A Fearsome Beauty: Material and Cultural Exchange between Venice and the Islamic Near East

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A Fearsome Beauty:
Material and Cultural Exchange between Venice and the Islamic Near East

By

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Introduction

Although it is Venetian in origin, Giovanni Mansueti’s *St. Mark Baptizing Anianus* (1518) (Fig.1) contains strong Near Eastern elements; the surrounding figures wear attire traditional to that of the Mamluk military, donning the prestigious *kamilyya* robe\(^1\) and their heads are wrapped with white bulbous turbans, while the soldier standing behind Anianus bears a bow and arrow that is held inside an Oriental embroidered quiver. The incorporation of these reflect Mansueti’s strong fascination and knowledge of Near Eastern—especially Mamluk—culture, something that is further enhanced by the use of other elements in the piece, such as the square minaret in the backdrop that is topped with a crescent moon, a gilded mosque lamp, and a ceramic bowl covered in ornate blue and white detailing. However, it will be shown that the story of cross-cultural interaction between East and West is much more complex than simple emulation/inclusion would suggest.

Venice, as a city, has an identity that, since Byzantine times, is highly differentiated from the rest of Italy, the largest reason being its location. As Venice is physically separated from the rest of Italy, it was not being considered to be part of the Kingdom of Italy until the late 19\(^{th}\) century, and was instead known as The Republic of Venice. It is understandable, then, why Venetians viewed themselves as being different from the rest of their Italian counterparts, and how this contributed to the unique Venetian identity.

Venice’s physical separation from the rest of Italy also resulted in it being a prime trading route for centuries, serving as a liaison between Europe and the Oriental world, and—as a result—has been largely responsible for the cultural diffusion and artistic exchange that has occurred between the East and West over the course of history. In addition to the presence of

\(^1\) Originating from Mamluk Egypt, this type of robe is characterized by its broad sleeves, and was often given as a symbol of honor. For more information regarding ceremonial garb from Mamluk Egypt, see Petry’s essay in *Robes of Honor: The Medieval World of Investure*.
Venetian diplomats to the Islamic Near East, discussed later on, this influx of Near Eastern goods resulted in intimate knowledge of Islamic customs, philosophy, science, and technology in addition to the arts.

In addition to being a city where goods would be exchanged, Venice also identified as being separate from the rest of Italy in regards to religion. Though Venice shared the same faith as the rest of Italy—Christianity—Venetians identified as being one of the defenders of their religion, as they saw their homeland as the New Alexandria due to Venice being known to be the resting place for St. Mark, the city’s patron saint. As a result, Venice, in addition to being a key leader in trade with the Near East, also served as a pilgrimage site, becoming an important point of departure to the Holy Land.

It should be noted that this perception of Venice being separate from the rest of Italy was not something felt solely by Venetians; rather, this feeling was mutual. Due to the frequent interactions with the Islamic Near East, both in regards to trade and diplomacy, Venice was seen as suspicious not only to Italy, but to the rest of Christian Europe, even though Venetians prided themselves on being the burial site of St. Mark. All of this combined together to create an identity that was unique to Venice.

When examining Venetian artworks from the Renaissance, specifically between the 15th and 16th centuries, one can clearly see that Venetians were in awe of their Oriental counterparts. However, this sense of awe was two-fold: on one hand, the Near East was seen as something exotic and highly desirable by members of the elite. In addition to the physical beauty of the works, the technological prowess of the Near East impressed Venetians, who would adapt what they learned from trade with Mamluk and Ottoman merchants, into their own works. This
admiration, as will be discussed later, was mutual, as sultans also acknowledged both the beauty of, as well as the innovations made in Venetian fine art.

On the other hand, however, the increasing military power of the Near East brought the rise of Islam, which was seen as a threat to Christianity. The purpose of this thesis is to show how this view—that the Islamic Near East was seen as ‘awesome’—was reflected in artworks produced during the Renaissance. By examining works from three different media, this thesis aims to show that the Venetian desire for and fear of the Near East is reflected in the artworks made.

Since the relationship between the Near East and Venice has been already extensively studied, some may question the reasoning for pursuing this topic. Often, when discussing Venice and the Near East in regards to the art, much focus is given on the appropriation of the East by the West. The main motive surrounding this thesis is to show that while this is true and that while Venetians were quick to consume and embrace certain artistic traits of the Near East, it is important to remember that they were well aware of the world surrounding them. By exploring both the positive and the negative sides to the sense of awe the Near East invoked in Venetians, I hope to show that though Venetians appreciated the beauty of the Near East, this does mean that they were blind to the threats their Eastern neighbors posed.

Islamic influence discussed in this paper will center on that of the Mamluk and Ottoman Empires, comparing works produced in these lands to those produced in Venice during the same time, and examining how they correlate. Works discussed date predominately between the 15th and 16th centuries. This thesis is divided into three main chapters, each covering one general form of media, and a conclusion that summarizes these three parts. While this might seem like a

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2 In this paper, the term ‘awesome’ is not used as it is used colloquially today. Rather, this term will be used following its traditional meaning as “inspiring awe; appalling, dreadful” as stated by the Oxford English Dictionary.
wide range to discuss, I feel it is important to include several forms of media to demonstrate how much the Islamic Near East influence integrated itself into Venetian art.

The first chapter discusses fabrics, and is divided into three sections: carpets, silk textiles, and velvets. Works discussed include physical fabrics that have survived today, such as a chasuble from the late 16th century, as well as those which have been immortalized in paintings, such as Oriental-inspired carpets found in the works of Lorenzo Lotto. The purpose and meanings behind these fabrics are also discussed. In this chapter, not only do I provide my visual analysis, comparing these works to those made in the Near East, but I also discuss techniques used, specifically in regards to velvet, and discuss the similarities and differences.

Chapter 2 moves on to discuss objects and, like chapter 1, has three subsections: ceramics, inlaid brassware, and Venetian glass. Again, comparisons in appearance and in technique are made, as is the discussion of the purpose of these objects. The section on Venetian glass provides a necessary contrast to the paper, as it shows that while Venice was enamored with the Near East, it must not be forgotten that this feeling was, at times, mutual, and that Venetian glass was highly sought after by those of the high class in the Near East. Emphasis is also made that the Near East was influenced by Ming China, and this translated into their works, which—in turn—carried over to Venetian art.

Chapter 3 covers the last medium I will be looking at, the pictorial arts, and is separated into two sections: portraits and narrative paintings. Works discussed include both religious and secular pieces that incorporate Near Eastern aspects (such as textiles and objects), as well as depictions of members from the Ottoman and Mamluk Empires, (both as the subject of portraiture, and as background characters in narrative works). By bringing back works that depicted the Near East—both its people and its landscape—artists were able to provide insight to
what this foreign land consisted of to those who would not have had the means to travel and see it for themselves. It is important to note, however, that these depictions were not always necessarily made for a European audience; portraits, for instance, were often commissioned by sultans such as Mehmet II, who saw value in Venetian portraiture.

Finally, it is in Chapter 3, that the second half of my argument is presented. Whereas in the first two chapters the focus is strictly on the positive sense of awe Venetians had of the Near East, the pictorial arts provide both sides: the positive and the negative. By looking at works such as Virgin and Child Enthroned and the Stoning of St. Stephen, I am able to demonstrate how this two-sided perception of the Islamic Near East was translated into the visual arts.

The artistic exchange between the East and West has been a popular subject of conversation among art historians, a multitude of books and articles being written that explore how works from the East have influenced those produced in the West. Bazaar to Piazza by Rosamond E. Mack is one of the most cited books amongst scholars, as it covers Islamic trade with not only Venice, but Italy as a whole, from the years 1300 – 1600. Covering various mediums including patterned silks, carpets, and paintings, this book combines the visual evidence of this cultural exchange with the historical context, beginning with Italy’s trade with the East, and ending with how this relationship was a two-way street with Italy producing works that were consumed by the East.

Bronwen Wilson’s The World in Venice: Print, the City, and Early Modern Identity has also proven to be beneficial as it discusses the visual and material culture of Venice and identity, including cross-cultural encounters with Islamic imagery. Unlike Mack, who covers a wide array of media, the bulk of this work focuses on prints. Wilson explores how the printed image influenced identity during a time when Venice was a trading crossroad, and divulges in how
Venetian identity came to be visualized within the growing global context that this medium constructed for it.

Two major exhibitions that have occurred regarding Venice and the Near East are *Bellini and the East*, held at the National Gallery in London, and *Venice and the Islamic World*, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Both catalogues for these exhibitions provide priceless information regarding Venice’s relationship with the Near East, each containing essays written by various experts in the field, including Deborah Howard and Julian Raby, which provide valuable insight to the Near East-West relationship. *Venice and the Islamic World* is similar to Mack’s in that it covers a wide array of media, including book binding and inlaid lacquer; however the focus in this catalogue is strictly Venetian, which suits the purpose of this thesis perfectly. *Bellini and the East* supplements the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s publication by providing the necessary background on Gentile Bellini, his travel to the Near East, and the impact this had on both Venetian and Near Eastern art.

In addition to books and articles that center on Venice’s relationship with the Near East, looking at literary works that focus strictly on Near Eastern art has also been beneficial; *Islamic Art and Design 1500 – 1700* by J.M. Rogers contains numerous works across various media, and discusses Islamic art and the changes it underwent with different rulers. The exhibition catalogue for *Gifts of the Sultan: the Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts* held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art contains essays written by several experts, each discussing the tradition of gift-giving in the Islamic world, a tradition that is key to understand as it explains how many Oriental objects found their way to Venice, as well as why Venetian artisans crafted works to suit an Eastern taste.
While the majority of this thesis centers on artistic works from both Venice and the Islamic Near East, it is important to mention the relationship between the two cultures from a non-art historical standpoint. Literary works that discuss the relationship of Islam and the West from a purely historical perspective have proven highly beneficial. Richard William Southern’s lecture entitled “The Moment of Vision”—one of several lectures published under the title *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*—for instance, supports the idea that threat the Islamic Near East posed was one that was both religious and political. This work discusses the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople, and examines the European perception of the Islamic world as not only a danger to Christianity, but also a political and military threat to the West.

Margaret Meserve’s work on humanists’ perception of Islam during the Renaissance tackles two questions: first, it addresses how and why humanists used history writing to understand the problem Islam posed; secondly, she discusses what these humanists’ writings say in regards to their own ambitions in Renaissance scholarly and political circles. In *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, closely examined selected readings of humanist accounts of Islamic history produced between 1380 and 1510, such as those of Giovanni Mario Filelfo, Favio Biondo, and Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, contextualize Meserve’s work.

Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks by Nancy Bisaha provides a good counterpart to Meserve’s work, as it also discusses Italian humanists’ view of Islam during the Renaissance, specifically focusing on the perception of the Ottomans before and after the fall of Constantinople. In *Creating East and West*, Bisaha argues that the works of these humanists reflects a complex perception of the Ottoman Empire that extended beyond a religious threat; that the East was seen as a sophisticated and threatening power in regards to secular matters as well.
The goal of this thesis, therefore, is to show that during the 15th-16th centuries, Venetians viewed the Islamic Near East with a sense of awe, and that this sense of awe was two-fold. On one hand, it was something seen as positive and desirable, as reflected by the Venetian consumption and imitation of Near Eastern artworks. On the other hand, however, Venetians viewed the Islamic Near East with a sense of dread. As this was a time where religion was heavily intertwined with politics, the rise of Islamic states—such as that of the Ottoman Empire—meant not only the rise of this religion over Christianity, but also the physical domination and political takeover of European lands, such as the fall of Constantinople, the capital of the Roman Empire, to the Ottoman Empire in 1453. Those who felt this threat the most were, understandably, religious and secular leaders who were members of the high class and would be able to commission works that reflected this fear that was felt by not only those in Venice, but throughout Italy.
Chapter 1 – Trade of Fabrics between the Islamic Near East and Venice

Carpets

As a result of Venice’s interactions with the Near East, exotic items such as spices, metal work, and precious stones were imported to not just Venice, but also to important clients, such as those in Germany\(^3\). Among the goods exchanged, textiles and carpets were two of the most common, and by the 15\(^{th}\) century, Venice was not only the leader in providing goods for the Middle East, but Venetian knowledge of the Oriental style and the Islamic world in general was considered to be unparalleled. \(^4\) This resulted in the creation of carpets and textiles made in the Oriental style—in addition to those imported from the East—that were highly sought after by members of the Venetian high class.

There are several reasons as to why Islamic works appealed to European audiences, the main one being that certain objects were technically and artistically superior to items produced in Italy. Under the rulership of various sultans and caliphs, the Arab elite developed a culture that emphasized grace and pleasure in everyday life. As a result, major developments were made in silk weaving, ceramics, and metalwork. Colorful hangings that once decorated a nomad’s tent were transformed into elegant items woven with luxurious materials and meticulous detailing. The combination of unusual materials, superior craftsmanship and exquisite decoration resulted in these items to be viewed as costly, and thereby highly desirable among the elite, even though many struggled to acquire these items in large quantities\(^5\).

Secondly, due to the Islamic ban on idolatry, there were no overt religious symbols or representations that would offend the Christian viewer. Whatever human figures that are


depicted are usually those of royal status partaking in some form of pleasure, such as making music or hunting. Even the Arabic script was seen as sensuous, the writing assuming shapes and following rhythms that appealed to the eye, even if the viewer did not understand its meaning. Finally, due to the fact that European and Islamic cultures share a common Greco-Roman and Byzantine artistic heritage, the organization of Islamic ornament was familiar to the European eye. For instance, both Islamic and Italian Renaissance art emphasize harmony of design, and overall perfection of the whole composition; the only real difference between the two is that while Italian Renaissance retained a naturalistic and representational bias of Greco-Roman tradition, Islamic art is fundamentally ornamental.

Oriental carpets began to arrive in Venice in the early 14th century, and gained popularity over time. Carpets especially were considered to be a highly-valued luxury item to the elite between the 15th to 17th centuries, as records indicate large and constant imports of Oriental carpets—the vast majority coming from the Ottoman Empire—throughout central Europe, the main transport of these carpets being Venetian ships. However, due to the damp climate of Venice, few of these carpets have survived over the centuries. While there are few preserved in churches and other religious foundations, the main evidence for the existence of these carpets lies in paintings made during this time.

Beginning in the 15th century, the majority of carpets that made their way to Venice came primarily from the Ottoman-ruled Anatolia. While the political climate of this time was heavy,

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6 Ibid, 4 – 5.
7 ‘Ornament,’ as defined by Oleg Grabar, differs from decoration, in that decoration can be anything (such as whole mosaics), whereas ornament is an aspect of decoration whose sole purpose is to enhance the decoration. Whereas classical decoration has intentional meaning, ornament does not appear to have intellectual or cultural content, their function being solely that of beautification. For more information regarding the ornamental form, see Grabar’s The Mediation of Ornament, as well as Grabar’s The Formation of Islamic Art.
8 Ibid, 74.
Ve
nice proved to be the primary provider as carpet merchant both via land and by sea. Documents from this time indicate that there was a flood of carpets arriving through Venice: at one point over 500 carpets from Turkey were delivered within an eight-month period. The high prices of these carpets are indicative of their value, especially when compared to the prices paid for works locally made by sculptors and paintings made by revered artists\(^\text{10}\).

In works prior to the mid-15\(^{th}\) century, carpets are shown as being both functional and symbolic: they are placed on the floor, and figures are shown standing, kneeling, or sitting above them, doing so signifying their status. Additionally, only part of the rugs is ever shown, visible parts baring designs of geometric compartments containing stylized animals. For example, in Domenico di Bartolo’s *The Marriage of the Foundlings* (1440) (Fig. 2), the carpet that members of the high class stand on, being witnesses to the holy matrimony taking place, bears a design strikingly similar to that of one from Anatolia from the same time (Fig. 3). While the overwhelming majority of Oriental carpets produced during this time bear strictly geometric designs, the fact that a majority of Venetian paintings show carpets with figured patterns demonstrates a preference in favor of stylized animals\(^\text{11}\).

From the mid-15\(^{th}\) century onwards, this preference changed, and the number of carpets shown bearing geometric designs increased exponentially, the reason being a new interest in the intricacy of arabesque designs rather than figural representation\(^\text{12}\). Additionally, the depiction of carpets changed: rarely are they shown on the floor, the only exception being placed beneath the throne of the Madonna, a saint, or of a ruler. Otherwise, carpets are shown being draped or hung over furniture or architecture, their intricate designs and bright colors being clearly visible to the

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\(^{11}\) Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 75.

\(^{12}\) During the mid-15\(^{th}\) century, the arrival of high quality Oriental carpets, silks, and velvets designed with geometric patterns to Venice and other parts of Italy was positively received. Painters began to reflect this change in preference by incorporating carpets bearing geometric designs as opposed to previous figural depictions.
viewer, regardless if the setting is religious or secular. This change in placement reflects a rising admiration for these carpets, as they became increasingly seen as prized objects, reflecting of one’s wealth and overall status.¹³

The mid-15⁰ century also saw an increase in the depiction of carpets in domestic settings, continuing well into the first quarter of the 16⁰ century. This is due to the fact that this time saw an overwhelming increase in the demand for luxury, as the upper classes during this time began to keep highly detailed records of the interior furnishings of their living and sleeping quarters. Even though they did not own much in terms of furniture, the wealthy decorated their tables, benches, and chests with precious Oriental carpets.¹⁴ Venetians also displayed carpets in public, especially on special feast days or festivals, as they were symbolic of communal in addition to individual prosperity. These carpets were often draped over balconies, and were made in a small size known as sajjada. Meaning ‘for prostration,’ this prayer rug style was the standard for Anatolian manufacturers and was available in a variety of types throughout the mid-16⁰ to mid-17⁰ centuries.¹⁵

In the 1547 painting Giovanni della Volta with his Wife and Children (Fig. 4) by Lorenzo Lotto, Giovanni and his wife sit at opposite ends of a table, framing their two children who are positioned in between them. Draping the table is a highly ornate, Orient-inspired rug—known as Oushak rugs—which bears Turkish designs. Resembling the hand-knotted carpets that were produced during the 16⁰ and 17⁰ centuries in Anatolia, the design of the rug is actually one of six that appears throughout Lotto’s works. Characterized by a lacy arabesque pattern usually in

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yellow on a red background with blue detailing\textsuperscript{16}, these carpets are apparently so accurately rendered that it is said that they could serve as documents for the history of carpet weaving, and have been since dubbed as ‘Lotto carpets\textsuperscript{17}.’ Bordering the central large arabesque patterns is an equally intricate pattern of white detailing superimposed against a green background. Known as a \textit{kufic} border, this trait common to Lotto carpets is called such due to the pattern’s resemblance to the \textit{kufic} Arabic letters of \textit{alif} and \textit{laam}. By comparing the rug portrayed in Lotto’s painting (Fig. 5a) to a carpet made during the same time in Anatolia (Fig. 5b), the similarities between the two become more evident.

Cesare Vecellio’s painting from 1555 (Fig. 6) is another family portrait, and three generations are depicted. Highly inspired by Lotto’s 1547 work, the family is also shown sitting around a large table that is draped with a highly ornate Oriental carpet. While the design of the carpet initially caused it to be previously mistaken as being from Anatolia—as the detailing in the center as well as along the border of the carpet resembles the star medallion commonly found in Oushak carpets—the carpet depicted here has since been identified as one from northwest Persia; this type of carpet was especially desired and rare in Renaissance Venice. Unlike those from Anatolia, carpets from Persia are characterized by a central elegant medallion that is “typically surrounded by a red field with floral or vegetal scrolls, an arabesque border, and inner and outer guard bands.”\textsuperscript{18} These carpets are usually massive in scale, and are considered to be extremely luxurious items due to their intense fine ornamentation.

\textsuperscript{16} King, Donald. \textit{The Eastern Carpet in the Western World from the 15th to the 17th Century} (Arts Council of Great Britain: 1983), 67 – 70.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
Silk Textiles

Whereas carpet trade was almost strictly an east-to-west exchange, the trade of textiles between the Islamic Middle East and Venice traveled in both directions, especially during the 16th century, as Venice became a major producer of luxury silk textiles that were highly desired by both Venetians and Ottomans. While the raw silk itself was produced in Persia, it was then bought in the Middle East by Venetians who then brought the goods back home to Venice. This new balance of textile imports and exports was reflective of a growing European dominance in the textile market that was the result of new technical innovations that were made during the medieval period, such as the spinning wheel and the pedal-operated loom. This resulted in an overproduction of textiles that were then sent to the Middle East, works ranging from low-quality cloth to high-end works, such as a brocaded cloth that reportedly valued at 2,500 ducats19.

Luxury textiles were considered to be staples of the international luxury trade throughout the Renaissance, their demand being so high that textiles often served as a form of currency. The reason for this is due to the fact that textiles served the same symbolic purposes in both Islamic and European cultures: in both the East and the West, wearing and the display of luxurious textiles not only served as symbols during religious rituals and during milestones of life (such as marriage), but also signified a person’s authority and overall rank in the secular social hierarchy. In war, it was common internationally for one to take the textiles belonging to the defeated as a prize or token of honor. In addition, the materials and colors used held significance depending on the culture: Byzantine emperors clothed themselves in purple, Venetian patriarchs red, and Mamluk sultans yellow. Prestigious fabrics were embroidered with gold and silver thread or adorned with pearls and other precious gems, the Ornamental patterns woven in being highly

subject to the fashion trends of the time, in contrast to the colors which had a specific
designation.\(^20\)

In the Islamic world, textiles held a prominent place in gift-giving: when presenting gifts, the robes a person wore held significance, such as robes of honor. These garments were highly ornamented and often had the name of the ruler inscribed on them in gold thread. Textiles were also circulated as part of a gifting cycle: to receive an already used item was not seen as an insult, but rather, often increased the value of the item.\(^21\) Receiving such an item from the Ottoman sultan was an exotic experience for most European diplomats, these robes taking the form of caftans made out of expensive silk textiles. However, for some, the honor was not so clear: accepting such a garment could be taken as a sign of allegiance— that the recipient was accepting of the sultan’s authority. This ambiguity was not only felt by Europeans, but also among those in the Middle East: an Ottoman sultan would have felt unease seeing a member of his court donning a robe ornamented in the distinct Safavid style, for instance.\(^22\)

A piece of brocaded silk fabric (Fig. 7) from Istanbul made during the same time is an example of a kemha silk which were produced in Istanbul throughout the 16\(^{th}\) century. Kemha silks are made in a specific technique commonly known as lampas, and consist of combining “two different weave structures to create areas of color by floating the unused warp threads on the back of the cloth.”\(^23\) These silks are usually decorated with either arabesque leaf designs (known as saz) or of flowers such as tulips and roses, which are then brocaded against a shiny

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\(^{20}\) Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 27.


satin ground. This particular piece is a hybrid between these two styles, as the central large motif is a highly decorated tulip, and surrounding it are curved arabesque leaves²⁴.

Due to the Ottoman dominance in textile production during the 15th century, Venetians became highly protective of their own products against their competitors, both European as well as Islamic. Thus, even though there is no doubt that Islamic textiles were sold in Venice, the evidence of their existence—predominately found in paintings made during this time—suggests that these textiles were rarely used for everyday, secular costume. Rather, Islamic textiles were used predominately for ecclesiastical purposes, such as altar furnishings or clerical vestments, such as in an altar frontal (Fig. 8) made during the second half of the fifteenth century. The central design of this piece is ogival, commonly found in Ottoman textiles. A pomegranate is depicted in the center, which is framed by the outline of a rose²⁵.

A chasuble belonging to Francesco Barbaro from the late-16th century (Fig. 9) also clearly shows the influence the ornamentation of the East had on Venetian textiles. Meant to be worn only twice a year—during the festivities of San Donato and on Christmas—the silk fabric for this garment also derives from Istanbul, while the embroidery was done in Venice. It was also made in the lampas technique, and the coat of arms of the Barbaro family is embroidered at the bottom. Like the silk fabric mentioned previously, the ornamentation on this chasuble contains both arabesque leaf designs as well as floral depictions: the ogival framing is bordered with carnations; inside these frames are large leaves that are in turn surrounded by blossoms²⁶.

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²⁵ Mack, Bazaar to Piazza, 47.
²⁶ Ibid, 321 - 322.
**Velvet Textiles**

In addition to silk, velvet makes up a large number of the textiles produced during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Bursa, in particular, is known to have been one of the largest producers of velvet in the Ottoman Empire; however, despite this, there is little physical evidence of there being velvet garments worn by the sultan. The reason for this most likely lies in the fact that from the 15th century onwards, the production of velvet was highly popular and was consumed by the masses, both within the Ottoman Empire as well as abroad. As a result, the sultan probably felt that to wear a garment or own a textile whose fabric could literally be found in every high-end shop and household was unacceptable, as the fabric had simply become too commonplace\(^\text{27}\).

Though the sultan may have snubbed Ottoman velvet textiles as being too mundane for someone of his stature, it should not be mistaken that these textiles were made in poor quality. Rather, the quality of the velvets remaining today indicates that these were high-end luxury items. Often they were embellished with golden thread that formed intricate patterns, often resulting in a design that consisted of three or four superimposed layers. These designs ranged from ogival medallions to arabesque leaves and intertwining vines. In addition, the dyes used in these works increased the value of the piece: for instance, lac was a type of dye imported from India, and cochineal dye was imported from Mexico\(^\text{28}\). Both were highly expensive and were not commonly found in European-made fabrics until the end of the 18th century. Finally, metal foil was often used in the threading of Turkish velvets. In these Eastern designs, the foils used were

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often almost pure-silver, with a small trace amount of copper, thereby adding even further value to the overall textile\textsuperscript{29}.

A piece made in Bursa from the second half of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century (Fig. 10) consists of two loom-width pieces that are sewn together. In this massive piece, three sets of leaves are decorated with small rosebuds and carnations in a brilliant crimson color. Large arabesque leaves create a frame surrounding what appears to be smaller pine-cone designs, a motif – like the tulip – favored by Ottoman weavers during this time. The silver threading used in the detailing of this piece, which would have been brilliantly shiny during the time of its creation, has unfortunately since become tarnished and corroded. Ottomans used works like this as furnishing for household items, such as cushions and curtains, as opposed to their European counterparts, who were more inclined to use Ottoman velvets for ceremonial costumes.

The production and exchange of velvet was not limited to East to West transactions. In fact, Venetian velvets became increasingly popular during the first half of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. With designs being made that would appeal specifically towards an Ottoman audience, Venetian velvets were highly prized by the Ottoman court, resulting in royal velvet textiles made from Venice greatly outnumbering those made of Turkish fabric. In addition, sometimes Turkish weavers wove carpets that were highly inspired by these imported velvets, which – combined with Venetian use of Ottoman designs—led to considerable difficulties in differentiating Ottoman velvet from Venetian\textsuperscript{30}.

An ecclesiastical cope from the mid 15\textsuperscript{th} century (Fig. 11) demonstrates this difficulty in differentiating Ottoman from Venetian velvets. The cope is made out of heavy set velvet, a weaving technique that was practiced both in Italy as well as in the Ottoman realms. The overall

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 193 -196.
design consists of compartments that alternate red and white in color superimposed against a backdrop of swirling and intricate vines and flowers. Given this design, one could easily assume this piece to have been made in Turkey. However, it has been determined that while the fabric itself originates from Bursa, this cope was cut, assembled, and embroidered in Venice.

Since there was constant trade between the East and the West, one cannot determine a velvet textile’s providence based on design alone; rather, one must look towards technique. When creating textiles, there are two key elements: the weft and the warp. The weft, being the transverse thread, is drawn through the warp, or the longitudinal thread. This constant weaving of the weft through the warp results in the pile, or the raised surface of the fabric. When creating velvet textiles in particular, the pile is short and dense, which gives the fabric its unique texture. There are several key differences between Venetian and Turkish velvets that allows one to differentiate between them: (1) In Venetian velvets, the loops of silk thread, made in weaving velvet, are kept uncut in Venetian works, which join cut loops to form the designs of the piece; Turkish velvets, in contrast, do not contain uncut loops. (2) As mentioned earlier, it was common for metal foil to be used in the threading of Turkish velvets; the same goes for Italian velvets, however, unlike their Eastern counterparts (who used almost pure-silver), many Venetian velvets are threaded with silver alloyed with a large quantity of copper. (3) Turkish velvets may have parallel lines stamped onto the surface of the velvet; these lines do not appear in Venetian velvets. (4) Finally, in Turkish designs, there is a strong contrast of color between the satin background and the velvet pile, as opposed to Venetian, which tends to be closer in tone.

Like carpets and silk textiles, a major source of knowledge regarding the existence of velvet textiles lies in paintings made during this time. In a portrait from the mid 15th century

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31 Ibid.
(Fig. 12), the doge Francesco Foscari is clearly distinguished by his garments: a cape with oversized golden buttons and a horned cap called the *corno* that is set over a white linen coif. He is seated in traditional profile view against a plain background, which not only causes the viewer’s eye to focus solely on the subject, but the dark color of the backdrop enhances the detailing in the doge’s clothes. The luxurious crimson fabric of his cape and *corno* is detailed with gold thread, reflecting his high status, and the oversized floral pattern seen throughout his garments is evocative of Ottoman velvets being imported during the time. Unfortunately, time has dulled the glazes of the piece, as the finer details such as the weave, texture, dye, and weight of the doge’s costume would have been more visible during the time of its creation.\(^{33}\)

\(^{33}\) MET, “Catalogue of Exhibited Works”, 301.
Chapter 2 – Objects between the Near East and Venice

Along with textiles, a variety of objects were imported between Venice and the Islamic world. Among these were ceramics and brassware, such as plates, vases, and jars which were used for both household as well as ecclesiastical purposes. As was seen in carpets and other textiles, this constant flood of imported objects highly influenced Venetian artisans, who were quick to adopt certain stylistic and technical elements from the East and apply them into their own works\textsuperscript{34}. Like textiles, objects were frequently given as gifts both among the elite within the Islamic world\textsuperscript{35}, as well as among international relations, and included items such as cups, vases, plates, and jewelry. Sometimes the gift would be food, spices, or medicine; however the containers in which they were packaged were seen as luxury objects in their own right. Objects given as gifts can be categorized into one of three groups: personal gifts, pious donations, and state/diplomatic gifts\textsuperscript{36}.

Items belonging to the first category suggest a more intimate connection when compared with diplomatic and state gifts. These include objects of personal adornment, such as jewelry, as well as functional (yet precious) objects like vessels made of silver and precious gems. Pious donations consist of objects that were secular in nature, but were specifically gifted to the mosque. Finally, state and diplomatic objects were items of a wide variety, including rock crystal pieces, horse trappings enriched with jewels, as well as board games, like chess and backgammon (Fig. 13). Though one may question the value of such an item, one must remember that these objects were made with rare and costly materials, thereby making them perfectly

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suitable diplomatic gifts\textsuperscript{37}. Overall, the purpose of these objects was simple: if they did not succeed in forming a friendship between two rulers, then—at the very least—they would serve as a symbol of an alliance\textsuperscript{38}.

Up until this point, the discussion has centered around the influence of the Islamic world on Venice. However, it is important to mention that the Islamic world itself was highly influenced by other parts of the East as well. China during the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644) was perhaps one the most influential to Islamic decorative arts, as gifts exchanged consisted of items decorated with precious materials such as jade and lapis lazuli\textsuperscript{39}, exposing Islamic artisans to new media which they then incorporated into their own works. Blue-white Chinese porcelain was especially popular in the Islamic Near East, the abstract designs of the wares appealing to Islamic tastes, and their importation to the Ottoman Empire peaked in the late 14\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} centuries.

As Ming objects were highly valued and admired, craftsmen began to imitate their styles and technique, some succeeding so well that during the 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} centuries, no real distinction could be made as to whether or not the object originated from China\textsuperscript{40}. Iznik pottery, named after a town in the Ottoman Empire, was produced from the early 15\textsuperscript{th} century until the end of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. Characterized by meticulous designs that combined traditional Ottoman arabesque patterns with Chinese elements, the pattern of these objects changed over time, becoming looser and more flowing during the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, and more colors were gradually added to the traditional turquoise and cobalt blue. Potters also developed a slip that ran around the glaze,

\textsuperscript{39} Ralph Kauz. “Gift Exchange between Iran, Central Asia, and China under the Ming Dynasty, 1368 – 1644” in Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts (Yale University Press: 2011), 119.
\textsuperscript{40} MET, “Catalogue of Exhibited Works”, 345 -346.
which allowed them to use red pigment, a color known for being unstable, and became a key characteristic in Iznik pottery over the next century. As the Ottoman Empire served as the main conduit through which Chinese pottery reached Europe, so did Iznik pottery; this resulted in Venetian craftsmen imitating works from both cultures, creating works that were a hybrid of all.

Ceramics

Out of all decorative arts, ceramics reflect continuous contacts with Oriental imports the most. Interaction with Eastern pottery began as far back as the early 11th century, when Islamic tin-glazed painted bowls were first introduced. These bowls, called bacini, while considered mediocre by Islamic standards, were highly admired by those in Europe. Scholars have categorized these ceramics into seven categories: Siculo-Maghrebi, Hispano-Moresque, Syro-Egyptian of the Fatimid period, Syro-Egyptian of the Mamluk period, Persian, and “Raqqa ware,” or ceramics made in northeastern Syria during the Ayyubid dynasty. Each of these categories is characterized by the color of the pieces; for instance, Siculo-Maghrebi ceramics have green, brown, and yellow decorations beneath the glaze; Hispano-Moresque, on the other hand, is characterized by blue decorations.

Used for a variety of functions, such as decorations for church facades and towers as well as for domestic purposes, such as kitchenware, the use of the bacini in every aspect of life, especially in religious buildings, reflects the admiration Venetians had for their aesthetic qualities. However, despite this consuming of Islamic ceramics, Venetian pottery remained primarily utilitarian and basic in detail. It wasn’t until the 14th century that Venetian techniques

41 Ibid, 345.
43 Maria Vittoria Fontana, “Islamic Influence on the Production of Ceramics in Venice and Padua”, 281.
and decorations began to incorporate Islamic sources into their own works, and by the mid-15th century, Venetian tin-glazed pottery (called *maiolica*) had become world-class and reflected their culture, whilst still retaining ideas and motifs drawn from Islamic sources.\(^4^4\)

When creating ceramics that use tin glazing, the clay vessel is covered with a white glaze that contains tin oxide; this results in the glaze becoming opaque, making it the prime base for painted decorations. This technique, though widely known in antiquity, disappeared in western Mediterranean art during the 5th century and did not reappear until the mid-12th. Scholars do not believe that this reemergence is due to an independent rediscovery, but rather that Italians learned directly from Islamic sources, objects from the early 13th century suggesting that these sources derived from multiple locations.\(^4^5\)

Beginning in the late 15th century, a specific style of ceramic emerged, called ‘Italo-Moresque,’ which was heavily influenced by ceramics originating from Islamic Spain that circulated during the late 13th and early 14th centuries. These works are characterized by their blue metallic luster (called *berettino*) and scrolling vegetal patterns that created either spiral forms (in older works) or leaves of ivy (in works from the 15th century). From these works, an ornamentation style called *rabesche* was created, which features interlacing fine knotwork that is usually adorned with small flowers, and was highly used in all famous ceramic workshops from the 16th century.

One such workshop was that of Maestro Lodovico whose works, such as a plate (Fig. 14) from 1540 – 1550, feature the *rabesche* design. In this piece, the ornamentation is seen throughout, the swirling pattern of the small vines occasionally broken by a larger leaf shape evocative of contemporary Ottoman styles. The overall design follows the shape of the plate,

\(^{4^5}\) Ibid, 95.
causing the viewer's eye to roam in a circle, until it ultimately lands on the central image of a flower. This piece is known specifically as a berettino, a style of maiolica that originated in Faenza that then spread to Venice, where it became immensely popular. These works are the result of artists who, during this time, began adding small amounts of cobalt blue to their glazes, which resulted in their works taking on a translucent light blue or lilac-grey tint. This adding of cobalt added value to the pieces, its Eastern sources making it well known as a luxury.46

As mentioned earlier, the Ottoman Iznik style of pottery made its way to Venice during the 15th century, the popularity of these items being so high that the supply never quite met the demand. As a result, Venetian potters began to create works comparable in style in order to fill this void; this was accomplished by combining traditional Italian tin-glazed earthenware techniques with the color schemes and motifs of objects imported from the East, resulting in works that blend both East and West beautifully. In a plate from 1516 (Fig. 15), the coat of arms of both the Meuting and Horwarth families is shown side by side in the center; the outer rim is decorated with scrolling vines and flowers. Along with its cobalt blue detailing set against an opaque white background, the overall appearance of the work bears a strong resemblance to works from the East (Fig. 16).

The Meuting and Horwarth families were among the first German traders to acquire Venetian ceramics made in the alla porcellana style47. This style, also found in Lodovico’s plate, was widely used in Northern Italy; like most other maiolica styles, alla porcellana spread throughout Italy due to the movements of both the objects themselves as well as their craftsmen48. Gaining popularity during the 16th century, it is characterized by the use of small, very fine flowers that are bluish-grey in color, along with miniscule leaves and buds that are

48 Mack, Bazaar to Piazza, 106.
superimposed against a white background. However, in Venetian maiolica, the bluish berettino glaze was often utilized; combined with scrolling foliage that often burst with roses and other flower buds, works from this time highly reflected Ottoman fritware from the 1480s onwards⁴⁹.

Inlaid Metalwork

Along with ceramics, inlaid brass work was a highly sought after good from the Islamic world. What is interesting about these objects, however, is that—unlike ceramics—the production of these items reflected a growing economic interdependence between Venice and Oriental lands. During the late 14th century, there was economic decline in Mamluk-ruled Turkey. Silver, copper and brass were limited in supply, and so artisans were forced to rely on the importation of these goods from outside sources. Venice answered this call, and exported large quantities of copper and brass to artisans in Turkey⁵⁰, who—in return—created objects made specifically for a European taste. This led to a second style of brassware that was more innovative in style, and is characterized by the use of various Western shapes and European coats of arms, and were frequently signed by the artist⁵¹.

Since Europeans were the principle consumer of these objects, those that were popular in Europe constitute the majority of objects that have survived today, their overwhelming number causing them to be dubbed as ‘Veneto-Saracenic’⁵². These objects varied in purpose, some being containers which held essentials from the East, such as spices (which were used for both culinary as well as medicinal purposes) that had to be transported in watertight containers. As mentioned earlier, gift-giving was a tradition in the Islamic world that extended to foreign relations, so gifts

⁴⁹ Fontana, “Islamic Influence on the Production of Ceramics in Venice and Padua”, 286.
⁵⁰ Mack, Bazaar to Piazza, 141.
⁵¹ Ibid, 142.
that were perishable, such as sweetmeats, were packaged in ornate boxes which not only protected the item enclosed, but would also add to the overall value of the gift.

Other works imported were more domestic-centered in their purpose. For instance, a candlestick (Fig. 17) from the early 15\(^{th}\) century reflects this new style that had developed to suit Venetian taste. While the tapering base and turned neck are characteristic of Islamic candlesticks, the neck is slightly more elongated in comparison to the rest of the piece. The base is decorated with inlaid silver and gold designs depicting scenes of animals in battle: which while these scenes were present in earlier Islamic works, they were considered antiquated by Islamic standards, though still perfectly in vogue for a European audience. Finally, the coat of arms belonging to the Boldù family solidifies the fact that this piece was made specifically for a Venetian audience\(^{53}\).

In general, there are two basic methods to manufacturing metal objects: molting and hammering. Molting involves the pouring of molten metal into mold of the required shape, whereas hammering—as the name suggests—involves the physical beating by a craftsman of a cast of metal into the desired shape by using a variety of tools\(^{54}\). Unlike ceramics, documentation discussing the specific Islamic manufacturing techniques in metalwork is rare, though what do remain are compliments to the skill of the Muslim craftsmen. Praise deriving from both from Europe as well as within the Islamic world was not only due to the appeal of the manufacturing skills, but also due to the complexity of the designs which invoked a sense of wonder in the viewer. These objects are characterized by designs of scrolling stems and knots that were picked

up by Europeans who would then incorporate them into almost every decorative art form, such as in the ceramics and textiles discusses earlier.\(^{55}\)

Some of the most famous brass works made during this time were crafted by Master Mahmud al-Kurdi. What is interesting to note is that nothing is known of his personal details, even the location of his workshop is still disputed today; and, yet, 13 works –12 bearing his full name—still exist. His skill in the execution of his designs makes his style immediately recognizable, signaling him out as arguably one of the leading craftsmen in this medium during the late 15th century. His style is one that adopted this new innovative style discussed earlier whilst still retaining elements of Mamluk tradition. All are made of brass and are inlaid with silver wire over delicate, intricate arabesque grounds. Mahmud frequently favored large-scale geometric outlines which stand out from scrolling stems. Within each geometric shape, engraved tiny arabesque designs fill the space, often forming a central knot or star\(^{56}\).

When examining Mahmud’s works, a magnifying glass is often needed in order to see how the finite details were achieved. Most likely worked section by section, the designs never waver from the underlying circular constraint surrounding each piece. In terms of technique, preparatory drawings were most likely made, from which the design was transferred onto the metal surface. Overall, the technique was time-consuming; all of his works use fine silver inlay of high purity (usually with only about 2 percent copper), instead of gold inlay, and are usually contrasted against a black inlay found in the recesses of the designs. What this black substance is, however, has been unable to be determined due to contamination from many years of use and polishing\(^{57}\).

\(^{56}\) Ibid, 216 – 219.
\(^{57}\) La Niece, “Master Mahmud and Inlaid Metalwork”, 228 -229.
Judging from the metal in one of his surviving boxes (Fig. 18), it is thought that he crafted works such as this via a combination of casting the metal shape and hammering to deepen and further round out the bottom. The design of each part—the box and the lid—are proportional to one another, allowing one to determine the design of the box from the lid alone. The large geometric compositions outlined in silver start from a central radial arabesque and end in shield-shaped sections. The piece is—like most of his works—engraved with his name, discreetly hidden under the lid. Boxes made such as this one, with a nearly hemispherical base and flat lid, were intended for a European audience, though—given the unstable nature of the rounded base—it is uncertain what their use was. Some scholars suggest that these objects may have been supported on metal stands (though these objects show no abrasions which would support this idea), or that perhaps these were used for the transport of goods such as herbs, the design of the box ensuring their freshness.58

As with ceramics, the Venetian desire for these brass works from the Islamic world was so high that the supply could not meet the demand; as a result, Venetian craftsmen saw this opportunity and designed works that imitated the style of their Eastern counterparts which was so highly sought after. These imitations required less technique than their Islamic counterparts and vary, from clear counterfeits to sensitive artistic reinterpretations. For instance, a Venetian bucket from the early 16th century (Fig. 19a) is a clearly meant to replicate Islamic buckets made during this time (Fig. 19b). Though the overall shape of the bucket could pass as Islamic, its decoration fails to do so; the inscriptions are pseudo-Arabic gibberish, and the negative shapes between the silver-outlined pendants and medallions are awkward, particularly on the lower half.

of the piece. Objects like this show that while imitations were not exactly perfect, the skill was good enough that it quenched the need for these works\textsuperscript{59}.

On the other hand, works such as a plate (Fig. 20a) made in the mid-16\textsuperscript{th} century were made with considerable technical and artistic sophistication. Bearing a strong resemblance to a plate made by Mahmud a few decades earlier (Fig. 20b), the craftsman did not try to reproduce the intricate Islamic motifs he did not understand. Rather, the plate is decorated with Europeanized versions of this ornamentation that is also found in other decorative arts, such as textiles and illustrated books. While the artist did have a grasp on geometric arrangement in regards to Islamic motifs, he did not understand their interplay with positive and negative spaces; however, the absence of blackening on the background, coupled with a rather un-Islamic abundance of motifs, conceal any awkwardness that might have been brought to the piece\textsuperscript{60}.

\textit{Venetian Glassware}

Unlike other forms of craft, Venetian glassmakers had virtually no industrial competition either within Italy or abroad in the glassmaking industry during their period of rapid development, beginning in around 1460. Prior to this time, this field was dominated by Syrian glassmakers, who suffered from technological stagnation in the late 14\textsuperscript{th} century, and glassmakers in Barcelona did not developed as quickly or as effectively as Venetians. During the mid 13\textsuperscript{th} century, Venetian glass factories were moved to the island of Murano, as frequent fires that broke out in the workshops threatened surrounding civilian homes and other businesses; this move –enforced by legislation—acknowledged that glassmaking had become economically

\textsuperscript{59} Mack, \textit{Bazaar to Piazza}, 145.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid ,146.
viable and that this was the time for Venice to encourage and market its glass production aggressively. As a result, the Venetian glassmaking industry and its secrets were kept confined until the mid-16th century\textsuperscript{61}.

While Venice may have dominated the glassware industry during the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, one should not be mistaken in assuming that they were not influenced by their Eastern neighbors. Rather, the influence of Islamic glassmakers is potent and deeply rooted. Islamic craftsmen were creating objects as early as the 7\textsuperscript{th} century, learning and perpetuating the traditional shapes, technology, decoration, and techniques inherited from early Byzantine craftsmen while also experimenting with new ones, resulting in works that included masterfully crafted transparent vessels, whimsical multi-colored objects, and works that reflected the splendid achievements that were made in enameled and gilded glass. Over time these skills were perfected and, for a while, Islamic glassmakers had no rivals in Europe. These objects found their way into Venice in the form of trade and diplomatic gifts, as well as through the personal interest of merchants and visitors, who acquired these items in the East and had them shipped back to Venice\textsuperscript{62}.

It comes to no surprise, then, that during the 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} centuries, Venice began to import from Syria raw materials along with recycled broken glass (called cullet) from those in the East. Glass cullet was of particular importance as it could be melted at a lower temperature, reducing costs; additionally, the material already contains the basic soda-lime glass ingredients found in the high quality Islamic glassware admired by Venetians. But perhaps the most crucial raw material exported was alkali, which was an essential ingredient; the importance of this raw material is reflected in the fact that not only was it mandatory to use in glassmaking to ensure a superior quality, but also it was banned from being exported to other European cities from


\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 254 - 255.
Venice. Along with these materials, Venetian glassmakers also acquired technical and technological information from their Eastern neighbors, along with a familiarity with the shapes and decorative patterns found in Near Eastern works that would find their way into Venetian glassware that dominated throughout the 15th century\textsuperscript{63}.

This domination coincided with the development of maiolica and the rising Italian demand for luxury household furnishings. Craftsmen during this time made great advancements in enameling and gilding techniques; Venetian domination owes an especially great deal to Angelo Barovier, who is credited with inventing crystallini (crystal clear glasses) and lattimo (milk glass), and his family is known for elevating Venetian glassmaking to a new level. A goblet made in 1475 (Fig. 21) represents the works associated with the Barovier family and reflects their skill and this combination of Oriental style with Venetian. In this work, the painted decoration is fused with the glass in a Syrian manner; however the enamel is much thicker. Furthermore, rather than paint gold onto their vessels, like in Syrian glassware, Barovier (and subsequent Venetian glassmakers) opted for gold leaf instead\textsuperscript{64}.

The Murano industry responded to the rising demand by the Italian elite for luxury items reflecting the exotic Orient by experimenting with a wide range of glassmaking techniques, including ancient ones. The results were marvelous; during the late 15th century, glassblowers developed a style of marbled glass that resembles semiprecious stone, called calcedonio. These works satisfied both the middle class as well as the elite, as the cost of these items suited the budget of lower classes, but their exquisite rendering made these imitations highly sought after by the higher classes. Calcedino were made in a variety of colors and marbled effects, rendered

\textsuperscript{63} Mack, Bazaar to Piazza, 113.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, 117.
both in Eastern and Western, old and modern shapes. A bottle (Fig. 22a) from the late 15th century, for instance, clearly copies distinctive Islamic shapes (Fig. 22b), with an elongated thin neck that widens down to the bulbous base.

In addition to developing new techniques, Venetian glassmakers revived ancient techniques that they derived from Islamic or Persian examples, such as mold-blown geometric decoration in relief; the most common version adopted by Venetians was mold blown in colorless glass, which was then decorated with enamel and gold leaf. When creating painted glassware, the glass that was to be painted was fired first, then delivered to a decorator who then painted it with either frit or color-glass (which would be provided by the glassmaker) mixed in an oily medium. After having been painted cold, the piece was then returned to the glassmaker and reheated in an annealing oven (called an ara) that was placed above the furnace. The piece was held in place by a metal rod, called a pontil, so that the enamel was kept in contact with the flames. Glassware made with handles had their handles attached on during this time as well, which unfortunately often led to accidents.

An example of a work made in mold-blown glass is a vase from 1500 (Fig. 23); made as a modern version of a Syrian mosque lamp from the 13th century, the overall shape is that of an hourglass, with a tall, wide neck that narrows down to the rounded bottom, pinching at the center. The piece stands on a base to prevent it from tipping over, and the handles on the side were used for chains when the lamp was hung. While the overall shape is consistent with 13th century.

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65 Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 121.
66 Ibid, 122.
century Syrian mosque lamps, the awkward pseudo-Arabic inscription on the enameled and gilt decoration indicates a European—rather than Oriental—patron.\textsuperscript{68}

One of the most popular types of glass objects created during the late 15th century in Venice was pilgrim flasks, or guastada. Reflecting the Venetian growing desire and taste for exotic Oriental objects, these bottle-shaped objects are characterized by their compressed circular bodies that were modeled after traditional Islamic flasks that were used to carry emergency water for travelers. In one flask from the early 16th century, the addition of a base to help the flask stand upright, the elongation of the neck, and the overall ornamentation has transformed the flask from a functional object to one that is purely decorative. Flasks (Fig. 24) such as this one were not only influenced by Islamic examples in regards to shape, but also in regards to incorporating arabesque designs and floral patterns into their pieces, a variety of techniques being used to ornament these vessels, such as enameling of clear and lattimo glasses.\textsuperscript{69}

Admiration for Venetian glassware was not limited to those in Italy: the skill and beauty of these works was recognized by those in the East; in fact, when Sultan Mehmed sent for a painter from Venice, he also requested an expert glassmaker, specifically one who specialized in cristallini. By the later 16th century, Venetian glass exports to the Ottoman Empire, which included a variety of items from window glass to mosque lamps, amounted to 20% of total production. As these works bore abstract decorative motifs and were free from specific cultural meanings, they appealed to an Eastern audience – in the same fashion as Eastern items’ lack of specific ornamentation appealed to a Western audience. Combined with the admiration for the

\textsuperscript{68} Mack, \textit{Bazaar to Piazza}, 123.
\textsuperscript{69} MET, “Catalogue of Exhibited Works”, 343.
skill involved in their production, it is no wonder why these objects were highly regarded in the East\textsuperscript{70}.

Two mosque lamps (Fig. 25) that were commissioned by the Ottoman vizier Mehmet Sokollu Pasha in the late 16\textsuperscript{th} century reflect this appreciation for Venetian glass. What is so interesting about these lamps in particular is that they were instructed to be made partly in plain glass and partly decorated. This style, called \textit{redeselli}, refers to fine opaque glass canes that are manipulated and twisted in order to create a delicate pattern resembling a web. This is then worked into the glass object to create spiraling decorative designs. In these two works, the \textit{redeselli} in one goes vertically down the lamp, whereas in the second, it twists around the entire surface of the object. The fact that these objects are gilded, when there is nothing mentioned in the instructions, initially implies that Venetian glassmakers paid special attention to works being made for an Ottoman audience by adding in details they felt would have appealed to them, such as floral and vegetal patterns they were familiar with from Eastern imports. However, the addition of the gilded designs to the \textit{redeselli} causes a visual dissonance, thereby allowing one to come to the conclusion that these designs were added by Ottoman artists afterwards\textsuperscript{71}.

\textsuperscript{71} MET, “Catalogue of Exhibited Works”, 344.
Chapter 3 – Paintings and Portraits of the Islamic World

Perhaps the greatest source of evidence of the influence of the Islamic East on Venetian art can be found in paintings. As mentioned in Chapter 1, while textiles and carpets were common forms of gift-giving both within the Islamic world and with European neighbors, there aren’t many physical examples that have survived today. Objects such as ceramics were also commonly shown in paintings, often being utilized in the image or used as a decorative piece. As a result, the depiction of Oriental-inspired items in paintings not only provide the evidence of the existence of these works, but the sheer number of their depictions—in both religious and secular works—indicates how much these items were valued by Venetians.

Unlike ceramics, textiles, or brassware, the impact Italian and Islamic painters had on one another is—at first glance—nonexistent. Islamic painted works are smaller in scale, when compared to Italian counterparts, as works are usually created on burnished paper and often bound into books, never on easel. However, upon closer examination, one can see that the link between Venetian and Islamic painting can be found in material and technique, rather than style. In regards to color, Venetian patrons were accustomed to and appreciative of a variety of hues; as a result, the abundance of colors found in Persian and Turkish paintings would have appealed to the Venetian eye."72

These included unusual contrasts of pastel lilac, pink, and pale green; Islamic artists did not shy away from juxtaposing intense hues against one another, such as saffron and mixed purples. These stimulating color schemes of Islamic artists may have served as an influence for artists such as Gentile Bellini and Titian, who began to arrange vibrant colors in their works. Trade between the East and Venice provided access to these pigments at an affordable price, the

demand for these colors being extremely high. Venetian painters also began to mimic Islamic techniques: for instance, they began to use saffron to paint on paper, both unmixed as well as mixing it with blue to create green. The use of orpiment—deep orange-yellow in color—mixed in water with indigo to turn paper green was also an Islamic technique adopted by Venetian artists.73

Venetian painting that includes elements from the Islamic world can be divided into two genres: large-scale narratives, and portraiture. Narratives were the popular genre of the 15th century, and were created to decorate the walls of religious institutions, while portraits were more dominant during the 16th century. These were usually commissioned for private use, as elite members of society, both in Venice as well as in the Islamic world, desired for portraits of formidable rulers to be added to their personal galleries of famous figures74. This appearance of Islamic luxury objects is referred to as “Oriental mode”75 and reached its peak during the late 15th century, though remnants can be found in 16th century works. Due to Venice’s position as a leader in trading, there was a plethora of Islamic textiles and objects coming in from the East that artists could use as reference for their paintings. The same, however, could not be said for depicting people or places. For the most part, Venetian artists did not have the opportunity to travel to areas such as the Ottoman Empire, the main exception being Gentile Bellini, and so, as a result, many of these artists had to rely on oral and literary accounts of those who had traveled to these lands in order to create depictions of Islamic people and places76.

73 Berrie, “Pigments in Venetian and Islamic Painting”, 144 – 145.
76 Arcangeli, “‘Orientalist’ Painting in Venice, 15th – 17th Centuries”, 121 – 122.
Gentile Bellini and the Near East

The painter most associated with the Near East is Gentile Bellini who, in 1479, was sent to the court of Mehmed II in Istanbul as a diplomatic favor; after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans, the Venetian Republic sent an envoy to Mehmed’s court in hopes of negotiating a peace treaty. This treaty was accomplished, and ended with Mehmed requesting that artists to be sent to his court; sending Bellini to Istanbul was a strategic play on Venice’s part: since Bellini was Venice’s most celebrated living artist at the time, sending such a prominent artist not only appealed to Mehmed’s narcissistic side, but by sending one of their best artists, Venice was able to showcase their immense aptitude in the arts. His 1480 portrait of Mehmed II (Fig. 26) is often cited as being the most important portrait of the Sultan made during this time, as it fully establishes Bellini’s status as "un bon depentor che sepia retrazer," or "an excellent painter who knows how to make a portrait."

In this work, Mehmed II appears set before a dark background, seated in three-quarter view. His profile is framed by a triumphal arch, and placed behind a parapet, which is draped with a highly ornately embroidered, jewel-encrusted textile. Similar to dogal portraits, having the parapet placed here protects his princely dignity by creating a physical separation between him and the viewer. He is clothed in a luxurious red kaftan, a dark brown fur mantle draped across his shoulders. On his head is a voluminous white turban that is carefully wrapped around a red taj, his signature headdress which marks his status as a Muslim. The soft curves of the turban contrast with the sharp angular features of his face, such as his nose and neatly trimmed beard. Bellini’s ability to create the illusion of three-dimensional space via shading in the arch is

representative of both his prowess in painting, as well as showcasing what it was considered important in Italian Renaissance art\(^79\).

When looking at portraits of Mehmed made after Bellini’s, it is clear to see that his work set the bar for Ottoman sultan portraiture. *Mehmed II Smelling a Rose* (Fig. 27)\(^80\), also from 1480, indicates that after seeing Bellini’s work, the sultan challenged other artists at his court to surpass Bellini’s masterful likeness of him. When comparing the two, the similarities are evident: the head, turban, and facial features of Mehmed in this work are almost exactly the same as those found in Bellini’s work, indicating that these aspects appealed most to the sultan. The distinctive folds of the sultan’s garments suggest that these were carefully copied, as they are present not only in his portrait of Mehmed, but also are found in three of his drawings\(^81\).

Bellini’s differs in that the Venetian master gave greater attention to subtle details, for example, articulating the shadow cast on the turban by his *taj*, and the stubble under his chin. Like Bellini’s, Mehmed is shown in three-quarters view, but rather than just his bust, his entire figure is shown. Finally, in the Turkish portrait of Mehmed, different iconography is used; whereas Bellini utilizes triumphal arches, crowns, and embroidered cloth to signify Mehmed’s status, this anonymous artist has shown Mehmed sitting cross-legged, firmly holding onto a checkered handkerchief in one hand, and holding a trio of roses in the other. There are several possible meanings for the roses: they could refer to the sultan’s intellectual and spiritual refinement, or perhaps they are meant to replace the three crowns found in Bellini’s work. In the

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\(^80\) This work is also referred to as the ‘Sinan Portrait’, named after Sinan Beg who was an artist in Mehmed’s court.

hand holding the roses, an archer’s ring is shown around his thumb, which alludes to his military prowess as well as his skills as a hunter\textsuperscript{82}.

\textit{Venetian Portraiture}

In addition to sultan portraiture, oriental influence found its way into works commissioned by Venetian patrons, depicting both members of the high class, as well as religious figures. In his portrait of Caterina Cornaro from 1500 (Fig. 28), Gentile Bellini depicts the Queen of Cyprus in a distinctive costume that conveys her royal status. Her outfit is typical of Venetian garb, consisting of a black overdress and a golden underdress, its adornment of gold, rubies, and pearls further denotes her high ranking status. What is interesting about her attire, however, is her headpiece: her head is covered by a rather un-Venetian black and gold cap that is embroidered with gold pseudo-kufic symbols and an interlaced knot pattern that is commonly found in Islamic brass work. As the name implies, the term ‘pseudo-kufic’ involves the use of Arabic kufic script in a non-Arabic context, and was a common decorative technique employed by Venetian artists during this time\textsuperscript{83}.

Bellini’s \textit{Virgin and Child Enthroned} from 1480 (Fig. 29) is a prime example of how Venetian artists incorporated Oriental elements into religious portraiture. In this piece, the Madonna and child are seated on a throne, a subject matter highly popular during the Renaissance, the large size of the piece giving the work a rather imposing effect. This making, like Bellini’s portrait of Mehmed II, demonstrates Bellini’s prowess as a painter. For instance, the application of textured strokes of paint show the surface effects of the cut and polished insets of the precious stones that not only adorn the Virgin’s throne, but can also be found in the

\textsuperscript{82} MET, “Catalogue of Exhibited Works”,296.
Virgin’s mantle of rich red velvet that is woven on a cloth-of-gold ground. Bellini painted the velvet pile with thicker and repeated brushstrokes, giving it the realistic effect of standing slightly raised from the surface\textsuperscript{84}.

The details in this piece reflect Christianity’s eastern Mediterranean origins as well as Venice’s trading history with the Near East, as the ornamentation of the niched throne recalls the adornment found in Roman and Byzantine ecclesiastical and imperial buildings. The Virgin’s mantle, on the other hand, is ornately decorated with a pattern that resembles a pinecone, deriving from the pomegranate design commonly found in Oriental textiles\textsuperscript{85}. Placed at the Virgin’s feet is a Western Anatolian prayer mat; often called ‘mosque-carpets,’ these rugs are used for the Islamic ritual of praying five times per day. The carpet placed here has a mihrab, or niche, design that is used in mosques to indicate the direction of Mecca. By placing such a symbolic image by the Virgin’s feet, further attention is drawn to her spiritual rank as Mother of God.

In both Giovanni Bellini’s—Gentile Bellini’s brother—1507 Portrait of Doge Loredan and Four Advisers as well as in Andrea Mantegna’s 1487 -1500 Adoration of the Magi, elements of the Near East can also be found. In Bellini’s work, the patron’s interest in Islamic material culture is shown through the depiction of a Para-Mamluk carpet and an Ushak re-entrant prayer rug, their presence symbolizing the doge’s rank; true to the Bellini workshop style, the garments of the figures seated are inspired by Oriental clothing, the patterns of the rich red textiles evocative of Islamic textiles. Mantegna’s piece, on the other hand, not only incorporates Islamic textiles (as seen by the garments of the three Magi), but Eastern objects can be found within the

\textsuperscript{84} Campbell, “The Bellini, Bessarion, and Byzantium”, 60- 61.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 63.
work as well, such as a small blue-and-white cup with floral scrolls that imitates Chinese porcelain, and an incense burner that resembles a Turkish tombak (a Persian goblet drum).

Venetian Narrative Paintings

Oriental influence also found its way to Venetian narrative paintings, a style of painting that coincided with an increased Venetian interest in geographical accuracy in regards to foreign settings during the early 16th century. One of the most important narrative paintings made during this time is *The Reception of the Venetian Ambassadors in Damascus*, made in 1511 (Fig. 30). Depicting the ceremonial welcome of Consul Nicolò Malipiero to Mamluk lands, questions regarding patronage as well as authorship of this work remain; though dependant in part to their work, the topographical accuracy, airiness, and color palette of this painting mark a striking difference from works created by Orientalist painters such as Gentile Bellini, Vittore Carpaccio, and Giovanini Mansueti. As this is a secular piece, the artist had the freedom to create a so-called ‘eyewitness’ view of a contemporary Islamic city, rather than be obligated to unite East and West through architecture like those who created narrative paintings that are religious in theme.

Though it is unclear whether the artist traveled to Damascus himself or whether he relied on second hand information, the result is a rather well-informed view of the city as seen from the Great Umayyad Mosque. From here, one can see various landmarks of the Islamic city, including three minarets, the public bath, and the grain market. Modest homes with their wooden balconies that have mashrabiyya shutters and the great palace complex’s ceremonial iwan can also be seen. Fine details in this work can be seen in textiles, such as the rug-covered dias that the na’ib and his two attendants sit on, as well as the variety of turbans worn by the different classes of

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Mamluk society. Although there are a large number of figures shown, the overall composition of the painting is not crowded; by placing the most important figures in the middle ground, rather than the immediate foreground as artists often do, the viewer is invited to linger over the painting and admire each section piece by piece. Despite this unique way of arranging figures, this artist does appear to have used the same stimuli, or patterned drawings, used by the more famous Orientalist painters, such as Bellini and Mansueti, for his depictions of figures, architectural details, and exotic animals\(^88\).

Finally, the palette used in this work also sets it apart from other narrative works created during this time: rather than using gold, ochre, and an extensive use of deep red like his contemporaries, the artist of *Reception* chose more a pale and luminous palette. The light pink, blue, and green colors of the turbans worn by the trio in the center of the foreground can be found elsewhere in the overall composition, and while this color choice is unusual for this genre, it does reflect the earlier discussion of the influence and adoption of lighter Islamic pigments that were being introduced to Venetian artists through trade during this time.

*Islamic as Threat to Christianity*

*Reception* is unique in that its subject matter is secular, as a majority of narrative paintings are religious; most were created for devotional confraternities, called *scuole*\(^89\), who decorated their chapels and meeting halls with these large scale works. However, while these works reflect an Eastern-Western cross cultural influence, it is also through these works that one can see the negative perception of the Islamic Other by Venetians most prominently.

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\(^{88}\) Ibid, 306.

\(^{89}\) Arcangeli, “*Orientalist* Painting in Venice, 15\(^{th}\) – 17\(^{th}\) Centuries”, 125.
Venice’s history with the Islamic Near East is one that can best be described as both pragmatic and complex. As has been already established, beginning with rise of Islamic caliphates during the 8th century onwards, Venice was seen as the intermediary between Italy and the East throughout the Renaissance, engaging in trade with both the Mamluks and the Ottoman Empire. Goods from Islamic lands were seen as highly desirable, and were in constant demand: the result being not only the consumption of these items, but also their influence trickled down into works made by Venetian artisans. However, despite this admiration of Islamic culture, the fact remains that the threat of Islam was a serious concern for Venetians. As discussed previously, due to being the location in which the remains of St. Mark—the patron saint of Venice—supposedly lie, Venetians identified their country as the New Alexandria, and saw themselves as one of the defenders of Christendom in Europe\textsuperscript{90}.

Venetians were not alone in their worry; during the 14th century, this fear rose to such a state that the Pope banned all trade with the Islamic world—much to the anger of Venetians, who, despite their fear, relied on trade with the Islamic world as a form of livelihood—that lasted until 1344. Though peace treaties were formed, and trade resumed between the Near East and Venice, the fear of Islam was ever prevalent, increasing only further when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Empire in 1453, an event that was seen as catastrophe for Christian civilization\textsuperscript{91}. As a result, this fear of the rise of Islam and the chance that it could destroy Christianity, made its way into artworks produced during the 15th and 16th centuries, many of which are found in narrative paintings.

One such work is Giovanni Mansueti’s 1499 piece The Arrest and Trial of St. Mark (Fig. 31). This is one of four panels that were commissioned for the prosperous Venetian silk-weavers


guild, the Arte dei Setaiuoli, all of which were meant to depict scenes from the life of Saint Mark; from these four, only two survive today, The Arrest and Cima da Conegliano’s Mark Healing the Cobbler Anianus in Alexandria. Overall, the work is typical in Renaissance style, notable for its deep spatial recession and monumental, marble architecture. Like many works produced during this time, Near Eastern textile makes an appearance; however, unlike works where the depiction of these textiles was used in a positive sense, seen as a sign of luxury symbolizing one’s status, Islamic textiles are used here as a form of indication, separating the “good” from the “bad.”

In this piece, almost all of the figures are dressed in contemporary Mamluk garb: depicting more than twice as many turbaned men than those found in Cima’s, Mansueti shows his extensive knowledge of Mamluk fashion. However, what is interesting to note is that the only person not clothed in Mamluk wear, is St. Mark. The judge sentencing the saint wears a ‘waterwheel’ turban, a type of turban with spokes that was only worn by the highest ranking officials, accurately signifying his position. The soldiers depicted each wear a furry red bonnet, called a zamt, while the guards who brutally push the saint through the prison gates wear a two-toned, flat-topped hat that has a white kerchief wrapped around the base, called a taqiyya. Those clustered in the foreground, talking and gesturing among one another, are also crowned with the more common—yet still distinctive—turban worn by high-ranking members in Mamluk Egypt and Syria. By having this juxtaposition of turbaned individuals, being associated with Islam, leading the non-turbaned Christian Saint to his—supposed—death, one can see how this reflects the Venetian (and overall Italian) mindset that Islam poses a threat to Christianity.

Vittore Carpaccio’s Stoning of St. Stephen from 1520 (Fig. 32) is a much more graphic in its message. The final painting in the narrative sequence for the Carpaccio’s Scuola di Santo

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Stefano cycle, this work is believed to be one of the last made by the artist. The overall scene being depicted is one of mob violence; St. Stephen has been wrongly accused of blasphemy against God and Moses, and has been driven from the city of Jerusalem. As he kneels, located on the right side of the canvas, praying to God to have mercy on those who will execute him, the saint is surrounded by men who hurl stones at him mercilessly. A turbaned figure clothed in red stands in the center of the composition, his face turned away from the viewer, rendering him faceless as he leads those casting stones with a gesture of his hand. What is interesting to note is that, according to the Bible, it was those of the Jewish faith who stoned St. Stephen, and yet, here those who are his killers are clearly represented as Ottomans. Recognizable via their bulbous turbans, which are wrapped around a *taj*, these men in clearly distinctive Islamic dress dominate the composition. Given that this was created during a time when the increasing military strength of the Ottomans was a serious concern to Venetians, it comes as no surprise that Carpaccio chose to depict Muslims as the killer of a Christian saint.

This negative portrayal of the Islamic world was not limited to large-scale narrative paintings: a woodcut from 1571(Fig. 33) by Nicolo Nelli succinctly conveys the Venetian viewpoint of the Grand Ottoman Turk. When looked at one angle, a man of substance is shown; when flipped at 180 degrees, instead of seeing a man of caliber, the viewer is faced with a diabolic beast, truly reflecting the Venetian perception of the Islamic world: on one hand, opportunity and admiration; on the other, danger and an overall threat.

Triumph of Christianity over Islam

Not all negative representations of the ‘Other’ involve having them depicted as the enemy, per say. Rather, in many cases, the idea surrounding the work is that of the triumph of Christianity over Islam. In Cima de Conegliano’s 1497-1499 work St. Mark Healing the Cobbler Anianus in Alexandria (Fig. 34), the overall setting does not resemble Alexandria in the slightest; rather, the large Renaissance building in the background with a dome and precious marble inlay which closely resembles the church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli clearly mirrors contemporary Venice. This does not come as a surprise, as Venice has long since claimed to be the rightful owner of St. Mark’s body.

In the scene depicted, the individuals—all with the exception of St. Mark and his companion—are Egyptians, yet are clothed in contemporary Mamluk garb, despite this being a scene that occurred well before the reign of the Mamluks. Whereas St. Mark and his companion wear apostolic tunics and have their heads uncovered, all the other figures wear precious Oriental garments, their heads covered with either a large bulbous turban, or a zamt, the infamous red bonnet worn by Mamluk military also seen in Mansueti’s piece. Again, by having this juxtaposition, a clear message regarding Islam and Christianity is being made. However, unlike Mansueti and Carpaccio, the message is not that Islam is the enemy: rather, it is the triumph of Christianity over Islam. In this scene, a miraculous event is occurring, as the cobbler has been saved by the grace of St. Mark. Those around him are non-Christians who, given their attire, can be assumed to represent Muslims, who have been fortunate enough to witness such a miraculous event. By having St. Mark and his companion wear traditional Roman garb without a turban, they are being distinguished separately from the ignorant Muslims.

95 Arcangeli, “‘Orientalist' Painting in Venice, 15th – 17th Centuries”, 126.
The Sermon of Saint Stephen (Fig. 35) is a second work from Carpaccio’s Scuola di Santo Stefano cycle. By the time he began working on this, Carpaccio had amassed a large stock of German prints, from which he drew upon for figural, architectural, and costume detail references. In addition, Erhard Reuwich’s woodcut illustrations served as one of his most important sources, which is reflected in this work. The architectural backdrop of this piece features several buildings that are taken directly from Reuwich’s illustrations. In the center, a triumphal arch and Roman column are shown, referring to the remnants of antiquity still visible in the Near East that fascinated Venetian visitors to these areas.96

In this work, a youthful Stephen stands on a crumbling pedestal similar to one that would have supported a Roman statue, pose similar to that of an orator. He wears a highly ornate deacon’s dalmatic97 and addresses a crowd of both men and women clad in a variety of garments. Among those in the crowd are Christian pilgrims and men capped with Ottoman and Mamluk turbans. Seated on the ground in front of him are five Muslim women; interestingly, four of the women have their veils pulled back, revealing their tall, ornamental hats (tarturs), and exposing their faces, something which typically would not have been done in public. The lively background consists of men, women and children, all of which are clad in traditional Near Eastern clothing.98

By having these people who are depicted in Islamic clothing—and thereby signifying them to be Muslims—be shown listening intently to the words of St. Stephen, one could argue that this was a subtle way for the artist to show Christianity’s dominance over Islam. Just like how in Cima de Conegliano’s work, depicting Muslims being witness to the miracle could be interpreted as being symbolic of Christianity’s triumph over Islam, the same can be said in

97 A wide-sleeved tunic that serves as a liturgical vestment, sometimes worn by a deacon at Mass.
98 Ibid.
Carpaccio’s work; the words of the Christian saint being so important, so enlightening, that everyone—Christian and non-Christian alike—gather around to listen.

Finally, Vittore Carpaccio’s *The Baptism of the Selenites* from 1507 (Fig. 36) is perhaps the most explicit in this message of Christianity triumphing over Islam. Made for the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, this work is one of nine narrative paintings that were completed in just five years. Preparatory drawings for this painting reveal that the artist was extremely precise when preparing complex compositions such as this one. In this work, representation of the Near East is abundant: the frieze-like composition shows figures depicted in Ottoman and Mamluk garb, alongside two women in Dalmatian costumes. Islamic luxury objects, including a Turkish carpet shown beneath the musicians’ feet and an Islamic water bottle further emphasize this Near Eastern influence\(^{99}\).

The scene being depicted is that of a group of Selenites being baptized; among them are turbaned individuals, one of which has cast aside his turban in preparation for being baptized. Here, the *literal* triumph of Christianity is being shown, symbolized through the casting of the turban: doing this can be interpreted as the symbolization of the casting off of one’s religion—in this case, Islam—in favor of Christianity. Having such a scene be depicted was most likely intentional: patrons of this work were probably well aware of Ottoman military might and, like many others, felt the pressure of Islam. By having works like this, members of religious organizations hoped to stop the fear from spreading to their citizens, as the triumph of Islam would not only be a religious calamity, but a political one as well.

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\(^{99}\) Arcangeli, “*Orientalist* Painting in Venice, 15\(^{th}\) – 17\(^{th}\) Centuries*, 131 – 132.
Conclusion

Venice’s long history with the Islamic world is a key aspect to Venetian identity, and is characterized by cultural exchange. Due largely to trade, as well as to diplomatic relations, various items made its way from Mamluk and Ottoman controlled lands and into Venetian harbors, these items becoming quickly highly sought after, and viewed as symbols of one’s status. Items brought over came in various media, one of the most sought after being luxury fabrics. Items such as silk textiles and velvets were worn by elite members of society, the rich color of these garments indicating their status. Unfortunately, few carpets have survived today due to the damp Venetian climate; however, many paintings during this time feature these rugs, allowing one to see how they—along with other forms of textiles—were deeply valued by the elite. The trade of both Ottoman and Venetian velvets shows that this admiration was not purely West-East but, rather, it was one that was mutual.

Oriental objects also found their way to Venice, their purpose varying from decorative household objects, to holding highly sought after spices, to being the containers in which diplomatic gifts were presented, their highly detailed ornamentation adding to the value of the overall gift. Gift-giving was a tradition that had been practiced in the Islamic world for centuries, and was continued with their relations with the West. In addition to textiles, objects such as cups, vases, and plates were highly decorated with jewels and gold or silver ornamentation, and were given as tokens of political camaraderie or alliances.

Ceramics from the Ottoman Empire owe a great deal to Chinese Ming porcelain, the blue and white designs characteristic of these works being picked up by Ottoman artists and made into works grouped as Iznik pottery. These works were highly desired by Venetians, the supply being unable to meet the demands; as a result, Venetian craftsman, such as Maestro Lodovico,
began to create works that imitated these Eastern ceramics, yet still had a Venetian flair to them, filling this void. This style of ceramic was called ‘Italo-Moresque’ and featured fine knotwork designs called rabesche.

The production of brassware, unlike other works, reflects a growing economic interdependence between the Islamic world and Venice. Since the Mamluk-ruled Turkey needed to import copper and brass from the West, works that were created were made to suit a Western palette. As a result, many works from this time made in the East feature Western features, such as European coat of arms, resulting in them being dubbed as ‘Veneto-Saracenic.’ Like ceramics, these works were extremely popular, and so Venetian craftsmen saw this opportunity and began to craft works that were so close in design that—although not perfect—they satisfied the needs of the elite masses.

Glassware, unlike other goods that were traded, is unique in that Venice suffered no industrial competition during the mid-15th century, and was highly sought after by Sultan Mehmet and other elite members of the Ottoman Empire. Containing elements from Islamic glassware that had flourished two centuries prior, these works appealed these high ranking members, resulting in numerous commissions for such works. This, coupled with the rising Italian demand for luxury household items, resulted in the rise of family-run industries, such as the Barovier family whose works reflect their skill and a combination of Oriental style with Venetian.

The pictorial arts unite all of these objects by being the form in which they are most represented. In secular and religious works made during this time –both in portraiture and in narrative paintings—textiles and objects that are from the Islamic world can be found; religious figures wear robes embroidered with pseudo-kufic writing, and oriental vases decorate the
interior of homes, showing just how much items from areas like the Ottoman Empire were admired and coveted by the elite classes.

However, in these works, one sees the negative sense of awe that Islamic-ruled lands, such as those of the Mamluks and the Ottoman Empire invoked in Venetians. As much as they admired the beauty and technical prowess of artisans from these lands, the fact remained that Venetians considered their country as the New Alexandria, and identified themselves as a leading defender of Christendom in Europe. Therefore, the military growth of these Islamic Near Eastern lands was seen as something to be feared, not only due to political reasons, but also due to religious ones: as these countries expanded their territories, so did the spread of Islam, the rise of this new religion posing a serious threat to Christianity. This fear was reflected predominately in the pictorial arts; for instance, in large narrative works, Ottomans and those clad in traditional Mamluk garb are depicted as being the enemy of Christianity, being the ones responsible for the death of Venice’s patron saint. In other works, Christianity triumphs over Islam, such as in the form of conversion.

Thus, by examining works made in various media, it is clear to see that lands in the Islamic Near East, namely those ruled by the Mamluks and the Ottomans, were seen as something ‘awesome’ by Venetians during the 15th and 16th centuries. This view had two sides to it: one positive, one negative. This positive view is seen in the fact that not only did Venetians desire for goods that came from these places, but the fact that Venetian artisans also valued the technical skills of their Eastern counterparts. As a result, works from the Mamluks or Ottoman Empire, or works heavily inspired by objects from these lands became symbols of one’s status.

However, this sense of awe also had a negative side: while Venetians highly admired the Mamluk and Ottoman artisans for their artistic prowess, it does not mean that these same
members were blind to the very real threat posed by their Eastern neighbors. Given that Venice identified itself as a key defender of Christianity, and that this was a time when politics and religion were heavily intertwined, the threat of Islam was one that was heavily felt by both religious and political leaders.

While Venice’s close relations with the Ottoman and Mamluk Empires during the Renaissance was integral to linking the East with the West, it must not be forgotten that these interactions also resulted in the alienation of Venice from the rest of Italy. For instance, though goods from Islamic lands were heavily desired by those in Rome, the fear of the rise of Islam—and the religious and political outcome that would follow—resulted in Rome questioning Venice’s loyalty to Christianity. Venetians consequently formed a unique identity that was separate from their Italian neighbors: though enamored with what the Ottoman and Mamluk Empires had to offer, Venetians also sought to defend the Christian faith by acknowledging the threat Islam posed. This two-folded sense of awe translated into their art, ultimately resulting in works that simultaneously celebrated and denounced the Islamic Near East.
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