

Georg Christ, Franz-Julius Morche, Roberto Zaugg  
Wolfgang Kaiser, Stefan Burkhardt, Alexander D. Beihammer (eds.)

# Union in Separation

Diasporic Groups and Identities  
in the Eastern Mediterranean (1100-1800)

viella

Copyright © 2015 - Viella s.r.l.  
All rights reserved  
First edition: September, 2015  
ISBN 978-88-6728-435-1

This book has been published with the assistance  
of the University Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne,  
Institut d'histoire moderne et contemporaine (IHMC)  
- research project *Mediterranean Reconfigurations*  
(European Research Council GA n° 295868)

## Contents

Preface	9
<i>Methodologies in Mediterranean Diaspora Studies</i>	
GEORG CHRIST Diasporas and Diasporic Communities in the Eastern Mediterranean. An Analytical Framework	19
GUILLAUME SAINT-GUILLAIN Venetian Archival Documents and the Prosopography of the Thirteenth-Century Byzantine World: Tracing Individuals Through the Archives of a Diaspora	37
SERGIO CURRARINI Socio-Economic Networks: An Introductory Discussion	81
ERIK O. KIMBROUGH Economic History in the Lab: The Impact of Institutional History and Geography on the Development of Long-Distance Trade	97
LARS BÖRNER, BATTISTA SEVERGNINI Genoa and Venice: Traders of Prosperity, Growth, and Death	105
<i>Trading Diasporas in Byzantium and the Latin Empire (Thirteenth Century)</i>	
GÜNTER PRINZING In Search of Diasporas in the Byzantine "Successor State" of Epirus (c. 1210-1267)	123
EKATERINI MITSIOU A Transcultural Society? The Empire of Nicaea (1204-1261)	137
DIMITRIOS MOSCHOS <i>Negotium Graecorum</i> : Trade as Theory and Practice in Ecclesiastical Contacts between the West and the World of Late Byzantium	153
KRIJNIE CIGGAAR Merchants in Frankish Syria: Adaptation, Isolation, Segregation and Union	165



**viella**  
libreria editrice  
via delle Alpi, 32  
I-00198 ROMA  
tel. 06 84 17 758  
fax 06 85 35 39 60  
www.viella.it

<i>Diasporic Groups in Mamluk Egypt</i>	
PETER EDBURY Reflections on the Mamluk Destruction of Acre (1291)	199
JULIEN LOISEAU Soldiers Diaspora or Cairene Nobility? The Circassians in the Mamluk Sultanate	207
JOHANNES PAHLITZSCH Byzantine Saints in Turkish Captivity in Anatolia (Late Thirteenth to Fourteenth Centuries)	219
GIUSEPPE CECERE Between Trade and Religion: Three Florentine Merchants in Mamluk Cairo	229
ALBRECHT FUESS Why Venice, not Genoa: How Venice Emerged as the Mamluks' Favourite European Trading Partner after 1365	251
CRISTIAN CASELLI Strategies for Transcultural Trade Relations: Florentine Attempts to Reproduce the Venetian Commercial System in the Mamluk Empire (First Half of the Fifteenth Century)	267
<i>From the Mediterranean to Central Asia: Black Sea Trade and the Armenian Community</i>	
ANGELIKI TZAVARA Conflicts, Caravans and Silk: Some Aspects of the Venetian Presence in Trebizond (1371-1376)	287
IEVGEN KHVALKOV Ethnic and Religious Composition of the Population of Venetian Tana in the 1430s	311
ANGELIKI TZAVARA <i>Nunc habitator Tane</i> . Venetian Merchants as Long-Term Residents in Tana (Fourteenth to Fifteenth Centuries)	329
ALEXANDR OSIPIAN Practices of Integration and Segregation: Armenian Trading Diasporas in Their Interaction with the Genoese and Venetian Colonies in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea (1289-1484)	349
EVELYN KORSCH The Sceriman between Venice and New Julfa: An Armenian Trading Network and its Sociocultural Impacts (Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries)	363
<i>Diasporic Communities in Rhodes</i>	
ANTHONY LUTTRELL Mixed Identities on Hospitaller Rhodes	381
TERESA SARTORE SENIGAGLIA Empty Ghetto: Being Jewish on Hospitaller Rhodes between Discrimination and Representation	387

PIERRE BONNEAUD The Influential Trade: Community of Western Merchants on Hospitaller Rhodes (1421-1480)	393
JÜRGEN SARNOWSKY Muslims and Jews on Hospitaller Rhodes (1421-1522)	411
NICOLAS VATIN The Insertion of the Order of Saint John in the Eastern Mediterranean between the Two Sieges of Rhodes (1480-1522)	425
<i>Transcultural Flows in the Aegean (Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries)</i>	
ALEXANDER BEIHAMMER A Transcultural Formula of Rule: The Byzantine-Frankish Discourse on the Formation of the Kingdom of Cyprus	435
MIKE CARR Papal Trade Licences, Italian Merchants, and Changing Perceptions of the Mamluks and Turkish Beyliks in the Fourteenth Century	453
MARGIT MERSCH Churches as "Shared Spaces" in the Eastern Mediterranean (Fourteenth to Fifteenth Centuries)	461
<i>Transcultural Flows of Trade and Techniques</i>	
DAVID JACOBY Cross-Cultural Transfers of Industrial Technologies in the Later Middle Ages: Incentives, Promoters and Agents	487
HEINRICH LANG The Import of Levantine Goods by Florentine Merchant Bankers: The Adaptation of Oriental Rugs in Western Culture	505
BENJAMIN ARBEL Mediterranean Jewish Diasporas and the Bill of Exchange: Coping with a Foreign Financial Instrument (Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries)	527
<i>Trading Diasporas and Commercial Institutions</i>	
JARED RUBIN Bills of Exchange, Financial Networks, and Quasi-Impersonal Exchange in Western Europe and the Middle East	545
FRANZ-JULIUS MORCHE The Dolfin Connection: A Medieval Venetian Trade Network (1418-1420)	555
CHRISTOF JEGGLE Merchant Communities, Commercial Networks, and the Constitution of Markets	571
REGINA GRAFE Was There a Market for Institutions in Early Modern European Trade?	593

*Diasporas in Early Modern Italy*

GUILLAUME CALAFAT	
Osmanli-Speaking Diasporas: Cross-Diasporic Relations and Intercommunity Trust between Marseilles, Tunis and Livorno (1600-1650)	613
FABIEN FAUGERON	
The Venetian "Nation" in Sicily in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century: The Example of the Valier Brothers' Company	625
STEPHAN SANDER-FAES	
Merchants of the Adriatic: Zadar's Trading Community around the Mid-Sixteenth Century	647
ANDREA CARACAUSI	
Foreign Merchants and Local Institutions: Thinking about the Genoese "Nation" in Venice and the Mediterranean Trade in the Late Renaissance Period	665
ISABELLA CECCHINI	
Florence on the Lagoon: A Strozzi Company in Early Modern Venice	679
ROBERTO ZAUGG	
On the Use of Legal Resources and the Definition of Group Boundaries: A Prosopographic Analysis of the French Nation and the British Factory in Eighteenth-Century Naples	699
	715
Selected Bibliography	783
List of Figures	785
List of Maps	787
List of Tables	789
Abstracts and Keywords	803
List of Contributors and Editors	811
Index	

## Preface

"Union in Separation" might evoke current political and economic developments in the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>1</sup>, be it in Cyprus, Egypt or Syria. It might also refer to the sometimes strained relationship between southern and northern member states of the European Union. However, we did not think of contemporary agendas when coining this title but of the medieval and early modern Mediterranean and its diasporas: a Mediterranean that was both a zone of contact and one of conflict. The aim of this volume is to investigate diasporas, specifically trading diasporas, in the Eastern Mediterranean during the long autumn of the Middle Ages (c. 1100-1800).<sup>2</sup>

The Mediterranean as a contact zone *par excellence* is an omnipresent *topos* in the research literature, which is often stressed in opposition to populist invocations of a clash of civilisations in the Eastern Mediterranean. On the other hand, the strong contemporary perception of the Mediterranean as an area of conflict and problems can hardly be denied: Mediterranean EU member states are experiencing severe financial difficulties; revolutions and civil wars are unsettling Arabic countries in the wake of the so-called "Arab Spring", while trans-Mediterranean migratory flows are regarded as a serious threat to European identity and stability; permanent and seemingly unsolvable conflicts in Catalonia, the Maghreb, Corsica, Cyprus and the Middle East continue to stir up the region with given regularity. Acknowledged or not, the Mediterranean is set to remain in the public focus.

In contrast, the "intra-Mediterranean" perspective can be quite distinct from those of external observers and is most adequately described as a complex set of conflicting perceptions. Mediterranean policymakers have to operate under severe economic constraints (which, in addition, are sometimes denounced as northern straightjackets) in the face of unfavourable domestic realities shaped by defensive ideologies, fragile identities, infrastructural problems and partisan interests. Yet despite major political and economic challenges, the Mediterranean remains a popular destination for tourists and scholars alike.

1. We decided to capitalize "Eastern Mediterranean" as a distinct geopolitical region of central relevance to this volume.

2. Cf. Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages. A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought, and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976).

In general, texts about Christian-Muslim disputations that were authored by Christians were written for a Christian audience and served only two purposes: either to strengthen the faith of the respective community by refuting the Muslim doctrine or to prepare the Christians to deal with the arguments the Muslims usually brought forth against the Christian faith. Texts of this genre can never be regarded as expressions of any kind of oecumenism.<sup>38</sup>

So what was the function of Palamas' letter to his flock? At the end of his letter Palamas very insistently admonishes his congregation not to become like these ill-willing people, namely the Muslims. "They call him who was born of the Virgin the Word of God and his spirit and Christ, that is God-man ... but then they flee and break away from him madly as non-God".<sup>39</sup> So the Muslims are represented as trying to seduce the Christians by claiming they also believe in the divine nature of Christ only to revoke it later. Actually the main topic of all the disputations described by Palamas was the question of the Muslims why Christians do not accept Muhammad as prophet whereas they, the Muslims, would believe in Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup> Evidently this was a very powerful argument which led to the conversion of many Christians since they could appease themselves with the thought that Islam and Christianity have many things in common. Palamas directs his letter against this attitude. His goal is to prepare his community against this "temptation" especially in a time when it became foreseeable that Thrace and thus his metropolitan see Thessaloniki would soon come under Ottoman influence.<sup>41</sup>

These different writings about and by saints, that this chapter has dealt with in a cursory way, certainly still need a more thorough interpretation as literary texts. However the fact that these texts could not be read as representations of what "actually happened" but rather have to be understood as works of literature with a specific function does not at all diminish their value as historical sources. Instead we gain new insights into the thinking of the authors of these texts and how they chose to present captivity, martyrdom and life under Ottoman rule as such.

38. Cf. for example Jacques Waardenburg, s.v. "Religionsgespräche", *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), vol. 28, pp. 631-648, especially pp. 641 seq.; Bernard Lewis, "The Other and the Enemy: Perceptions of Identity and Difference in Islam", in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, pp. 371-382, here pp. 376 seq., points out, albeit not entirely correctly, that just because the Islamic world was for a long period not threatened by Christianity there was not much interest in writing about and against Christianity. In the same volume Sidney Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: from Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)", pp. 251-273, here 272, states: "But one function of the (Christian) texts in Arabic was not so much to encourage interconfessional dialogue, but to draw lines of disagreement more clearly". One Muslim author was especially opposed to Christians "who tried to use Islamic religious phrases in a Christian way, or who modified Christian devotional behavior in response to Islamic criticism".

39. Philippidis-Braat, "La Captivité de Palamas", § 33, pp. 162-165; Sahas, "Captivity and Dialogue", pp. 430 (English).

40. Philippidis-Braat, "La Captivité de Palamas", p. 205, with the references; cf. also Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam*, pp. 70 seq.

41. Sahas, "Gregory Palamas (1296-1360) on Islam", p. 19, points also out that Palamas' letter "is primarily of a pastoral nature, utilising the experiences of his captivity to admonish his flock about active faith".

GIUSEPPE CECERE

## Between Trade and Religion: Three Florentine Merchants in Mamluk Cairo

### 1. Introduction

The presence of important groups of Italian traders in medieval Egypt has been well studied by economic historians.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the "religious side" of this presence remains largely unexplored, especially from the viewpoint of the history of mentalities. How did Italian merchants and diasporic trading groups interact – both actually and symbolically – with different religious groups and authorities in the country? How were they perceived by the "others", and, likewise, how did they perceive the "others" and portray them? How did their reports affect their fellow citizens' collective imagery? Did they in any way contribute to the reshaping of ideas widespread in their homelands (i.e. different Italian city-states) on Muslims, Jews and Eastern Christians?

Such questions seem to be particularly important with reference to the formative period of Humanism and the Renaissance culture, whose cradle is traditionally identified as the fourteenth-century Northern Italian towns, and especially Florence. There, merchants and artisans were acquiring more and more economic and political power, thus cultivating favourable conditions for major cultural changes. A new vision of the world, characterised by a deeper interest in worldly matters and a progressive "secularisation" of cultural and social life, emerged in connection with the rise of the bourgeoisie, as can be perceived in the mid-fourteenth century novels of Boccaccio. Were such new attitudes interacting with the mentalities of Italian diasporic groups overseas and of those Italians who visited the Middle East for trade, diplomacy or pilgrimage (these three aims often overlapping)?

Far from proposing any "general" answer to such complex questions, in this chapter we will present a case study: a comparison of three different reports of the same voyage, written in the last years of the 14<sup>th</sup> century by Florentine merchants Leonardo Frescobaldi, Simone Sigoli and Giorgio Gucci.<sup>2</sup> In 1384, together with

1. As a principal source, see Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

2. Leonardo Frescobaldi, "Viaggio in Terrasanta di Leonardo N. Frescobaldi", in Leonardo Frescobaldi – Simone Sigoli, *Viaggi in Terrasanta*, ed. by Cesare Angelini (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1944); Simone Sigoli, "Viaggio al Monte Sinai di Simone Sigoli", in Frescobaldi – Sigoli, *Viaggi in Terrasanta*, ed. by Cesare Angelini (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1944); Giorgio

three other Florentine merchants and their respective servants,<sup>3</sup> they sailed from Venice on a cock-boat (*cocca*)<sup>4</sup> for making the great pilgrimage circuit overseas,<sup>5</sup> beginning from Alexandria and ending at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. After stopping in some Adriatic and Greek ports, most of them under Venetian rule,<sup>6</sup> they disembarked in Alexandria, where they visited several churches and holy places for indulgences,<sup>7</sup> and also met the consuls of the main trading “nations” in the city.<sup>8</sup> Then, they travelled on the Nile to Cairo, where they visited several other churches and places of worship, some of them connected with the Holy Family’s flight into Egypt. From Cairo, they went across the desert to the sacred area of Mount Sinai. They then left Egypt heading to Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup>

After their return to Florence, Frescobaldi, Sigoli and Gucci wrote three distinct travelogues.<sup>10</sup> All of them have been printed several times<sup>11</sup> and they have been used by historians of Mediterranean trade since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, their religious attitudes, apart from some remarks by Franco Cardini about

Gucci, “Viaggio ai Luoghi Santi”, in *Viaggi in Terrasanta di Lionardo Frescobaldi e di altri*, ed. by C. Gargioli (Florence: 1862). An English translation of all of them is provided in Bellarmino Bagatti, *Visit to the Holy Places of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine and Syria in 1384 by Frescobaldi, Gucci and Sigoli. Translated from the Italian by Fr. Theophilus Bellorini OFM and Fr. Eugène Hoade OFM with a preface and notes by Fr. Bellarmino Bagatti, OFM*, (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1948). In spite of some particular features of the language used by Fr. Bagatti, the present paper will use this work as the main reference for quotations from the three travelogues.

3. Giorgio Gucci provides a detailed list of the pilgrims. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, p. 149.

4. On the spread of *kogge* or *cocca*, a round vessel of Northern European origin, in Mediterranean trade since late 13<sup>th</sup> century, see Mohamed Ouerfelli, *Le sucre. Production, commercialisation et usage dans la Méditerranée médiévale* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2008), pp. 362-364.

5. Frescobaldi: “le cherche maggiori d’oltremare” (the great search for indulgences). *Viaggi in Terrasanta* (1944), p. 45.

6. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 35-37 (Frescobaldi); pp. 93-94 (Gucci); pp. 160-161 (Sigoli).

7. See the complete list in *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 9-16.

8. Venetians, Catalans, Genoese, as well as Florentine merchant Guido de’ Ricci, who acted as a representative of the Portinari family. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, p. 38.

9. The main steps of the journey are listed by Bagatti in *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 1-2.

10. The final date of the composition is available only for Sigoli’s report: “Compiuto di scrivere martedì a dì 4 ottobre 1390 il dì di santo Francesco Benedetto, e Dio ne sia lodato, amen”, *Viaggi in Terrasanta* (1944), p. 269.

11. Frescobaldi’s report was printed first in 1818, Sigoli’s in 1829 and Gucci’s in 1862. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 22-28; R. Delfiol, “Su alcuni problemi codicologico-testuali concernenti le relazioni di pellegrinaggio fiorentine del 1384”, in *Toscana e Terrasanta nel Medioevo*, ed. by Franco Cardini (Florence: Alinea, 1982), pp. 139-176. A critical edition of Frescobaldi’s report by Gabriella Bartolini is published in Gabriella Bartolini – Franco Cardini, *Nel nome di Dio facemmo vela. Viaggio in Oriente di un pellegrino medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 1991), pp. 99-196.

12. See for instance Wilhelm Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au Moyen-Age*, (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1885-1886), vol. 2, pp. 45, 433 and p. 433, n. 1; Charles Schefer, “Introduction”, in Jean Thénaut, *Le voyage d’outremer* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1884), pp. VII-XV.

Frescobaldi’s travelogue,<sup>13</sup> have not yet been analysed. The present chapter will investigate the authors’ attitudes towards Muslims<sup>14</sup> in light of their historical context, with special attention to the religious and legal framework of interactions between Muslim and Latin Christians in medieval Egypt. Although travelogues, especially when written by such “quick” and biased observers as pilgrims, are hardly reliable sources on “factual realities”,<sup>15</sup> they are instead precious for the history of mentalities. They reflect how the author looked at the realities he confronted, and how actual experiences and intellectual prejudices interacted in his mind.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the case of the three Florentines seems particularly interesting as their travel took place in a period<sup>17</sup> marking a turning-point in the history of Egypt and Mediterranean trade: two years after the “transition of power” from Bahārī to Circassian Mamluks, and roughly twenty years after the Crusader raid in Alexandria led by the King of Cyprus Peter I Lusignan (1365).

## 2. The Three Florentines’ Travel in Context: Transcultural Legal Frameworks and Informal Mechanisms Governing the Interactions of Trading Diasporas

### 2.1. Mediterranean Trade and Sharī‘a. General Principles and Special Conditions

As is well known, although the overall attitude of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) was not favourable to trade relations with the “People of the Book”, economic needs often called for a flexible interpretation of religious legal principles. Basically that was made possible by adopting and developing the notions of *ṣulḥ* (truce) and *amān* (safe conduct) alongside that of *jihād* (war for God’s sake).<sup>18</sup> The principle of *ṣulḥ* allowed Islamic rulers to stipulate temporary truces with non-Muslim powers on the grounds of the perceived interest (*maṣlaḥa*) of the Muslim community. This laid the foundations for the development of an Islamic international law, as the basic distinction between *dār al-islām* and *dār al-ḥarb* was nuanced by the introduction of a third category, that of *dār al-ṣulḥ* (the “realm of suspension of war”). The principle of *amān* (safe conduct), too, played a key role

13. See Bartolini–Cardini, *Nel nome di Dio facemmo vela*, pp. 85-95.

14. The authors’ attitudes toward Jews and Eastern Christians are beyond the scope of this paper. However, all three travelogues provide many remarks and commentaries on these issues, which deserve special analysis.

15. “Ce genre de textes ont tendance à imposer des catégories propres sur la réalité du Moyen Orient”. Francisco Javier Apellániz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne: le deuxième État mamelouk et le commerce des épices (1382-1517)* (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2009), p. 29.

16. See Bartolini–Cardini, *Nel nome di Dio facemmo vela*, pp. 85-95.

17. From the 28<sup>th</sup> of September – date of their landing in Alexandria – until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, when they left Mount Sinai heading towards Gaza.

18. Georg Christ, “Masked Cooperation With The Infidel? Venetian Commercial Privileges, Political Power, and Legal Culture in Mamlūk Egypt”, in *Power and Culture. Hegemony, Interaction and Dissent*, ed. by Ausma Cimdina and Jonathan Osmond (Pisa: Edizioni PLUS-Pisa University Press, 2006), pp. 33-51.

in mitigating the idea of *jihād*. In the formative period of Islam, the pre-Islamic Arab notion of “protection” granted on special conditions to foreigners belonging to hostile groups, was adopted for “organising” relationships with people of the conquered countries who did not embrace Islam as well as with foreigners coming from *dār al-ḥarb*. This included the possibility of an individual or a tribe being granted protection. On these grounds, Christians and Jews living under Muslim domination were applied the status of *dhimma*, combining “protection” and socio-juridical inferiority, as expressed in the set of rules traditionally attributed to Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644), though more likely fixed in the following century.<sup>19</sup> Granting Christians and Jews the safety of their lives and properties on condition of the payment of a special tax and of the acceptance of a set of discriminations in social and religious life, *dhimma* marked their submission to the Islamic rule. This institution is therefore to be understood as a particular development in the idea of granting protection to a “foreigner” in exchange for something.

The overall principle of the “protection of the foreigner” was also the main reference for building relationships with Christians and Jews coming from outside *dār al-Islām*. As Georg Christ points out: “This institution also survived in its original form, as an *amān* (safe conduct) granted to a foreigner. This offered an easier basis for the establishment of commercial relationships with Christian states than the law of armed truce”.<sup>20</sup> While every single Muslim could in theory grant an *amān* to an individual or to a limited group of persons (*amān khaṣṣ*), “the head of the Muslim community was allowed to issue an *amān*, then called *amān ‘amm* [general safe conduct] to an unlimited number of non-Muslims”.<sup>21</sup> This provided Muslim rulers quite a flexible tool in relationships with foreign “non-believers”, by issuing commercial privileges which were established on a negotiable basis.<sup>22</sup> Of course in theory the ruler had to comply with the principles of Islamic law. So, he was in constant need to justify the contents of such commercial and diplomatic agreements from the viewpoint of the *sharī‘a* to prevent criticism from the doctors of the Law.<sup>23</sup>

19. On *dhimma* in Mamluk Egypt and Syria, see Eliyahu Ashtor, “The Social Isolation of Ahl Adh-dhimma”, in *Etudes orientales à la mémoire de Paul Hirschler*, ed. by A. Komlos (Budapest: 1950), pp. 73-94.

20. Christ, “Masked Cooperation”, p. 37.

21. *Ibid.*

22. For instance, the three Florentines and their fellow pilgrims were applied a duty of 2% on gold and silver money and all other goods. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 38, 150, 161. This was in accordance with the Treaty of 1345 between Venice and the Mamluk Sultan, which established a unified duty of 2% on all merchandise coming from Venice. Earlier, this rate was applied only to gold and silver, other goods being taxed at of 4,5%. See Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant*, vol. 2, p. 45, n. 3. However, the pilgrims were also asked to pay several tributes, accurately recorded in the detailed list of all travel expenses provided by Gucci at the end of his report. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 149-156.

23. Georg Christ’s analysis of rhetorical strategies adopted by Sultan al-Mu‘ayyid Shaykh (1412-1421) and his staff in drafting a safe conduct for Venetians (1415) in *sharī‘a*-compliant terms, shows well the constant need, for political powers, “to include their decrees in the realm of divine law”, even when they were “not really in the spirit” of such law. See Christ, “Masked Cooperation”, pp. 39-41.

However, the field of trade with the “Infidel” was somehow transferred from the realm of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to the realm of politics (*siyāsa*).<sup>24</sup> As a consequence, though foreign Christians and Jews were theoretically in a worse position than local *dhimmī*-s, as they came from potentially or actually hostile countries, conditions accorded to foreign merchants in international treaties were sometimes more favourable than those applied to *dhimmīs*. For instance, Italian and other European merchants were often explicitly allowed to dress “like Muslims” in order to move safely through the country,<sup>25</sup> thus being exempted from compulsory dress codes and outward religious markers of distinction imposed on local Christians and Jews.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.2. Possible Influence of Cooperation among Individuals on the Evolution of Transcultural Relationship Mechanisms

Along with international treaties, individual agreements between traders were another important field of action implying some possible derogation from classical *fiqh* rules on relationships with non-Muslims. Some cooperation between traders from different religious backgrounds was rather common, from simply travelling on a ship belonging to an “infidel”, to sharing some commercial ventures. In

24. According to a pioneering study (1925) by Willi Heffening, import taxes in Muslim ports in the Middle Ages must have followed general principles of the Islamic fiscal system: Muslim merchants should pay 1/40 on their goods (in accordance to the rules of *zakāt*), whereas *dhimmī*-s should pay 1/20, and foreign *ahl al-kitāb* 1/10. Nonetheless, the actual organisation of markets never adhered to such principles, and rules varied considerably according to times and places, as Claude Cahen proved, at least for Fatimid and Ayyubid Egypt, in his study of al-Makhzūmī’s *Minhādīj*. See Willi Heffening, *Das Islamische Fremdenrecht bis zu den islamisch-fränkischen Staatsverträgen* (Hannover: Heinz Lafaire, 1925); Claude Cahen, “Douanes et commerce dans les ports méditerranéens de l’Égypte médiévale d’après le Minhādīj d’al-Makhzūmī”, *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 7/3 (1964): pp. 217-314. Heffening’s theses are discussed by Cahen, *Ibid.*, at pp. 268-271.

25. Cf. John Wansbrough, “Venice and Florence in Mamluk Commercial Privileges”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 28/3 (1965): pp. 483-527. A Flemish pilgrim (traveling in 1481-1484) states that the sultan could grant such an exemption to all foreigners: see Joos Van Ghistele, *Voyage d’Égypte de Joos Van Ghistele*. Traduction, introduction et notes par Mme Renée Bauwens-Préaux (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1976), Book III, Ch. 2, p. 133.

26. Though none of the three Florentines gives any information on the pilgrims’ own dress, Sigoli provides an interesting remark on dress codes imposed on local religious communities: “I Saracini portano in capo le bende bianche, e i Giudei le bende gialle, e i Cristiani di cintura le bende azzurre, e i Samaritani le bende rosse”. *Viaggi in Terrasanta*, (1944), pp. 178-179. This is evidence that regulations issued by the Mamluk sultans on this issue (1301; 1354) were actually implemented in the time of the travel (1384). On dress codes and other markers of distinctions in Mamluk Egypt and Syria, see Ashtor, “The Social Isolation of Ahl Adh-dhimma”, pp. 75-82. On a debate on this issue, in 1310, between Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn and some ‘ulamā’, among whom the ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Taymiyya, see Henri Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taki-d-din Ahmad b. Taymiyya, canoniste hanbalite né à Harran en 661/1262, mort à Damas en 728/1328* (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1939), Book I, pp. 141-143.



some cases, at least for the most complex operations, the parties felt the need for an official record of their agreements. Therefore, some notarial instruments were created in order to confirm contracts between Muslim and non-Muslim traders.

This was not without juridical problems on both sides. From the viewpoint of *sharī'a* experts, in particular, the issue remained controversial. First of all, as trade contracts imply juridical equality between the parties, jurists often considered such interactions as threatening the religious and social hierarchies between Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>27</sup> The problematic nature of such agreements was particularly evident when a contract was stipulated by taking recourse to a non-Muslim notary and/or one or more non-Muslim witnesses.<sup>28</sup> An intense debate went on among Muslim jurists, especially in the Maliki *madhhab*, on possible legitimacy of interfaith contracts as well as on the status of foreign *ahl al-kitāb*.<sup>29</sup> Some jurists argued that rules governing the relationships with *dhimmī*-s, though generally providing the main reference for relationships with foreign merchants, did not automatically apply to them; that was demonstrated by exceptions admitted in *ṣulh* agreements with non-Muslim states.<sup>30</sup> Though legitimacy of interfaith contracts between individuals remained controversial, such contracts were far from being uncommon in Mediterranean trade practice.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, doctors of the Law were often trying to keep the juridical framework unchanged. Human realities had to adapt to the divine Law, and not the opposite. According to Ibn Taymiyya, Christian countries had no right to trade with Muslim states, although the Muslim ruler could give them such an opportunity in the interest of the community (*maṣlaḥa*). In such cases, the relationship should be organised according to the principles of *ṣulh* (temporary peace agreement for the sake of the Muslim community). However, in Ibn Taimiyya's view,

27. See e.g. the fatwa issued by the Tunisian *ʿālim* Ibn al-Rammāh (d. 749 / 1348-1349) against *qirād* contracts with *dhimmī*-s. H.R. Idris, "Commerce maritime et Kirād en Berbérie orientale d'après un recueil inédit de fatwas médiévales", in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 4 (1961): here p. 233.

28. On classical *fiqh* theories discriminating against non-Muslims in matters of *ʿadāla*, that is capability of acting as legal witnesses, see E. Tyan, "Adl", in *Encyclopédie de l'Islam. Nouvelle Edition*, vol. 1, pp. 215-216; R. Peters, "Shāhid", in *Encyclopédie de l'Islam. Nouvelle Edition*, vol. 9, pp. 213-214.

29. Dominique Valérian, "Le recours à l'écrit dans les pratiques marchandes en contexte interculturel : les contrats de commerce entre chrétiens et musulmans en Méditerranée", in *L'autorité de l'écrit au Moyen Âge* (Orient-Occident. XXXIXe Congrès de la SHMEPS (Le Caire, 30 avril- 5 mai 2008) (Paris: Sorbonne, 2009), pp. 59-72.

30. In a fatwa issued in Hafside Tunisia on building churches in *funduq*-s, a distinction is drawn between *dhimmī*-s and Western Christian merchants on the grounds of *ṣulh* principles. Dominique Valérian, "Les foundouks, instruments du contrôle sultanien sur les marchands étrangers dans les ports musulmans (XIIe-XVe siècle)?" in *La mobilité des personnes en Méditerranée de l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne : procédures de contrôle et documents d'identification*, ed. by Claude Moatti, Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome 341 (Roma: Ecole Française de Rome, 2004), p. 693.

31. See Valérian, "Le recours à l'écrit", p. 60; Francisco Javier Apellaniz, *Research Project: Cooperation in Complex Environments: Cross-cultural Trade, Commercial Networks and Notarial Culture in Alexandria (Egypt): 1360-1450 (MEDALEX)*, www.notaires-venitiens.com/notaries/files/MEDALEX.pdf

Muslims were not really need to trade with Christian countries, whereas the latter actually needed some goods which they could find only in Muslim countries.<sup>32</sup>

### 2.3. *Papacy and Mediterranean Trade. Religious Prohibitions and Inner Tensions on the Christian Side*

On the Christian side, the theoretical framework was also unfavourable to trade relationships with the "Infidel". Papal excommunications were repeatedly laid on those who traded in strategic goods with Muslims countries, especially after the fall of Acre (1291).<sup>33</sup> Political authorities of merchant countries were of course reluctant to implement such prohibitions, as is well exemplified by the tensions during the 14<sup>th</sup> century between the Republic of Venice and the Papacy on the issue of trade with Mamluk lands.<sup>34</sup> The Church never solved the contradiction between religious principles and economic needs once and for all, but case by case, by special permissions that the Pope issued in return for substantial financial contributions from the licensee. Such permissions were always considered as exceptional, conditional and revocable, thus confirming the overall ideological framework of relationships with the "Infidel" and allowing the Church to exert a certain "moral suasion" on the international politics of Christian states as well as on the commercial behaviour of Christian traders.

### 3. *Between Need and Culpability: The Impact of Legal and Religious Prescriptions on Merchants' Mentalities*

#### 3.1. *Moral Regulation of Non-Muslims and Competition for Discursive Control Over Muslim Society*

Although mutual economic need pushed both Muslims and European Christians to develop wide and complex commercial relationships beyond legal theory and religious prescriptions, the ideological contexts remained largely unfavourable to such "cooperation with the Infidel". Therefore, on both sides actors in the Mediterranean trade had to cope with several external restrictions as well as with some inner feelings of "culpability".

In Mamluk Egypt, in particular, attitudes towards European merchants, as well as towards *dhimmī*-s, were highly sensitive issues in a context where the

32. See Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines d'Ibn Taymiyya*, vol. 2, p. 274.

33. Odoricus Raynald, *Annales Ecclesiastici ab anno MCXCVIII, ubi desinit Cardinalis Baronius* (Lucae: typis Leonardi Venturini, 1747-1756), a.a. 1291, no. 27; Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant*, pp. 25, 42.

34. See Gherardo Ortalli, "Venice and Papal Bans on Trade with the Levant: The Role of the Jurist", in *Intercultural Contacts in the Medieval Mediterranean. Studies in Honour of David Jacoby*, ed. by Benjamin Arbel (London-Portland: Frank Cass, 1996), pp. 242-257; *Diplomatariū veneto-levantinum sive Acta et diplomata res venetas graecas atque Levantis illustrantia*, ed. by Georg Martin Thomas and Riccardo Predelli, Monumenti storici 2, serie prima, documenti 9 (Venice: Deputazione veneta di storia patria, 1899), Pars 2, a. 1351-1454.



field of interpretation and implementation of Islamic law was a privileged “battle-ground” between different actors – political rulers, doctors of Islamic religious sciences (*‘ulamā*) and Muslim mystics (*ṣūfiyya*)<sup>35</sup> – competing for “discursive control”<sup>36</sup> over society, in a complex interplay between the “élite” (*al-khāṣṣa*) and “common people” (*al-‘amma*). Basically, Muslim rulers were caught between the need for some cooperation with local and foreign “non-believers” and the need for legitimisation from religious authorities. Attitudes by Muslim scholars and Sufis towards local and foreign *ahl al-kitāb* were often marked by a call for strict implementation of traditional legal norms, and complaining about the rulers’ “laxity” in enforcing the conditions of *dhimma* is indeed a *topos* among religious writers of the time. Actual or perceived permissiveness hurt the feelings of common believers, who were inclined to see it as a perturbation of the socio-religious order established by God. To the lower strata of the Muslim community, in particular, economic wealth and social prominence actually or allegedly enjoyed by non-Muslim individuals or groups appeared as a social injustice and as an intolerable offense to Islamic pride. Some clerics even saw it as a possible temptation for lukewarm believers. Fakhr al-dīn ‘Uthmān al-Zaylā’ī (d. 1342) explicitly says that displays of richness and luxury by non-Muslims could mislead “weak” Muslims, causing them to “acquire a liking” for the others’ faiths.<sup>37</sup> In the same vein, it was the scandalised reaction from a Maghrebian dignitary face the alleged display of wealth and power by a Coptic notable in Fustāt that caused, according to al-Maqrīzī, the ban of Christians and Jews from higher administrative positions in 1301.<sup>38</sup> Mamluk policies should thus be understood against the background of a broader tendency toward “moral regulation” (as Tamer El-Leithy calls it),<sup>39</sup>

35. Far from being two completely separate social “bodies”, sufis and jurists were rather partly overlapping networks of religious figures. A pioneering study on connections between juridical and mystical *milieux* in Medieval Egypt is Jean-Claude Garcin, “L’insertion sociale de Sha’rānī dans le milieu cairote”, in *Colloque International sur l’histoire du Caire*, 27 mars-5 avril 1969, ed. by André Assabgui (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, 1972), pp. 159-168. For a recent case study, see Giuseppe Cecere, “Le charme discret de la Shādhilyya. Ou l’insertion sociale d’Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī”, in *Mystiques juives, chrétiennes et musulmanes dans l’Égypte médiévale: intercultures et contextes historiques*, ed. by Giuseppe Cecere, Mireille Loubet, Samuela Pagani (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 2013), pp. 63-93. For a comprehensive critical assessment of this issue, see Nathan Hofer, *The Popularization of Sufism in Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Egypt: State and Society, 1173-1325* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015). I am grateful to the author for showing me some sections of his then unpublished manuscript.

36. On competition for discursive control over religious communities in medieval Egypt, both in Islamic and Jewish contexts, see Nathan Hofer, “Mythical Identity Construction in Medieval Egyptian Sufism: Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī and Abraham Maimonides”, in *Mystiques juives, chrétiennes et musulmanes*, pp. 393-422.

37. Zaylā’ī therefore called for separation between Muslims and dhimmīs. See Ashtar, “Social Isolation”, p. 75.

38. Al-Maqrīzī, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks de l’Égypte*. Traduite en français et accompagnée de notes philologiques, historiques, géographiques par M. Quatremère, vol. 2, Part 2 (Paris: The Oriental Translation Fund of Great-Britain and Ireland, 1845), pp. 177-179.

39. “By moral regulation I understand a series of discourses and practices whereby some social agents problematize the beliefs and practices of others on moral grounds and seek to

promoted by doctors of the Law and Sufi masters as well. Such tendency also found expression in “endemic” popular riots against Christians and Jews and their places of worship, that were often inspired by some religious figures, even in opposition to political authorities, as it seems to be the case with the wave of violence unleashed in 1321.<sup>40</sup> All this largely contributed to the unceasing process of reducing the population and socio-religious space of Christian and Jewish communities in Egypt through the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.2. Moral Regulation and Western Christian Merchants

Popular feelings towards Western merchants were seemingly not very different from those towards local *dhimmī*-s. Despite all their theological and political divergences, foreign and local “Christians” were often associated in the eyes of the Muslim *‘amma*. Since a very early age, especially during and after the time of the Crusades, European merchants and local *dhimmī*-s were suspected of cooperating against Muslims.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the perceived wealth of foreign Christian merchants and the privileges they were granted by political authorities were at odds with the popular feeling of “Muslim honour”. All this could lead, especially among lower classes, to hostile actions against traders and pilgrims, as the Florentine travellers directly experienced it in 1384. Giorgio Gucci reports:

In the said journey we received very great displeasure and insults from the said Saracens [...], and especially in Cairo, in Gaza and Jerusalem, and on the journey to the Jordan, and in Nazareth and along the Sea of Galilee and in Damascus. [...]. And all for fear of worse we had to suffer. And these outrages we received from servants and such villains and not from men of standing.<sup>43</sup>

Gucci’s final remark confirms that hostile attitudes towards foreign non-Muslims were more widespread among the lowest classes, the “unbeliever” easily being taken as a scapegoat for social frustration.<sup>44</sup>

impose limitations upon them”, Tamer El-Leithy, “Sufis, Copts and the Politics of Piety. Moral regulation in Fourteenth-Century Upper Egypt”, in *Le développement du soufisme en Égypte à l’époque mamelouke*, ed. by Richard Mc Gregor and Ahmad Sabra (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 2006), pp. 75-120.

40. See Denis Gril, “Une émeute anti-chrétienne à Qūs au début du VIIIe/XIVe siècle”, *Annales Islamologiques* 16 (1980): pp. 241-274.

41. See Audrey Dridy, *Églises et Synagogues de Fustat-Le Caire*, (unpublished MA thesis, Paris: Université de la Sorbonne, September 2009); Doris Behrens Abouseif, “Locations of non-muslim quarters in medieval Cairo”, in *Annales Islamologiques* 22 (1986): pp. 117-132; Bernard Blanc, Sylvie Denoix, Jean-Claude Garcin, and Romanello Giordiani, “A propos de la carthe de Matheo Pagano”, *Annales Islamologiques* 17 (1981): pp. 203-285.

42. For an episode occurred as early as 996 and involving Amalfitan merchants in Cairo, see Claude Cahen, “Un texte peu connu relatif au commerce oriental d’Amalfi au Xe siècle”, *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane n.s.* 34 (1953-1954).

43. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 143-144.

44. For a similar case which happened to a Florentine merchant in 1422, see F. Brancacci – D. Catelacci, *Diario di Felice Brancacci, Ambasciatore con Carlo Federighi per il Comune di Firenze (1422)*, in *Archivio Storico Italiano serie 4/8* (1881): pp. 157 seqq.; see also the contribution of Cristian Caselli in this volume.

### 3.3. In Florence: New Visions of the Other?

The dawn of Humanism in Northern Italy and especially in Florence brought more open-minded attitudes towards worldly matters and human realities. In the 1350s the *Decameron* by the Florentine writer Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) marked the beginning of a new era. In this collection of novels, merchants are often presented as the heroes of a new ideal of life, balancing spiritual values and practical intelligence. In one case, in particular, Boccaccio proves to be strikingly open-minded with regards to religious plurality. That is the story of the Jewish merchant Melchizedek (Day 1, Novel 3), which is significantly “located” in Egypt in the time of Saladin. Looking for an excuse to draw on the resources of his wealthy non-Muslim subject, the Sultan asks him which “law” (religion) he considers as the true one between Judaism, Islam and Christianity. As a man of pragmatic intelligence, Melchizedek escapes the trap by telling the Sultan a symbolic story. In the “old times” a rich man had a ring of extraordinary beauty and value, and established that “whichever of his sons was found in possession of the ring [...] should thereby be designated his heir”.<sup>45</sup> This became a tradition in the family, and the ring passed from hand to hand for many generations, until it came to a man who had three sons, all of them virtuous and obedient. As the man “loved them all equally”, he “caused a cunning artificer secretly to make two other rings” and he gave one ring to each of his sons separately. After his death, each son showed his ring and claimed for inheritance and the place of honour, but it was impossible to distinguish the true ring, so the suit to determine the true heir remained pendent. And so, Melchizedek concludes, it is for the three religious laws. Beyond the veils of fiction, Boccaccio seems to express quite an original viewpoint on religious differences, clearly at odds with the mainstream religious culture of medieval Europe. A few decades earlier, another great Florentine poet, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) had expressed a complex attitude towards the Muslim world in his *Commedia*: though condemning Muhammad to Hell as a “schismatic”, he assigned a much more favourable condition to Muslim philosophers Ibn Sīnā (“Avicenna”) and Ibn Rushd (“Averroes”) as well as to the Muslim ruler Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (“il Saladino”), the latter being evidently considered as a hero of chivalric values, in line with an interpretation that was widespread in medieval Europe. Dante admitted the three of them, together with some great figures of the Greco-Roman antiquity, in the special place of Limbo which he imagined for those *spiriti magni* (right and valuable persons) who died without embracing the Christian faith.<sup>46</sup> Though being denied God’s vision and access to Paradise, these souls were not given any other punishment. In line with the

45. Quotations are provided according to Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio faithfully translated by J.M. Rigg* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1903). For an overview of theories on possible (Eastern or Western) origins of this literary theme, see: Pamela D. Stewart, “The Tale of the Three Rings (I.3)”, in *The Decameron First Day in Perspective: Volume One of the Lecturae Boccaccii*, ed. by Elissa B. Weaver, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc., 2014), pp. 89-112; Iris Shagrir, “The Parable of the Three Rings: a revision of its theory”, *Journal of Medieval History* 23 (1997): pp. 163-177.

46. See Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, Inferno, Canto IV *spiriti magni*, for Saladin, in particular, IV, 129; Canto XVIII, 22-33 (Muhammad).

official religious culture, Dante considered Christianity as the only “door” to salvation; nevertheless, he was unwilling to “send to Hell” right and noble human beings even though they were not Christian.

## 4. The Three Florentines and Islam: Traditional Ideas or New Views?

### 4.1. Preliminary Remarks

Did these new viewpoints on religious diversity somehow affect the three Florentine travellers? An in-depth analysis of attitudes towards Muslims expressed in their reports will help to answer this question.

### 4.2. Lionardo Frescobaldi: Spiritual Salvation and Military Intelligence

Lionardo Frescobaldi (1324?-1413?) was the most prominent personality of the group. Born to a noble family of Florentine merchants and bankers who were active on European markets since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, he took part in the religious and political life of the city. In 1379, in the aftermaths of the peace between Florence and the Pope, he was the addressee of one of the many letters that Saint Catherine of Siena wrote to Italian “politicians” of her time.<sup>47</sup> He also accomplished military and diplomatic tasks for the Commune of Florence, both before and after his travel to the Holy Land.

According to his own report, even Lionardo’s pilgrimage was not devoid of military interest: at the very beginning of his travelogue, he states that the Bishop of Volterra<sup>48</sup> had entrusted him with a mission of *intelligence*, on behalf of the King of Naples.<sup>49</sup> In this way Lionardo puts his pilgrimage, somehow, under the sign of the Crusade, thus turning his travel from an individual enterprise for the salvation of his soul into a mission ultimately connected to the salvation of Christianity.

This “Crusader spirit” deeply affected Lionardo’s report and his way of looking at the realities he met with. Indeed, since before the landing, Egypt is evoked as a privileged “lieu de memoire” of the conflict between Christianity and Islam, by the sharp symbolic contrast of the last two episodes preceding the pilgrims’ disembarkation in Alexandria. Still on the *high sea*, but heading towards *Alexandria*, the miraculous figure of St. Mark the Evangelist is evoked by an element

47. See: *Le lettere di Santa Caterina da Siena ridotte a miglior lezione e in ordine nuovo disposte con proemio e note*, ed. by Niccolò Tommaseo (Florence: G. Barbera, 1860), vol. 4, *Lettera CCCLIX*, pp. 420 ff.; Caterina da Siena, *Lettere*, ed. by Oscar Luigi Scalfaro and Umberto Meattini (Turin: Edizioni Paoline, 1993), pp. 375, 530.

48. Onuphrius Visdomini Steccuti, Bishop of Volterra from 1384 to 1390, then of Florence (1390-1400) and Comacchio (1400-1403). See a short notice provided by Bagatti in *Visit to the Holy Places*, p. 5.

49. “Messer Nofrio, frate romitano e maestro in sacra teologia, allora vescovo di Volterra, come di che poi e’ fusse vescovo di Firenze [...] comandommi per parte del detto re [...] io procurassi i porti e’ paesi di là, sicchè alla mia tornata dove si potesse comodamente pigliar porto a gente d’arme, e procurassi e fiumane e luoghi e siti da campeggiare, e qual terre fussino atte a vincere per battaglia”, *Viaggi in Terrasanta* (1944), pp. 40-41. Cf. *Visit to the Holy Places*, p. 32.

of the landscape: “[...] taking the high sea towards Alexandria, we left the island of Crete to the left. And to the right is an islet divided in two;<sup>50</sup> which, it is said, split in two when the Venetians took the body of St. Mark the Evangelist from the city of Alexandria to Venice<sup>51</sup> to make way for the ship”. The mention of such a miracle at the very moment when the pilgrims are approaching *partes infidelium* plays an important role in the author’s narrative strategy. In the silent and powerful language of symbols, Frescobaldi vindicates the Christian “identity” of Egypt, epitomised by St. Mark, traditionally considered as the first evangeliser of the country. He also aims at providing evidence for God’s approval of the “pious” theft of St. Mark’s sacred corpse by the Venetians: the island was divided before St. Mark “fleeing” from the hands of the Infidels just, one would say, as “the waters were divided”<sup>52</sup> before the Jews fleeing Pharaoh’s persecutions. By mentioning this miracle connected to St. Mark’s transfer, Frescobaldi was therefore claiming a sort of “spiritual heritage” that would legitimise (or even “oblige”) Latin Christians to fight for getting Egypt back to the “true faith”.<sup>53</sup> Such a powerful claim of Egypt’s Christian “identity”, is immediately followed by a fearful reminder of the present Muslim reality of the country: “We went as far as the old port of Alexandria, where we arrived at night (...) And for fear of the Saracens we cast the irons off shore”.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the first mention of Muslims, even before seeing any of them, is connected to *fear*. Though the first actual encounter with Muslims the morning after is not as fearful as it was expected, the author insists nonetheless on the Saracens’ hostile attitudes towards pilgrims: “They led us inside the port of Alexandria and presented us to certain officials, who had us registered and numbered *like animals* (“*come si fa con le bestie*”) (...) having first searched us carefully, even to the flesh”.<sup>55</sup>

More than the merciless accuracy of the search, it is the comparison with animals (*bestie*) which calls for our attention in connection with Muslim-Christian mutual perceptions. According to Frescobaldi, Christians are treated *like animals* for the very reason that Muslims consider them as such. In this framework, the assonance between the Arabic word *khān* and the Italian word *cane* (“dog”) inspires

50. *Visit to the Holy Places*, p. 37. It is probably the islet called Strophades or Strivalis, South of Zante; Bagatti found no other sources on the miracle of the divided island, see *Ibid.*, p. 37, n.1.

51. According to tradition, in 828 V.E., Venetian merchants Rustico of Torcello and Bono of Malamocco stole the sacred corpse from his burial place in Alexandria and brought it to Venice, where a great basilica was built to host it. St Mark’s relics soon became the “cornerstone” of Venetian identity. See *The Itinerary of Bernard the Wise (A.D. 870)*, trans. by H. Bernard (London: Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society, 1893), p. 5, quoted in J. Faivre, “L’Eglise Saint-Sabas et le Martyrium de Saint Marc à Alexandrie”, *Bulletin de l’Association des Amis de l’Art Copte* 3 (1937): pp. 71-72.

52. Exodus 14:21 (King James Version).

53. On this issue, see Giuseppe Cecere, “Le corps du martyr comme lieu de mémoire. Pérégrinations de reliques en Méditerranée (IX<sup>ème</sup>-XIV<sup>ème</sup> siècle)”, in *Guerre et Paix dans le Proche-Orient médiéval. Actes du Colloque international organisée par Sylvie Denoix, Matieu Eychenne, Stéphane Pradines et Abbès Zouache. Le Caire, Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 15-18 décembre 2011* (forthcoming).

54. *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 37-38.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

him a false but most meaningful etymology: when Muslims make their prayers in mosques, he says, all Latin Christians are locked in a building called *il Cane* (meaning “the khan”, but also “the dog”): “and this name comes from [their assumption] that we are *cani* (dogs)”.<sup>56</sup> He in turn is ready to qualify Muslims by the same epithet in a passage deserving an in-depth analysis:

In the city there are very many cooks, who cook outside in the street, by night and day, in great cauldrons of copper, the finest and good meats. And no citizen, however rich, cooks at home, and so do all in pagandom, and they even send to buy at these bazaars, as they call them. And often they set themselves to eat in the streets, where they spread a skin on the ground, and they place the viands in a basin in the centre, and they sit around on the ground with legs crossed or squatting. And when they have soiled the mouth, they lick it with the tongue as dogs, which they are.<sup>57</sup>

The whole scene expresses a complex attitude of attraction and repulsion towards “the other”. On the one hand, the author insists on some attractive elements, thus drawing a picture in line with the folkloric theme of *pays de Cocagne*. This was a typical expression of the basic *topos* of the *univers à l’envers*, often inspiring the perception and representation of the “other” in traditional societies.<sup>58</sup> All key features of the “Cocagne-theme”, including richness and sexual freedom,<sup>59</sup> are found in Frescobaldi’s description of Egypt. As Jacques Le Goff pointed out, such representations usually played an important role of “compensation” to the constraints of the audience’s everyday life.<sup>60</sup> However, Frescobaldi is not dealing with a remote or a fictitious world, but with a very concrete reality, which he feels as a close and permanent threat to Christianity. In representing Egypt as an *univers à l’envers*, therefore, his aim is not to entertain readers pleasantly but to strengthen their sense of superiority and hostility towards Muslims. Accordingly, he cannot indulge in potentially counterproductive descriptions which might give rise to some attraction towards the “other” in his readers. Therefore, when feeling that his description of the street banquets is becoming too attractive, he abruptly shifts to a shocking image: “They lick [their mouths] as dogs, which they are”. Such an *unhappy ending*, turning delight into disgust, is clearly aimed at cathartic effects.

For the same reasons, Frescobaldi is quite “discreet” about the sultan’s wealth, whereas he insists on sexuality as a mark of Saracens’ supposed “bestiality”. Islamic marriage rules are presented as an expression of unbridled sexual appetites: “They are not content with one wife, nay, they have as many as they can maintain [...]. The Sultan has a hundred wives between whites and blacks, as Mohammed had”.<sup>61</sup> Mention of Muhammad in this context is quite significant,

56. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

58. For Medieval Europe, see Jacques Le Goff, “Le merveilleux dans l’Occident médiéval”, in *L’étrange et le merveilleux dans l’Islam médiéval*, ed. by Mohamed Arkoun, Jacques Le Goff, Tawfiq Fahd and Maxime Rodinson (Paris: Editions J.A., 1978), pp. 61-79, here 69.

59. Cf. *infra*.

60. See Le Goff, “Le merveilleux dans l’Occident médiéval”, p. 69.

61. *Visit to the Holy Places*, p. 49. Apparently Frescobaldi does not know that four wives is the limit imposed by the rules of Islamic polygamy, or he does not distinguish between wives and slave concubines.

because Frescobaldi sees unbridled sexuality as a key feature of Islamic religion. Even *adhān*, the Islamic call for prayer, is interpreted accordingly: "And their shouting is to bless God and Mohammed; then they say: increase and multiply, and other dishonest words".<sup>62</sup> He also provides distorted information on Islamic divorce (*talāq*). He says that after divorcing thrice from the same woman, her husband cannot marry her again, unless she lies first "with a blind man".<sup>63</sup> In Cairo, he adds, there are men "who blind themselves in competition to be ready for such services".<sup>64</sup> Thus, he switches from indignation to humour. That is another way, of course, to mark his distance from a world which is, in his view, ruled by lust much more than reason. Ultimately, it is an *univers à l'envers*.<sup>65</sup>

In this framework, another image seems particularly important. When evoking "the seigniory of the Sultan", ruling over many kings, Frescobaldi says that several times the Sultan had one of these kings brought before him with a collar on his neck, "like a dog".<sup>66</sup> In such an example of *univers à l'envers*, humour plays a cathartic role: the ridiculous image of the king on a leash comes after an allusion to the sultan's military power, thus working as an exorcism against possible "fear of the Saracens".<sup>67</sup>

Frescobaldi's approach to Muslims never goes beyond religious polemics and apologetics. A description of the Islamic sacred month of Ramadan is an opportunity to stress the "beastly" connotation of Muslims according to the *topos* of *univers à l'envers*: "Their fast is not to eat anything from dawn till dark, then all night they eat like beasts, (...) singing and dancing".<sup>68</sup> In his preconceived hostility, he does not even care about the accuracy of the information he provides: he places the Muslim feast day on Monday instead of Friday, and he roundly says that Muslims do not pray during the rest of the week.<sup>69</sup> In such context, even Frescobaldi's mention of some points on which Muslims seem to "draw near" to Christianity, like their reverence for Jesus and the Virgin Mary, has a merely apologetic function, these supposed similarities being seen, of course, as pale reflections of the light of the "true" religion flickering in the darkness of unbelief.

Frescobaldi's attitude could actually be summarised in a simple equation: Islam is to Christianity as usurpation is to legitimacy, both in theological and

62. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 49. The information is transmitted also by Sigoli, but the latter speaks of "three blind men": see *Ibid.*, p. 164. It is clearly a distortion of a well-known Qur'ānic rule (Qur'ān, II, 230): after divorcing a wife thrice, a man cannot marry her again, unless she marries another man who later divorces her (or dies).

64. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, p. 49.

65. Another element characterising Egypt as a world turned "upside down" is that of merchant women, see *Ibid.*, pp. 44-46.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

67. In Frescobaldi's view, fear and derision are also the dominant attitudes by Muslims towards Latin Christians. See *Ibid.*, p. 39 ("They fear the Christians of over here, those whom they call Franks"); p. 65 ("and in derision of our faith, [Sultan's knights] carry painted on the horses' covers a chalice").

68. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

69. See *Ibid.*, p. 41.

geo-political terms. Muslim rule on Egypt is basically felt to be a usurpation of a Christian land. This is made clear, first and foremost, by some examples of religious-spatial "substitution", where an Islamic element is presented as the "usurping" of a Christian one:

1. In Alexandria, the Admiral's residence "substitutes" the houses of Saint Catherine: "There is a lord called Lamolech,<sup>70</sup> which amounts to a king, who represents the sultan. This man resides in the houses that belonged to Saint Catherine the Virgin, but they are in a form other than they were"<sup>71</sup>;

2. In Cairo, the Sultan's palace has "substituted" that of Pharaoh where Moses grew up.<sup>72</sup>

3. In Maṭariyya, the miraculous water source and the garden of balsam, both bearing witness to the passage of the Holy Family, have become the property of the Sultan.<sup>73</sup>

4. In S. Catherine at Mount Sinai, although the area is managed by (Eastern) Christian authorities and monks, these are nevertheless under the Sultan's rule, and they have to accept the presence of a mosque, as well as to feed the Saracens officiating there.<sup>74</sup> That is at least a partial "religious-spatial substitution".

5. Finally, in the countryside and the desert around that area, another case of substitution is mentioned, Arabs (that is Bedouins) living where Jews dwelt under Moses while waiting to reach the Promised Land.<sup>75</sup>

In Frescobaldi's view, not only sacred places of Egypt are to be rescued from the hands of the Infidels, but the whole country and its inhabitants, including the many "renegade Christians".<sup>76</sup> He himself, with the help of a friar from Venice, tries to bring one of them back to the Christian faith: it is the Sultan's grand interpreter, whom he describes as "a renegade Venetian" married to the daughter of a Florentine renegade, the latter having been grand interpreter before him.<sup>77</sup>

Another renegade Christian, however, calls for much more attention from the author: the Sultan himself. Though Frescobaldi does not mention his name, he has to be identified with al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Abū Sa'īd Barqūq, who was officially in power since 1382 and whose reign marked the beginning of the Circassian Mamluk period. According to Frescobaldi, the Sultan was formerly a Christian slave imported from Greece,<sup>78</sup> who not only embraced Islam for himself but, pushed by his lust for power, went as far as forcing his father to convert, thus causing him

70. Clearly a deformation of the Arabic expression al-Malik ("the king").

71. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 39-40.

72. See *Ibid.*, p. 45.

73. See *Ibid.*, p. 54.

74. See *Ibid.*, p. 59.

75. See *Ibid.*, p. 60.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

77. See *Ibid.*, p. 45. Unfortunately, Frescobaldi does not mention any of the names of these supposed Italian "renegade" Christians working for the Sultan.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 45. The term "Greek" was often used as a general label for "non-Latin" Christians living in Eastern countries. The Sultan is considered a "Greek" also by Sigoli (see *Ibid.*, p. 171) and Gucci, the latter even specifying the Sultan's origin: "formerly a slave and a Greek Christian of Carcascia (*sic*)", *Ibid.*, p. 100.

to die. As only a Muslim with a Muslim father could become a legitimate Sultan, the former slave, in complicity with “certain evil Christians of Greece” had his father brought to Cairo, where he forced him to “renege the faith of Christ” and to be circumcised, “of which in a short time from pain and grief he died”.<sup>79</sup> The grim story, which is not mentioned at all in the other two travelogues,<sup>80</sup> seems to be mere forgery. It is neither found in Ibn Khaldūn, the first Arabic biographer of Barqūq,<sup>81</sup> nor in the first valuable Latin biography of the Sultan, composed in 1416 by Christian Italian merchant and traveller Bertrando de’ Mignanelli from Siena, who knew Barqūq personally and spent many years in Syria and Egypt.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Barqūq is one of the rare Mamluk figures whose father is known: apparently another Mamluk, Sharaf al-Dīn Anās Jarkasī Uthmānī,<sup>83</sup> who died in 1382<sup>84</sup> after having been an “Amir of a Thousand”,<sup>85</sup> the highest rank for Mamluk Amirs in Egypt.<sup>86</sup> In Frescobaldi’s eyes, nevertheless, this story of betrayal and cruelty would perfectly match with the sin of apostasy: as Barqūq first betrayed his Heavenly Father, nothing might prevent him from betraying his earthly one.

Usurpation, indeed, affects the physical space as well as those who live therein. Yet, if human beings can “apostatise” and renounce their faith, natural elements cannot. Even in the hands of the “Infidels”, the land of Egypt still bears witness to the only “true faith”. Along with great miracles having left their mark on the Egyptian landscape, Frescobaldi records humbler but quite significant miracles taking place in everyday life:<sup>87</sup> “There is a kind of fruit which they call *muse*<sup>88</sup> like cucumbers, and they are sweeter than sugar. They say that it is the fruit in which

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

80. Sigoli gives a detailed account on the rise of Barqūq, whereas Gucci focuses on the Sultan’s possessions and income. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 100-101 (Gucci); *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175 (Sigoli).

81. See *Kitāb al-ta’rīf bi-bn Khaldūn wa-riḥlatuhu gharban wa-sharqan*, ed. by Muḥammad b. Tāwīt al-Ṭanjī (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta’līf wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr, 1951), pp. 314-348 and *passim*.

82. Walter Y. Fischel, “Ascensus Barcoch. A Latin Biography of the Mamlūk Sultan Barqūq of Egypt (d. 1399) written by B. de Mignanelli in 1416. Rendered into English with an Introduction and a Commentary”, *Arabica* 6 (1959): pp. 57-74 (part I); pp. 152-172 (part II).

83. His mausoleum still stands in Cairo. See A. C. Creswell, “A Brief Chronology of the Muhammadan Monuments in Egypt to A. D. 1517”, *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale* 16 (1919): pp. 39-164, here p. 115.

84. Fischel, “Ascensus Barcoch”, p. 58, indicates 1381 as the year of Anās’ death, but with no explanation.

85. Cf. Abū al-Maḥāsin Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī. *Les Biographies du Manḥal Ṣāfi*. Ed. and trans. by Gaston Wiet. *Mémoires de l’Institut d’Égypte* 19 (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1932), N. 549, pp. 79-80.

86. Cf. David Ayalon, “Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army – II”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 16/1 (1954): pp. 448-476; here 466-468.

87. A “recurrent miracle” showing resistance to usurpation is one concerning oxen at the waterwheels in Maṭariyya: they “never wish to turn from Saturday evening to Monday morning”, thus “sanctifying” the Christian feast day. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 54-55.

88. Arabic *mūz* (“banana”) was given the name of *musa paradisiaca* in Latin, whereas its vernacular equivalents were “Paradise apple” (Sigoli) or “Adam’s apple” (Gucci).

Adam sinned, and dividing it in any way you find a cross, and in many places we experienced it”.<sup>89</sup>

Such miracles occurring outside the traveller’s religious space (*in partibus infidelium*) and confirming his religion as the “true” one are not only found in Christian texts. Arabic literature of the Middle Ages is full of such examples. A case somehow comparable to that of bananas with the cross is found in *Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Hind*,<sup>90</sup> whose author evokes, among many other marvels, a tree whose leaves are naturally “imprinted” with letters forming the first part of the *shahāda*, so that one clearly reads *lā ilāha illā Allāh* on them.<sup>91</sup> Both examples express a “triumphalistic”<sup>92</sup> attitude, aiming at “religious appropriation” of space.

#### 4.3. Simone Sigoli: a Skillful Blend of Attraction and Repulsion

Very limited information is available on Simone Sigoli. Though he belonged to an ancient and noble Florentine family, there is no evidence that he took part in Florence’s public life.<sup>93</sup> In his travelogue, written in 1390, Sigoli proves as hostile as Frescobaldi towards Muslims, though drawing a more detailed picture of their “customs and manners”. His idea of religious re-appropriation of space is clearly expressed in one of his first remarks: “Alexandria lies on the sea and has a very beautiful and big port, such, indeed, that in the hands of the Christians it would be far more beautiful”.<sup>94</sup> Later on, when dealing with the miraculous water source in Maṭariyya, Sigoli reports a “recurrent miracle” expressing the place’s resistance to religious-spatial usurpation by Muslims: “When a Saracen wishes to drink of the said water, it seems to him as bitter as poison: and for that reason no Saracen can drink it, because it does not seem to please God. And when a Christian drinks of it, it is very good”. Notwithstanding, he says, Saracens do not cease to venerate the place, thus confirming the truthfulness of the Christian faith: “and every time that the Saracens feel any pain they go to this fig tree [where the infant Christ was hidden] having very great faith in it”.<sup>95</sup>

Contrary to Frescobaldi, however, Sigoli does not build his description of Egypt on an overall symbolic opposition between the Christian past and the Muslim present. In Sigoli’s report, the mention of the island that split to make way for St. Mark’s body comes in a much earlier phase of the travel, that is between Zante and Modone,<sup>96</sup> not immediately before the arrival at Alexandria. Thus, there is no

89. *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 42-43.

90. See *Livre des Merveilles de l’Inde*, ed. by P. A. Van Der Lith and M. Devic (Leiden: Brill, 1883-1886), pp. 170-171.

91. See Giuseppe Cecere, “Le meraviglie dell’Oceano Indiano. Appunti sui caratteri del meraviglioso nel Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Hind”, *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 25 (2002): pp. 349-364.

92. Cf. André Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu’au milieu du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. 1 (Paris-the Hague: Mouton, 1987), pp. 127-132.

93. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, p. 3. His family coat-of-arms, with three golden scythes on a blue field, is reproduced in the frontispiece of the book (page not numbered).

94. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

95. *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

96. See *Ibid.*, p. 160.



direct connection between St. Mark's miracle and claims of Christian identity of Egypt, as it was in Frescobaldi's report. Moreover, Sigoli provides some better information than Frescobaldi on Muslim customs. He correctly indicates Friday as the Islamic feast day, he mentions a limit to the permitted number of wives (though indicating "seven" instead of "four") and he proves aware of the difference between legal wives and concubines.<sup>97</sup> Also, Sigoli is the only one who mentions the Feast of Sacrifice.<sup>98</sup> He admires the outward appearance of Saracen men, especially of the elders,<sup>99</sup> and he is ready to admit the honesty of one of the group's Muslim guides. Also, he provides a fascinating description of a Muslim wedding, including what is probably one of the first Western reports on belly dance.<sup>100</sup>

In spite of his curiosity towards Muslims, however, Simone Sigoli is in no way a forerunner of "participant observation". In his descriptions of "customs and manners" of Saracens, he just amplifies mechanisms of attraction and repulsion that have been analysed with reference to Frescobaldi's report. This is most evident when he deals with sexuality. For Sigoli, lust is the very foundation of Muslim religion: "Their law speaks naught but of eating and giving themselves to every lustful pleasure". In his eyes, even *niqāb* (full veil) ironically turns into a shelter for women in search of extramarital pleasures. Accordingly, he insists on alleged sexual connotations of the Islamic call for prayer: "The priests of the mosques go up the towers (...) recounting something of the dishonest life of Mohammed and of his evil companions (...) Then they shout (...): increase and multiply so the law of Mohammed increases and multiplies". And in this way they live like animals (*bestialmente*).<sup>101</sup>

Muslim society is therefore depicted as an *univers à l'envers*: religion fosters corruption instead of continence, priests practice polygamy instead of abstinence and they preach fornication instead of continence. Sigoli insists as much as Frescobaldi on the allegedly irrational and "beastly" connotations of Muslim style of life, often stating that "they live like animals". In Sigoli's *univers à l'envers*, Muslim women play quite an active role in sexual life. According to his reports, women would not only do their best "to please the men" and search extramarital relations, but also claim the right to sexual pleasure inside marital relations: a wife can go before a "bishop" (that is, a *qādī*) and ask for divorce if her husband does not have sex with her as often as she wishes.<sup>102</sup> For Sigoli, all this should be nothing but evidence of the sinful and perverted character of Islamic religion: "their law orders them to do every evil; *and so they live like animals*".<sup>103</sup>

The alleged "beastly" connotation of Islam is also expressed by blind obedience to irrational tenets imposed by force rather than by persuasion. After the Friday sermon (*khutba*) in the mosque, "their Kadi (...) draws his scimitar from his

97. See *Ibid.*, pp. 163, 170-172.

98. See *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.

99. "Bellissimi uomini sono del corpo molto più di noi", *Viaggi in Terrasanta* (1944), p. 189.

100. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 165 and 167 respectively.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

102. See *Ibid.* p. 164; in Italian "se non usa con lei quant'ella vuole", *Viaggi in Terrasanta* (1944), p. 182.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

side (...) saying: Whoever wishes to contradict what he [Muhammad] has said, let him be cut in twain; immediately they all begin to shout in a loud voice: be it as he said. *And so they live like animals*".

In such a framework of sheer hostility towards Muslims Sigoli's descriptions of attractive sides of Egypt are meant to feed the audience's wish for a religious-spatial re-appropriation. Sigoli's first image of Alexandria is that of a "very attractive city", rich in every kind of merchandise, with great abundance and variety of the finest food in the world.<sup>104</sup> The long enumeration of fruits following this introduction is really worthy of a *pays de Cocagne*, but it meaningfully ends with the miraculous *musa* (banana), which acts here as a "'natural' marker of Christian identity".<sup>105</sup> The author never loses religious self-control: the attractive side of the other is only evoked to fuel the audience's "Crusader spirit" with some material arguments.

A more complex intention is probably behind Sigoli's frequent and detailed mentions of the Sultan's power, "nobility" and "fine appearance". In a fabulous hunting scene, the Sultan is accompanied by a "great multitude of people, a hundred thousand on horse", along with "a very great number of gerfalcons, and pelerine falcons, and a great number of pointers and greyhounds"; so many are the pavilions that "when the camp is pitched it looks like a city". The Sultan's extraordinary generosity recalls Western medieval ideals of *cortesia*: having received a fabulous gift from the admiral of Damascus, that is a hundred camels laden with gold and silver, the Sultan summoned his barons "and in the space of an hour he had distributed all these things out of courtesy".<sup>106</sup> The author, however, proves fully aware of the political meaning of such generosity: "For magnanimity of heart he holds that seigniory, which did not fall to him, because he belonged not to the issue with the right to be Sultans". Sigoli even provides a detailed report, less biased than Frescobaldi's, on the Sultan's ascent to power from slavery, not hiding the cruel and cunning ways he used, but stating that this former slave is now a wise and respected sovereign.<sup>107</sup> However, Sigoli's attitude remains an apologetic one: in the end, all details regarding the Sultan's magnificence are somehow turned into the glory of the Christian faith. Though ruling on immense possessions and "many very large towns" which provide him with huge revenues, so that one can hardly imagine "the treasure that must accrue to him",<sup>108</sup> the Sultan does not hold any real power in his hands. He is actually submitted to a Christian king: "Prester John of India", to whom he pays a huge tribute every year, lest "a certain cataract of a river" be opened and all Egypt be flooded.<sup>109</sup> Though the legend of Prest-

104. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, p. 16.

105. "In this fruit is seen a very great wonder, for when you divide it in any way, either by its length or by its breadth, whichever way you cut it, the Crucifix is distinctly seen inside". *Ibid.*, p. 161.

106. *Ibid.*, pp. 172-173.

107. "Since this man became Sultan, you can go through all his territory with gold in hand, so much is he feared, and so well does he give right justice to all manner of people". *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

108. This quotation and those immediately above are from *Visit to the Holy Places*, p. 176.

109. "Therefore for this reason, namely fear, the Sultan sends him every year a gold ball surmounted by a cross, worth three thousand gold besants". *Ibid.*, p. 176.

er John (usually identified with the Christian Negus of Ethiopia) was widespread in medieval Western Europe, Sigoli is the only one of the three Florentines to mention it. By evoking this powerful Christian figure after long and magnificent descriptions of the Sultan, he is telling his Christian audience that they have actually nothing to fear. On the contrary, it is the Sultan who has very good reasons to *fear* a Christian sovereign. Prester John acts therefore as a mythical compensation for Western Christians rulers' temporary inability to overcome the Saracens, whereas the most powerful Sultan is symbolically reduced to nothing more than a "king on a leash".

#### 4.4. *Giorgio Gucci: A Realistic Crusader Spirit*

Giorgio Gucci was born to a plebeian but wealthy family which played an important role in the public life of Florence. His father Guccio was one of the leaders of the War of the Eight Saints against the Papacy (1375-1378), representing the Wool-cloth Manufacturing Guild (*Arte della Lana*) in the War Council. Giorgio himself played some political and diplomatic roles, being one of the Priors of Florence in 1379 and being sent as an ambassador to the Pope in 1383.<sup>110</sup>

In his travelogue Giorgio Gucci proves to be a complex personality, combining traditional and humanistic attitudes. Though sharing his fellows' strong Crusader spirit and even amplifying it, he departs from them on several sensitive issues, showing greater intellectual curiosity and independence of mind than his more educated companions. He is the only one who does not mention the divided islet linked to the miracle of St. Mark's transfer. When describing Muslims, he keeps away from the rhetorical scheme of *univers à l'envers*. He never hints at the supposed "beastly" connotations of *Saracens*, nor does he transmit any "sexual interpretation" of the Islamic call to prayer. His description of Muslim "churches" (mosques) is quite objective.<sup>111</sup> Also, Gucci does not even mention "recurrent miracles" such as the cross seen inside bananas, the oxen refusing to "work" on Sunday in Maṭariyya or the water changing its taste according to the drinker's religious belonging.

Despite all this, he has a sharp "Crusader spirit" too. His first description of Alexandria combines realistic observation with intense feelings of religious-spatial re-appropriation. His first remarks on the town are complimentary, especially praising its character as a "merchant city" and the presence there of the most important European trading "nations".<sup>112</sup> Immediately after, however, a powerful marker of Christian identity is evoked: the two columns of St. Catherine's martyrdom and the prison where she was detained.<sup>113</sup> Alexandria is thus identified, first and foremost, as the city of St. Catherine. Her martyrdom, far from being a pale memory from a remote past, is strictly linked to recent history and the Crusader spirit: "Between

110. On Guccio Gucci, see *Visit to the Holy Places*, p. 3; John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 151-155. On the War of the Eight Saints, see David S Peterson, "The War of the Eight Saints in Florentine Memory and Oblivion", in *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence*, ed. by William J. Connell, (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 173-214.

111. See *Visit to the Holy Places*, pp. 3, 105.

112. See *Ibid.*, p. 94.

113. See *Ibid.*, p. 94.

the said two columns, King Peter (...) of Cyprus, to the honor of God and the Holy Faith, had a Mass said and the Body and Blood of Christ offered up, in the month of October in the year of the Lord 1365, when this King took the said city of Alexandria, which he held for three days".<sup>114</sup> The author is thus calling for religious-spatial reclamation of Egypt even more intensely than his fellows, though with partly different means. Instead of denigrating the enemies, he prefers to focus on historical events, searching for reasons and even for responsibilities behind them, as he does for the failure of the Crusades launched, respectively, by King Louis of France and King Peter of Cyprus.<sup>115</sup> At the same time, he proudly states that Christians are no longer allowed to go "where St. Mark was beheaded", in Old Alexandria, "solely because the Saracens fear that a man going there and seeing it would find means and ways by which the said city of Alexandria could be taken from them by the Christians": re-appropriation of the Egyptian space, he seems to say, is not only necessary but it would even be easy.

While believing in miracles, Gucci is definitely more interested in analysing material forces at work. When dealing with the monks on Mount Sinai, for instance, he reports the tradition of the miraculous support provided them by Moses and the Virgin Mary in a moment of great distress, but he pays more attention to the economic foundations of the monks' life:

They live on alms which are given them. Because the pilgrims who come here do them great favours and make them great gifts of their own money, and of money given them to carry there from persons who have great devotion for the place: chiefly, great lords, barons and knights and rich men of Germany, Flanders, England, France and Gascogne and from very many places (...). Besides there are lords from here [Italy] who send them often very large alms; and according to what we were told Queen Giovanna of Naples and Messer Galeotto Malatesta are big benefactors.<sup>116</sup>

Following his realistic attitude, Gucci often provides original insights into the "other's" world. When dealing with Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, he focuses on relationships between trade and religion:

From every city and village of the Sultan, people go every year to Mecca, some for business and some on pilgrimage; for they say that there is the head and the tomb of Mohammed, that is, of their God, to whom they pay great reverence (...) This Mecca they say is a big city and borders on India; and there collect at the said time merchants from India with great quantities of merchandise, that is, spices; and there they give and take and in three days they are through with everything and start for home. It is an ordinary thing in those three days to sell and buy merchandise for two million florins.<sup>117</sup>

Nevertheless, religious polemic is not absent from this seemingly neutral description. It is all contained in a brief but powerful clause: "the tomb of *Mohammed*,

114. *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

115. See *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98, and pp. 94-95 respectively.

116. *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 144. The erroneous idea that Muhammad was buried in Mecca was widespread in medieval Europe. Unlike Sigoli, Gucci does not mention the legend of the ark floating in the air due to some technical artifices. On this issue, see Charles Pellat, "Notes sur la légende relative au cercueil de Mahomet", in *Bulletin des Etudes Arabes* (Algiers: 1945), pp. 112-113.



that is, of their God". Such definition implies radical rejection of Islam, considered as a false religion, adoring a man in God's place. In so short a sentence, Gucci provides much sharper a condemnation of Islam than Frescobaldi and Sigoli do with all their derogatory expressions and marvellous anecdotes. That is, in a nutshell, Gucci's attitude which can be described as a "realistic Crusader spirit".

##### 5. Some Final Remarks: A Manifold Warlike Attitude

All of the three travellers are actually quite far from the tolerant view on religions expressed by Boccaccio's novel of Melchizedek and the three rings. Nevertheless, one of them, that is Giorgio Gucci shows something of the pragmatic and worldly mind that characterises Boccaccio's merchants in *Decameron*. Neither Sigoli nor Frescobaldi try to develop any independent vision on the basis of their experiences. Rather, they tend to see new things through the filter of their prior knowledge. They are interested in "recognising" much more than in "discovering": experience just provides evidence to preconceived ideas. Gucci, on the contrary, is able to look at new realities with real curiosity, sometimes even questioning what he "knows" on the grounds of what he "sees". Such traces of a pre-Renaissance mentality, however, are combined in him with a fierce Crusader spirit.

The three authors share, in fact, a sharp hostility towards Islam and a deep aspiration to religious-spatial re-appropriation of Egypt. Even their remarks on the country's agriculture and other economic activities are to be understood within this framework. They all insist on the extraordinary fertility of the cultivated land, abundance and quality of food, huge volume of trade exchanges that the country's geographical position at the crossroads between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean allows for. Whether such an enthusiastic picture was justified by real conditions of the country in that time is a matter of debate.<sup>118</sup> For sure, it was functional to the authors' wish to arouse, also through material arguments, Christian readers' desire to rescue Egypt from the hands of the "Infidel".

This attitude will continue to dominate the following centuries. As is shown even by the case of diasporic trader Emanuele Piloti, who spent much of his life in Egypt,<sup>119</sup> the intensity of the Crusader spirit did not actually depend on one's degree of knowledge of the "other". In a theoretical framework that remained resistant, on both sides, to cooperation across "theological" and cultural boundaries, there would be just one fully "legitimate" way to solve, once and for all, tensions between economic needs and religious culpability: subduing the "other" in order to neutralise the subversive potential of its "otherness". Despite Boccaccio and Melchizedek, on both sides of the Mediterranean, military conquest continued to be seen for long time as the only durable solution to the inner conflict between trade and religion.

118. For an updated critical survey of the debate on supposed "decline" of Egypt in the Second Mamluk State, see Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finances en Méditerranée pré-moderne*, pp. 13-27.

119. *Traité d'Emmanuel Piloti sur le passage en Terre Sainte (1420)*, ed. by P. H. Dopp (Louvain-Paris: Nauwelaerts, 1958).

## ALBRECHT FUESS

### Why Venice, not Genoa: How Venice Emerged as the Mamluks' Favourite European Trading Partner after 1365

#### 1. Introduction

It is always difficult trying to rewrite history and to speculate what the possible outcome would be if the historical actors involved had taken some different twists and turns. This contribution will therefore not argue that Genoa could have become the main trading partner of the Mamluks instead of Venice had it acted in a different way after the Cypriot attack on Alexandria in 1365. The aim is rather to show how the far more aggressive Genoese stance against the Mamluk Empire did have, on the one hand, some short- and mid-term positive effects for Genoa like the conquest of Famagusta. On the other hand, this approach proved to be counterproductive in the long run and even earned Genoa, as will be shown at the end of this chapter, the role of the eternal arch villain in pre-Modern Egyptian and Syrian minds. In contrast to this, the mutual Mamluk-Venetian perspective was less belligerent.

To introduce the topic a brief sketch is necessary to describe the two great Italian rivals and their Levantine policies in the mid-fourteenth century, at a time when the end of the papal ban concerning trade with the Mamluks reopened direct trade routes from Europe towards the Mamluk Empire. This ban had been issued and renewed several times after the Mamluks' final expulsion of the crusaders from the Holy Land in 1291.

#### 2. Venice

Venice was keen on resuming trade with the Mamluk Empire after the end of the papal prohibition which had hindered official trade to a large extent. When in 1345 Venice and the Mamluks reached a new trade agreement, the Venetian envoys noted that no Venetian had set foot on Mamluk soil for twenty-three years.<sup>1</sup>

1. *Diplomatarium Veneto-Levanticum sive Acta et diplomata res venetas, graeca atque Levantis, illustrantia*, ed. G.M. Thomas and R. Predelli, vol. 1 (Venice: Sumptibus, 1880), p. 291; Gherardo Ortalli, "Venice and Papal Bans on Trade with the Levant: The Role of the Jurist", in *Intercultural Contacts in the Medieval Mediterranean: Studies in the Honour of David Jacoby*, ed. by Benjamin Arbel (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1996), p. 248; Albrecht Fuess,