *The Pylgrimage*, 13.

⁷²¹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 420.

⁷²² Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 424. “A dì 20, domenega. Da matina fo mandati li piati, con li patricii chiamati, vestiti di seda e scarlato, li principal sier Pollo Trivixan, el cavalier, et sier Zuan Badoer, dotor et cavalier, numero

delivered Loredan a formal oration of greeting in Latin and presented two letters from the sultan. The doge, in turn, awarded Taghriberdi a monthly stipend of 150 ducats and a gift of candies and wax, paid for out of the *cottimo*.⁷²³

The grand dragoman, ostensibly in Venice for important negotiations, spent the following weeks as something of a tourist, and was hosted around the city as an exotic guest of state. On 27 September, he dined with the governor of Cyprus, attended a choir performance, and closed the evening with a poetry recitation held at his house.⁷²⁴ In October, he witnessed a patrician wedding in Dorsoduro (“to see the women”) and he and his retinue partook in the dinner with other guests.⁷²⁵ In December, he visited the Rialto and the Merceria.⁷²⁶ He observed the procession of Corpus Christi, and was given an excellent vantage point on an *altana*, where he could watch the procession of boats along the Grand Canal.⁷²⁷ Yet, all the while, little discernible progress on negotiations between the sultanate and the republic was actually being made. Though Taghriberdi, fluent in Italian, did hold meetings with the doge, the Maggior Consiglio, the Collegio, and the Provedadori di Cottimo, he asserted that he lacked the authority to commit the sultan to the terms of a new treaty.⁷²⁸ This must have appeared a strange stumbling block to

40, e andono a la Zuecha in cha’ Pasqualigo, a levar Tangavardin, orator dil signor soldan, et condurlo a la udiencia. Era la piazza piena a veder smontar dito orator, qual vene con 22 mori avanti, tra li qual. . . caschi con acete in man, et do chadi avanti; et cussi andoe a la Signoria.”

⁷²³ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 424-5. “Et sentò a presso il principe, e li parlò latin, per saper la lengua, zoè le salutation; e presentò do carte rabesche. . . et il principe li fè bona ciera; e cussi ritornò a caxa, et per quelli di cotimo li fo dato per uno mexe ducati 150 per spexe, e certo presente di confetion e cere.”

⁷²⁴ Sanduo, *Diarii*, VI, 430. “In questa matina l’orator dil soldan fo a disnar con missier Marco Malipiero, comandador di Cypro con 4 di soi principali, fo honorevol pranso. Poi disnar fu a le Verzene aldir cantar; la sera a caxa li fo recità un’ egloga pastoral; sì che ave gran piacer.”

⁷²⁵ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 437. “In questa sara, a cha’ Nani, a San Trovazo, per le noze di una fia fo di sier Zorzi Nani, in sier Zuan Batista Badoer, di sier Barbaro, fo fato meza festa, e fo menà Tangavardin, orator dil soldan, a veder le done, per numero 50, qual cenò li; *etiam* lui con X mori soi cenò li.”

⁷²⁶ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 515.

⁷²⁷ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 485.

⁷²⁸ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 436, 451, 458, 542. ASVe, Del Sec, reg. 40 f. 208 r, mentions Taghriberdi as being “sença tale liberta,” and so it was necessary to send one of his retinue back to Cairo for further instructions. Cf. Wansbrough, “A Mamluk Ambassador,” 516.

his Venetian hosts, since committing the sultanate to a new treaty was ostensibly the entire purpose of his presence in the city. Regardless of whether he was deliberately trying to prolong his mission, exacting a strange and expensive revenge upon his hosts for earlier mistreatment, or genuinely lacked adequate authority, it is true that as early as October he had dispatched requests for further instructions from the sultan. Carried by one of his Mamluk retainers, a certain “Francesco Damonte,” a Circassian and former dragoman in Damascus, the response would not arrive until the following year.⁷²⁹

In the meantime, little could be achieved in the way of diplomacy. In March 1507, Taghriberdi visited the Collegio again, “with his customary pomp,” but only to request that several people who had been arrested for shouting insults at him be freed.⁷³⁰ When letters from the sultan arrived in May, the negotiations, especially the issue of mandatory pepper purchases, a major source of strife in Venetian-Mamluk relations, had remained at a standstill since October.⁷³¹ Although there is no indication that the sultan complied with any of the Venetians’ requests, the new missives from Cairo, Sanudo claimed, gave Taghriberdi wider powers and enabled him to engage in direct negotiations with a Venetian delegation composed of the managers of the *cottimo* of Alexandria.⁷³² As Wansbrough suggested, it is more likely that the Venetians and the grand dragoman just moved ahead with plans for a new treaty, disregarding or at least minimizing their earlier concerns about al-Ghuri’s own terms.⁷³³ By the end of the month, Taghriberdi again visited the doge and assured him that he and his Venetian colleagues

⁷²⁹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, 458, 496. ASVe, Commemoriali, Reg 19, f. 92 r ff. “Francesco da Monte, fo Turçiman a Damasco de nation cercasso.”

⁷³⁰ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 24. “A di 3 marzo. Fo consejo di X, con zonta di collegio. Et la matina Tangavardi, orator dil soldam, vene a la Signoria con la solita pompa, facendo andar tutti li mori a hordine, acompagnato da quelli sora cotimo; et vene per visitar la Signoria, et pregar che alcuni jotoni di la Zuecha, qual per averli dito villania fono retenuti, che li sia perdonato.”

⁷³¹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 79.

⁷³² Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 85.

⁷³³ Wansbrough, “A Mamluk Ambassador,” 517-18.

had almost completed a new agreement.⁷³⁴ Taghriberdi did not finally depart Venice, however, until 26 July 1507, some ten months after his arrival.⁷³⁵ Upon leaving, he was given a robe made of cloth of gold lined with sable worth 300 ducats and 1,000 ducats in cash out of the *cottimo*, while his retainers received other lesser robes of green, scarlet, and purple velvet. The doge's musicians played an accompaniment of trumpets as he embarked, escorted by the future consul of Alexandria Marin da Molin.⁷³⁶

Before departing, Taghriberdi left a final, human gift in Venice – a returned captive. One member of Taghriberdi's retinue, Giacomo, chose to remain behind rather than return to Egypt, and asked to join the ranks of the Venetian military.⁷³⁷ This man, a former Venetian subject from Friuli, had been taken captive by the Ottomans some six years previously, and had come to Cairo as a slave, where he converted to Islam and became a Mamluk soldier.⁷³⁸ Giacomo declared to the Signoria that he had remained a Christian in secret, and that he would now gladly offer his services to the republic. In September of 1507, the Senate voted overwhelmingly in favor of granting him a monthly stipend of ten ducats, two horses, a squire, and a position as a stratiot in the Venetian army.⁷³⁹ In subsequent years, this figure, known as "Giacomo Mamaluchò," led

⁷³⁴ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 86.

⁷³⁵ The text of the treaty exists in three variations, discussed in Wansbrough, "A Mamluk Ambassador," 519-20. Sanudo, VII, 220-4; ASVe, *Commemoriali*, reg. 19, f. 98; ASVe, *Miscellanea Atti Diplomatici*, n. 1576.

⁷³⁶ Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 122. "A dì 26. La matina vene Tangavardin, orator dil soldan, in colegio a tuor licentia; si parte. Era con lui sier Marin da Molin, va consolo in Alexandria, et quelli sora il cotimo. Fo vestito di restagno d'oro fodrà di zebellini: la vesta costa ducati 300; do caschi, cazache di veludo verde, 8 altri di scarlato et 6 di verde, zoè panno. Et fo acompagnà, con trombe dil doxe a altri diversi istrumenti, per la piazza, et andò a caja a la Zuecha. *Etiam* li è sta dato ducati 1000 venetiani, pur a conto di cotimo *Item*, va con le galie dil trafego, sopra la galia patron sier Luca Loredam."

⁷³⁷ Giacomo is sometimes named in the documents as "Giacomo Furlan" or "Giacomo da Sacil," (i.e. "the Friulian from Sacile").

⁷³⁸ ASVe, *Senato, del Mar*, reg. 41, f. 57 r (27 September 1507). Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 463. "Questo fo moro, vene qui con Tangavardin e perchè era di Friul volse torna a la fede di Christo, et si fe' christiam, et per la Signoria, per esser valente homo, li fo dato cavali et provision."

⁷³⁹ ASVe, *Senato, deliberazioni Mar*, reg. 41, f. 57 r (27 September 1507), Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 155.

Venetian forces into battle on the Italian mainland before his death in 1511.⁷⁴⁰ There is no explicit indication anywhere in the sources that Taghriberdi endorsed Giacomo's decision to return to Italy, but considering the dragoman's history of captive redemption, he probably engineered or at least condoned the man's return.

In contrast to the magnificence of his departure from Venice, Taghriberdi's last years in the court at Cairo were characterized by estrangement from both the Venetians and Sultan al-Ghuri. Initially, all was well, for according to Ibn Iyas and the letters recorded by Marin Sanudo, Taghriberdi received a positive reception upon his return to Egypt at the end of 1507. In Alexandria, he was welcomed by the local governor and disembarked from the Venetian galley proudly wearing the golden robe he had received in Venice, while in Cairo the sultan awarded him another honor and officially restored him to his post as grand dragoman.⁷⁴¹ This was not to last, for the grand dragoman emerged as an outspoken critic of the Venetians in 1510.

"Taghriberdi," declared the consul of Alexandria, Thomà Contarini, "our cruelest enemy, fosters harm to our state and promotes its ultimate extermination by doing his worst, always speaking one evil or another in arranging things, speaking lies rather than truths."⁷⁴² Taghriberdi's recent condemnations of the Serenissima before the Mamluk court coincided with a new diplomatic crisis between Venice and Egypt over a host of issues: piracy in the eastern Mediterranean, the sultan's growing frustration with the terms of the 1507 treaty, and the Mamluk discovery of letters from the Shah in the possession of Venetian agents in Syria. At the sultan's court, Taghriberdi openly scorned the diplomatic mission in which he had participated, claiming that he had been promised much that the Serenissima failed to deliver, including another Venetian

⁷⁴⁰ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 463.

⁷⁴¹ Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un Bourgeois*, 116. Sanudo, *Diarii*, VII, 182.

⁷⁴² Sanudo, *Diarii*, XII, 307-8. Letter dated 13 May 1511.

ambassador with gifts for al-Ghuri. Sanudo claimed that he had also encouraged the sultan to abandon commerce with the Venetians in favor of other European powers.

What had been Qansuh al-Ghuri's true intention in sending Taghriberdi to lead the diplomatic mission of 1506, and why had the dragoman eventually cut his ties with Venice completely? His experience in negotiating with foreign powers, particularly the Serenissima, undoubtedly made him qualified for such a task, but it is indeed curious that an official with such a mixed reputation in both Venice and Cairo would have been chosen. Wansbrough argued that "had in fact Taghri Berdi's relations with the Venetians been at all difficult or strained, he would scarcely have been selected by the Mamluk sultan for the embassy to Venice in 1506-7."⁷⁴³ Yet perhaps the dragoman was being set up for failure on both sides. In spite of his activities in captive redemption, the Signoria had already begun by 1502 if not earlier, to view him as an obstacle and even a threat. For al-Ghuri, strains in his relationship with Taghriberdi began over the Cyprus tribute at around the same time, and by 1506, Girolamo Priuli reported that "the sultan treats him as his slave, and holds him in low regard."⁷⁴⁴ In acting as an ambassador to Venice, therefore, the grand dragoman was required to settle complex political and commercial issues, most importantly the rights of Venetian merchants within the sultanate and the requirements for pepper purchases, between two parties that both viewed him with hostility and mistrust.

Taghriberdi in this way became a scapegoat for both groups. Unable to placate Venice and Cairo fully, he ultimately relinquished much of his control over negotiations to the Venetians and distanced himself from them, and their new treaty, entirely. The resulting document

⁷⁴³ Wansbrough, "A Mamluk Ambassador," 510.

⁷⁴⁴ Segre, *I diarii di Girolamo Priuli*, vol. 2, 425. "Lo avea per suo schiavo et di pocha reputatione." Similarly, in 1510, the consul of Alexandria reported that the grand dragoman's reputation in Cairo was poor. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XI, 75. "Al Chajaro Tangavardin à pocha reputatione."

conceded to the concerns of the republic and its merchants on every point, and represented a marked departure from previous agreements with the sultans. Although, after his return to Cairo, Taghriberdi eventually convinced al-Ghuri to agree to the terms of the new treaty, no long-term solution had actually been found. Over the following two years, al-Ghuri eyed the treaty, the Venetians, and his dragoman with growing disdain. When matters came to a head in 1510, Taghriberdi attempted to extricate himself by blaming the Venetians for the results of his 1506 mission, but had by this time lost control over even his own position within the court. The final blow, according to Ibn Iyas, came when allegations and material evidence surfaced that implicated him in treasonous correspondence with other European rulers, in which he had supposedly encouraged a western naval attack on Egypt and the Levant.⁷⁴⁵ When the Venetian ambassador Domenico Trevisan arrived in Egypt in 1511 to normalize relations between Cairo and Venice, he found a new grand dragoman in the service of the sultan. This replacement, a Veronese renegade named Younus, got on well with the Venetian delegation, assisting the ambassador and his retinue during their stay in Egypt.⁷⁴⁶ Taghriberdi, on the other hand, who had maintained himself in his office for almost thirty years, had been arrested and imprisoned. After his many efforts to secure the release of Muslim and Christian captives both in Egypt and elsewhere, he himself finished his career imprisoned in Cairo. It was not until 1513 that he was released, when al-Ghuri pardoned a number of criminals as an act of thanksgiving for the recovery of his vision.⁷⁴⁷

Judging from this examination of the activities of Taghriberdi and his colleagues, dragomans heavily influenced Mamluk-Venetian relations in several important respects. In the

⁷⁴⁵ Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un Bourgeois*, 199, 203.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibn Iyas provides his name, "Younus Etterdjuman," and Pagani relates that he was Veronese. Pagani, *Viaggio*, 19.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibn Iyas, IV, 316. 29 Rabi' 919; Sanudo, *Diarii*, XVII, 156.

first place, these agents were of course instrumental in brokering cross-cultural negotiations at all levels, whether they served ambassadors and consuls, merchants, or pilgrims. For all visitors, however, they did more than mediate, and their business could also include acting as guides and guardians, hosting foreigners in their homes, carrying on commercial dealings with Venetian traders, recovering lost goods, redeeming captives, and even more illicit ventures such as securing prostitution. It is a mistake to view the dragomans as “just interpreters,” in the same way that it is incorrect to consider consuls “just diplomats.” It is equally incorrect to view dragomans as passive interlocutors cut off from the reins of power, as other researchers have portrayed them.⁷⁴⁸ Because of the wide range of activities in which they engaged, and as a result of their interstitial position at points of contact between Mamluks and foreigners, it was vital that visitors secure their goodwill. The fact that that support came at the price of gifts of cash and commodities is not at all startling. People often refused to meet their dragomans’ demands, which is surprising given how dependent they were upon them as guides and mediators. Despite the obvious reciprocity involved, and the patently obvious benefit that Venetians and other foreigners derived from dragomans, writers still usually expressed resentment and argued that they had been cheated.

In other chapters, it was shown that whenever a semblance of mutual benefit was present, both parties typically accepted an exchange as equitable. Dragomans were an exception, however, owing to their liminal status; their linguistic and cultural fluidity made them targets of intense suspicion and even animosity. By occupying a third space that oscillated between familiar and unfamiliar, translators exposed themselves to chronic uncertainty in the eyes of their clients. Multilingualism, an ability to transcend boundaries, to defy easy categorization, that is,

⁷⁴⁸ Jean Delisle and Judith Woodsworth, eds., *Translators Through History* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1995), 127-9.

the very same qualities that enabled them to succeed in their profession, could also mark them as threatening or untrustworthy. Taghriberdi is an excellent example. The arc of his career and the complexities of his actions belie the simplistic label eventually assigned to him as “the greatest enemy of our nation,” or Fabri’s claim that he was a “wolf in sheep’s clothing.” The grand dragoman may have acted against the Venetians’ and the pilgrims’ best interests at certain points, but he also went out of his way to aid them at other times. In rescuing the Venetian merchants from the plague-ridden jails of Massara and taking them to his home, and in helping other western captives return to Europe, he could hardly be called an enemy either to Venice or to Christendom. Thus, although at times dragomans could turn affairs to their benefit, sooner or later they usually found themselves undone by the same people whom they served. Given the amount of suspicion that translators attracted, it is remarkable that Taghriberdi held his post for as long as he did. Ibn Iyas last mentioned Taghriberdi in 1513, upon the latter’s release from prison. Thereafter, the former grand dragoman vanishes from the historical record. Whether he died soon following his liberation or lived long enough to witness the Ottoman invasion in 1516 is entirely open to speculation. Given his spectacular talent for survival and his versatile ability to refashion his identity in new environments, though, it is not difficult to suppose that Taghriberdi outlasted the Mamluk Sultanate and found a position in the service of the new rulers of Egypt.

Epilogue: The Twilight of Contentious Coexistence

Lodovico: Is this the noble Moor
whom our full Senate
Call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake? Whose solid virtue
The shot of accident, nor dart of chance,
Could neither graze nor pierce?

Iago: He is much changed.

Othello, Act 4, Scene 1

This study opened with a passage from *Othello* to introduce the topic of gift giving between Venetians and Muslims. It was in precisely Shakespeare's lifetime that western European attitudes toward non-Christians become more hostile. The Mediterranean frontier became more starkly divided between Ottoman and Hapsburg zones in the later 1500s, with Cyprus itself, *Othello*'s island, falling to the Ottomans in 1571. Antipathy and enmity increasingly characterized Christian-Muslim encounters, and it was in precisely this climate that the familiar Orientalist caricature of the Islamic Other developed.⁷⁴⁹ Indeed, the image of the "Moor" was "much changed." Over the past five chapters, this analysis has shown that a unique historical moment of contentious coexistence linked Venice and Cairo at the turn of the sixteenth century. The subjects of the two regimes strove toward and largely achieved a framework for profitable interaction in which the transfer of goods shaped and influenced their relationship.

⁷⁴⁹ For a classic examination of Shakespeare's less sympathetic portrayals of Turks see John W. Draper, "Shakespeare and the Turk," *The Journal of English and German Philology* 55 no. 4 (1956): 523-532. See also Jerry Brotton, "Shakespeare's Turks and the Spectre of Ambivalence in the History Plays," *Textual Practice* 28, no. 3 (2014): 521-38 for a more recent critique. Brotton here traces the polarized concept of Christian-Ottoman binarity. Cf. the discussions of Pietro della Valle and Ogier de Busbecq in Bisaha, *Creating East and West*, 180-84, and the comments on Giovanni Botero in Valensi, *The Birth of the Despot*, 91-96.

By examining the overlooked role of objects in determining the course and outcome of these encounters, the active, flexible range of choices that Venetian and Mamluk subjects used to negotiate and communicate become apparent. Exchanges lacked a fixed significance, could be read in alternating ways, and were open to multiple interpretations. The fluidity of meanings contained in material exchanges often enabled Venetian and Mamluk interlocutors to cooperate and to avoid open conflict. At first glance, these regimes would seem to have been inherently opposed: on the one hand, a land-based Islamic sultanate of slave-warriors that stretched across two continents and regarded itself as the guardian of the sacred cities of Jerusalem, Mecca, and Medina; on the other, a maritime Christian republic with a history of assisting in some of the great crusading projects of the Middle Ages. Yet the two regimes cooperated, even in a time of crisis, by using precious commodities to continually reiterate and renegotiate the terms of their relationship. While conflict, and sometimes violence, did occur on an individual level between Venetian and Mamluk subjects, a full-scale confrontation between the two regimes never took place. Instead, a climate of contentious coexistence, in which Venetians and Mamluks both worked with, and struggled against one another, prevailed.

This special relationship involved both the use of objects and interpretations about their possession and transmission. Ambassadors relied on diplomatic gifts to communicate and fulfill their missions in Egypt. Venetian merchants sometimes colluded with Mamluk officials to defraud their own government, but at other times embraced the state embargo (*abbatalation*), using the refusal to trade as a means of exerting control over Muslim merchants. The giving of gifts as favors (*cortesia*), meanwhile, played a major role in facilitating the Venetian-Mamluk pilgrimage industry, but issues of theft and extortion of property belonging to Christian travelers to the Holy Land also acted as the primary catalyst for conflicts between the pilgrims and their

Muslim custodians. In the case of resident consuls, responsibilities for overseeing material exchanges between Venetians and Mamluks hindered their ability to fulfill their duties, while the receipt of robes of honor as gifts from the sultan transformed these officeholders into possessions themselves. Dragomans, finally, supplied their services in exchange for presents from their clients while also using their own gift giving strategies to carry out their tasks as intermediaries. Material possessions set the scene for a multitude of Venetian-Mamluk encounters, and their capacity for influencing interactions demonstrates the need to continue further inquiry into the role of objects as historical actors. In all these cases, transfers of material goods shaped and influenced the ways in which individual Venetian and Mamluk subjects negotiated with one another, while also affecting attempts by the two regimes to both compete and collaborate along the shifting fault lines of early modern global politics.

For Venetian history in particular, this study reveals the Serenissima's exceptional pursuit of a unique strategy of cross-cultural cooperation at a time when heightening ethnic antagonism occurred elsewhere. Between the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, an intractable degree of hostility appeared to characterize encounters between Christians and non-Christians in the Mediterranean and beyond. In Iberia, the phenomenon of *convivencia* collapsed completely, replaced by the atmosphere of zealous militarism that accompanied the final stages of the Reconquista. The Ottoman occupation of central Europe, similarly, led to an exodus of native Christian elites and the formation of a Christian-Muslim frontier in Hungary. From the Alhambra Decree, to the Siege of Vienna, to the Orientalized image of "the Turk" in Renaissance art and literature, the space for peaceful encounters would seem to have narrowed dramatically. The previous chapters have however demonstrated that, for a time, a space for contentious coexistence still functioned in the webs of material interaction between Venice and

Cairo. Through their pursuit of commercial self-interest, the Venetians inadvertently played a crucial part in keeping western contacts with the Dar al-Islam open just as the boundaries between these communities became more pronounced in other regions

The significance of this research extends well beyond the shared histories of Venice and Egypt. By exploring the symbolism contained in the objects that Venetians and Mamluks exchanged, by considering the ways in which different transactions constituted communicative acts, and by scrutinizing language to assess why observers chose to define transactions as licit or illicit, this study has reframed long-running discussions about the early modern Mediterranean, which dispute whether the region constituted an area of cultural confrontation or a shared zone of tolerance. Understanding where exchanges of goods aided cooperation between Venetians and Egyptians, and where they instead engendered hostility, shows that the two groups relied on objects to interact, communicate, and express their views of each other in lieu of open warfare. People from both regimes exploited the multiple, frequently ambiguous meanings of objects to arrive at a point where cooperation became possible. It was, moreover, precisely the ambiguity of such exchanges that made that partnership possible, for it masked sources of antagonism and allowed participants to avoid humiliation or a loss of honor.

The contributions drawn from anthropological and sociological literature on reciprocity and the gift have also shown that a reappraisal of the nature of Venetian-Mamluk relations is in order. Whether observers labeled them as licit or illicit, altruistic or self-interested, the many varieties of transactions shaded gradually into one another, and the lines between them were often very far from clear-cut.⁷⁵⁰ A model of exchange based on a binary opposition between generosity and self-interest, as articulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss, does not adequately describe

⁷⁵⁰ Cf. Malinowski, *Argonauts*, 188-9, 526-527; Sahlins, "On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange," 146-7.

the nuanced range of ways in which Venetian and Mamluk subjects used goods to do business and mediate conflict.⁷⁵¹ Erving Goffman's theory of strategic interaction offers more insight. When sharing in moments of ritualized, object-centered communication, they had to be willing to help one another save face and to engage in tactful blindness, in order for their transactions to succeed.⁷⁵² Much more important than whether members of the two regimes participated in an objectively fair deal was the issue of whether they succeeded in reaching a consensus that the exchange had been mutually beneficial. Regardless of whether a modern observer would identify such a bargain as equitable, what mattered was that it became so to participants and witnesses when they perceived reciprocity. Rather than stemming from either intercultural antagonism or simple Mamluk avarice, many of the "forced exactions" denounced by western visitors to the Sultanate resulted from a failure to arrive at a consensus concerning the meaning of an exchange.

Considerable insight can be gained through an analysis of specific, local interactions within the much larger context of cross-cultural, transcontinental developments.⁷⁵³ As a study of global history on a small scale, this research leads to a richer and more accurate understanding of Venetian-Egyptian collaboration in the Age of Discovery.⁷⁵⁴ Such a connected approach is necessary in order to avoid insular readings of Renaissance history that neglect Venice's sustained role as a node in a much larger world system of cultural contact and material exchange. Examining goods in this way has refocused attention on the neglected material factors that enabled partnership between Venice and Cairo at the turn of the sixteenth century, a point of interaction frequently overlooked in studies of European voyages of exploration. By highlighting

⁷⁵¹ Lévi-Strauss, "The Principle of Reciprocity," 52-68.

⁷⁵² Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 14-18, 31.

⁷⁵³ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 742-5.

⁷⁵⁴ See Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 271.

the connections linking Europe and Asia via the eastern Mediterranean, it frees Venice and Egypt from the shadows of the far larger Ottoman and Iberian empires, whose dominance by the year 1500 is often taken for granted. Reexamining Venice and its ties to the wider world provides a vital corrective to interpretations that overemphasize the strength of Lisbon and Istanbul in the late 1400s and early 1500s, a period when their ascendancy was still far from absolute. This examination therefore reintroduces a corrective degree of contingency back into history by underscoring the fact that Ottoman and Iberian supremacy was not yet a *fait accompli*. Instead, it was in this era that subjects of Venice and Cairo continued to pursue alternative strategies of interaction, founded on the exchange of material goods, and resulting in the fascinating phenomenon of contentious coexistence. But the circumstances that allowed for this situation would soon come to an end, placing Venice in a new relationship with the Mamluks' conquerors, the Ottomans.

* * *

Between the summer and winter of 1516, Venice's great trading partner, the Mamluk Sultanate, came toppling down with a rapidity that stunned contemporaries. The Ottoman ruler Selim I entered the citadel of Cairo on 12 February 1517, an act symbolically concluding the swift and decisive campaign that had brought the centuries-old Egyptian regime to its end.⁷⁵⁵

These new circumstances left the Venetian home government, which had been following reports

⁷⁵⁵ Ibn Iyas dates his ascent to the citadel as having occurred on 20 Muharram 923 (12 February 1517). Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, volume 5, 170; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d'un Bourgeois*, 154.

Cf. Emilio Lippi, "1517: L'ottava al Servizio del Sultano," *Quaderni Veneti* 34 (2001): 49-50.

According to Consul Thomaso Venier of Alexandria, Sultan al-Ghuri left Cairo with a large army with 15,000 cavalry and around 30 pieces of artillery in May of 1516. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 483. Selim I's wars with the border lords of southeastern Anatolia and Shah Ismail of Persia disturbed the balance of power along the Syrian frontier, and prompted Qansuh al-Ghuri's expedition against them. Unable to arrive at a negotiated settlement, the Mamluk and Ottoman armies engaged in a pitched battle at Marj Dabiq, near Aleppo, on 24 August 1516, in which al-Ghuri himself died and the Mamluks were routed. The Ottoman conquest of the sultanate took roughly six months, having begun in August 1516 and with the majority of operations concluded by January of 1517. Cf. Michael Winter, "The Ottoman Occupation," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, 490 ff.

of the war from its beginning in northern Syria, scrambling to develop an adequate response.⁷⁵⁶ Letters had been flowing in over the preceding months from Venetians living in the east who had become increasingly concerned about the possibility of a total Ottoman victory and what it might mean for both their safety and their economic interests.⁷⁵⁷ With the threat of a Turkish occupation looming, Andrea Arimondo, the resident consul in Syria, began an evacuation of merchants and their goods from Aleppo in August 1516. At the same time, consular officials struggled to keep one another and the home government apprised of the situation. A Venetian merchant reporting on the war from Cyprus, confessed that “I pray God does what is best for Christianity, because if the Turk defeats the Sultan, there will be great danger here, not just to property, but to life. May the Lord help us.”⁷⁵⁸

Yet despite their prayers for the defeat of the “Great Turk,” the Venetians proved ready to adapt when confronted with the bitter alternative: the annexation of Syria and Palestine into the Ottoman Empire. In October, a merchant vessel carrying cotton from Cyprus arrived in Venice with dispatches from Consul Arimondo in Damascus confirming reports of Sultan al-Ghuri’s death in battle with the Turkish army outside Aleppo.⁷⁵⁹ According to his letters, the consul and merchants had decided to barricade themselves in the fontego of Damascus, where they fearfully awaited Selim’s arrival in the city. When the Ottomans arrived in September, Arimondo gained a

⁷⁵⁶ A letter from the Venetian consul in Alexandria date 6 April reported that Qansuh al-Ghuri was preparing an army to campaign against Selim. Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 227. “Di Alexandria, fo letere di sier Tomax Venier consolo, di 6 April. Come l’armada dil Soldan contro portogalesi havia preso do charavele et tre butate a fondi di ditti portogalesi. Item, il signor Soldan preparava exercito contra il Turco, parli voy venir adosso.”

On the circulation of the news of the Ottoman conquest in Venice and its territories, see Benjamin Arbel, “La République de Venise face à la Conquête Ottomane de l’État Mamelouk,” in *Conquête ottoman de l’Égypte (1517), Arrière-plan, impact, échos*, ed. Benjamin Lellouch et al. (Boston: Brill, 2013), 113-142.

⁷⁵⁷ See, for example, records of the letters from Andrea Contarini, Donado Marzelo, Zuan Dolfin, and Nicolò Michiel in Cyprus, written in August 1516 and transcribed in Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 659.

⁷⁵⁸ “Prego nostro Signor Dio fazi quello sia il meglio per il christianesimo, perchè s’il Signor turcho rompesse il signor Soldan, de qui si staria in grandissimo pericolo, non solamente de la facultà, ma *etiam* de la vita. Il nostro Signor Dio sia quello ne ajuti in tutte cose nostre.” Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 660.

⁷⁵⁹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXIII, 106.

formal audience with the Turkish sovereign, giving him 1,500 ducats worth of gifts, probably in the form of silks. But even with this submissive largesse, the Ottomans denied the consul any opportunity to discuss how their conquest of the Levant would affect the Venetians.⁷⁶⁰ Though the consul was allowed to kiss Selim's hand in a gesture of deference, he found himself firmly forbidden from speaking to him. The gifts were perhaps not magnificent enough for the new ruler, and this failure of exchange underscores the fact that the older atmosphere of contentious coexistence was coming to an end. It was a fitting counterpoint to the presents and pomp that he had lavished on the Egyptian ruler just a few weeks earlier.

Across the Mediterranean, the home government addressed this crisis as news continued to arrive from the east. Al-Ghuri's defeat greatly concerned the Collegio, which, upon receipt of Arimondo's dispatch, remained in session until late in the night discussing the sudden turn of events. Confronted with this unwelcome reality, the council at length decided to send an embassy to Selim bearing the Serenissima's formal congratulations on his victory in Syria in the hopes that he would make his intentions toward Venetian interests known.⁷⁶¹ The government did so in the belief that Selim might still come to terms with the Mamluks, now led by the self-proclaimed sultan Tuman-Bay, and that the war might not be a complete Ottoman victory. By the time of the arrival of ambassadors Alvise Mocenigo and Bartolomeo Contarini in Egypt in the middle of the following year, however, Turkish forces had already dispersed the remnants of Egyptian resistance and had secured possession of Cairo.⁷⁶² According to Ibn Iyas, the conquest of the city was followed by pillaging and bloodshed, crowned by the public execution of captured members of the Mamluk elite. The chronicler asserted that the level of wanton destruction called to mind

⁷⁶⁰ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXIV, 20.

⁷⁶¹ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXIII, 106.

⁷⁶² Albèri, *Le Relazioni*, vol. 9, 52 ff.

the ruinous results of the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258.⁷⁶³ The reports of ambassadors Mocenigo and Contarini make it difficult to dismiss the words of Ibn Iyas as mere hyperbole. “Egypt and Syria are devastated. . . and the Lord Turk has deported the leading Cairenes, the rich merchants, to Constantinople and elsewhere, so Cairo is abandoned, its buildings in ruins,” observed Contarini.⁷⁶⁴

Although the final Venetian embassy to Egypt did take place in Cairo, the ambassadors discovered that much had changed since the last diplomatic mission to the Mamluks. Upon their arrival at the Turkish court, Contarini and Mocenigo were required to undergo a search for weapons before entering Selim’s chambers, and forced to consign their gifts, a rich set of satin fabrics embroidered with gold thread, to the sultan’s pashas upon arrival. Although their commission from the Collegio had given them explicit instructions to negotiate directly with Selim, they found that they, like Arimondo, were forbidden from speaking a single word to him, and instead allowed only to make a brief appearance, kiss his hand, and exit.⁷⁶⁵ Ottoman court officials afterward made the Porte’s position clear to the Venetians. The pashas explained to Contarini and Mocenigo that the sultan expected regular payments to him for the Cyprus tribute, (to be paid in cash, not camlet, since there would always be problems, they said, arising over the quality of such cloth).⁷⁶⁶ The idea had also arisen that the money still owed to Muslim lenders over the debts of the merchant common fund, or *cottimo*, would be canceled in the wake of the

⁷⁶³ Ibn Iyas, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i’ al-duhūr*, volume 5, 157; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d’un Bourgeois*, 151. The looting of Cairo was also described by Leo Africanus. Giovambattista Ramusio, ed., *Il Viaggio di Giovan Leone e le Navigazioni di Alvise da Ca Da Mosto, di Pietro di Cintra, di Annone, di un Piloto Portoghese e di Vasco di Gama* (Venice: Co’ Tipi di Luigi Plet, 1887), 150. For an overview of the conquest, see Benjamin Lellouch and Nicolas Michel, “Les Échelles de l’Événement,” in *Conquête ottoman de l’Égypte (1517), Arrière-plan, impact, échos*, edited by Benjamin Lellouch and Nicolas Michel (Boston: Brill, 2013), 1-50.

⁷⁶⁴ Albèri, ed., *Le Relazioni*, vol. 9, 62.

⁷⁶⁵ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXIV, 291; Albèri, *Le Relazioni*, 57-8.

⁷⁶⁶ Albèri, *Le Relazioni*, vol. 9, 60.

regime change, but these hopes were soon dashed.⁷⁶⁷ Rather than erasing the Venetians' debts, the Ottomans instead demanded that all money owed by Venetians to Mamluks who had helped finance the *cottimo* must be paid instead to Istanbul. According to the terms of the treaty drawn up between the Ottomans and Venetians, the Serenissima would make a payment of 8,000 ducats every two years for possession of Cyprus.⁷⁶⁸ All outstanding debts owed to individual Mamluk creditors would be paid to the Ottoman sultan. According to Selim's designs, Beirut and Alexandria were to become secondary sites of commercial activity, with the majority of business to be shifted instead to Istanbul.⁷⁶⁹ The ambassadors noted that the sultan was intent on directing commerce away from Syria and into the capital so that the collection of commercial profits would be easier to oversee.⁷⁷⁰ "He wants to cast down this empire of slaves, which was so rich and excellent, in order that it becomes wholly ruined," Contarini explained.⁷⁷¹

In the face of such clear plans, the new governors encountered difficulty maintaining control of their acquisitions. Although Mamluk rule in Egypt and Syria may well have been

⁷⁶⁷ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 19, f. 50 r ff. (2 January 1518). "Se ha visto per effecti grandissimi quanto siano sta le grandissime provision facter per questo consiglio per sublevation del cotimo de Damasco, hora trovandose el dicto cotimo in malissimo termine, per le mançarie grande et intolerabel spese e desordeni che sono seguiti e de continuo segueno cum gravissimo danno de esso cotimo, per la grandissima summa de danari el se ritrova debito, si á usura in mori, come debito in nostri, et e ridotto da novo nel pristino et pericoloso stato. Per il che e necessario far prestissima provision, per la qual non se incorri piu ne li errori passati. Hora havendo mirabel occasione di farlo, essendo el Serenissimo Signor Turcho facto signor pacifico de tuta la Soria, e pacificamente possieder el stado di schiavio, ita che per li advisi se hano el prefato summo signor Turco non permete simel manzarie per il che se die presumer che ditte spese extraordinarie et manzarie siano al tuto anichilate, se dali proprii nostri seguendo il stillo consueto, non li sia data la via et il modo di farlo incorer ne li errori, come per il passato é sta fatto." Cf ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, busta 947, "Liber del cotimo di Damasco," fol. 49 v.

⁷⁶⁸ ASVe, Commemoriali Registri 20, fol 60 r ff.

Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World, 1571-1640, 350. Ronald Jennings. After 1517, the Sublime Porte came to dictate the course of trade throughout the entire eastern Mediterranean, based on its own particular economic and political designs. Cyprus, the jewel of the Venetian Stato da Mar, afflicted by waves of plague, locusts, and cut off from the Syrian commerce on which it depended, entered a long period of stagnation.

⁷⁶⁹ Maria Pedani, "Venetians in the Levant in the Age of Selim I," in *Conquête ottoman*, 105-6.

⁷⁷⁰ Albèri, *Le Relazioni*, 62.

⁷⁷¹ Albèri, *Le Relazioni*, 62.

“tyrannical, exploitative, and arbitrary,” the Ottomans initially proved to be little better.⁷⁷² Ferhat Pasha, an administrator the Venetian *bailo* Pietro Bragadin described as an oppressor who “devoured the lands” of Egypt and Syria, is a case in point.⁷⁷³ His cruel and incompetent misrule of the former Mamluk territories engendered considerable hatred from the populace and led to his eventual arrest and execution under the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent.⁷⁷⁴ Far more troubling for Istanbul, however, were the series of revolts that took place in Egypt and Syria, first in 1520 under the leadership of a former Mamluk amir, and again in 1523 in an alliance of Mamluks, Bedouins, and Ottoman rebels.⁷⁷⁵ Though both uprisings were crushed in a matter of months, they were indicative of the weaknesses of the Porte’s control over its new provinces. Through a set of reforms initiated under Suleiman and his grand vizier Ibrahim Pasha, major innovations in the Egyptian and Levantine administrations subsequently brought the territories firmly under Ottoman control. They would remain so for the next three centuries, functioning as subordinate commercial entrepôts and supplying the Sublime Port with valuable merchandise imported from Asia and the Indian Ocean. The result, noted the Venetian *bailo* Gianfrancesco Morosini in the late 1500s, was the “utmost abundance” of exotic goods in the markets in Istanbul, where foreign traders flocked to buy silk, muslin, and spices shipped in from Syria and Alexandria.⁷⁷⁶

The turbulent events of this period brought other dramatic changes as well, with the conquest affecting even the way that Venetians remembered the former regime. It is at this moment that the previous rulers of Egypt cease appearing in the documents as “Mamluks”

⁷⁷² Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule*, 193.

⁷⁷³ Albèri, *Le Relazioni*, 107.

⁷⁷⁴ Albèri, *Le Relazioni*, 107.

⁷⁷⁵ Geoffrey Rudolph Elton, ed., *The New Cambridge Modern History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 571.

⁷⁷⁶ Albèri, *Le Relazioni*, 107.

(*Mamelucchi*) and instead become “slaves” (*schiavi*). Observers in earlier years had referred to the state as the “Sultanate of Cairo,” but this now underwent a terminological devolution, becoming a “dominion of slaves” (*dominio de schiavi*).⁷⁷⁷ What made for such a sharp linguistic departure? Certainly a Mamluk was, in a sense, a slave, having been purchased in childhood to train as a warrior. But prior to 1516-17, both Egyptian and Venetian writers had always been very careful to distinguish members of this unique military caste from mere slaves. With the fall of that regime, Venetians abandoned the terminological discrepancy and instead adopted a language that delegitimized the sultanate of Cairo by portraying its government as a debased empire of servitude. Such language sought to efface the memory of Mamluk magnificence, humbling this once-proud elite by reducing them to the status of objects and possessions.

While the Sublime Porte incorporated Egypt and the Levant into its already vast empire, the Mamluk Sultanate’s southeastern salient came under attack from the Portuguese. Since 1497, fleets from Portugal had actively raided Muslim ships and ports in the Indian Ocean. In February 1509, Mamluk attempts at resistance at sea had been crushed in a disastrous naval defeat near Diu, on the west coast of the subcontinent.⁷⁷⁸ Ibn Iyas, who witnessed the devastation wrought by both the Ottomans and Portuguese, described the effects of the “Frankish” naval presence near the Arabian Peninsula in detail: “twenty of their ships dared to enter the Red Sea and to attack the vessels coming from India, ambushing the convoys and seizing their cargoes, blocking

⁷⁷⁷ See, for example, ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Mar, reg. 19, fol. 41 r (24 September 1517), “e necessario far urgentissima provisione qual sia de sorte che piu non se incorri in tal necessita et intessi, et precipue hora chel Serenissimo Signor Turco pacificamente possed et impera il stato et la *signoria de schiavi*, ita che per quello se intende el prefato Serenissimo Signor Turco come e de suo costume non permette simel manzaria per la qual cosa le spese straordinarie, le male usanze, et pessime manzarie seranno cessate;” ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, b. 946/947, fol. 49 v. “essendo il summo signor Turcho fatto signor pacifico di tuta la Soria et pacificamente possieder *el stado de schiavi*.”

⁷⁷⁸ Edward A. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 74.

imports; as a result, it was very difficult to find muslin, canvas, and linens.”⁷⁷⁹ At the port of Yanbu al-Bahr, the Portuguese “routed the fighters, killed many Bedouins warriors, burned the houses along the coast, and destroyed many of the shops.”⁷⁸⁰ The impact on the city of Alexandria alone was readily apparent. Ibn Iyas noted that “the merchants of Europe and Morocco stopped coming to the city, hastening its demise. It was said that one could scarcely find any food to buy, even bread. A few shops were open, but most were sealed up, devoid of merchandise.” The Mamluk chronicler’s unusually profound note of despair in this passage is apparent: “and to think that Alexandria was formerly one of the most beautiful cities in the world,” he added.⁷⁸¹ By 1518, with the creation of their Viceroyalty of India, the Portuguese had taken possession of the key ports of Malacca, Hormuz, Colombo, and Goa.⁷⁸² As a result of the Ottoman and Portuguese campaigns, therefore, the invisible threads running from South Asia to Venice began to dissolve.⁷⁸³

In their place, new links between Lisbon and the Indian Ocean solidified due to Portugal’s violent incursions into the east. The steady stream of goods from Asia to Iberia, the outcome of the *Carreira da India* route, are apparent in the postmortem inventory of the estate of Beatriz, Infanta of Portugal, composed in 1506. In this document, the material splendor of the early Portuguese empire, stemming from its rapid expansion overseas, is clearly discernible. The

⁷⁷⁹ Ibn Iyas, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i’ al-duhūr*, volume 4, 109; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d’un Bourgeois*, 106.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibn Iyas, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i’ al-duhūr*, volume 4, 90; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d’un Bourgeois*, 91.

⁷⁸¹ "و لم يكن بثغر الإسكندرية يومئذ أحد من أعيان التجار لا من المسلمين ولا من الفرنج. وكانت المدينة غاية الخراب بسبب ظلم النائب و جور القباض، فإنهم صاروا يأخذون من التجار العشر عشرة أمثال، فامتنع تجار الفرنج و المغاربة من الدخول إلى الثغر، فتلاشى أمر المدينة و آل أمرها إلى الخوات، حتى قيل طلب الخبز بها فلم يوجد و لا الأكل، و وُجد بها بعض دكاكين مفتحة و البقية خراب لم تفتح. و كان الإسكندرية من أجل مدائن الدنيا." Ibn Iyas, *Badā’i’ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i’ al-duhūr*, volume 4, 424; Ibn Iyas, *Journal d’un bourgeois*, 391.

⁷⁸² Alpers, *The Indian Ocean*, 74.

⁷⁸³ “Du point de vue vénitien, la conquête ottomane de l’État mamelouk faisait suite à d’autres événements traumatisants du début du XVI^e siècle: la circumnavigation e l’Afrique par les Portugais, qui remettait en question le rôle central de la République dans le commerce international des épices; la guerre de la Ligue de Cambrai (1509-1517), qui avait mené les ennemis de Venise jusqu’aux abords de la lagune, menaçant l’existence même de la Sérénissime; et la dernière guerre avec l’Empire ottoman qui s’était conclue en 1503 par la perte de plusieurs territoires outre-mer.” Arbel, “La République de Venise face à la Conquête Ottomane,” 138.

Infanta, in addition to owning exotic animals, gold, silver, and slaves, was at the time of her death in possession of rare drugs, pearls, coral, sapphires, emeralds, rubies, benzoin resin incense, and hundreds of pounds of sugar. Beatriz also owned two civet cats, whose musk was a substance coveted in the production of early modern perfumery.⁷⁸⁴ Thus, what the Venetians acquired at enormous expense through diplomatic and commercial engagement with the Mamluks, the crown of Portugal took through force. The Ottomans and Portuguese would spend the rest of the century struggling for mastery over the Indian Ocean and the luxury goods found in this vast maritime region.⁷⁸⁵

This is not to say that the Venetian presence in the eastern Mediterranean vanished overnight, or that its commercial contacts with Asia suddenly collapsed. Trade underwent a gradual evolution: although the state-run *muda* convoy system did decrease in the sixteenth century, private shipping became more viable.⁷⁸⁶ By the same token, while Alexandria, Beirut, and Damascus were less profitable destinations, Venetian merchants made money further inland, at Cairo and Aleppo. Even so, a discernible downward trajectory in the former Mamluk Empire, with a significant demographic decline in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine in the mid-1500s, occurred. The population of Cairo, which had enjoyed great prosperity in the fifteenth century, had fallen by perhaps as much as 30% by about 1550.⁷⁸⁷ In addition, the political and economic center of gravity undeniably moved to Istanbul, where the sultans and their pashas issued their commercial capitulations (*ahdname*) and dealt directly with the Venetian *bailo*, alongside representatives of

⁷⁸⁴ A.B. Freire, "Inventário da infanta D. Beatriz 1507," *Arquivo Historico Português* 9 (1914): 64-110.

⁷⁸⁵ Ernst Van Veen, "The European-Asian Relations during the 16th and 17th Centuries in a Global Perspective," in *Rivalry and Conflict: European Traders and Asian Trading Networks in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, ed. Ernst Van Veen et al. (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2005), 6-23.

⁷⁸⁶ Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 2, 299-300, 392.

⁷⁸⁷ Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 434.

other European nations.⁷⁸⁸ Relations between Venice and the Ottomans, based on a highly asymmetrical balance of power, should be seen in stark contrast to the more contingent, negotiated relationship that existed between Venice and the Mamluk Sultanate.

The phenomenon of contentious coexistence that had characterized Venetian-Mamluk relations did not, therefore, continue after 1517. A host of events permanently altered the political and economic climate of the eastern Mediterranean, and led to Venice's increasing economic and military inferiority with respect to the Ottoman Empire. Whereas the Sublime Porte continued its ascent as a leading world power after the conquest of Cairo, the Serenissima inexorably lost influence and strength.⁷⁸⁹ With the fall of the Mamluk Sultanate, the only center of diplomatic activity in the region became Istanbul, where Venice's ambassadors and consuls approached the leaders of the regime as supplicants rather than as political actors with real negotiating power. At the same time, the sixteenth century saw the Turkish capital replace Alexandria, Beirut, and Damascus as the major mercantile hub of eastern commerce. With the fall of Rhodes in 1522 and the expulsion of the Franciscans from the Holy Land in 1551, pilgrimage to the east also declined.⁷⁹⁰ Even methods for recruiting dragomans had by the late 1500s been institutionalized in Venice, where the republic trained a select group of professional

⁷⁸⁸ Leo Africanus, who was in Egypt shortly before the Turkish conquest, remarked on the palaces of Cairo, writing "ne sono alcuni dove il soldano soleva fare i conviti pubblici, o dare udienza agli imbasciatori, e mostrar la sua pompa con gran cerimonie; e altri per gli ufficiali deputati al governo della sua corte: ma tutti questi ordini al presente sono stati levati via e annichilati da Selim granturco." Ramusio, ed. *Il Viaggio di Giovan Leone*, 151.

⁷⁸⁹ "In questi termini, Venezia era una potenza secondaria ed il ruolo da essa svolto in tale periodo sul piano politico-militare non poteva che essere marginale. Questo le regalò alcuni anni di pace, ma il senato si rendeva ben conto che la conquista dell'Egitto e la successiva espansione turca lungo la costa africana comportavano un incremento dei contatti e dei traffici tra Costantinopoli ed il Mediterraneo central, in seguito al quale i possessi veneziani di Cipro e Candia avrebbero finito per risultare dei corpi estranei, se non dei veri e propri ostacoli all'omogeneità dell'Impero ottomano." Giuseppe Gullino, "Le frontiere navali," in *Storia di Venezia IV*, eds. Alberto Tenenti and Ugo Tucci (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1995), 13-111.

⁷⁹⁰ Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, vol. 1, 130-1. John V. Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 206-233

translators with proven loyalties to the state.⁷⁹¹ The ambassadors, merchants, pilgrims, consuls, and dragomans who inhabit the preceding chapters would not, in other words, have recognized the Mediterranean world of the late sixteenth century.

The gifts consigned to the Ottoman court in the 1500s reflect Venice's posture of increased deference, and stand in marked contrast to the routinized presents that earlier ambassadors brought to Cairo. Such objects included not only textiles, furs, and Murano glass, but also gems, a unicorn (narwhal) horn, a jewel encrusted saddle, armor and arms adorned with gold, silver, and pearls, as well as devices such as clocks, pipe organs, and mechanical automata.⁷⁹² The relationship between Istanbul and Venice was such that the sultan and his lieutenants issued demands for specific gifts, which the *bailo* was expected to fulfill as one of his many duties of office.⁷⁹³ While the Ottomans sometimes financed the acquisition of more elaborate or unusual requests (for example, Suleiman the Magnificent's famous crown that the Caorlini brothers manufactured in 1532), Venetians often provided the objects gratis simply to cultivate goodwill.⁷⁹⁴ Gifts, in this climate, had become a form of outright tribute from Venice to Istanbul, paid regularly to the leading members of the Ottoman court.⁷⁹⁵

Among the many rich and marvelous objects that the Venetians dispatched to the Porte after the fall of Cairo, one of the strangest is a piece of poetry. This *Vita e Gesta di Selim I*

⁷⁹¹ Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 165 ff.

⁷⁹² Sanudo, *Diarii*, LV, 636; Pompeo Molmenti and Horatio F. Brown, trans., *Venice: Its Individual Growth from the Earliest Beginnings to the Fall of the Republic* (Chicago: McClurg, 1906), 130; Julian Raby "The Serenissima and the Sublime Porte: Art in the Art of Diplomacy, 1453-1600," in *Venice and the Islamic World*, 102-4.

⁷⁹³ In this context, Gentile Bellini's 1479 visit to Istanbul, where he painted his famous portrait of Mehmet II, is noteworthy. Although he worked as a paid court painter, his presence and the artwork he produced for the Porte ought to be regarded as a kind of gift from Venice to the Ottoman Empire. See Caroline Campbell et al., *Bellini and the East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). Cf. Carboni, *Venice and the Islamic World*, 95-96.

⁷⁹⁴ In this case, the Ottoman ruler evidently paid for this spectacular piece of headgear. Gülru Necipoğlu, "Suleiman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal Rivalry," *Art Bulletin* 71, no. 3 (1989): 401-27. Cf. Raby, "The Serenissima," 95-96.

⁷⁹⁵ "In the absence of regular tribute, the Venetians had to make sporadic, but frequent, gifts to members of the Ottoman court." Raby, "The Serenissima," 95.

Sultano is a Venetian victory oration written in 1518 to congratulate the ruler on his conquest of Egypt.⁷⁹⁶ A striking example of the new pattern of gift giving that characterized Venetian-Turkish relations, the anonymous poem was only recently discovered in Treviso's Biblioteca Comunale. Consisting of nine cantos dedicated to the martial prowess of the Ottoman sultan, the author explained his unusual choice of subject matter by saying that the great sea of Selim's achievements had driven his poetic "ship of genius" to sing the praises of the sultan.⁷⁹⁷ The work covers much of the Turkish ruler's career through a total of eight thousand lines of rhyming verse, and probably took the author several years to finish.

The result is a strange mixture of humanist rhetoric, replete with laments over the fickle nature of Fortune and abundant classical references, coupled with the theme of Selim's God-given destiny to rule over a new world empire. "O Sultan," the poet admonishes al-Ghuri during his account of the Battle of Marj Dabiq, "wretched you are, who will be buried, and whose pride has angered God."⁷⁹⁸ Yet even in an epic poem celebrating the Ottoman conqueror, the author could not resist a lengthy excursus on the generosity and magnificence of Venetian gift giving with the Mamluks. In describing the arrival of the Egyptian army at the outset of al-Ghuri's failed expedition against Selim, he wrote the following:

Then the Mamluks, armed with lance and sword / In ranks under their great banner / All came with dignity / And infinite pride, and high stateliness / And it suited them / To go along a street where dwelt the Venetians / A place administered / By Andrea Rimondo, honored consul / Who had the road where /

⁷⁹⁶That is, Treviso, Biblioteca Comunale, Ms. 4700, which was discovered several years ago by Emilio Lippi. For a brief English overview, see Emilio Lippi, "Born to Rule the World: An Italian Poet Celebrates the Deeds of the Sultan Selim I," *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi* 19, no. 1 (2004): 87-92. For a more detailed discussion in Italian, see "Per Dominar il Mondo al Mondo Nato: Vita e Gesta di Selim I Sultano (Prima Parte)," *QV* 40 (2004), 17-20. I extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Lippi and the staff of the Treviso municipal library for their generous assistance with this document.

⁷⁹⁷ Lippi, "Per Dominar il Mondo, (Prima Parte)", 29.

⁷⁹⁸ Lippi, "Per Dominar il Mondo al Mondo Nato (Parte Terza)," *QV* 43 (2006): 68.

The sultan came with his hardened men / adorned with cloth of gold and silk /
 Most nobly on all sides / And burned thirty torches to show / That just as the day
 was bright, and the sun shining / Even greater was his magnificence and his love
 for him. / And throwing countless serif-coins before him / For the greater glory of
 his state / He placed bags of cloth of gold and silk / Before that esteemed lord /
 Because none could rival him in *cortesía*. / And thus this sultan was grateful / and
 his mind could not be changed / And so he would not seem to lack in kindness /
 He freed the Venetians from all taxation.⁷⁹⁹

The scene, possibly derived from the same letters transcribed by Marin Sanudo or perhaps even an eyewitness account, stands out of place in the larger scheme of the poem. The magnificent spectacle of this last encounter between the consul and the sultan, with the attention drawn to the lavish displays of Venetian gifts, in fact outshines efforts to celebrate Selim elsewhere in the verses. Therein lies the problem of the text: since its discovery, the exact purpose of this anonymous epic remains unclear.⁸⁰⁰ It may well constitute an experiment in gift giving, a rather creative Venetian attempt to use Renaissance rhetoric to please the Ottoman conqueror of Cairo. Yet if read as a piece of tragic irony rather than self-serving panegyric, it might instead represent an epitaph to the phenomenon of contentious coexistence.

This study has traced the mobilization of objects within the context of conflict and collaboration between the Mamluk and Venetian empires from 1480 to 1517. Faced with worsening political and economic conditions in this period, the subjects of these two regimes continued to use a consistent set of exchange practices to maintain their commercial and diplomatic ties despite the impact of grave crises at home and abroad. Instead of innovating with

⁷⁹⁹ Lippi, “Per Dominar il Mondo, (Terza Parte),” 51.

⁸⁰⁰ Lippi has suggested that the anonymous author sought the financial patronage of Selim, to whom it is dedicated, through this epic poem. See his introductory comments in Lippi, ed., “Per Dominar il Mondo, (Prima Parte), 17-18.

new strategies of diplomatic gift giving, forms of tribute, or other means of conciliation, the people of Venice and Cairo relied on the tried and true methods of an earlier era. That their exchange practices endured right up to 1517 is a testament to the efficacy of these strategies, which had developed to guarantee stability over the course of generations of interaction. In the wake of the Ottoman conquest of Cairo, Venice's power throughout the Mediterranean waned. The republic confronted a narrower, more inflexible range of material possibilities for negotiating with the rulers of Istanbul. As Venice faced the new political realities of the sixteenth century, it would be forced to navigate an increasingly fine line between the boundaries of Christendom and the Dar al-Islam.

Appendix

Venetian-Mamluk Gift Lists, c. 1489-1516

A) Gifts of the 1489-90 Embassy⁸⁰¹

“Copia di presenti del signor Soldan et altri Signori, consignadi per la illustrissima Signoria al magnifico miser Pietro Diedo kavalier ambassador a dicto signor Soldan. Et prima:
Per el signor Soldan cavezi 19.

Casa 1 numero 5.	braccia 23
veludo alexandrin in do pelli	braccia 13
raxo verde scuro	braccia 11 ½
raxo bianco	braccia 23
raxo arzentin	braccia 23
raxo festechin	braccia 23
pano d'oro alexandrin in uno oro	braccia 13
raxo lionado	braccia 23
pano d'oro verde in un oro	braccia 13
restagno d'oro richo	braccia 13
raxo alatado	braccia 23
veludo verde in do pelli	braccia 23
pano d'oro cremexin in un oro	braccia 13
raxo cremexin	braccia 23
raxo color de paia	braccia 23
restagno d'oro	braccia 13
veludo color danera in do pelli	braccia 23
veludo cremexin alto e basso	braccia 23
veludo cremexin in do pelli	braccia 23
presentati fuerunt domino Sultano die 17 decembris 1489. per cancellarium et per Franciscum Teldi. numero 8.	
panno scarlato de cento	pichi 1
scarlato de 80	pichi 1
paonazo de 80	pichi 1

⁸⁰¹ ASVe, Archivi propri degli ambasciatori, Archivio proprio Egitto, b. 1. Document 17, f. 9 r. ff and Document 138, f. 67 r ff. Cf. Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 78-83; 225.

saia bianca
presentati fuerunt domino Sultano.

pichi 1

numero 1
baril de vari numero 3000 grandio cum zebelin
80 dentro in mazi do presentati fuerunt ut
supra.

numero 2
armelini mille in uno bariletto
presentati fuerunt ut supra.

formazo peze 40 in casse 5 ... habuit
serenissimus Sultanus

numero
22
3
24 peze 8 per una.
25
26

Per la Soldanessa cavezi 12.

cassa 1 .n. 7.	
restagno d'oro	braccia 13
raxo arzentin	braccia 11 ½
veludo cremexin in do pelli	braccia 13
raxo color de paia	braccia 11 ½
raxo allatado	braccia 13
raxo verde scuro	braccia 13
raxo bianco	braccia 11 ½
damaschin pel de lion	braccia 13
raxo lionado scuro	braccia 11 ½
tella de Rens in do cavezi	braccia 86

Presentati fuerunt domino Sultano quia Regina
non fuit nec visitata nec presentata quia non est
de more.

Per Isbech grande armiraglio

cassa 1 numero 9.	
pano d'oro verde in un oro	braccia 13
veludo alexandrin in do pelli	braccia 11 ½

pano d'oro alexandrin in un oro
 veludo colo danera in do pelli
 scarlato de cento
 scarlato de 80
 paonazo de 80
 formazi casse 3 a peze 4 per cassa

braccia 13
 braccia 11 ½
 braccia 8
 braccia 8
 braccia 9

10
 numero 11
 12
 numero 3
 vari baril 1. numero 1000
 habuit et ser Franciscus Teldi consignavit et
 habuit tantum varos quingentos.

Per el memendar
 numero 16.

raxo lionado schuro
 scarlato de 100
 scarlato de 80
 paonazo de 80

braccia 11 ½
 braccia 4
 braccia 4
 braccia 4

13

numero 15
 formazi peze in una cassa
 habuit et Baptista interpres tulit die XVII

Per el diodar granda

cassa 1 numero 6.
 raxo lionado schuro
 raxo allatado
 velludo collo danera in do pelli
 panno scarlato
 panno paonazo
 raxo arzentin
 raxo verde mezo collar

braccia 11 ½
 braccia 11 ½
 braccia 12
 braccia 8
 braccia 8
 braccia 11 ½
 braccia 11 ½

formazi casse 2 a peze 4 per 1
 numero 13
 14
 habuit cum additione unius veste auree in uno
 aureo dei XVII, ex assignatis admiratio in
 varos quingentos ex assignatis ut supra.

Per i do armiraglio de Alexandria per mità
numero 17

pano scarlato de 80	braccia 16
panno paonazo de 80	braccia 17
panno paonazo per el turziman di armiragli	braccia 5
raxo lionado schuro	braccia 23
raxo arzentin	braccia 23

formazi casse 2 a peze 4 per cassa

numero 18

19

Campsum armiraglio del castello hebbe la mità del antescritto presente. L'armiraglio de Alexandria hebbe el contrascritto suo presente. Zanibech truciman de l'armiraglio hebbe una vesta de scarlato in loco de la paonaza et peza una formazo.

A dì XXVIII novembris 1489

El presente de Campsum portò Domenego et Francesco da Bressa et Dolphin. Quel de l'armiraglio portò Francesco da Bressa cum altri del grippo. Quel del truciman portò Domenego et Philipppo.

Per el catibisser

numero 21

panno scarlato de 80 ⁸⁰²	braccia 8
paonazo de 80	braccia 9
raxo bianco schuro	braccia 11 ½
raxo verde mezo collar	braccia 11 ½
raxo alexandrin	braccia 11 ½
raxo festechin	braccia 11 ½

numero 20

formazo peze 5

numero 4

vari 500

habuit ultra deputatam vestem unam auream in

⁸⁰² Significant damage to the page makes the transcription of the next three lines an approximation. The words from this section are drawn from Rossi's reading of the manuscript.

uno auro die XVIII, consignatam per
cancellarium et turciman et Baptistam.

Per Tangavardi turziman grande
numero 28
formazi peze 2

numero 27
groppo 1 ducati 50
A di XI decembris 1489 hebbe i antescripti
ducati L, item le do peze de formazo

Per Camber turciman secondo
numero 29
scarlato de 80 cavezo 1 solo

braccia 4

numero 30
peza 1 formazo

Questo scrivan del nadracas se chiama [. . .]
ha havuto paonazo per una vesta che portò
Feres.

Item Temerdes memendar secondo ha habuto
vesta una scarlato de 100 et pichi 13 de raxo
cremexin comprato et peze do formazo.

Al miriacur veste do de scarlato de cento, do
paonazo, vesta una raxo verde et una
alexandrina, peze 3 formazi.

Al nadracas vesta una raxo arzentin, una de
scarlato de cento, una de scarlato de 80 et una
paonaza de cento et peze 3 formazi

Al diodar del diodar secondo scarlato de cento,
vesta una, et peza una formazi

Al diodar secondo 2 veste de scarlato de cento,
2 paonaze de 80, 2 veste de raxo et una peze 2
formazi

Al naibo del catibisser una vesta de raxo, una
de scarlato, una paonaza et una peza de
formazo

Al scrivan de la dachiera una vesta de scarlato,
una paonazo et una peza de formazo.

MCCCCLXXXX a di XXVII marzo del
Cayero

Presenti mandati a casa per el signor Soldan et consignati a mi, Zuane Borgi, secretario ducal, cum ordine de presentarli a la illustrissima Signoria, et prima.

Una vesta de seda lavorada cum oro ala turchesca, fodrà de armelini, da esser presentada a la illustrissima Signoria per la conclusion facta in le cose de Cypri.

Piadene de porzelana basse senza oro, bianche, lavorà de azuro	numero 12
Piadene de porzelana verde cum oro	numero 2
Mersori de porzelana lavoradi a azuro	numero 2
Cadini de porzelana verde	3 a fogliame et 2 a sonde numero 5
Scudelle bianche schiete de porzelana	numero 5
Scudelle bianche de porzelana lavorate a azuro	numero 8
volue	
Pezze de sessa, do de L, tre mostoli, do sempsi et do mahiar, summa pezza	numero 9
Saburi bianchi peze	numero 4
Legno aloe cum l'imboglio, rotoli	25
Benzui cum l'imboglio, rotoli	45
Zibeto in do corni, oncie	7
Una ampola de balsamo	
Do scatolle de tiriacha cum bossoli 5 per una. Summa bossoli	numero 10
Scatole cum mixtura et polvere da ochi et bossoleti do de tyriacha arba per una	numero 10
Zuchari cantara 2, pani	numero 51

Zucharo candi biancho, scatole basse numero 2

Monede 97 1/2

“Questa io scrivo solamente a vostra magnificentia per dechiarirli come heri cum el nome del Spirito Sancto fui vestito da questo excellentissimo signor Soldan et benignamente spazato. La vesta è de seda cum oro ala turchescha, fodrata de armelini. Fo etiam vestito el reverendissimo monsignor Malipiero et similiter Alvisè de Piero, mio coadiutor, servitor de vostra magnificentia. Domane harò i presenti et la vesta per la investition de Cypri.”⁸⁰³

B) Gifts of the 1503 Embassy⁸⁰⁴

“A di 19. el Signor Soldan mandò uno presente al magnifico Orator nostro, zoè castroni 20, galine 100, pani 40 de zucheri, miel, onto sottil, et inter 100 ...”

“Uno presente multo solenne, zoè de pani doro et de seta de deverse sorte et colori, et pani scarlati et paonazi, pele de zebelini et martori, et assai peze de formazo molto grande.”

“Fo mandato per el Signor Soldan uno altro presente, el qual fo de zuchari cantara 1, castroni 12, galline para 12, nosperseghi, armelini, pomi, et anguri 7 da aqua.”

A di 3. lujo el magnifico Orator cavalcò al castello per tuor licenzia dal Signor Soldan; et zonti li el Soldan lo fece vestir duna vesta doro et de seda, fodrata de armelini, et con quella tornasemo a casa con triumpho.

“A di 10 lujo el Soldan mandò lo infrascripto presente al orator da esso presentado alla nostra illustrissima Signoria

Porzelane tra grande et pichole numero 20

Sette peze numero 5

Belzui rotoli numero 30

Legno aloè rotoli numero 15

Zibeto corno uno de onze numero 4

Zucharo pani numero 50

Presente dado al magnifico orator in sua specialita

Legno aloè rotoli numero 5

Belzui rotoli numero 5

Porzelane numero 5

Et ducati numero 200

⁸⁰³ Rossi, *Ambasciata straordinaria*, 220.

⁸⁰⁴ Danese, “Viaggio di Benedetto Sanudo,” Marciana Cod. Ital. XI, 66 c. 265 r. - c. 270 v. Cf. D. Pellegrini, ed., *Relazione inedita d'un viaggio al Cairo*, *Giornale dell'Italiana Letteratura* 9 (1805): 99-133.

C) Gifts of the 1512 Embassy⁸⁰⁵

“Il giorno seguente al giunger nostro il Serenissimo Signor Soldano mandò a presentare la Magnificenza dell’Ambasciatore di questo presente per suo vivere, cioè:

Pani di zucchero da L. 4 l’uno	numero 44
Pignatte di miele d’India	numero 5
Pignatte di unto sottile	numero 2
Castroni	numero 40
Galline	paja 50
Oche	numero 20
Sacchi di riso	numero 2

“Lista del presente mandato al Serenissimo Soldano, a mezzo del Magnifico Ambasciatore Veneziano.

Panno d’oro soprarizzo in campo pavonazzo da 30 ducati al braccio	Vesta 1
Panno d’oro soprarizzo cremesin	ves. 1
Ristagno d’oro	ves. 2
Campo d’oro cremesin	ves. 2
Campo d’oro Alessandrin	ves. 2
<hr/>	
Ori – Veste .	8
Velluto alto basso cremesin	Veste 2
Velluto piano cremesin	ves. 3
Velluto verde pian	ves. 3
Velluto lionado pian	ves. 3
Velluto pavonazzo pian	ves. 3
<hr/>	
Velluti – Veste .	14
Raso bianco	Veste 2
Raso beretin	ves. 3
Raso turchin	ves. 3
Raso color di paglia	ves. 3
Raso verde scuro	ves. 3
Raso verde chiaro	ves. 3
Raso lionado	ves. 2
Raso cremesin	ves. 6

⁸⁰⁵ Barozzi, *Viaggio di Domenico Trevisan*, 22 ff.

Raso Alessandrin	ves. 1
<hr/>	
Rasi – Veste .	26
Damascho Alessandrin	Veste 1
Damschino lionado	Ves. 1
<hr/>	
Damaschini – Veste	2
Tra oro e seda	Veste 50
Panno scarlatto da 100 e da 80	ves. 42
Panno pavonazzo <i>ut supra</i>	ves. 8
<hr/>	
Panni – Veste	50
In tutto tra ori, sete e panni	Veste 100
Zibellin mazzi 3	numero 120
Vari dossi	numero 4500
Armellin mazzi 2	numero 400
Formaggio piacentino da L. 80 l'una, pezze	numero 50

Il quale presente fu portato davanti esso Signor Soldano quando era seduto sopra il mastabe che aspettava la Magnificenza dell'Ambasciatore. E poi fu portato in una sala grande per fino al compire della udienda nostra, la qual finite et ritornati noi a casa come ho detto di sopra, la Magnificenza dell'Oratore chiamò il Torcimano ed io, e mandonne subito ambidue a consegnare esso presente al prefato Signor Soldano perchè così è costume de qui. E in compagnia del Torcimano Veronese andassimo a consegnar il detto presente. Primo entrassimo in castello per quella via che entrassimo col Magnifico Orator, ma poi fossimo condotti per altre parti, dove ascendendo una scala entrammo in una sala superbissima assai più bella di quella dell'udienda della Illustrissima Signoria nostra di Venezia. Il soglio tutto a musaico di porfidi, serpentini, marmi e altre pietre gentili, e quasi tutto coperto di un tappeto. Il soffitto tutto intagliato e dorato, finestre di bronzo in luogo di ferrate. In detta sala si trovava il Signor Soldano a canto una finestra sopra un giardinetto pieno di aranci, colla sua scimitarra e brocchiere da un lato, seduto sopra un cuscino ed un scagnetto ambedue alti circa un piede, ed era scalzo e senza scarpe, mostrando i piedi nudi. Aveva in capo un altro conciere di fez come porta l'Ammiraglio di Alessandria, il quale è alto e senza corni; e così entrati in detta sala fossimo per il suo Torcimano introdotti ambedue, cioè il Torcimano e io avanta sua Sublimità, lontani circa due passi e così stando, e noi mirando la sua presenza, per essergli vicino parvemi vedere un Signore di aspetto gravissimo e superbissimo, uomo di 60 anni, abbenchè alcuni dicono 70. L'abarba nera, pochi peli bianchi introclusi, viso bruno, non molto rapato, grasso e pianciuto. Il nome suo è Campsum Grani, e si faceva portara avanti di è i presenti ad uno ad uno, e gardatili li mandava via; ora finito di vedere detto presente, sua Sublimità chiamò il Torcimano di Damasco il qual era dietro a me, e gli disse in lingua araba che ci dovesse riferire, che il presente gli aveva piaciuto molto, perchè era bello, ma assai più la presenza del Magnifico Ambasciatore, per essere uomo grave e maturo, e non giovane, perchè hanno il cervello sopra la beretta. Queste parole mi fece dire il Soldano per il Torcimano”

“Fossimo introdotti in un giardino appellato il giardino del soldano, di grandezza di essa piazza, dove in mezzo di esso giardino è un luogo alto un passo da terra, fatto in forma di loggia con colonne di pietra e di sopra verdure, e da un lato e di dietro alcune tende per riparare il sole, e ciascuna di dette colonne ha attaccato un uccelletto in gabbia che cantava. Nel qual luogo si trovava il Signor Soldano con fez alto e senza corni in capo. Ivi fu introdotto il Magnifico Oratore vestito d’oro con maniche alla ducale, e fatte le solite riverenze si presentò al Signore stando in piedi colla berretta in mano, accompagnato solo dal segretario e dal Torcimano nostro e suo, e anche dal Memendar. Noi altri della compagnia in questo intervallo fossimo condotti per tutto il giardino, il qual era pieno di pomi ingranati, aranci, musì, pomi, peri, fichi, uva, mirto ed altri alberi assai. Fornita detta udienza il Magnifico Ambasciatore montò a cavallo, ed andò a visitare il Diodar grande, il qual si giudica che dopo la more dell’attuale Soldano terrà lo scettro di questo regno; è uomo di 40 anni. Accettò con grata accoglienza sua Magnificenza, e fece portar da bere in alquante porcellane; prima bevette lui, e poi diede al Magnifico Oratore ed anche a tutta la compagnia di una certa bevanda fatta d’acqua, zucchero, sugo di limoni e altre mescolanze; dimorato per poco spazio e usate molte accomodate parole si tolse licenza e si ritornò a casa. Dopo desinare per il Torcimano con uno altro servitore fu mandato alla Serenissima Regina Soldanessa lo infrascritto presente:

Velluto cremesin alto e basso	Vesta 1
Velluto verde	ves. 1
Raso cremesin	ves. 2
Raso bianco	ves. 1
Raso lionado	ves. 1
Raso Alessandrin	ves. 1
Raso verde	ves. 1
Raso arzentin	ves. 1
Raso color di <i>Carnason</i>	ves. 1
Tele da Renso da L. 4 al braccio,	pezze 3

Presente mandato al Diodar grande e primo:

Velluto cremesin alto e basso	Vesta 1
Velluto lionado alto basso	ves. 1
Raso Alessandrin	ves. 1
Raso lionado	ves. 1
Scarlatto da cento	ves. 1
Paonazzo da cento	ves. 1
Formaggi	pezze 6

Altro presente mandato all’Ammiraglio grande:

Velluto cremesin in due pelli	Vesta 1
Velluto violato in due pelli	ves. 1
Raso lionado	ves. 1
Raso alessandrin	ves. 1
Scarlatto da 80	ves. 1

Pavonazzo da 80	ves. 1
Formaggi	pezze 6

Al Memendar:

Velluto cremesin in due pelli	Vesta 1
Velluto cremesin alto e basso più 7 braccia	3
Velluto lionado alto e basso	3
Scarlatto da 80	ves. 1
Pavonazzo da 80	ves. 1
Formaggi	pezze 2

Al Chatibiser:

Velluto cremesin in due pelli	Vesta 1
Velluto lionado in due pelli	ves. 1
Raso cremesino	ves. 1
Raso Alessandrino	ves. 1
Scarlatto da cento	ves. 1
Pavonazzo da 80	ves. 1
Formaggi	pezze 4

“El signor Soldan avanti li fece intender el desiderio suo era che el presenti, se li ha a far, non se mandasse al consueto da poi l’audientia e coperto, ma si portasse per sua reputazion el zorno di la prima audientia davanti l’ambassador e scoperto, *unde* parse a sti consoli e marchadanti che il presente deputado al signor Soldan fusse pocho e non cussì honorificho come se richiedeva, e deliberono di ampliarlo e tuor tuto al presente hanno portato de li e darlo al signor Soldan, e per li altri signori poi proveder e comprar altri panni di seda de li e apresentarli. Et cussì fu fatto, e il presente dil signor Soldan fu: 100 veste portate a questo modo, 8 d’oro, 14 de veludo de diversi colori, 28 de raxi e damaschini, 32 di scharlato, 18 di paonazi, messi in sti soi schafazi di datoleri, e portati discoperti, che tutti vedeano. Oltra di questo, messeno le pelatarie, 120 pezi de zebelini, 400 pezi de armelini, 4500 vari e dossi molto fini et belli, et 50 pezi di formazo piazentin, e tutto questo presente fo portà per mori su la testa che tutti el vedeva, e andavano avanti l’ambasador a do a do, che era un triumpho a veder. Per tute le strade di questa terra, era tanto populo ch’era cossa inextimabile.”⁸⁰⁶

“Addi 13 marzo l’ortolano del Signor Soldano portò uva matura a presentare al Clarissimo Ambasciatore.”

“Addi 15 il Clarissimo Ambasciatore andò a visitare un grande ministro il quale si chiama Nadracas, e che è colui che riscuote i dazii per nome del Signor Soldano . . . Terminato il parlamento, fu portata una colazione tutta di confezione ed acque zuccherate da bere, alla guisa moresca, la quale fornita si patissimo, e a quella via andò a visitar il Catibiser, e fatte assai belle parole, ed anche la usanza loro di bere le sue bevande.”

⁸⁰⁶ These details are taken from Sanudo, *Diarii*, XV, 195.

“Addì 26 fu data la settima ed ultima udienda in luogo detto il *Maidan* descritto sopra, dove il Clarissimo Ambasciatore accompagnato da ambidue i Consoli, vestiti di vellut cremesino con maniche alla ducale, fece poche parole al Signor Soldano nel pigliar licenza da sua Signoria e poi fu condotto da canto, e spogliatogli il manto di velluto cremesino foderato di armellini, e rimasto in una vesta pure di velluto cremesino con maniche strette, fu vestito di una vesta di velluto cremesino foderata di armellini alla guisa moresca, con il bavero di ermellini di dietro. Fu ancora vestito il Magnifico Console di Alessandria ed il Magnifico Messer Marc’Antonio figliuolo del clarissimo Oratore, di due vesti di una sorte, come sarche dipinte. Altre due di lega più bassa pure di seta bianca e nera, furono data, una al Scretario, l’altra al Torcimano, e tutti così vestiti ritornarono di nuovo alla presenza del Signor Soldano, e fatti i debiti ringraziamenti per il Clarissimo Oratore, tolse l’ultima licenza; la quale subito tolta, i nostri otto trombetti cominciarono a suonare alla presenza del Signor Soldano, e così vennero suonando avanti il Magnifico Ambasciatore fino a casa, dove dimorati per poco spazio, ci possiamo a sedere a mensa per disinare con tutta la compagnia, cioè consoli e mercadanti.”

D) Gifts from Sultan al-Ghuri to the Kingdom of Cyprus, received by the Republic of Venice, 1515⁸⁰⁷

“In questa matina, fo portato in Colegio, trata di doana, la cassa mandata di Cypri con el presente dil Soldan, la qual fo aperta e subito per quelli di Collegio fo sacomanata; chi tolse una chossa e chi l’altra, con tanta furia ch’era gran vergogna a veder tal acto. El Principe ave il corno di zibeto et li altri tutti a furi e fese, et iscari, et porzelane, e il resto fo rapito. Sier Antonio Tron procurator non voleva si facess a questo modo; ma si mandasse via et darlo a le Raxon vechie e sia venduto a beneficio di San Marco; nulla li valse, e si parti con intention di proveder il primo Pregadi. Sier Alvixe Pixani consier tolse la vesta d’oro fodrà di armelini; sier Francesco Foscarì consier assa’ ixari e fessa; sier Zuan Francesco Bragadin cao di XL la sella, *ita che* tuti ave qualcosa. Li Savj ai ordeni nulla ebene e sier Zuan Barozzi cao di XL si consuetava, al tempo Io era savio ai ordeni, che fo partido questi presenti, mandar cinque di Colegio, uno per ordine, a la Procuratia e ivi partirlo, ma el benzui e li panni da far pianee restava a lax chiezia di San Marco e lo alo. El resto tutti ne haveva la so’ parte e non andava a la zaffa, come è andato questo; de la qual voce e acto la terra fo piena.”

E) Gifts from Consul Alvise Arimondo to Sultan al-Ghuri, 1516

“Sabato seguente, el consolo andò a portar el presente, e lo portò con tanto ordine che ogniun coreva a veder: era tabolie 25, zoè su do tabolie ducati 1000 per tabolia di maidini, et da poi 7 tabolie fra panni scarlati, paonazi, damaschini, veludi alti e bassi e piani, armelini e conii, et 4 tabolie con 4 castelli de zucharo et una de frutti di zucharo, et uno scachier, et cavalli, et homeni, et tre tabolie de siropi in pignate, et el resto marzapani, pignochade, fongi e altro.”⁸⁰⁸

F) Miscellanea

⁸⁰⁷ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XX, 41.

⁸⁰⁸ Sanudo, *Diarii*, XXII, 586.

“Circa le 20 hore gionsemo al dicto Giaffo; pur niuno peregrini descendete de galea perchè è gran pena a peregrini descendere in terra de mori senza el salvaconducto; ma subito el magnifico nostro patrono mandò el suo scrivano a Rama per annunciare li et in Ierusalem la nostra venuta, et per havere lo salvoconducto de descendere in terra. Mandoe etiam uno messo al Diodaro* in Damasco con presenti de certi vasi christalini adciò ne fosse propitio con li altri signori al nostro viaggio; et quivi se dimorassemo fine al lune aspetando la venuta de li signori de Rama et de Gazera con el salvaconducto, perchè senza loro ne serebbe facto grandi rincrescimenti da mori.”⁸⁰⁹

“Mercore a di 9 agosto li patroni feceno presenti a li signori di Ramma e di Iherusalem et a mamluchi e a più offitiali di panno, vietto lavorato, cadini di terra, conche de ligno, candeleri di recalco, formazo, confetione et dinari ad alcuni, che fu uno gran perdere di tempo a contentare tanti perfidi et obstinati ladri, che più vero epyteton non si li pò convenire.”⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁹ Paoletti, *Viaggio a Gerusalemme*, 163.

⁸¹⁰ Nori, *Itinerario al Sancto Sepolcro*, 131-2.

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Vita

Name: Jesse Jacob Hysell

Date of Birth: 5 May 1986

Degrees Awarded:

Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York (PhD 2017, M. Phil, 2014)

Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan (MA, 2011)

Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio (Bachelor of Arts, History, 2008)

Publications “Interpreting the Veneto-Mamluk Gift Exchanges of 1489,” in *Culture matérielle et contacts diplomatiques entre l’Occident latin, Byzance et l’Orient*, Brill (Forthcoming, 2017)
 “Cultural Encounters and Material Exchanges in the Venetian Archives,” American Historical Association Blog Series (Summer 2016)
 <http://blog.historians.org/author/jhysell/>
 “*Pacem Portantes Advenerint*: Ambivalent Images of Muslims in the Chronicles of Norman Italy,” *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 24, no. 2 (2012): 139-156

Awards & Honors	Certificate in University Teaching Awarded by the Graduate School of Syracuse University	2017
	Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation Research Grant for the Study of Venice and the Veneto	2015-16
	Kathryn Davis Fellowship for Peace in the Study of Critical Languages	2015
	Syracuse University Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award	2015
Teaching Experience	Visiting Assistant Professor , University of Puget Sound	2017-18
	Instructor , Syracuse University	2017
	Teaching Assistant , Syracuse University	2012-16