

IMAGES IN THE BORDERLANDS

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AND THE WORLD

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Images in the Borderlands

*The Mediterranean between Christian and Muslim Worlds
in the Early Modern Period*

Edited by

IVANA ČAPETA RAKIĆ AND
GIUSEPPE CAPRIOTTI

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Table of Contents

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| List of Illustrations | 9 |
|------------------------------|---|

Introduction

| | |
|--|----|
| Images in the Borderlands: The Mediterranean between Christian and Muslim Worlds in the Early Modern Period | 19 |
| Ivana ČAPETA RAKIĆ and Giuseppe CAPRIOTTI | |

Part 1

Borderland

The Mediterranean Basin between the Two Worlds

| | |
|--|----|
| Rival Legacies: Islamic Art in Early Modern Europe | 35 |
| Peter BURKE | |
| Zadvarje (Duare): The Fate of a Fortress at the Border of Two Worlds | 51 |
| Ivan ALDUK | |
| The Bastions of the Ottoman Capital: The Fortresses of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus Seen by French Military Engineers, Diplomats, and Travellers in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries | 61 |
| Ferenc TÓTH | |
| The Image of Elite Corps, from Al-Andalus to Lepanto | 75 |
| Ana ECHEVARRIA | |

Part 2

Lepanto

*The Image and the Reflection of the Battle
in the Mediterranean Basin and Beyond*

- Between Liguria and Southern Piedmont: Images of Lepanto
in Religious Contexts** 99
Laura STAGNO
- Heroic Comparisons in Images of Christian Political and
Military Leaders Engaged in the Wars against the Turks:
Some Observations Starting from the Battle of Lepanto (1571)** 133
Chiara Giulia MORANDI
- Johannes Sambucus's *Arcvs aliquot triumphal* (Antwerp, 1572):
Visual and Written Propaganda for the Victor at Lepanto** 155
Juan CHIVA and Víctor MÍNGUEZ
- On the Other Hand: The Battle of Lepanto in Ottoman Sources** 181
Naz Defne KUT

Part 3

Circulation

*From Ancient to Modern, across Imagined
and Secret Battles Reflected in Images*

- The Rhetorical Index in the Portraits of Mehmed II: Some
Episodes between Words and Images, from the West Shore of
the Mediterranean** 197
Angelo Maria MONACO
- Representing Africa in the Exequies for King Philip II** 223
Cristelle BASKINS and Borja FRANCO LLOPIS
- Old and New Enemies in Ancient and Modern Battles:
Anachronisms in Three Works by Mattia Preti in Malta** 245
Maria Luisa RICCI
- 'Macometto in Una Nugola Nera' (Muhammad in a Black
Cloud): The Imaginary War of Giovanni da San Giovanni
(and Ferdinando II de' Medici) at Palazzo Pitti** 259
Francesco SORCE

| | |
|---|-----|
| 'At his Feet': The Image of the Eastern Prisoner in Late Baroque Iberian Public Sculptures | 279 |
| Iván REGA CASTRO | |
| Index | 301 |

The Rhetorical Index in the Portraits of Mehmed II

*Some Episodes between Words and Images,
from the West Shore of the Mediterranean*

An Introduction to the Method

He — for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise It — was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters. It was the colour of an old football, and more or less the shape of one, save for the sunken cheeks and a strand or two of coarse, dry hair, like the hair on a cocoon. Orlando's father, or perhaps his grandfather, had struck it from the shoulders of a vast Pagan who had started up under the moon in the barbarian fields of Africa; and now it swung, gently, perpetually, in the breeze which never ceased blowing through the attic rooms of the gigantic house of the lord who had slain him.¹

The incipit of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (London, 1928) takes the reader to the heart of the matter between Christians and Muslims in the sixteenth century: a clash that has become a habit. But it is also an adequate opening

It is a wish of the author to thank the editors, Giuseppe Capriotti and Ivana Čapeta Rakić, for accepting the essay; Alexander J. Noelle and Walter Cupperi for useful suggestions on medals by Bertoldo; the DFBC (Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage) of Ca' Foscari, Venice, for supporting the translation of the essay from Italian; and a special thanks to the anonymous peer readers for their valuable advice.

¹ Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 3.

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to the contents of this essay from a lexical point of view: the choice of the verb 'to disguise' which alludes to the game of appearances.

The young lord plays with the head of a Moor, dangling ceaselessly from a beam in the top-floor chamber of the mighty dynastic mansion, which had belonged to the ancestor who had detached it from the bust of an Infidel and brought it back, with Virginia Woolf's words, from 'the barbarian fields of Africa'. That is, from a bloody military campaign in which many men on both sides had been decapitated. There is no mockery of what is left of the enemy in the gesture of the young lord who trains for war by striking a dry head with his dagger, like a leather ball, shaggy like a coconut, almost like those animal heads hanging on the walls after returning from a safari, but displayed without the usual solemnity reserved for a hunting trophy.

It is precisely on the changing perception of the iconography of certain 'heads' between victors and vanquished in the hostilities between the two shores of the Mediterranean between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that I will write below. On the one hand, I will focus on that of Mehmed II the Conqueror, that is, how the image of his portrait was altered along with his increasingly bad reputation on the western shore of the same sea; on the other hand, I will discuss how the image of the heads of the eight hundred citizens of Otranto, raised by the sabres of the infidels in 1480, contributed to the amplification of anti-Ottoman propaganda over a long period of time.

Warburgian scholars taught us to look at Renaissance images in a three-dimensional way.² In other words, viewing them as symptoms of the era in which they were conceived and as bearers of cultural information that goes beyond the two-dimensional limits of the surface they occupy and the forms they depict. The thought of a given era imbues the form with a degree of complexity that is directly proportional to the ability of the *inventor* of the iconographic programme, whether or not he is the artist, to become a receiver of the knowledge circulating in his time. I am referring in this essay to a rhetorical index, which will be as high as the sum of the meanings and references stratified in the image to which this exponent refers. But it will be a 'relative' index, since its understanding is in turn proportional to the observer's capacity to decode it. A definition of a work of art given by Umberto Eco, recently circulated on the Instagram account @RaiCultura (i.e. a medium for the circulation of knowledge that would probably amuse him), comes to mind: 'a work of art is a fundamentally ambiguous message, a plurality of meanings that coexist in a single signifier'.³ On the other hand, even when an image is observed from a wide historical and cultural distance, as is the case with the works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the possibility of understanding its deeper meaning remains ambiguous and at the discretion

2 For an intellectual profile of Aby Warburg, see Cieri Via, *Introduzione a Aby Warburg*; within the extensive bibliography available, see Pallotto, *Vedere il tempo*.

3 Instagram, @raicultura (published 2 June 2021).

of the reader, their ability to retrieve historical data, to reconnect plots and restore forms of knowledge from that same era.⁴ The same historical distance, however, offers today's reader an advantage over the first recipients, namely the possibility of straightening out certain aberrant deformations resulting from the rhetorical use of the same image, whether in the case of a single 'biographical profile' as in that of Mehmed II (1432–1481), or in the case of complex historical episodes, as the Turkish conquest of Otranto (1480) from which an episode of 'construction of sanctity' (bottom to top) emerged.⁵

The effigy of Mehmed II undoubtedly undergoes a process of becoming aberrant. The naturalistic features of the sultan, documented in some well-known contemporary medallions and paintings, are gradually altered towards that of a caricature, proportionate to the maturation of the process of demonization of his historical figure on this side of the Mediterranean. So the somatic features of the man in a turban take on those of a classical satyr, reinvigorated by the sense of the grotesque from which the Renaissance was not immune.⁶ The enemy is necessarily the devil. Thus, Mehmed is Nero, Herod, the Pharaoh who persecutes the chosen people. He has a hooked nose and pointed ears. He is necessarily lascivious, satyr-like, merciless, diabolical, as he is described, as we will see below, by some accredited authors (Matteo Bandello, Paolo Giovio, and later Marco Boschini). In this sense, the rhetorical index of the effigy of Mehmed II (as would later happen with the infidel Turk in general) reaches an exponent as high as the anti-Ottoman propaganda in the Christian world.

I have dealt with the case of Otranto elsewhere, to the point of explicitly talking about the construction of an Otranto mythography.⁷ But in this attempt to focus on the unprecedented concept of 'rhetorical index', the mythographic process of the massacre takes on a special dimension, since Mehmed II was its instigator. As is very well known, the southern Italian city of Otranto in the Kingdom of Naples, at that time ruled by King Ferdinand I, was attacked and laid to siege by the Turks commanded by Gedik Ahmet Pasha, during Mehmed II's reign, on 23 July 1480. After some weeks of resistance to the siege the city fell, and on 14 August almost eight hundred citizens were beheaded by Turks. Most European courts were shocked by the siege of Otranto since it was the first time in which Muslims landed on Italian soil to conquer a Christian city. Duke Alfonso of Calabria, the son of King Ferdinand I of Naples, was able to free the city only in 1481, due to the fact that the Ottoman Empire abandoned the idea of conquering southern Italy as a consequence of the unexpected death of Mehmed II.⁸

4 Freedberg, *The Power of Images*.

5 Boesch Gajano, *La Santità*, pp. 77–95.

6 Battisti, *L'antirinasimento*.

7 Monaco, *La 'Gerusalemme celeste' di Otranto*; Monaco, "Qui amicti sunt et unde venerunt?"

8 Bibliography on the Turkish invasion of Otranto is vast and protean in nature. For a historical overview, see Fonseca, ed., *Otranto 1480*, and Houben, ed., *La conquista turca di Otranto*. Devoid of some essential bibliography references is Bianchi, *Otranto 1480*.

The complexity of this subject of colossal proportions, that is, the parallel evolution and reception of Mehmed II's iconography on both sides of the Mediterranean, cannot be fully explored here. And some iconographic traditions remain outside the scope of this investigation. Such is the case of the iconography of the sultan in the *Oracula Leonis*, where in an oracle entitled *Μελισμός* (separation) Mehmed II is presented in the form of a bear with suckling cubs, to signify the separation of the empire upon his death. Attributed to the Byzantine emperor Leo the Wise (AD ninth–tenth century) but evidently collated over a wide chronological span, the collection of short biographical oracles, circulated in some magnificent manuscripts, was disseminated in Venice by mathematician Francesco Barozzi. He was the one who, from the 1550s or 1570s, edited an anthology in Latin and in the vernacular, translating parts of Greek manuscripts collected during his wanderings in the Mediterranean.⁹ This precious oracular tradition, which includes extremely interesting aspects of iconographic culture, is excluded from the discussion that follows for geographical reasons, since its Cretan origins are still linked to the Byzantine world, and it remains linked, as far as I know, only to the codicological sphere. It will be sufficient in this essay to refer quickly to the depiction of Mehmed II, in the series of portraits of Ottoman sultans, also of Ottoman origins, in the collection of Paolo Giovio, in his famous villa on Lake Como.¹⁰ From this collection at least the two successful series for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese in Caprarola and part of the 'Jovian' for Cosimo de' Medici in the Uffizi derive. This indicates a singular episode of the geographical circulation of images between originals and copies, about which Ilenia Pittui (doctoral student at Ca' Foscari) focuses with great interpretative finesse.¹¹ Some other relevant iconographic traditions must also be excluded from the discussion.¹²

The Sultan's Effigy between Nature and Fear

Aby Warburg was one of the first scholars to mention the portrait of Mehmed II by Bertoldo di Giovanni as an image instrumental to a rhetorical purpose. Indeed, the particular statement can be viewed as a reverse of a famous medal (Fig. 9.1). Here the personifications of the three provinces of Trabzon, Greece, and Asia conquered by the sultan can be seen linked to a man in a turban and a cloak posing as a classic Nike (a *pathosform* in itself) standing upright high above the triumphal chariot of two horses pulled by a soldier. Warburg's idea

9 Valuable are the studies on this subject by Rigo, *Oracula leonis*; Hatzopoulos, 'Oracular Prophecy'.

10 Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio*.

11 Pittui, 'Tra originali e copie'.

12 Orbay, *The Sultan's Portrait*; Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews*.



Figure 9.1. Bertoldo di Giovanni, *Mehmed II* (obverse and reverse), copper alloy, diam. 94 mm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst (5129). c. 1480. © cat. 15a. in Aimee Ng, Alexander J. Noelle, and Xavier F. Salomon, eds, *Bertoldo di Giovanni: The Renaissance of Sculpture in Medici Florence*, exhibition catalogue (New York, The Frick Collection, 18 September 2019–12 January 2020) (New York: The Frick Collection in association with D Giles Limited, 2019), pp. 406–09.

on the reuse of that classical iconography in Bertoldo's medal concerns the application of a rhetorical index to the image.¹³

The effigy of Mehmed II made a comeback in 2019 in two major exhibitions held on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. As traced by Xavier Salomon in the excellent catalogue of the monographic exhibition on Bertoldo held at the Frick Collection between 2019 and 2020, based on a proposal by Emil Jacobs in 1927,¹⁴ the sculptor, known as one of Michelangelo's first masters, made a medal celebrating the powerful Mehmed II Fâtih — the Conqueror — possibly on commission of Lorenzo the Magnificent, around 1480, in order to repay the one he had received as a gift from the sultan himself.¹⁵ At the same time possibly Gentile Bellini portrayed him in a very similar manner in the well-known painting (also c. 1480) in the National Gallery in London, signing himself 'Venetus Eques Auratus Comesq[uae] Palatinus'.¹⁶

-
- 13 I have seen the Italian translation of the essay in Warburg, *Fra antropologia e Storia dell'Arte*, p. 670. No reference to Warburg's mention of Bertoldo's medal can be found in the bibliography I will mention below.
- 14 Jacobs, 'Die Mehemed-Medaille des Bertoldo'.
- 15 See a specimen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, diameter 94 mm, reproduced as fig. 207 in Ng, Noelle, and Salomon, eds, *Bertoldo di Giovanni*, pp. 406–09, where reference is made to Jacobs, 'Die Mehemed-Medaille des Bertoldo' (p. 408).
- 16 From the National Gallery curatorial board: 'the painting is almost entirely repainted, especially in the figure. An old inscription, lower right, gives the date 25 November 1480. The lower left inscription is a more recent reconstruction; it includes the names Mehmet and



Figure 9.2. Cristofano dell'Altissimo, *Mehmed II*, oil on wood, Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi, 2nd half of the 16th century. © and reproduced with the permission of the Ministero della Cultura.

Independently, in the catalogue of the exhibition *Rinascimento visto da Sud* (*Renaissance seen from the South*) held in Matera in the same year, Walter Cupperi provides new insights on the iconography of the same medal (a later and flawed specimen can be found in Modena, Galleria Estense, inv. 9105).¹⁷

Gentile Bellini. The attribution to Bellini is not proved, but the sitter is reasonably identified as Mehmet II (1432–1481). Gentile Bellini visited his court in Constantinople. There is insufficient evidence for deciding whether the picture is a copy or a very damaged original. <<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/gentile-bellini-the-sultan-mehmet-ii>> [accessed 25 January 2022]. For a recent study of Gentile's portrait compared with other iconographic sources relating to the physiognomy of Mohammed II, albeit within the limits of a lack of bibliographic updating about the medals by Bertoldo and Costanzo, compare Soldi, *Al-FĀTĪH*. See also Schroeder, 'Frame for a Sultan'.

¹⁷ Walter Cupperi, catalogue entry 1.23, *Bertoldo di Giovanni, Maometto II*, post-1461, in Catalano and others, eds, *Rinascimento visto da Sud*, p. 221, with bibliography on the medal.

Of this piece, he prudently circumscribes the terminus post quem for its craft on circumstantial grounds, not without underlining the lack of documents proving the circumstances of the commission or the place where the piece was cast. The triumphal chariot surrounded by allegorical figures undoubtedly celebrates Mehmed II's annexation of the Byzantine and Trebizond Empires (1453 and 1461, respectively, and recalled in the circular inscription on philological bases), but not, as proposed by Jacobs and by Raby and accepted by Salomon,¹⁸ the events in Otranto (1480), hence the proposed date for the medal. Indeed, as Cupperi points out, the depiction of the throne in flames on the crossbar of the chariot, rather than being one of the Aragonese heraldic figures (one of the feats of King Ferdinand, or Ferrante, sovereign from 1458 to 1494, who reigned at the time of the landing of the Turks at Otranto), would in fact be a recognized martial symbol appropriate for celebrating on the one hand the valour of the person depicted, but also his moral inadequacy: the throne in flame could be a reference to the thirteenth chair of the round table which would burst into flames if occupied by an unworthy knight.¹⁹ In other words, the iconography does not provide evidence of the conquest of Otranto. Therefore the dating of the medal remains problematic.

As is well known, it was Mehmed II himself who asked various courts in the peninsula to send artists to the capital he conquered in 1453 — hence the 'paradox' of a conquering and ruthless sultan who was also a patron of the arts, as formulated by Julian Raby.²⁰ Gentile Bellini and Bartolomeo Bellano were some of those who worked for such a particular patron and lover of certain aspects of classicism, reached by Costanzo de Moysis (or di Mosè) from Padua (or Venice) who, according to a letter from the Estense ambassador Battista Bendidio dated 24 August 1485, most recently recalled by Cupperi in 2019, had been sent by King Ferrante I of Aragon as a 'pictore a Bisanzio' (painter to Byzantium) upon request of the sultan himself, who wished to have 'uno pittore de quelli dal canto di qua' (a painter of those from this side).²¹ A medal bearing the portrait of Mehmed II, in profile on the *recto* and on horseback while crossing a clearing surmounted by a fortress on the *verso*, would date back to this period. A few examples are known with conspicuous epigraphic variants, including one in Washington, DC²² (in excellent condition, Fig. 9.3) and one in

18 Raby, 'Pride and Prejudice'.

19 A very interesting topic is the circulation of imagery ascribable to the Arthurian cycle in the Mediterranean area. An early episode that has not yet been sufficiently focused on is the depiction of Rex Arturus among the figures on the mosaic floor of Otranto Cathedral, signed and dated by Presbitero Pantaleone (as he signed himself in the pavement of the basilica) in 1165. On the 'rhetorical index' of the mosaic of Otranto and its connection with preaching in the Middle Ages, see Bolzoni, *La rete delle immagini*, p. 145.

20 Raby, 'A Sultan of Paradox'.

21 Sricchia Santoro, 'Pittura a Napoli negli anni di Ferrante e di Alfonso Duca di Calabria'.

22 Pollard, *Renaissance Medals*, 1, pp. 162–63 (where the artist is named Costanzo da Ferrara; the inscription on the *recto* is: MOHAMETH II OTHOMANUS TURCORUM IMPERATOR SULTANUS; on the *verso*: HIC BELLI FULMEN POPULOS PROSTRAVIT ET URBES;



Figure 9.3. Costanzo de Moysis (or di Mosè), *Mehmed II* (obverse and reverse). Last quarter of the fifteenth century – beginning of the sixteenth century.
© Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art.

Bargello (inv. 5985), not perfectly moulded, dated 1481 (so cast the same year of Mehmed II's death, on display at the exhibition in Matera).²³ In any case, this is an episode of artistic patronage that testifies to the liveliness of exchanges between the Aragonese and Ottoman courts, the circulation of images on both sides of the Mediterranean, and religious tolerance when it comes to luxury goods. Thus, as in a Shakespearean comedy, three otherwise irreconcilable characters interact on the Mediterranean stage: a Christian king, a Muslim sultan, and a Jewish artist (Costanzo de Moysis's onomastic title suggests as much).

Is it possible to think of medals as a source of inspiration for a process of image caricature — beyond the conventional criteria of *ritrarre* and *imitare* in the Renaissance, as explained by Giorgio Vasari in his *Vite* (*Life of Artists*, Florence, 1550 and 1568) — whereby certain graphic solutions aimed at the grotesque are nothing more than the consequences of an exacerbation of natural facial features? 'Yet "imitating" nature was not necessarily the same as "portraying" a person', recalls Carlo Falciani in his introduction to the exhibition on the protean meaning of portraiture in sixteenth-century Florence on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.²⁴ All the more so if nature lends itself to mockery, as in the case of Mehmed II who was endowed (according to Gentile's 'naturalistic' portraits, both in the painting and in the medal, probably devoid of any intention of derision) with a hooked nose

in a bi-annotated table of smaller character size: CONST/ANTIUS/F).

23 Cupperi, catalogue entry 5.21, *Da Costanzo de Moysis, o di Mosè, Maometto II (1432–1481)*, in Catalano and others, eds, *Rinascimento visto da Sud*, p. 371, with the r/v epigraphic text.

24 Falciani, 'Power and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Florentine Portraiture', p. 17, also for references to the use in Vasari of the verbs 'imitare' and 'ritrarre'.

and a protruding chin. In other words, two easily derisive characteristics, to which one would add, to worsen his image, the satyr-like and diabolical pointed ears found both in the medal by Costanzo de Moysis (here more close to the natural folding of the ear lobe due to the pressure of the turban) and, as we will see, in Herod's images in three of four *Massacre of the Innocents* by Matteo di Giovanni. According to the evolution of an iconographic process of sclerotization of the evil nature of the Turk, the infidels are identified with the torturers in the Passion of Christ or his martyrs in many works in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (for example, in Tintoretto's *Miracle of the Slave*, 1545, Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia). A similar situation had already occurred from the fourteenth century onwards against the Jews, represented, as Giuseppe Capriotti has pointed out, according to unequivocal physiognomic characteristics (once again feral, satyr-like) and unmistakable iconographic attributes (the scorpion on their chest, the yellow robe, the bag with the thirty pieces of silver).²⁵

The Demonization of the Enemy in Images and Words (the Poisoning of the Image of the Grand Turk)

It is interesting to note the process of demystification of the historical figure and his progressive derubrication as the incarnation of evil, with the alteration of his effigy, both in painting and in literature. In the case of Mehmed II, this process is reinforced after he sowed terror by landing his troops on Italian soil for the first time in 1480. In this sense, it is useful to recall the portrait of Mehmed II described by Paolo Giovio in his *Commentario de le cose de' Turchi* (Rome, 1535).²⁶ The codification of the physiognomy of the infidel sultan, charged with all the derogatory attributes considered, will culminate in the portrait of the Jovian series by Cristofano dell'Altissimo, around 1560, in Florence, Uffizi Galleries, possibly based on Giovio's description itself (Fig. 9.2). This is a significant compilation of the way of proceeding by accumulating disparate sources, in which all the topoi of a physiognomic nature highlighted are brought back by the humanist to the moral perversion of the person who embodies them, in the conviction shared in his time that the face was the mirror of the soul. A description without any possibility of appeal in which the imperfections already eternalized by the effigy moulded by Costanzo de Moysis, passing through those displayed by Matteo di Giovanni, exacerbate the reader's degree of intolerance towards this ambiguous character, an infidel, fratricidal sodomite, and with no faith whatsoever, cunning in replacing religious prescriptions when necessary and who in the end refused any moral law. It was a literary portrait of great

25 Paraphrasing the title of a study on the subject by Capriotti, *Lo scorpione sul petto*.

26 Giovio, *Commentario de le cose de' Turchi*, pp. 95–109. See Appendix, text 1.

success, later quoted in other sources such as in Matteo Bandello's collection of *Novelle* (first published in Lucca in 1554, but already circulating with humanists): in particular in the one entitled *Maometto imperador de' turchi ammazza i fratelli, i nipoti e i servidori con inudita crudeltà vie più che Barbara* (Mehmed, emperor of the Turks, kills his brothers, nephews, and servants with unprecedented and barbaric cruelty).²⁷ Giovio's text is significant in terms of the perceived image of the subject he is writing about. An atrocious persecutor of the innocent, accustomed to the most despicable practices, an avowed enemy of Christianity, yet capable of a certain generosity towards cultured and literate men, and passionate about classical culture: 'a Sultan of Paradox'.²⁸ It is also interesting to point out a reference to the Otranto siege in another *novella* by Bandello: part iv, number XXVIII, entitled *Fra Michele da Carcano predicando in Firenze è beffato da un fanciullo con pronto detto* (Brother Michele from Carcano preaching in Florence is mocked by a guy with a clever sentence).²⁹ As Elisabetta Menetti points out, in her critical introduction to a modern edition of Bandello's *Novelle*,

Entering the *Novelle* of Bandello is like walking through the different places of the Renaissance courts with the impression of being projected into the heart of history. A path that not only shows the limpid and solid architecture of the ideals of the Renaissance, but also is on the whole sometimes chaotic, of absolute values and their subversion, of light and dark, of labyrinths and underground passages in which roams, perhaps a little bewildered, the modern man.³⁰

In the mid-seventeenth century, Marco Boschini, following a well-established tradition of disparagement, drew on the biographies of Venetian painters Gentile Bellini and Carpaccio, both seduced by the exotic allure of the Ottoman court in the late fifteenth century (visited by the former, only imagined by the latter), to write a ruthless portrait of the 'Great Turk' in verse. A short story entered in the *Carta del navegar pitoresco* (Venice, 1660), paradoxically biblical because of the subject matter (that is, the theft of an apple), is a valid proof of the sultan's cruelty. Someone steals a single apple from his orchard and pays with his life. 'Zentile Belin', an eyewitness of what happened, has

27 Bandello, 'Maometto imperador de' turchi ammazza i fratelli', p. 116 et passim. See Appendix, text 2, Bandello A.

28 Raby, 'A Sultan of Paradox'.

29 See Appendix, text 2, Bandello B.

30 Bandello, *Novelle*, p. 7: 'Addentrarsi tra le *Novelle* di Bandello è come passeggiare tra i diversi luoghi delle corti rinascimentali con l'impressione di trovarsi proiettati nel vivo della storia. Un sentiero che non mostra solo la limpida e solida architettura degli ideali del Rinascimento, ma si inoltra nell'insieme a volte caotico, di valori assoluti e del loro sovvertimento, di chiari e di scuri, di labirinti e di sotterranei in cui si aggira, forse un po' spaesato, l'uomo moderno' (my translation). By the same author, see also Menetti, *Enormi e disoneste*.

no doubts: he will soon return to his own land, far from this Nero enemy of the Christians, to Venice, 'dove alberga rason e umanità' (where reason and humanity dwell).³¹

The typological and iconographic assimilation of the infidel enemy with the harassers of Christianity had already found wide support in fifteenth-century art, with the spread of some subject matters, such as the flagellation (exceptional is the masterpiece by Piero della Francesca, c. 1455, Urbino, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche),³² and the iconography of the *Massacre of the Innocents*. This is no doubt because of the fall of Constantinople in 1453, with the massacre of Christians,³³ and then for the events of Otranto in 1480.³⁴ This is the case in the works of Siennese artist Matteo di Giovanni (Borgo San Sepolcro, c. 1430 – Siena, 1495), who turned the theme of the massacre narrated in Matthew 2. 1–16 into a speciality of his catalogue, using it in a typological key and as an allegorical representation of his times, on at least four occasions: three in Siena and one in Naples.³⁵

Below is a synopsis of the four *Massacres* by Matteo di Giovanni, in chronological order:

1. *Massacre of the Innocents*, based on a drawing by Matteo di Giovanni, Duomo di Siena, marble floor dated MCCCCLXXXI (1481), with inscription: 'TEMPORE F. ALBERTI. D. FRANCISCI. DE ARIGNGHERIIS, EQUITIS HYEROSOLIMITANI. MCCCCLXXXI' (1481).
2. *Massacre of the Innocents*, Siena, Santa Maria della Scala (from Sant'Agostino), tempera, silver, and gold on wood, 236.5 cm × 236.5 cm, with inscription: '[O]PUS-MATEI-IOHANNIS-/ ESENS-MCCCCLXXXII' (1482).
3. *Massacre of the Innocents*, Siena, Chiesa Basilica di Santa Maria dei Servi (datable 1491), tempera and gold on wood, 233 cm × 233 cm; bezel, 110 cm × 233 cm, with inscription: 'OPUS. MAT/TEI. IOANNE:/DE SENS' (Fig. 9.4).
4. *Massacre of the Innocents*, Napoli Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte (from Santa Caterina a Formello) with uncertain dating, as I will point out below.

In the three panels in Siena, the enemy of the Innocents is no longer the pagan Herod (as happens instead in the panel in Naples) but a scary Mehmed II clearly marked by his diabolical shape and the conventional turban. The precious painting is counterpointed by the cruelty of the iconography, pushed to the limit by a painter who was aware that he had to impress, to scare, and

31 *Carta*, Vento I, 33, 28. See Appendix, text 3.

32 About the panel and its connections with the historical context, essential is Ronchey, *L'enigma di Piero*.

33 Bádenas de la Peña and Pérez Martín, *Constantinopla 1453*.

34 Please refer to the bibliography mentioned in notes 7 and 8, above.

35 References to the painter's activity in Siena can be found, in general, in Syson and Angelini, *Renaissance Siena*; Alessi and Bagnoli, eds, *Matteo di Giovanni*.



Figure 9.4. Matteo di Giovanni, *Massacre of the Innocents* (detail), tempera and gold on wood, Siena, Basilica di Santa Maria dei Servi. 1491. © Web Gallery of Art.

to strike the soul of the viewer, to turn them to pity for the victims and to indignation or terror at the perpetrator.

The panel in Naples is problematic with regard to its chronology and iconography: its chronology due the discordant dating in the sources (1468 or later);³⁶ its iconography because is the only one of the four *Massacres* by Matteo in which Herod is not disguised as a Turk but portrayed as an emperor 'all'antica.' The matter is not irrelevant since exactly this panel is most linked to relics from Otranto: it was after the liberation of the city in 1481 that Duke Alfonso of Calabria transferred a substantial *corpus* of almost 240 bodies from the eight hundred martyrs beheaded by the Turks the year before, to store them (where they still remain), as relics, in a reliquary chapel built in the church of Santa Caterina a Formello, where the painting was displayed at least after 1481. It will not be superfluous to note, moreover, that already in this panel (the most back-datable), Herod has pointed ears as an eloquent symbol of his wickedness.

These works were conceived in communities that had long been educated to use images for devotional purposes. Particularly in Siena the voice of Saint Bernardino still echoed, a skilful weaver of visionary prayers cast like nets over the crowds of believers. Lina Bolzoni has taught us how the technique of preaching in the vernacular makes pervasive use of the visual medium, where the typological comparison between scriptural narrative and everyday life is a rhetorical device that is widely exploited.³⁷ Bringing the mysteries of faith or sacred history back into the everyday sphere affects the minds of the devotees. As Michael Baxandall has taught us, it edifies thought and the spirit.³⁸ We would say today: it orients public opinion.

Cronaca di una Strage dipinta (Chronicle of a Painted Massacre) was the evocative title of the exhibition held in Siena in 2006,³⁹ in which the painter's works were observed from the aforementioned perspective. In keeping with a consolidated iconographic code according to which the beauty and ugliness of the subjects portrayed are directly proportional to the nobility or narrowness of their souls, the rubicund beauty of the little torn bodies (as if they were taken from a Donatello chancel) and the desperation of their mothers, some of whom surrendered, others fighting with their nails and teeth, but all in precious clothes and very elegant hairstyles, are counterbalanced by the grotesque and ruthless features of the torturers, exaggerated to the point of making those of Herod, caught in the act of carrying out the ancient — and pagan — gesture of *imperium*, seem clearly diabolical.⁴⁰ Anticipating the description of Mehmed II by Giovio and Matteo Bandello, that is, in a series of writings functional to anti-Ottoman propaganda, Matteo di Giovanni's Herod is threatening, with a hooked nose and pointed ears, as in the best traditions of satyr iconography.

36 Di Majo, 'Qualche osservazione su un dipinto napoletano di Matteo di Giovanni.'

37 Bolzoni, *La rete delle immagini*, pp. 145–242.

38 Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*.

39 See again note 36, above.

40 It is not considered pedantic to note the slight difference in the gesture of Herod's hand in Santa Maria dei Servi: the only one with the palm upwards, but with the index finger pointing forward like in the other images, but in the end expressing the same meaning.

According to a proposal made by Robert Henry Hobart Cust,⁴¹ taken up by André Chastel,⁴² and now widely accepted,⁴³ the *Massacre* in the pavement of the Duomo, dated MCCCCLXXXI (1481), was a typological image of the Massacre of Otranto and a tribute to its liberator, Duke Alfonso of Calabria, who was in Siena at the time to help fight Florence. Matteo di Giovanni's depiction of the *Massacre of the Innocents* is then both typological and devotional, as it recalls through the Holy Scriptures 'the [contemporary] horrors to be endured at the hands of the unspeakable Turk',⁴⁴

The massacre of Otranto was sensational in the chronicles of the time, as its political implications went well beyond the geographical boundaries of the Salento peninsula (at that time an integral part of the Kingdom of Naples, under the crown of Ferrante I of Aragon), since it was loaded with geopolitical implications that could be considered as having 'European' repercussions, on whose dynamics and 'massive symbol' we have a solid bibliography.⁴⁵ The massacre of Otranto expands, emancipating the city from its peripheral location in the international geopolitical chessboard and amplifying itself like circles in the water, until it acquires, in the contemporary anti-Ottoman imagination, the dimensions of the fall of Constantinople. This is an image supported by propaganda, which immediately includes the need to connote the citizens as martyrs — technically victims of war. Equated with the chosen people persecuted by the Pharaoh, as in the Old Testament, the people of Otranto became the martyrs of the *prima resurrectio* (first resurrection) of the Book of Revelation, in the decorations of the first chapel built to house, after the liberation of the city, the remains of the decapitated bodies, already perceived as miraculous objects, that is, as relics. All this is documented by the numerous sources and testimonies collected to constitute the ample evidentiary corpus of the long process that led to the canonization of the eight hundred Otrantines, passing through several stages: the recognition of the prerequisites for the profession of a cult at a local level; the recognition of the martyrdom and beatification of the victims in accordance with Urban VIII's decrees on the subject (of 1634) — the evidence of which is found in the ciborium of the relics — with a high 'eschatological index', bearing the name of sculptor Gabriele Riccardi and the date 1524 (Fig. 9.5);⁴⁶ and the proclamation of their

41 Cust, *The Pavement Masters of Siena*, pp. 59–60.

42 Chastel, *L'Italie et Bysance*, pp. 293–94.

43 Monaco, "‘Qui amicti sunt et unde venerunt?’"; see also Argenziano, 'I santi Innocenti'.

44 Cust, *The Pavement Masters of Siena*, p. 60; see Appendix, text 4.

45 See note 8, above.

46 On all these issues related to the investigation for the recognition of the martyrdom of the Otrantines beheaded by the Turks, and for an iconographic and iconological analysis of the relics' ciborium, I refer to Monaco, *La 'Gerusalemme celeste' di Otranto*. On sculptor Gabriele Riccardi, see Monaco, 'Gabriele Riccardi'. On the eschatological connotation of the iconography related to the clash between Christianity and Islam, see at least Rusconi, ed., *Storia e figure dell'Apocalisse*, where, for example, consider Germana Ernst's essay, 'L'alba



Figure 9.5. Gabriele Riccardi, *Relic Ciborium of the '800 Martiri di Otranto'* (detail of a capital depicting the Apocalypse), 'leccese' limestone, gilded and painted, Otranto, Cathedral. 1524–1536. Photo by the author.

sanctity. Three stages of a very long preliminary investigation were involved that, synthesized into a timeline, saw the massacre in 1480; the liberalization of the cult at a local level in 1538; the positive conclusion of the beatification process in 1671 in which images also played, undoubtedly, a decisive role;⁴⁷ and the proclamation of Saints Primaldo and companions by Pope Francis I in 2013 (in an age significantly awakened in a clash between the two confessions after 11 September 2001). It is in this long process that the growth of an Otranto 'mythography' is nourished, which, if from a religious point of view

colomba scaccia i corvi neri' (pp. 107–25), in which Campanella's avian prophecy is the key to interpreting a sixteenth-century portion of the mosaics in the Basilica of St Mark's in an anti-Ottoman light.

47 It is relevant to point out the documentary use of the iconographic examination of the columns of ciborium in the beatification investigation of 1770–1771, held by a Vatican commissioner and some local witnesses, in ASV (Archivio Segreto Vaticano), Congregazione dei Riti, Processus, vol. 2017, *Hydruntina VV. Antonij Primaldi et Sociorum Martijrum Hydruntinorum Processus Additionalis Ordinarius Super Fama Martyry et Causa Martyry et Cultu Immemorabili*, foll. 285 ter et seg., now transcribed and commented by Monaco, *La 'Gerusalemme celeste' di Otranto*, pp. 135–55.

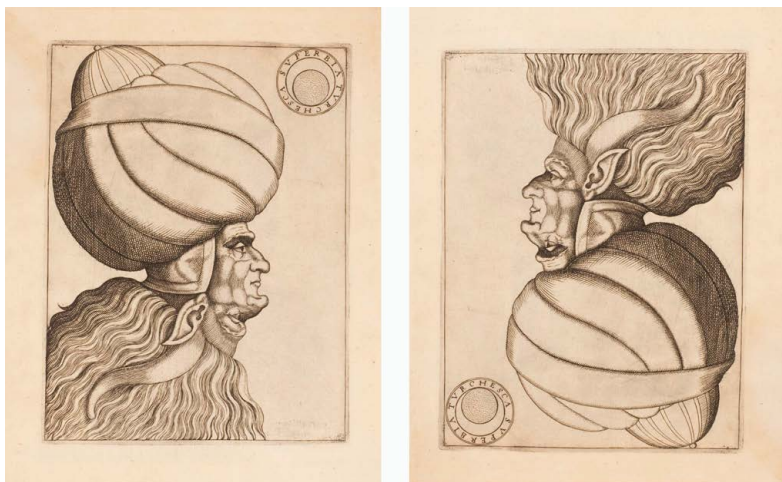


Figure 9.6. Nicolò Nelli, *Superbia turchesca* (the right side is the image rotated 180°), private collection. 1572. Photo by the author.

coincides and evolves with the consolidation of a sense of devotion to the martyrs on the part of the community of believers, from a historiographic and secular perspective allows the recognition of the whole issue as an episode of ‘construction of sanctity’. As I have shown elsewhere, an eloquent sign of this is the genesis of the official iconography of the siege of Otranto, modelled on the image of the siege of Paris in the illustrations of the Valgrisi edition of *Orlando furioso* (1556).⁴⁸ The ‘story’ of Otranto is emblematic of the long duration of certain historical processes that draw strength from images, from their circulation, from their reception. Even the iconography of the siege of Otranto takes on a very high ‘rhetorical index’ over time.

By Way of Conclusion: Mehmed II’s Face Revisited

The process of ‘poisoning’ Mehmed II’s image evolved with the escalation of the ‘Mediterranean question of the Turks’. An intriguing deformation of the portrait of an Ottoman sultan dates back to 1572 and is intended to frighten the observer. In 1572 Nicolò Nelli created a reversible chalcography portrait of the personification of *Superbia turchesca* (Turkish pride), in which the now iconic features of Mehmed II may be recognized (Fig. 9.6). Looking at the image, the eye catches the portrait of the Grand Turk in a turban (threatening, protruding chin, and hooked nose). Turning the image upside down, the

⁴⁸ Monaco, ‘L’iconografia dell’assedio di Otranto e il frontespizio del Tancredi’, pp. 253–54.

eye finds an infernal devil (threatening, pointed ears, protruding chin, and hooked nose). This is a pivotal example of a process that started with the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, followed by the conquest of Otranto in 1480, and ended with the 'Great Turk' becoming a huge symbol at Lepanto in 1571.⁴⁹

Going beyond the cross-border geographical limits and chronological terms discussed in this essay, it is painful to acknowledge how dramatic the consequences of a different interpretation of images between the two shores of the Mediterranean can still be today. In other words, how heavy the repercussions of the interpretation of an image (and therefore the decoding of its rhetorical index) can be based on divergent cultural perspectives. It will not be rhetorical then to recall the opposite reactions (enraged reaction and/or ironical acceptance) unleashed by the caricatured depiction of the Prophet in a turban with Christ and Abraham, in August 2016. Hence a new siege of Paris 2.0 in the attack on the office of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*.

49 Gibellini, *L'immagine di Lepanto*.

Appendix of Primary Sources⁵⁰

Text 1. Paolo Giovio

Portrait of Mehmed II in Paolo Giovio, *Commentario de le cose de' Turchi*, ed. by Lara Michelacci (Bologna: CLUEB, 2005), pp. 95–109, here pp. 95–99, 106–09. [Original edition: *Comentario de le cose de' turchi, di Paulo Iovio, vescovo di Nocera, a Carlo quinto imperadore augusto*, stampato in Roma per Antonio Blado d'Asola in le case de meser Gioanbatista di Massimi, 1535.]

Morto che fu Amurate, con estremo favore de soldati, fu cridato signore Maometto suo figliuolo, d'età di 21 anno, qual per regnare senza sospetto subito fece ammazzare il fratello. Costui fu re della fortuna e d'animo, ingegno e cupidità di gloria simile ad Alessandro magno; fu etiamdio molto crudele in guerra e nel Serraglio, di sorte che ammazzava giovenetti e fanciulli, quali lui amava libidinosamente, per ogni picciola cagione, ma per contra fu liberale remuneratore di virtuosi e valenti uomini e di chi bene lo servia. Molti estimorono che non credessi più nella fede di Maometto che in quella di Cristo o de Gentili, per essere allevato in infanzia da sua madre qual fu figliuola del despoto Lazaro di Servia, e teneva la fede cristiana e gli imparava l'avemaria e il paternostro, ma poi che fu adulto e retirandosi alla fede maomettana, si portò di sorte che non tenne né l'una né l'altra per il che non mantenea la parola se non quanto gli venea bene, e nulla cosa istimava essere peccato per adempire gli appetiti suoi. Fu grand'amatore de gli eccellenti maestri in ogni arteficio e tenne gran cura che le sue vittorie fussino scritte da uomini litterati e di giudicio e di continovo leggeva l'istorie de gli antichi. [...] Donò largamente a Gentile Bellino pittore veneziano, avendolo fatto venire da Venezia a Costantinopoli, per farsi ritrarre del naturale, e pingere gli abiti di ponenti, insomma molte virtuose parti, congiunte con la buona fortuna, lo fecero degno de l'Imperio di Costantinopoli qual subito assaltò per non occuparsi in basse e poco onorevole imprese. [...] Mandò Acomat Bassà ad Otranto in Puglia. [...] La morte di Maometto fu la salute d'Italia perché li Turchi, i quali aveano in Otranto sostenute francamente le forze di tutti quasi li principi cristiani per un anno e più mesi, non aspettono più Acomat Bassà il quale era già venuto vicino alla Velona con venticinque mila Turchi per infrescare il campo, e si reserono a patti onorevoli. Questi Turchi di Otranto mostrono essere maestri di guerra e sempre batterono li uomini d'arme nostri e ammazzorno dui eccellenti capitani: il conte Iulio [Giulio Antonio Acquaviva d'Aragona] padre del duca d'Atri, e il signor Matteo di Capua [Matteo d'Altavilla, conte di Palena, principe di Conca, duca d'Atri] [...]. Regnò Maometto trentadue anni non forniti e campò cinquantatre anni: fu nervoso e gagliardo, avea la faccia gialduccia, li occhi grifagni con le ciglia

⁵⁰ All translations are my own.

arcate e il naso si adunco che la punta pareva toccasse le labbra; si trova che ne le sue guerre perirno di spada più di trecento mila uomini.

Translation:

When Amurate died, his son Mehmed, aged twenty-one, was acclaimed sultan with the support of the soldiers, and to reign without any claimants, he immediately had his brother murdered. He was a ruler similar to Alexander the Great in fortune, soul, wit, and greed. He was also very cruel both in war and in the seraglio, to the extent that he killed young men and children for every small reason, even though he had loved them with lust; on the other hand, he was liberal and very generous with the virtuous and good men who served him well. Many claimed that he no longer believed in the faith of Mohammed, Jesus Christ, or the pagans, having been raised by his mother, who was the daughter of the despot Lazar of Serbia, and who was a Christian, and who taught him to recite the Hail Mary and Our Father. But when he became an adult and converted to the Mohammedan faith, he behaved in such a way that he did not respect either one or the other, showing himself as a believer only when it suited him, believing that nothing was a sin as long as his desires were satisfied. He esteemed the best minds in all disciplines and was very keen that his military exploits should be written by learned and judicious men, and he read the histories of the ancients all the time. [...] He was generous with Gentile Bellini, a Venetian painter, whom he had brought to Constantinople from Venice, so that he could have his portrait made live and painted with the customs of the Westerners. In short, many virtuous qualities combined with a favourable fate made him worthy of the Empire of Constantinople, which he immediately decided to conquer, leaving aside enterprises of lesser value. [...] He sent Acomat Pascià on an expedition to Otranto in Apulia. [...] Mehmed's death was the salvation of Italy because the Turks, who had resisted the military counterattack of almost all the Christian princes for a year and several months in Otranto, did not wait for the return of Acomat Pascià, who had already arrived near Valona [in Albania] with an army of twenty-five thousand men to strengthen the army, and surrendered, making honourable agreements. The Turks at Otranto proved to be masters of war, always defeating our men-at-arms and killing excellent captains: [such as] Count Iulio [Giulio Antonio Acquaviva d'Aragona] the father of the Duke of Atri, and Signor Matteo di Capua [Matteo d'Altavilla, Count of Palena, Prince of Conca, Duke of Atri] [...]. Mehmed reigned for about thirty-two years and lived fifty-three: he was of sanguine temperament, had a yellowish face, rapt eyes with arched lashes, and a nose so hooked that the tip seemed to touch the lips; it is said that in his wars more than three hundred thousand men were killed by the sword.

Text 2. Matteo Bandello (A, B)

Matteo Bandello, *Le novelle del Bandello*, Letteratura italiana Einaudi (online at <http://www.letteraturaitaliana.net/pdf/Volume_4/t77.pdf> [accessed 5 July 2021]) based on the following edition: *Tutte le opere di Matteo Bandello*, ed. by Francesco Flora, vols I–II (Milan: Mondadori, 1942–1943). [Original edition: Matteo Bandello, *La prima (seconda, terza) parte de le Novelle del Bandello*, in Lucca, per il Busdrago, 1554.]

Bandello A. Part II, Novella XIII, *Maometto imperador de' turchi ammazza i fratelli, i nipoti e i servidori con inudita crudeltà vie più che barbara* (Mehmed, emperor of the Turks, kills his brothers, nephews, and servants with unprecedented and barbaric cruelty), pp. 880–91.

The story is about Mehmed II's rise to power and his immoral and cruel temperament. According to the final part of the previous novel (i.e. Novella XII: *Il marito trovata la moglie in adulterio fa che impicca l'adultero e quella fa sempre in quella camera restare ove l'amante era impiccato*, pp. 871–80 — the betrayed husband hangs his wife's lover and leaves her in the same room with the hanged man) the narrator is Ferrando of Otranto, a witness in Constantinople of many cruelties by the emperor. Bandello reuses many sources such as the description by Giovio (compare with text 1 above). Here some passages are chosen as examples.

Maometto, di questo nome secondo imperador de' turchi, fu figliuolo d'Amorato secondo, ed esso Maometto fu quello che debellò e levò ai cristiani l'imperio orientale. Egli ancora giovinetto fu dal padre, che era vecchio e molto desiderava la quiete ed il riposo, fatto signore sotto la cura di Cali [...]. [p. 880] Sapeva simulare e dissimulare come voleva [...]. Il principio del suo imperio comin[ciò] e consa[crò] col sangue fraterno [...]. [p. 888]. Ma se io vorrò tutte le crudelissime crudeltà di questo fierissimo tiranno annoverare, prima il giorno è per inancarmi che io ne possa venir al fine, perciò che ancora nel sangue ottomanno non è stato prencipe nessuno, ben che ce ne siano stati di crudelissimi, che Maometto di gran lunga tutti avanzati e superati non abbia. Egli si persuase non esser Dio alcuno: si beffava de la fede dei cristiani, sprezzava la legge giudaica, e nulla o beri poco stimava la religione maomettana, perciò che pubblicamente diceva che maometto, quel falso profeta, era stato servo cirenaico, ladrone ed assassino di strada, e con ferite in faccia cacciato di Persia con grandissima sua vergogna, di modo che non ci era setta alcuna che da lui non fosse sprezzata [p. 887].

Translation:

Mehmed, second emperor of the Turks to bear this name, was the son of Amorato II, and was the one who defeated the Christians in the Eastern Empire [this refers to the siege of Costantinople in 1453]. While still a boy

he was elected by his father, who was old and eager to rest, commander of the kingdom under the guidance of Calì [...]. He knew how to simulate and dissimulate at will [...]. He made his debut in command with an act of blood by killing his brother [...]. But if I want to enumerate the heinous cruelties of this tyrant, one day before it ends will not be enough, since Mehmed II was the cruellest of the Ottoman princes. He was persuaded there was no God at all: he mocked the faith of Christians, nor he was shy of the Jewish law, and very little esteemed Mohammedan law. He publicly said that Muhammad, that false prophet, had been a Corenian servant, a bandit, and with a wounded face he had been expelled from Persia with shame. He despised any religious sect.

Bandello B. Part IV, Novella XXVIII, *Fra Michele da Carcano predicando in Firenze è beffato da un fanciullo con pronto detto* (Brother Michele from Carcano preaching in Florence is mocked by a guy with a clever sentence), pp. 1672–76.

The story tells of the Otranto massacre and the liberation of the city after the death of Mehmed II, with great relief for the pope and for the whole Italian peninsula.

Il [Maometto II] perché con armata di mare occupò e prese Otranto, città del regno di Napoli, posta nei confini di Calabria e de la Puglia, che divide il mar Ionio da l'Ausonio, e per iscontro al lito de la Vellona, con poco spazio di mare, che l'Italia dalla Macedonia divide [p. 1672]. [...] Divolgata per Italia la presa di Otranto per i turchi, empì di spavento tutti i signori e popoli italiani, veggendo il comun nemico nel nome cristiano aver posti il piede in Italia e poter d'ora in ora con una velificazione soccorrere i suoi. E nel vero si dubitava forte de la rovina di tutta l'Italia, se la providenzia di Dio non provedeva, ché prima che i turchi potessero fermare il piede ed allargare l'imperio vicino ad Otranto, Maometto loro imperadore morì. Il che fu cagione che non dopo molto Otranto si ricuperò [p. 1673].

Translation:

Mehmed II conquered with a naval fleet the city Otranto, in the Kingdom of Naples, located on the borders of Calabria and Apulia, regions that separate the Ionian Sea from the Ausonian Sea [i.e. the Tyrrhenian Sea], facing the coasts of Valona, in a small stretch of sea that separates Italy from Macedonia. [...] After [news of] the Turkish conquest of Otranto spread throughout Italy, all the lords and people of the peninsula were terrified, having seen the common enemy of Christians set off to Italy and quickly reach other shores by sea. And truly the worst was feared for all of Italy if there had not been a divine intervention for which, before the Turks set foot throughout the peninsula, Mehmed II suddenly died. Which shortly after allowed the liberation of Otranto.

Text 3. Marco Boschini

Marco Boschini, *La carta del navegar pitoresco* (Venice: Baba, 1660).

Bellini dal Gran Turco, vento I, 33, vv. 3–30.

Zentil Belin (per dir la verità)
 Fu fato degno de supremi onori
 Dal gran Signor; ma i barbari rigori
 L'intimoriva, e l'alte crudeltà.
 Retrovandose un zorno int' un zardin
 Col Gran Signor, là per recreazion,
 La mala sorte fece, o l'ocasion,
 O fusse efeto de crudel destin,
 Che 'l gran Turco se acorse che mancava
 Un pomo da un pomer de molta stima,
 Per esser pomo de la classe prima;
 Dove per questo efeto el rabiava.
 E dito e fato, da Neron crudel
 El disse: questo ha magnà el pomo certo;
 Via, che a sto tristo el peto ghe sia averto;
 La so dolcezza se converta in fiel.
 E in fin fu vero, e 'l gramo restè morto,
 E quei che viste el caso puoco manco;
 Ma se a Zentil bateva el cuor e 'l fianco,
 El diga quei, che intende el dreto e 'l storto.
 Guarda el Ciel (tra de si disse 'l Pitor)
 Che de mi tal suspeto bestial
 Ghe fusse intrà in la testa a l'Animal!
 L'anima mia sarave al Creator.
 No no, se g'hè rimedio, voi tornar
 Dove alberga rason e umanità,
 A Venezia, mia Patria e mia Cità.
 Tal che con preghi el se fè rechiamar.

Translation:

Gentile Bellini, in all honesty, was showered with many honours by the sultan; but he was terrified by his cruelty. One day, when he was with him in a garden to amuse himself, bad luck or chance had it that the sultan noticed that an apple was missing from an orchard of great quality, which made him angry. When all was said and done, this cruel Nero [i.e. the sultan] said: 'Take the man who has stolen the apple and open his chest, let the sweetness of the fruit be turned into bitterness'. And so it happened, the poor man was killed, as almost happened to the man who witnessed the case [i.e. Bellini himself]. But whether Gentile felt more the beat of his heart or his side, let those who

understand everything decide. ‘Guess what,’ said the painter to himself, ‘if this beast had suspected me, my soul would have already met its maker. Not at all, there is a remedy, I want to return where reason and humanity dwell. To Venice, my homeland and my city.’ He begged so much that he was called back to his homeland.

Text 4. Robert Henry Hobart Cust

Robert H. Hobart Cust, *The Pavement Masters of Siena (1369–1562)* (London: Bell, 1901), pp. 59–60.

At this period all Italy was convulsed with horror at the awful Sack and Destruction of Otranto [...]. The shock to the Christian world was so terrible that the Pope, Sixtus IV, in an Encyclical addressed to all the cities of Italy, called their attention to the disaster, pointed out to them that none of them, however remote, was safe [...]. Alfonso, Duke of Calabria, son of Ferdinand, King of Naples, then living as ruler in Siena, was hastily recalled to take command of an expedition against the common enemy: and it is, I submit, not straining a theory too far, to suppose, that Matteo di Giovanni may have been directed to design these scenes on the Pavement of the Duomo [...] as an object lesson to recall to the public mind, through the medium of Scriptural Tragedy, the horrors to be endured at the hands of the unspeakable Turk.

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