Review Article

Renaissance Italy and the Muslim Mediterranean in Recent Historical Work*

Francesca Trivellato
Yale University

In 1951, Robert Sabatino Lopez published a provocative piece in the *American Historical Review* entitled "Still Another Renaissance?" The question mark in the title was little more than a rhetorical concession. Lopez had no doubt: "If renaissance be understood in its original meaning of revival, new birth, or, indeed, new conception, no period in European history seems entitled to be called renaissance more than the tenth century."[1] An economic historian who did not shy away from the study of "civilizations," Lopez was less concerned with the emergence of new intellectual trends than he was with the demographic, economic, social, and political opportunities that opened up for larger strata of the population in much of western Europe, and particularly in the Italian peninsula, at the end of the first millennium of the Christian era. His proposal for a new chronology of the Renaissance had broad implications. In Lopez's words, "The humble beginnings of the tenth century ushered in the long age of European preponderance in the world."[2]

* The following books are reviewed in this article: Deborah Howard, *Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture, 1100–1500* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. xvi+283, $75.00; Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East and West* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 224, $52.50; Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 320, $59.95 (cloth), $22.50 (paper); Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 359, $52.50; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim across Worlds* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2006), pp. 448, $30.00 (cloth), $17.00 (paper); Giovanni Ricci, *Ossessione turca: In una retrovia cristiana dell'Europa moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), pp. 240, €17.50. William Caferro, Marcia Colish, Julius Kirshner, Yuen-Gen Liang, and Alan Mikhail offered helpful suggestions for this article. I also appreciate the research assistance of Michael Meadows.

[1] Robert Sabatino Lopez, "Still Another Renaissance?" *American Historical Review* 57 (1951): 1–21, 2.

[2] Ibid., 7. Lopez's provocative piece was a response to the then current debate about the relationship between what Erwin Panofsky called "the proto-Renaissance of the twelfth century" and the fifteenth-century Renaissance. See Erwin Panofsky, "Renaissance and

The Journal of Modern History 82 (March 2010): 127–155

Today we look in vain for such bold statements, whether one welcomes them or not. Mirroring the fragmentation of academic research in the humanities (a fragmentation that itself reflects a healthy multiplication of perspectives and the broadening of the academic profession), historical studies of the Italian Renaissance and Renaissance Italy lack a focus on one major debate, one set of texts, or even specific themes.[3] Assessing the state of Renaissance studies at the turn of the third millennium, one scholar noted that "the Italian Renaissance continues to exert a powerful hold on historical imagination," but "the field is relatively devoid of big interpretative theses around which specialized scholarship clusters."[4] This is not to say that the field is moribund. Christopher Celenza may be right to remind nonspecialists that "there are no more than a handful of institutions in North America where there are practicing scholars of Italian Renaissance intellectual history."[5] But after lethal attacks on and passionate defenses of its relevance, scholarship on the Renaissance and its Italian incarnations appears quite vigorous.[6] Even if we adopt a more orthodox chronology than the one suggested

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Renascences," *Kenyon Review* 6 (1944): 201–36, now in his *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm, 1965), 42–113; and Charles Homer Haskins, *Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1928). Two decades later, Lopez proposed a more traditional chronology when he divided the Italian Renaissance into three epochs: youth (1453–94), maturity (1494–1527), and decay (1527–59). See Robert Sabatino Lopez, *Three Ages of the Italian Renaissance* (Charlottesville, VA, 1970).

[3] I use the expression "the Italian Renaissance" to refer to the distinctive intellectual and cultural movement associated primarily with humanism. By contrast, "Renaissance Italy" denotes the period between 1250 and 1530. This chronology has the double advantage of conforming to a traditional periodization of the history of northern and central Italy and focusing on the formative period of early modern Christian literary and visual representations of the Turks. In keeping with this chronology, I do not discuss recent contributions that pertain to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, among which Eric R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, 2006), is particularly relevant. On issues of chronology and conceptualization, see Randolph Starn, "The Early Modern Muddle," *Journal of Early Modern History* 6 (2002): 296–307.

[4] Mark Jurdjevic, "Renaissance Studies in the New Millennium," *Canadian Journal of History* 38 (2003): 281–93, 281.

[5] Christopher S. Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians, and Latin's Legacy* (Baltimore, 2004), 56.

[6] A famous indictment of the concept of "Renaissance" appeared in Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston, 1977), 137–64. Strenuous vindications of the same concept can be found in William J. Bouwsma, "The Renaissance and the Drama of Western History," *American Historical Review* 84 (1979): 1–15; and Paul F. Grendler, "The Italian Renaissance in the Past Seventy Years: Humanism, Social History, and Early Modern in Anglo-American and Italian Scholarship," in *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Allen J. Grieco, Michael Rocke, and Fiorella Gioffredi Superbi (Florence, 2002), 3–23.

by Lopez, we find that in the last decade, an impressive quantity of academic publications—particularly but not only in English and Italian—has appeared, many of very high quality, which address various aspects of the social, cultural, intellectual, political, economic, and artistic history of the northern and central regions of Italy between 1250 and 1530.

Admittedly, one would reach a different conclusion based on a glimpse at the North American job market. Even so, university and trade presses continue to publish fresh accounts of such traditional topics as Leon Battista Alberti (whom Jacob Burckhardt saw as the quintessential Renaissance man), humanist education, and social life in Renaissance cities, as well as of well-known events such as the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478.[7] John Najemy's history of Florence is destined to remain a classic.[8] English translations of Italian *magna opera* have appeared.[9] In 2001, Harvard University Press and Harvard's Center for Italian Renaissance Studies inaugurated a magnificent and extensive series of translations and critical editions of Latin works by Italian humanists.[10] Meanwhile, the list of titles in the history of women and gender is growing.[11] Religiosity, religious institutions, and antireligious feelings have

[7] Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* (New York, 2000); James Hankins, ed., *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge, 2000); Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden, 2000); Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools, 1200–1500* (Cambridge, 2001); Daniel Stein Kokin, "The Hebrew Question in the Italian Renaissance: Linguistic, Cultural, and Mystical Perspectives" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2006); Lauro Martines, *April Blood: Florence and the Plot against the Medici* (Oxford, 2003); Marcello Simonetta, *Montefeltro: A Renaissance Mystery Decoded* (New York, 2008); Nicholas Terpstra, *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance: Orphan Care in Florence and Bologna* (Baltimore, 2005); Thomas Kuehn, *Heirs, Kin, and Creditors in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge, 2008).

[8] John M. Najemy, *History of Florence, 1200–1575* (Malden, MA, 2006). Venice also has its new synthesis, this one centered on varying conceptions of geographical and urban space: Élisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, *Venice Triumphant: The Horizons of a Myth*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore, 2005).

[9] Riccardo Fubini, *Humanism and Secularization: From Petrarch to Valla*, trans. Martha King (Durham, NC, 2003); Eugenio Garin, *History of Italian Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Giorgio Pinton, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 2008).

[10] Information on the I Tatti Renaissance Library is available at http://www.hup.harvard.edu/itatti/intro_series.html.

[11] Judith Brown and Robert C. Davis, eds., *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy* (London, 1998); Trevor Dean and K. J. P. Lowe, eds., *Marriage in Italy, 1300–1550* (Cambridge, 1998); Stanley Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice: Twelve Essays on Patrician Society* (Baltimore, 2000); Joanne M. Ferraro, *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice* (Oxford, 2001); Daniela Hacke, *Women, Sex and Marriage in Early Modern Venice* (Aldershot, 2004); Guido Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love: Sex, Self, and Society in the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore, 2007); Alexander Cowan, *Marriage, Manners and Mobility in Early Modern Venice* (Aldershot, 2007);

been reexamined.[12] The history of state building is very much alive and the subject of continuous empirical and methodological scrutiny.[13] Environmental history is making tentative inroads.[14] Economic history, however, has not mustered much enthusiasm, except for Richard Goldthwaite's recent synthesis of Renaissance Florence's economy and a few innovative but isolated studies.[15] For most Anglo-American historians, Florence remains a magnet, but its

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Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650* (Baltimore, 2008). The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe, a series published by the University of Chicago Press, includes writings by Italian women.

[12] Cynthia L. Polecritti, *Preaching Peace in Renaissance Italy: Bernardino of Siena and His Audience* (Washington, DC, 2000); Ottavia Niccoli, *Rinascimento anticlericale: Infamia, propaganda e satira in Italia tra Quattro e Cinquecento* (Rome, 2005); David M. D'Andrea, *Civic Christianity in Renaissance Italy: The Hospital of Treviso, 1400–1530* (Rochester, NY, 2007); Tamar Herzig, *Savonarola's Women: Visions and Reform in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 2007).

[13] Samuel K. Cohn Jr., *Creating the Florentine State: Peasants and Rebellion, 1348–1434* (Cambridge, 1999); William J. Connell and Andrea Zorzi, eds., *Florentine Tuscany: Structures and Practices of Power* (Cambridge, 2000); Isabella Lazzarini, *Italia degli stati territoriali: Secoli XIII–XV* (Rome, 2003); Amedeo de Vincentiis, *Battaglie di memoria: Gruppi, intellettuali, testi e la discontinuità del potere papale alla metà del Quattrocento* (Rome, 2002); Marco Folin, *Rinascimento estense: Politica, cultura, istituzioni di un antico Stato italiano* (Rome, 2004); Serena Ferente, *La sfortuna di Jacopo Piccinino: Storia dei bracceschi in Italia, 1423–1465* (Florence, 2005); Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford, 2007); Elizabeth Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge, 2008); Monique O'Connell, *Men of Empire: Power and Negotiation in Venice's Maritime State* (Baltimore, 2009). For a biographical approach, see Dennis Romano, *The Likeness of Venice: A Life of Doge Francesco Foscari, 1373–1457* (New Haven, CT, 2007).

[14] Karl Appuhn, *A Forest on the Sea: Environmental Expertise in Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore, 2009).

[15] Richard A. Goldthwaite, *The Economic History of Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore, 2009). In light of contributions by Italian scholars such as Sergio Tognetti and Franco Franceschi, Goldthwaite maintains that the economic history of Renaissance Florence "is prospering as never before" (xiii). This conclusion cannot be extended to the rest of the peninsula. Goldthwaite's *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300–1600* (Baltimore, 1993) was the last major and controversial interpretation of the economic history of the Italian Renaissance (and largely focused on Tuscany). It was followed by a study by one of Goldthwaite's students (Luca Molà, *The Silk Industry of Renaissance Venice* [Baltimore, 2000]), and it inspires a growing literature on consumption that nonetheless examines consumption's cultural rather than economic aspects. See Evelyn Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy, 1400–1600* (New Haven, CT, 2005). More provocative, even if less cited by historians, are the studies of two scholars well versed in economics: Maristella Botticini (with Daniel A. Ackerberg, "The Choice of Agrarian Contracts in Early Renaissance Tuscany: Risk Sharing, Moral Hazard, or Capital Market Imperfections?" *Explorations in Economic History* 37 [2000]: 241–57; "A Tale of 'Benevolent' Governments: Private

primacy and uniqueness have been questioned.[16] As further testimony to the liveliness of the field both inside and outside of the classroom, British and American academic and trade presses have produced an outpouring of edited volumes and reprints as well as interpretative and synthetic overviews.[17] And this rapid survey is far from complete.

In the vastness of this ocean, scholars seem to be in the process of finding

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Credit Markets, Public Finance, and the Role of Jewish Lenders in Medieval and Renaissance Italy," *Journal of Economic History* 60 [2000]: 165–89; "A Loveless Economy? Intergenerational Altruism and the Marriage Market in a Tuscan Town, 1415–1436," *Journal of Economic History* 59 [1999]: 104–21) and Stephan R. Epstein ("Market Structures," in Connell and Zorzi, *Florentine Tuscany*, 90–121). For an important examination of the costs of war, see William P. Caferro, "Warfare and Economy in Renaissance Italy, 1350–1450," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 39 (2008): 167–209.

[16] Paula Findlen, Michelle M. Fontaine, and Duane J. Osheim, eds., *Beyond Florence: The Contours of Medieval and Early Modern Italy* (Stanford, CA, 2003); David Abulafia, "The South," in *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance, 1300–1550*, ed. John M. Najemy (Oxford, 2004), 208–25. In the eternal rivalry between Florence and Venice, the interest in the Islamic world that is discussed in the following pages contributes to swinging the pendulum toward the latter.

[17] Guido Ruggiero, ed., *Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance* (Malden, MA, 2002); John Jeffries Martin, ed., *The Renaissance: Italy and Abroad* (London, 2002); Najemy, *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance*; John Jeffries Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (New York, 2004); Kenneth Gouwens, *Italian Renaissance: The Essential Sources* (Malden, MA, 2004); Jonathan Woolfson, ed., *Palgrave Advances in Renaissance Historiography* (New York, 2005); Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti, eds., *Renaissance Florence: A Social History* (Cambridge, 2006); Theodore K. Rabb, *The Last Days of the Renaissance and the March to Modernity* (New York, 2006); John Jeffries Martin, ed., *The Renaissance World* (New York, 2007); James Hankins, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2007); Élisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, *Renaissances italiennes, 1380–1500* (Paris, 2007); William Caferro, *Contesting the Renaissance* (Malden, MA, forthcoming). A valuable multivolume series in Italian has began to appear: Il Rinascimento italiano e l'Europa (Treviso, 2005–). As a cohort of distinguished historians retires, original research in their honor is included in various collections of essays: John Marino and Thomas Kuehn, eds., *A Renaissance of Conflicts: Visions and Revisions of Law and Society in Italy and Spain* (Toronto, 2004); Isabelle Chabot, Jerôme Hayez, and Didier Lett, eds., *La famille, les femmes et le quotidien (XIV^e^–XVIII^e^ siècle): Textes offerts à Christiane Klapisch-Zuber* (Paris, 2006); David S. Peterson and Daniel E. Bornstein, eds., *Florence and Beyond: Culture, Society, and Politics in Renaissance Italy; Essays in Honour of John M. Najemy* (Toronto, 2008); Konrad Eisenbichler and Nicholas Terpstra, eds., *The Renaissance in the Streets, Schools, and Studies: Essays in Honour of Paul F. Grendler* (Toronto, 2008); Peter Arnade and Michael Rocke, eds., *Power, Gender, and Ritual in Europe and the Americas: Essays in Memory of Richard C. Trexler* (Toronto, 2008); Diogo Ramada Curto, Julius Kirshner, Eric R. Dursteler, and Francesca Trivellato, eds., *From Florence to the Mediterranean and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Anthony Molho*, 2 vols. (Florence, 2009); Lawrin Armstrong and Julius Kirshner, eds., *Lawyers and Statecraft: Forty Years On* (Toronto, in press).

still another renaissance. This new renaissance lacks the clear chronological boundaries, the conceptual sharpness, and the force of Lopez's proposition. At the same time, its basic creed is fitting for our age: the period that has long been considered to be foundational to the history of Europe and the West cannot be understood and conceptualized without examining its relations with the Islamic world and the Muslim Mediterranean in particular. The topic is hardly revolutionary, but it is now moving from a textually based and erudite type of analysis rooted in the best Orientalist tradition to the core of scholarly debates.[18] The recent monographs, scholarly articles, and conference papers on the subject are neither the most numerous nor necessarily the most sophisticated.[19] Their significance, however, is twofold. First, they partake in an emerging global turn that affects the way in which many scholars write the history of early modern Europe.[20] Second, they constitute the most recent reinterpretation to which the Italian Renaissance has been subjected at the hands of every generation since the time of Giorgio Vasari. New aspirations and new anxieties propel scholars today to explore the old, multilayered, and complex relations between the Christian and the Islamic worlds. As happened

[18] Among an old and vast scholarship, see Clarence Dana Rouillard, *The Turk in French History: Thought and Literature, 1520–1660* (Paris, 1941); R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 1962); Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh, 1960); Carl Göllner, *Turcica: Die europaïschen Türkendrucke des XVI; Jahrhunderts*, 3 vols. (Bucharest, 1961–79); Albert Mas, *Les Turcs dans la littérature espagnole du siècle d'or* (Paris, 1967); Robert S. Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk, 1453–1517* (New York, 1967); W. Montgomery Watt, *The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe* (Edinburgh, 1972); and several important studies and critical editions by Agostino Pertusi (1918–79), including his *Bisanzio e i Turchi nella cultura del Rinascimento e del Barocco*, ed. Carlo Maria Mazzucchi (Milan, 2004). Paolo Preto's *Venezia e i Turchi* (Florence, 1975) scouted many unpublished sources.

[19] The still modest incidence of publications about Renaissance Italy and the Muslim world is evidenced by the articles published in *Renaissance Quarterly*, *Renaissance Studies*, *Sixteenth-Century Journal*, *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, and *Renaissance Quarterly*, from 1998 to 2008, and in *Rinascimento: Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento* and *RHR: Réforme, humanisme, renaissance*, from 1998 to 2007. A complete tabulation is available from the author on request. A search by keywords in the main articles of the 150 journals listed under the discipline of "history" in the JSTOR online journal storage archive reveals that since 1998 the word "Islam" had appeared 1,076 times, the word "Muslim" 1,163 times, and "Muslims" 837 times (the count was done on June 23, 2009).

[20] For reasons of space, I omit references to the burgeoning scholarship on representations of Islam in Spanish, French, and English Renaissance literature, art, religious, and historical writings. T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe, eds., *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge, 2005) is an example of the recent global turn in Renaissance historiography. But a global approach was not absent from earlier pioneering work, such as Iris Origo, "The Domestic Enemy: The Eastern Slaves in Tuscany in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Speculum* 30 (1955): 321–66.

in past decades for other subjects (including the history of women and sexuality), contemporary concerns reveal crucial but unfamiliar aspects of Renaissance societies and culture.

A remarkable feature of the recent literature on Renaissance Italy and Islam is that its hero or villain is no longer Jacob Burckhardt but either Fernand Braudel or Edward Said. For Burckhardt (as for Jules Michelet before him), "the discovery of man" went hand in hand with "the discovery of the world." But for Michelet and Burckhardt, and for countless others thereafter, "the world" meant the so-called New World.[21] What could the Mediterranean possibly offer to the intrepid spirits of truly Renaissance men? According to Frederic Lane, in the early fifteenth century Venice already "turned westward" for its artistic and scientific models.[22] In contrast, although neither was a specialist of the Renaissance, Braudel and Said put the Mediterranean at the center of their analyses. In their seminal works, scholars of the Renaissance find inspiration to reexamine connections between the Middle Sea and the globe at large and to probe the value of two divergent visions of the interaction among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Moreover, both Braudel's notion of the unity of the Mediterranean and Said's concept of Orientalism have a specific but also a loose chronology with which Renaissance scholars seek to contend. Braudel studies the long sixteenth century, but his emphasis on the climatic and geographical construction of the unity of the Mediterranean renders it nearly timeless.[23] Said traces the rise of Orientalism to the military and self-perceived "positional superiority" that British, French, and North American colonialism achieved in the Middle East after Napoleon's 1798 invasion

[21] Recent reappraisals are in J. H. Elliott, "The Discovery of America and the Discovery of Man," in *Spain and Its World, 1500–1700: Selected Essays* (New Haven, CT, 1989), 42–64; and David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (New Haven, CT, 2008). Previous generations of scholars, including Carlo M. Cipolla in his *Clocks and Culture, 1300–1700* (London, 1967), had posited causal links between the culture of Renaissance Italy and European transoceanic explorations. Bisaha (*Creating East and West*, 183) suggests that "European assertions of intellectual superiority over Native Americans did not spontaneously arise on the first contacts between the two cultures" but drew from the "coherent vision of Western culture and its inherent superiority to other societies" that Italian humanists elaborated in relation to the Ottoman threat. This insight has been explored by scholars of the Spanish and British empires but needs further development with regard to humanism. See Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1982), 193; Barbara Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European Identities* (Cambridge, 2001); Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York, 1999), 83–107.

[22] Frederic C. Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore, 1973), 202.

[23] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1972–76).

of Egypt. Yet he also leaves the door open to turning the Orientalist discourse into a metahistorical category of Western thought, with its infancy in classical Greece, its adolescence in the times of Dante and humanism, and its maturity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[24]

The refreshing prominence of Braudel and Said in recent debates about the Renaissance has not put to an end what Randolph Starn calls "the Oedipal ritual of Burckhardt-bashing by Renaissance historians."[25] In fact, as we will see, Burckhardt's views of the relation between Renaissance Italy and Islam curiously creep into several revisionist interpretations. But it is clear that by sidelining Burckhardt, historians have moved away from investigations of the origins and internal coherence of Renaissance culture and toward the study of cultural transmission and the intersection of multiple traditions.[26] At the same time, many old debates die hard. Questions of name and chronology remain paramount. Thus, Deborah Howard consistently refers to the period from 1100 to 1500 as medieval rather than Renaissance in order to emphasize the discontinuity created by European transoceanic voyages; in an elegant turn of phrase, she reminds us that there was a "period when the western hemisphere was unknown, when the world seemed flat, when paradise lay in the east" (xi). For his part, Giovanni Ricci ironically and tellingly speaks of Ferrara's "so-called Renaissance" (11). More important perhaps, as the following pages will reveal, the new centrality of the Mediterranean revives more than it displaces old historiographical questions: How can we understand the relation between artistic endeavors and economic developments? Was the Renaissance a rebirth or a continuation of trends begun long before? And should we consider the Renaissance solely as a high-culture phenomenon or as a more profound societal transformation?

Aesthetical Borrowings

In 2000, two books appeared that, in spite of their remarkable differences, did more than any others to reorient (to borrow Gerald MacLean's expression) Renaissance scholarship.[27] Deborah Howard's *Venice and the East* and Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton's *Global Interests* look eastward in order to reinterpret

[24] "Since the time of Homer . . . every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was . . . a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric." Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), 204.

[25] Randolph Starn, "Who's Afraid of the Renaissance?" in *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies*, ed. John Van Engen (Notre Dame, IN, 1994), 129–47, 137.

[26] Anthony Grafton, "Introduction: Notes from Underground on Cultural Transmission," in *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Grafton and Ann Blair (Philadelphia, 1990), 1–7.

[27] Gerald MacLean, ed., *Re-orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East* (New York, 2005).

core artistic phenomena in the West. Both contributions build on previous work by scholars such as Ernst Grube and Julian Raby on Islamic influences on European, and especially Venetian, art and architecture.[28] At the turn of the twenty-first century, with the rise of interest in the relations between Europe and the non-Western world, the time is ripe for Howard, Jardine, and Brotton to gesture to scholars beyond their immediate fields of expertise.[29]

Venice and the East and *Global Interests* could not be more dissimilar in method, yet they largely converge in their overall conclusions. Both embrace a Braudelian vision. For Howard, "the cognitive world" of Venetian merchants "was moulded by the unity of the Mediterranean" (3), and, at least in matters of architecture, "the Venetians displayed a more receptive and respectful mentality than is revealed in most 'orientalist' discourses" (2). Jardine and Brotton also soundly "reject the appropriateness of Said's version of Western Europe's construction of the Orient as an alien, displaced other, positioned in opposition to a confident, imperialist Eurocentrism" (61).

Venice and the East is an imaginative, thoroughly documented, and subtle study. It asks how Venice acquired its distinctive oriental allure, those eastern architectural forms that no visitor fails to notice. The question is deceptively simple. Although Howard takes seriously John Ruskin's earlier attempts to answer this question, she more than her British predecessor "seeks to demythologise the 'enchantment'" (5) of the city. Still, answering the question proves challenging. Empirical evidence is scant because "few members of the building trades in the medieval period are known to have travelled from Venice to areas beyond the limits of the Greek colonies" (5).[30] How, then, did Venetian patrons, architects, and builders acquire architectural information from the East? What models did they imitate? And what happened to those models as they were being emulated? In the absence of systematic records of how information about Islamic architecture was passed on to Venetian masons, carpenters, bricklayers, stone carvers, and architects (although there is evidence that goldsmiths may have played a role in transmitting architectural information), Howard is left with the task of piecing together clues from a wide array of visual and written records. The result is a learned and elegant, if often conjectural, analysis.

[28] Julian Raby, *Venice, Dürer and the Oriental Mode* (Florence, 1982); Ernst J. Grube, ed., *Arte veneziana e arte islamica: Atti del primo simposio internazionale sull'arte veneziana e l'arte islamica* (Venice, 1989); Ennio Concina, *Dell'arabico: A Venezia tra Rinascimento e Oriente* (Venice, 1994); Charles Burnett and Anna Contadini, eds., *Islam and the Italian Renaissance* (London, 1999).

[29] Their most direct legacy is visible in Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300–1600* (Berkeley, 2002).

[30] Howard draws a useful distinction between the Greek-speaking regions of the eastern Mediterranean, where Venice exerted direct political control, and those regions at the center of her study (Egypt, Syria, and Palestine), where the Venetian presence required "a mentality that did not assume political superiority" (2).

Although in narrative fashion, Howard delineates a rigorous, tripartite model of the process of acquisition, reception, and reinterpretation of Islamic architecture in the lagoon. The model's first (and most extensively and successfully executed) component draws from close readings of a stunning variety of documents from the period before the invention of the printing press: travel accounts, pilgrim narratives, geographical writings, reports of Venetian officials who served overseas, merchants' letters and instruction handbooks, inventories of household possessions, and legal instruments documenting real estate ownership. Howard also examines archeological ruins and small material objects (ranging from coins to ivories) as well as well-known buildings and their decorations, including the Saint Mark basilica. The second building block of Howard's interpretative model is a theory of cultural transmission and mutation that draws from an interwar cognitive psychologist, Frederic Charles Bartlett, who conducted experiments about the visual memory of unfamiliar and distant images and motifs. Third and finally, Howard considers why Venice proved so receptive to Oriental forms even though the vast majority of its residents never left for the East. Here, her explanation is more predictable: Venice was a fertile terrain for Islamic architecture because trade with the East played a significant role in the social, economic, and political life of the city. What links these three levels of analysis together is literary theorists' notion of "intertextuality," which she uses to explain why "when forms migrate from one culture to another, especially when crossing a religious or ideological boundary, they cannot preserve their meaning intact" (158–59).

The power of Howard's analysis lies less in her conceptual model than in the dazzling assortment of evidence and the penetrating reading of individual texts, monuments, and objects that she offers. For instance, she argues that the distinctive features of Venetian gothic windows (especially those found in the private residences of those merchants who until the fifteenth century built their fortunes on trading with the Levant and North Africa) carry traces of the decoration of the most sacred space in Islamic mosques: the niche that pointed to Mecca (mihrab). In this and other examples, too numerous to be recounted here, Howard suggests that we revive connections that were once obvious and intelligible but that the modern eye misses more often than not. Her interpretation, however, relies on a series of conjectures. For example, she claims that even if Venetian merchants rarely entered a mosque, they "must have seen" (156) Muslim traders and travelers praying to an image of mihrab as depicted on carpets, wooden and ceramic panels, or smaller objects such as Koran stands and book covers.[31]

[31] The book is peppered with similar speculations: "designs on plaster, in theory at least, could have been located on to ships and brought to Venice, but they were large, cumbersome and fragile" (55); "the acquisition of graphic images by Venetians [was] a distinctive possibility" (58); "it seems highly probable" (58) that Islamic geometric

The unintended result of Howard's conjectures is that a fuzzy notion of memory and mentality plays a great role in her model. A myriad of eastern influences found their way into Venetian architecture through multiple channels and went through considerable adaptations that are difficult to pin down. In analogous fashion, the repetition and juxtaposition of piecemeal details produces a cumulative effect that gives soundness to Howard's argument. That said, at a minimum, Howard convincingly revises familiar accounts according to which Spain and Sicily were the singular conduits of Islamic influences on Christian Europe. Her work also complements Patricia Fortini Brown's study of the appropriation of classical antiquity in the visual arts of the only major Italian city that did not boast its Roman foundation.[32] In so doing, Howard participates in a broader effort to curb the centrality of classical antiquity in the Renaissance.[33]

The latter is also Jardine and Brotton's goal. Lighter in research and sophistication than *Venice and the East* but grander in ambition, their *Global Interests* has as its aim no less than to "dismantle Renaissance Man as constructed by Burckhardt and Freud" and "circumvent an account of the marginalized, exoticized, dangerous East within Renaissance studies as not only politically unhelpful but also historically inadequate" (61). Jardine and Brotton seek to produce "a shift in mentality on the part of art historians and cultural historians" (184). Briefly stated, their thesis is that allegories and symbols derived from classical antiquity and reinterpreted in light of humanist scholarship were not the sole references for Renaissance patrons and artists. Rather, "art objects from the Renaissance originally carried powerful associations with the East whose impact is now lost to us." These associations, in turn, are said to reflect "a vigorous *two-way* process of recognition" between Europe and its eastern neighbors (183; my emphasis).[34]

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patterns inspired the marble facades of the Ducal Palace. Experts find some of these conjectures more credible than others. In an otherwise laudatory review, Oleg Grabar (*Art Bulletin* 85 [2003]: 189–92, 191) doubts that illustrated Arabic manuscripts were imported to Renaissance Italy and served as another "potential source of visual depictions" of Islamic architecture, as Howard claims (58).

[32] Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past* (New Haven, CT, 1996).

[33] Brian Curran's *The Egyptian Renaissance: The Afterlife of Egypt in Early Modern Italy* (Chicago, 2007) documents the fascination with ancient Egypt—not only ancient Rome and Greece—among Renaissance Italian patrons, artists, and architects.

[34] Whereas Howard defines "East" in precise geographical and historical terms ("the spatial realm of the Christian spiritual imagination" [xi], which largely corresponded to Egypt, Syria, and Palestine), Jardine and Brotton use the term loosely for all "territories eastwards and southwards across the Mediterranean, including the Mamluk Empire in North Africa" (188 n. 9), but they really focus on the Ottoman Empire. They occasionally also refer to Orthodox Christians as Easterners, as in their discussion of

Jardine and Brotton test their thesis by scrutinizing a select number of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century European artworks, including celebrated paintings such as Vittore Carpaccio's cycle in the Venetian confraternity of *San Giorgio degli Schiavoni* (ca. 1504–7) and Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533).[35] Above all, they display a predilection for large-scale narrative tapestries and portrait medals. Although different in size, both tapestries and medals were highly transportable; it is thus reasonable that they passed from hand to hand, although the authors do not investigate specific transfers of property.[36] While Howard seeks to map the specific channels through which information, materials, and taste traveled from the southeastern Mediterranean to Venice, Jardine and Brotton tell us that depictions of vegetation in sixteenth-century northern European tapestries "bear close affinity with Persian and Ottoman motifs" (73), but they do not elaborate on the sources through which the weavers or the artists drawing the cartoons became acquainted with carpets and textiles from the East.

Even more uncorroborated are generalizations about the mutual artistic influences between East and West. Here Jardine and Brotton stand on the shoulders of giants but offer no evidence of their own of cross-cultural

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the Council of Ferrara and Florence. An even more simplistic version of their thesis is outlined in Jerry Brotton, *Renaissance Bazaar: From the Silk Road to Michelangelo* (Oxford, 2002). In earlier works, both authors presented a more nuanced global approach to the study of Renaissance Europe: Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (London, 1996); Jerry Brotton, *Trading Territories: Mapping the Early Modern World* (Ithaca, NY, 1997).

[35] For a different interpretation of Carpaccio's paintings on the backdrop of Venetian antagonism against the Turks, see Augusto Gentili, *Le storie di Carpaccio: Venezia, i Turchi, gli Ebrei* (Venice, 1996). Fortini Brown (*Venice and Antiquity*, 248) highlights the presence of objects and motifs from classical antiquity in Carpaccio's cycle, particularly in *St. Augustine in His Study*.

[36] Jardine and Brotton maintain that "in the fifteenth century, the portrait medal carried the visible marks of its Eastern origins" (24), and thus they focus on this artifact to demonstrate "a typical movement of cultural currency, creating an undivided, seamless cultural sphere" (42) between East and West. Their examples include Pisanello's portrait medal of the Byzantine emperor John VIII Paleologus (1439) and Costanzo da Ferrara's portrait medal of Mehmed II (ca. 1481). On the latter see also Ricci, *Ossessione turca*, 30–31. A further example both supports and complicates Jardine and Brotton's interpretation: by commissioning a medal to celebrate Mehmed II's capture of Otranto (a victory that set Florence's enemy Naples back temporarily), Lorenzo de' Medici enhanced his reputation as a greedy and impious ruler; James Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995): 111–207, 125–26. In any case, portrait medals in Renaissance Italy more commonly borrowed motifs from imperial Roman coins (some examples are cited in Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity*, 232–34).

brokerage.[37] One of the few examples they offer of a "two-way process of recognition" concerns pedigreed horses. Marco Polo had already remarked on the "excellent breed of horses" and "the largest and handsomest breed of asses in the world" that were exported from Persia for very high prices.[38] For Jardine and Brotton, bred horses, valued as symbols of wealth and military power, "created bridges, in some specific and potentially instructive ways, between geographical locations and people" (133). In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Francesco Gonzaga and his son Federico II, marquises of Mantua, bartered saddles, artillery, and other luxury goods for horses with Ottoman sultans Beyazit II and Suleyman the Magnificent. Giulio Romano depicted these beautiful animals in Palazzo Te, and Andrea Mantegna did so in the Ducal Palace. Here the reader is persuaded of the importance of eastern elements, and not just the classical tradition (as in Marcus Aurelius's statue), in the conception of famous cycles of Italian Renaissance frescoes. But these examples are tenuous evidence of "a pragmatic engagement between East and West in which *each* fully acknowledged the participation of the other and negotiated workable relationships" (61; my emphasis). In other words, while they advance an interesting argument with regard to the influence of non-European elements in European art, Jardine and Brotton are less sound when claiming the reciprocity of cultural exchanges between East and West.

They are at their best when they dissect the traces of Renaissance political and military conflicts in the Mediterranean, and beyond the Mediterranean, on European artwork. Greco-Roman and biblical themes, they show, were re-elaborated in light of more pressing concerns. Thus, the stories of Scipio the African woven into a tapestry commissioned by Charles V in 1544 take on new meanings in light of the Habsburgs' recent conquest of Tunis: they are not "mysteriously imbued with some classically derived iconographic value, as Panofsky would seem to suggest" (116–17). Yet here, again, their generalizations are as inflated as their close readings can be perceptive. Panofsky's

[37] They borrow, e.g., from Gülru Necipoğlu's splendid study of grand *vizir* Ibrahim Pasha (1523–36), who was instrumental in acquiring aesthetic symbols from Christian Europe, but neglect to report that Pasha's successors turned away from his initiatives. See Gülru Necipoğlu, "Süleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal Rivalry," *Art Bulletin* 71 (1989): 401–27. Interestingly, even Necipoğlu, who emphasizes Roman, Byzantine, and Renaissance influences on Ottoman architecture, concludes that "the Ottoman receptiveness to Italian architectural innovations is more readily recognized because of documented invitations to architects from Italy, but imagining the possibility of a more fluid, two-way traffic in architectural concepts is doubly hindered by the lack of written evidence and by the great divide in scholarship between 'Islamic' and 'Western' architecture." Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (London, 2005), 83.

[38] Manuel Komroff, ed., *The Travels of Marco Polo* (New York, 2001), 35.

iconography hardly dominates the discipline of art history today, nor does it seem productive, as they do elsewhere, to place Stephen Greenblatt's notion of Renaissance self-fashioning under the rubric of "neo-Burckhardtian Renaissance studies" (60). Jardine and Brotton risk setting up a straw man when they stress the predominance of "neo-Burckhardtian Renaissance studies" in current historiographical perspectives. After all, more than twenty years ago, Jardine herself helped to undo traditional views of Renaissance individualism in an important study of humanist education coauthored with Anthony Grafton.[39] Finally, and paradoxically, Jardine and Brotton omit any references to Burckhardt's contention that the culture of Renaissance Italy held a "dispassionate tolerance" toward Islam, even when their own interpretation is not far from this assertion.[40]

Humanism and Muslim Powers in the Mediterranean

Scholars of Italian humanism are less interested in cross-cultural exchanges than in the distinctive Renaissance representations of Muslim powers and of Ottoman Turks in particular. In 1995, James Hankins offered a subtle overview of what then still sounded like an oxymoron: humanist crusade literature. Having ascribed more than 400 texts to this genre, he concluded that "the humanists wrote far more often and at far greater length about the Turkish menace and the need for crusade than they did about such better-known humanist themes as true nobility, liberal education, the dignity of man, or the immortality of the soul."[41] While he emphasizes both continuities with the Middle Ages and innovations in fifteenth-century humanist representations of the Turks, overall Hankins interprets these texts as laying the ground for "the articulation of a new secular identity for western Europe."[42] Perhaps not

[39] Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 1986).

[40] "The close and frequent relations of Italy with Byzantium and the Mohammedan peoples had produced a dispassionate tolerance that weakened the ethnographical conception of a privileged Christendom. . . . To the study of man, among many other causes, was due the tolerance and indifference with which the Mohammedan religion was regarded. The knowledge and admiration of the remarkable civilization that Islam, particularly before the Mongol inundation, had attained was peculiar to Italy from the time of the Crusades." Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance* (London, 1944), 303, 305. Note that the Swiss scholar was no admirer of Islam. See his *Judgments on History and Historians*, trans. Harry Zohn (Boston, 1958), 46–52.

[41] Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders," 112. For earlier inquiries into this topic, see Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204–1571*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 1976–84); and Robert Black, *Benedetto Accolti and the Florentine Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1985), 224–85.

[42] Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders," 123.

surprisingly, neither Hankins nor like-minded scholars explicitly invoke Burckhardt when advancing the notion that humanist views of Islam were increasingly secular.

Nancy Bisaha's *Creating East and West* and Margaret Meserve's *Empires of Islam* further dissect the humanist crusading literature and engage with Hankins's interpretations. While presenting opposite conclusions, these two authors demonstrate how a focus on humanist concerns with Muslim people and powers can inject new life into such traditional academic debates as those about the degree of continuity between medieval and Renaissance intellectual traditions and about the latter's secular nature.

Having analyzed the works of about thirty humanists—mostly of Italian background but including some Greeks from Byzantium as well—Bisaha concludes, with Hankins, that "humanists revolutionized Western views of Islam, transforming an old enemy of the faith into a political and cultural threat to their growing sense of 'Europe'" (5). In the first chapter, Bisaha acknowledges the debt that humanists such as Coluccio Salutati and Poggio Bracciolini paid to medieval religious vocabulary and chivalric literature. The rest of her study, however, stresses the novelty of the humanist discourse in adapting the classical opposition between Greek civility and Persian barbarism in order to characterize Ottoman Turks as the "new barbarians." Others before her had already made this point, but Bisaha delves deeper and emphasizes both the impact of Greek scholars in fueling anti-Ottoman sentiments after 1453 and their influence on the progressive rehabilitation of the Eastern Church as the first Christian victim of the Turks rather than a rival of Rome.[43] For Bisaha, then, the rediscovery of antiquity (the quintessential humanist intellectual contribution) was a vehicle through which a heightened cultural confrontation between Europe and Asia emerged. "Renaissance thinkers," she writes, "adopted an attitude toward Muslims that was more hostile on the whole than was that of their medieval predecessors" (19) but also more secular because it turned Turks from "infidels" into cultural and political enemies.[44]

Nowhere does Bisaha depict the humanist discourse as monolithic. She is careful to cite aspects of Ottoman rule that elicited appreciation (most notably its military discipline); she uncovers the personal motives behind the views of individual writers (as in the case of the Florentine writer Donato Acciaiuoli, whose family had large possessions in continental Greece); she recalls the hesitant welcome with which several Greek scholars were met in Italy before 1453; she devotes several pages to the irenic views of those intellectuals who

[43] Chapter 6 of Schwoebel, *Shadow of the Crescent*, 147–75, e.g., is entitled "The New Barbarian." See also Hankins ("Renaissance Crusaders," 119–21), who gives evidence that anti-Greek sentiments persisted among some Italian humanists even after 1453.

[44] See also Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders," 121.

favored a peaceful conversion of Muslims.[45] The adjective "complex" and the noun "complexity" recur countless times as a corrective to an assumed black-and-white characterization of humanist views of Islam.[46] However, I struggled to reconcile the different strands of her interpretation, especially when it came to the most intriguing part of her thesis, according to which the legacy of humanistic discourses about the Turks is the paradoxical coexistence of "Eurocentrism" and "cultural tolerance" (9). I read this thesis as a reappraisal of Burckhardt's notions of secularism mediated via Denys Hay, although even Hay stressed the role of Christianity in shaping the idea of Europe.[47] Unlike Burckhardt, Bisaha is careful to contrast representations and reality, and she admits that "a growing attitude of religious intolerance in [fifteenth- and sixteenth-century] Italy applied both to internal and external non-Christian groups" (142). She once concedes that "sixteenth-century writers echoed humanist concepts of the Turks as a threat to *both* Christianity and high culture" (179; my emphasis). But she never fully elucidates how humanists can be seen as "simultaneously fashioning both a chauvinistic sense of 'Western civilization' and a more relativistic approach to other societies" (174). The use of terms such as "tolerant," "secular," "lay," and "relativistic" with little reference to their linguistic and cultural context is not helpful, and her theoretical references are murky.[48] Still, the conundrum she raises is undoubtedly central to current debates about what constitutes a European identity. More than an echo of it reverberates in contemporary discussions about whether to mention Christianity as a founding value in the *Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe* (2004) and in the still ongoing deliberations about whether Turkey is to become a full member state of the European Union.

Meserve's *Empire of Islam* takes a very different stand and pursues a narrower but subtler analysis of humanist texts that examined the historical

[45] Notably John of Segovia (d. ca. 1458) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64), who are also discussed in Schwoebel, *Shadow of the Crescent*, esp. 223–25.

[46] In reference to Dante's views of Muslims, the adjective "complex" recurs three times on the same page (18). On Dante and the Islamic world, see Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Dante and the Orient* (Urbana, IL, 2002).

[47] Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh, 1957), 4, 21–23, 84. In his discussion of the rise of individualism in Renaissance Italy, Burckhardt invokes the barbarian trope as having existed among both ancient Greeks and Arabs: "in the same way the Greek had once distinguished himself from the barbarian, and the Arab had felt himself an individual at a time when other Asiatics knew themselves only as members of a race." Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance*, 81.

[48] Bisaha praises the usefulness of "cross-cultural theory" (6–7) for examining humanist texts but leaves us in the dark as to what she means by it. She also put off some readers with her disparaging comments about Ottoman bigotry and despotism. See Gerald MacLean, "When West Looks East: Some Recent Studies in Early Modern Muslim Cultures," *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies* 7 (2007): 96–112, 103.

origins of Muslims, as peoples and empires, and Ottoman Turks in particular.[49] Meserve advances three arguments that are in direct contraposition to Bisaha's. She claims that Renaissance historians "actually took very little of their information from ancient sources," and thus, "despite the classical veneer they gave their descriptions of the Scythian Turks, [they] ultimately perpetuated a medieval Christian image of barbarity" (151–52). Second, she maintains that "it was medieval historians, not Renaissance ones, who devised the analogy between Christian-Islamic conflicts of the present era and Greek-Persian rivalries of the past" (157). She adds that this opposition fell out of favor after 1453, when the Ottomans were increasingly demonized. Finally, Meserve is struck by "the relative *inattention* of the humanists" (157) to the secular aspects of Islamic history, which had attracted medieval Latin chroniclers.

The corollary of this tripartite thesis is that, rather than being "authoritative, elegant, and plausible" (115), Renaissance historiography—at least insofar as the origins of Islamic empires are concerned—fostered polemical, even myth-making, uses of the past. Humanists, for Meserve, "took little interest in the accuracy or even the historical plausibility of the narratives of Islamic history they constructed" (239). Historians such as Andrea Biglia (ca. 1395–1435) and Flavio Biondo (1392–1463), she argues, were engaged in "a sustained campaign of ignoring and forgetting" (168)—not a light indictment of someone like Biondo, whom his successors called "the first of all moderns."[50] Like Hankins, Meserve thus insists on the intentional distortions of humanist scholarship.[51] But unlike Hankins, she underscores the continuity in method, style, and themes that characterized medieval and humanist crusading literature.

While Bisaha subordinates textual analysis to the search for a new synthesis, Meserve is at her best when she subjects Renaissance and modern commonplaces to a close reading of primary sources. Through a skillful examination of well-known texts by Salutati, Enea Silvio Piccolomini (later Pius II), and others, she debunks the widespread claim according to which, by calling the Turks *Teucri* (Latin for Trojans), several humanists recognized them as descending from the same progeny as Aeneas, the mythical founder

[49] For sure, the origins of Islamic empires were not solely a humanist crux. Legends about the founding of the house of Osman have continued to haunt modern historians. See Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley, 1995).

[50] Onofrio Panvinio cited in Eric Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago, 1981), 38.

[51] For Hankins ("Renaissance Crusaders," 144), "humanist learning in the Renaissance was hardly the detached, objective style of inquiry it is often presented as in the older literature and in some other writings of more recent date."

of Rome.[52] She subjects the topos of Turkish "barbarism" to equally severe scrutiny and shows that in constructing the image of the Turks as savage and brutal, humanists drew as much from classical texts as from medieval Latin and Byzantine chronicles and apocalyptic literature that we would expect to fail the test of Renaissance philology and source criticism. In assembling evidence for his negative characterization of the Turks, as fine a scholar as Piccolomini credited dubious sources dating from the High Middle Ages and, in contrast, "expressed serious doubts about the value of medieval or contemporary travelers' reports" (310 n. 133). For others, too, firsthand experience added little to ingrained traditions and militant propaganda. After surviving captivity in Ottoman hands in 1430, the Greek-Venetian scholar Niccolò Sagundino described "the barbaric origins of the Turks" on the basis of "well-worn clichés about the habits of earlier Scythian people" more than he relied on "his own direct observation or historical research" (107), which might have led him to praise some features of Ottoman culture.[53] Furthermore, when it served to promote their own erudition, humanists did not shy away from conscious falsifications of accounts of Ottoman history.

However, Meserve does not maintain that all assessments of Islamic people and polities were negative. In fact, rejecting Said's hasty transposition of modern Orientalism into the medieval and Renaissance periods, she demonstrates that Renaissance historians did not portray the Orient as one uniform entity; rather, they often denigrated the Ottomans by comparing them to Muslim powers that they deemed more worthy. After 1453, for example, the Safavids, the archenemies of the Ottomans, and lesser known Muslim polities, such as the Akkoyunlus of eastern Anatolia ruled by Uzun Hasan, were cast in a positive light.[54]

Meserve offers a myriad of examples to prove that humanists "manipulated the material they found in their unlikely sources" and made a selective use of the evidence available in order "to show the Turks in as poor a light as possible" (115). In so doing, she sides with those scholars who emphasize that fifteenth-century historians lacked the standards of source criticism that in the

[52] Bisaha also notes that, puzzlingly, "those humanists who showed some respect or sympathy for the Turks tended not to represent them as a noble and ancient people who possessed the same legendary ancestry and greatness as the Romans" (92).

[53] Writing about the same author, however, Kate Fleet stresses the considered and in some respects admiring portrait of Mehmed II painted by Segundino. See her "Italian Perceptions of the Turks in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 5 (1995): 159–72, 166–67.

[54] Uzun Hasan appears in one of the portrait medals that Jardine and Brotton identify as vehicles of cross-cultural exchange between East and West and in at least one Florentine *cassone* dating from the 1460s (Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, 228).

following two centuries shaped modern European historiography.[55] Regrettably, Meserve recoils from engaging more openly with this controversial debate. This reticence perhaps explains why the book closes with an ambiguous and truncated argument, according to which the turning point in Renaissance views of the Muslim world occurred in the early sixteenth century, when historians such as Marc'antiono Sabellico, Andrea Cambini, and Raffaele Maffei, and later notably Francesco Sansovino and Paolo Giovio, lost interest in the "lurid details" (241) of the alleged primordial barbarity of the Turks because they could now count on more accurate information from travelers and ambassadors. Meserve thus suggests that an ever more dispassionate empiricism made headway. Hinted at more than demonstrated, this conclusion deserves further elaboration because it conflicts with existing accounts of sixteenth-century European representations of the Turks, according to which images did not faithfully mirror factual information. Several of these accounts trace an opposite trajectory from admiration (however mixed) for Ottoman politics and society to increasingly negative connotations after the battle of Lepanto, culminating in the eighteenth-century notion of Oriental despotism.[56]

Cultural and Social Encounters

The Renaissance per se is not an explicit preoccupation of Natalie Zemon Davis's *Trickster Travels* and Giovanni Ricci's *Ossessione turca*. Yet both Davis (whose focus is on the early sixteenth-century papal court) and Ricci (whose starting point is the court of Ferrara) think that we can uncover important aspects of Renaissance and early modern Italian society by looking at its cultural and social entanglements with the Muslim world. But there is another reason to juxtapose these two studies: reading them side by side leaves one with the sensation of witnessing a dialogue that should have occurred but did not, for the differences in method and interpretations between the two are

[55] A recent contribution to this debate is in Anthony Grafton, *What Was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2007).

[56] C. F. Beckingham, "Misconceptions of Islam: Medieval and Modern," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 124 (1976): 606–11, now in his *Between Islam and Christendom: Travellers, Facts, and Legends in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London, 1983); C. A. Patrides, "'The Bloody and Cruell Turke': The Background of a Renaissance Commonplace," *Studies in the Renaissance* 10 (1963): 126–35; Lucette Valensi, *The Birth of the Despot: Venice and the Sublime Porte* (Ithaca, NY, 1993). Perhaps the greatest early sixteenth-century Italian admirer of the Ottoman Empire was Machiavelli, to whom Meserve and Bisaha only devote a few sentences. For a fuller treatment, see John Najemy, "Machiavelli between East and West," in Curto et al., *From Florence to the Mediterranean*, 1:127–46.

as striking as their similarities.[57] What Ricci and Davis share is less a vision of than a focus on the Mediterranean. The two authors seek to rescue the historical distinctiveness of the early modern Mediterranean from both the "clash of civilizations" theory and idealized notions of unity. But whereas Davis updates the Braudelian project, Ricci reappraises Said's claim that "for Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma."[58] Moreover, Davis gives her undivided attention to one man, and Ricci gives his to one city, in order to depict larger trends in Christian-Muslim relations. Yet they incorporate the lessons of microhistory in remarkably different ways. Davis strives to offer an authentic portrait of a man who embodies the possibility of cross-cultural communication. Ricci takes cues from the "conjectural paradigm" of microhistorian Carlo Ginzburg in order to capture cultural assonances across time and space.[59] Finally, both scholars recognize the role played by gender and sexuality in cross-cultural relations, but they pursue this insight to opposite ends.

Davis and Ricci grapple with a ubiquitous Mediterranean phenomenon—piracy—and its consequences, namely, slavery and, in some instances, conversion (either forced or voluntary). The scholarship on this theme is large and growing, but it is tilted toward the fate of Christian slaves in North Africa and European efforts to release them more than toward the lives of Muslim captives in southern Europe.[60] In spite of the paucity of records, Davis turns every stone to recreate the peregrinations, thoughts, and intimate life of one such captive: al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan, better known to Anglophones as Leo Africanus. Born in Granada in the 1480s, Leo fled with his family to Fez while the troops of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabelle of Castile advanced. While traveling on a diplomatic mission on behalf of the Moroccan sultan, in 1518 al-Wazzan fell into the hands of a famed Spanish pirate who, recognizing the value of his prey, offered him as a gift to pope Leo X. Freed from imprisonment after being baptized as Johannes Leo de Medicis, he spent nine years in Italy working as a translator and becoming an author in his own right (when writing in Arabic he signed his name as Yuhanna al-Asad, i.e.,

[57] The only trace of this dialogue is a praiseworthy but exceedingly brief reference to *Trickster Travels* in Giovanni Ricci, *I turchi alle porte* (Bologna, 2008), 140 n. 80.

[58] Said, *Orientalism*, 59.

[59] Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in his *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore, 1989), 96–125, and *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London, 1990).

[60] Among a larger literature, see Bartolomé Bennassar and Lucile Bennassar, *Les Chrétiens d'Allah: L'histoire extraordinaire des renégats, XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Paris, 1989); Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500–1800* (New York, 2003); Wolfgang Kaiser, ed., *Le commerce de captifs: Les intermediaries dans l'échange et le rachat des prisonnier en Méditerranée, XV^{e}–XVIII^{e} siècle* (Rome, 2008).

John the Lion). Leo's main work, completed in 1526, came to enjoy much editorial fortune: his *Description of Africa* was revised and included in the first volume of Giambattista Ramusio's travel narratives printed in Venice in 1550. It was then translated into English and Latin in 1600 and 1632, respectively, and disseminated across Europe. In 1527, the year of the sack of Rome, Leo vanished from all surviving documents. Five years later, one of his former Roman patrons hinted that Leo had returned to Tunis.

"Baffling silences" (6) surround Leo's youth in North Africa. These silences must have attracted Davis's attention as much as Leo's extraordinary life did. A formidable scholar, Davis has probed the role of fiction and storytelling in historical writing throughout much of her career—beginning with *The Return of Martin Guerre*, then in *Fiction in the Archives*, and more recently in the imagined dialogues between herself and her characters in *Women on the Margins*.[61] Her latest experiment consists in writing "a plausible life story" (13), which seeks to offer a truthful portrait of an enigmatic figure while not denying what we cannot know (the narration is punctuated by "maybes" and "perhapses," by conditional verb forms—"would have," "may have"—and by the refrain, "we can imagine"). In order to fill the blanks in Leo's biography, Davis combines two strategies: on the one hand, she scouts for clues in Leo's writings; on the other, she scours the secondary literature in search of details about the individuals, places, and institutions that may have played a role in his life. The result is not quite a microhistory. Although Davis gestures toward this historical method when she writes that "an extreme case can often reveal patterns available for more everyday experience and writing" (11), she uses the context to shed light on Leo's biography more than she uses his biography to illuminate the context.

What drives Davis is a political and intellectual question that transcends the protagonist of her story: "Did the Mediterranean waters not only divide north from south, believer from infidel, but also link them through similar strategies of dissimulation, performance, translation, and *the quest for a peaceful enlightenment*?" (13; my emphasis). In Leo's life and works, Davis ultimately finds a positive answer to this question. In her rendition, Leo is "a man with a double vision, sustaining two cultural worlds, sometimes imagining two audiences" (12–13); a man able to survive in, and perhaps even appreciate, both Christianity and Islam; a former diplomat trained to be tactful; a student of law able to value the systematicity of European codification, including canon law; a fierce enemy of Shiites who may have admired the unity of the Roman Catholic Church without foreseeing the Lutheran revolt; and an author

[61] Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA, 1987), and *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), 1–4.

capable of hiding behind the third person (although Ramusio turned his narrative into the first person) and behind the figure of an amphibious bird in order to escape "obligation and blame by claiming different identities" (112). We thus value Leo's effort to offer a sober and normalized depiction of Africa and its people and excuse his "shocking" references to "the pestilence [*pestilencia*] of Muhammad" and "the folly [*pazia*] of Muhammad" (160) as concessions to his godfathers, among whom was Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo (ca. 1469–1532).[62]

A clergyman, scholar, and early Christian Kabbalist, Egidio da Viterbo was Leo's main patron in Rome. For him, Leo revised and annotated a Latin translation of the Koran, while for Alberto Pio, prince of Carpi, he transcribed an Arabic version of Saint Paul's Epistles. Through these and other prominent figures at the papal court, Leo was introduced to wider networks of humanists, as well as to Jewish instructors and translators employed by the latter (with one of them he began a Latin-Hebrew-Arabic dictionary). He probably collaborated closely with Vatican librarian Girolamo Aleandro and offered information to historian Paolo Giovio. Davis is sure that Leo dissimulated his religious beliefs at baptism, but she suggests that he must have taken pleasure in becoming part of "a fascinating, cosmopolitan world of learning and get[ting] a glimpse of the high circles of European power and wealth" (194). That this world of learning was populated by clergymen advocating new crusades does not go unnoticed. Davis is never insensitive to the power asymmetries between Leo and his supporters and admirers. She is not surprised that they do not mention him directly. Leo clearly remained "on the margins of these elite humanist circles" (74).

Here, however, is where the legacy of Leo Africanus ceases to be paradigmatic and becomes quasi-chimerical. If there was a "quest for a peaceful enlightenment" in Renaissance Italy, it resided with Leo and his posthumous readers, not at the papal court and its entourage. This quest remained alive through Leo's extraordinary *Description of Africa*: "for the myriad educated readers it reached over the centuries, it bore the possibility of communication and curiosity in a world divided by violence" (260). Isaac Causabon's annotations on a manuscript version of the text and Amin Maalouf's twentieth-century fictional recreation of Leo prove the point.[63] Yet without a more

[62] Davis characterizes Leo's vision of Africa in quasi-Braudelian terms: "In its variety of languages and people, his [Leo's] Africa was held together by trade relations; political relations, including warfare, domination, and the exaction of tribute; and the movement and mixture, including linguistic and sexual mixture, of peoples" (150).

[63] Amin Maalouf's novel *Leo the African* (London, 1988) recreates the multifarious possibilities for encounters and cross-fertilization in the premodern Mediterranean. However, it also seems to express a more concrete political view: sotto voce, it

sustained analysis of the *Description*'s reception, Leo is bound to remain the sixteenth-century incarnation of a hero of our postcolonial times. In at least one context, the *Description*'s plasticity served imperialistic purposes rather than ecumenical feelings. In 1930 the British ordered an official translation to be made in Hausa, the main language of Nigeria, in order to highlight the material progress that they had brought to the region in comparison to the precolonial period.[64]

Ricci's *Ossessione turca* unfolds in Ferrara and its vicinities—that is, an area far behind the front lines (*una retrovia*, in the Italian subtitle) of direct military and cultural confrontation between Christians and Turks. A city of no more than 30,000 inhabitants, home to the court of the Este family (the longest lasting ruling dynasty in a regional state of the Italian peninsula), Ferrara hosted the beginning phase of the 1438–39 ecclesiastical council called to reunite the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches; nourished writers such as Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso; and witnessed the publications of a voluminous literature known as "militarized humanism." Ferrara did not compare to Rome, Venice, or Naples. But Ricci's goal is precisely to demonstrate that an "obsession with the Turks" infiltrated all corners and all levels of European society in spite of the fact that personal encounters with Muslims were sporadic. Ricci thus offers an alternative geography for the study of Italian Renaissance encounters with the Islamic world that could be fruitfully applied to other lesser cities. Although the bulk of his evidence comes from court society, international politics, literature, art, and architecture, he skillfully shows that Muslims populated the imagination of ample segments of the population, via, for example, prophecies, poems, and processions.

Ricci's account complements but also negates Davis's: rather than asking whether there was any room for a "quest for a peaceful enlightenment" in the sixteenth-century Mediterranean, Ricci posits the existence of an inescapable vicious circle in Christian-Muslim relations in which fear fed violence and violence fed more fear—a cycle that he sees as repeating itself to this day. Captivity by the infidels (on both sides of the religious divide) thus appears

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condemns the fragmentation and passivity with which North African powers confronted Ottoman expansionism in the early sixteenth century and implies that a pan-Arabism *ante litteram* could have perhaps changed the course of history for the Muslim Mediterranean. Interestingly, Davis criticizes Maalouf's portrait of Leo Africanus for its lack of historical accuracy but not for idealizing the degree of intermixing of cultures in the Mediterranean.

[64] Valeria Escauriaza Lopez Fadul, "The Wavering Fortune of *The Cosmography and Geography of Africa*, 1526–2006" (senior essay, Department of History, Yale University, 2008), 38–39. I thank the author for permission to cite her unpublished study. The first Arabic translation of Leo's work on Africa appeared in Rabat in 1980.

less as a vehicle of cross-cultural exchange than as a source of perennial suspicion and exploitation, including sexual exploitation. Whereas Davis conjectures that Leo settled into a stable family life in Rome, living with a woman and their child, Ricci discusses the sexual abuses perpetuated against captives and the sexual construction of the "other." Muslim domestic servants in Ferrara (women for the most part) and dark-skinned men displayed at court pageants were often victims of sexual aggression. Ferrara's religious confraternities that worked to ransom Christian slaves in North Africa always suspected former captives—even those who never renounced their Catholic faith—of having engaged in homoerotic intercourse. The association between Muslims and illicit sexuality was literalized in the use of the word "dogs" to refer to both sodomites and infidels.[65] The desire to cleanse sexual (and other forms of) impurity governed the rituals through which those captives who returned safely to Ferrara were reintegrated into local society.

Having to rely on fragmentary evidence to paint four centuries of obsession with the Turks in this Italian principality, Ricci borrows from Ginzburg's work, as well as from an eclectic mixture of cultural anthropology, cultural history, and psychoanalysis. This eclecticism results in insightful (if sometimes more suggestive than fully demonstrated) arguments, as when Ricci interprets the crusades as an outpouring of repressed male sexual anxiety (74–75). If both Ricci and Davis are preoccupied with the notion of identity—the late twentieth-century incarnation of the old theme of Renaissance individualism—Ricci is concerned with the rituals surrounding former captives more than with their individual experiences and with the traditionalism of his subjects more than with the few who may have attempted to subvert the normative behavioral and rhetorical boundaries between the acceptable and the illicit. He finds no Leo Africanus in Ferrara.

That in this period Islam and the Catholic Church had different conceptions of what it meant and whether it was appropriate to dissimulate offers further elements of comparison. Because Muslims considered it legitimate for their coreligionists to dissimulate their faith if endangered by infidel rulers (a practice known as *taqiyya*), Davis can imagine that al-Wazzan did not meet any obstacle when he returned to Tunis after almost a decade spent as a Catholic in Rome. In contrast, the Roman Inquisition and the confessional

[65] Jews were also labeled as "dogs." On the cliché of Muslims as sodomites (which seventeenth-century Christian authors occasionally "proved" by citing two passing references in Leo's *Description*), see also Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen*, 109–27. Admittedly, accusations of sodomy were also a weapon of seventeenth-century intra-Christian confessional polemics and ways to vilify atheists (John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration, and Early Enlightenment Culture* [Cambridge, 2000], 706–19). Finally, native populations in the Americas were also portrayed as practicing bestiality and homosexuality (Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*, 176).

associations that provide Ricci with much of his source material sought not only to discipline the bodies and mores of those who lapsed while in North Africa but also to scrutinize their inner souls. Ricci nods at the thesis, pursued by Catholic scholars, according to which the growing disjuncture between inner beliefs and outer appearances in post-Reformation Europe favored the birth of modern, autonomous, and self-reflexive individuals.[66] But unlike those who espouse this thesis, he is not very optimistic about the degree of freedom inherent in this process and emphasizes instead the cultural conformity imposed by repressive institutions of church and state.

Conclusion

In its relatively brief life span, the scholarly reorientation of Renaissance studies toward the East has excited some, annoyed others, and confused many.[67] In an essay published in 2002, a scholar of the Ottoman Empire bemoaned that "our narratives of rebirth and discovery now ignore the Middle East."[68] Five years later, MacLean declared emphatically that "examining how and why Europeans represented the Muslim world . . . is arguably the most exciting and certainly the most important scholarly endeavor on the agenda of early modern cultural studies today."[69] By contrast, after having done so much to enlarge the perspectives of Renaissance historiography, Peter Burke now ridicules interpretations such as Jerry Brotton's and laments that "the danger today is not the neglect of non-western contributions but the exaggeration of their importance."[70]

As the opening section of this review essay suggests, we have hardly reached a level of saturation in the study of Renaissance encounters with the Muslim world. But while the scholarly contributions reviewed here reveal the importance of this subject, they also leave some questions unresolved. Three questions in particular are worth mentioning for their broader implications:

[66] Lucetta Scaraffia, *Rinnegati: Per una storia dell'identità occidentale* (Rome, 1993), x, 101–88.

[67] How recent this reorientation is can be surmised by the silence about the Muslim world in the broadest critical surveys of the historical literature on Renaissance Italy that have appeared in the past thirty years. See Bouwsma, "Renaissance"; Edward Muir, "The Italian Renaissance in America," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 1095–1118; forum on "the persistence of the Renaissance," *American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 51–124; Celenza, *Lost Italian Renaissance*.

[68] Linda T. Darling, "The Renaissance and the Middle East," in Ruggiero, *Companion*, 55–69, 55. Darling's interest is more on whether the notion of Renaissance can be applied to the Muslim world than on the relations between the Italian Renaissance and the Muslim world.

[69] MacLean, "When West Looks East," 97.

[70] Peter Burke, "Renaissance Europe and the World," in Woolfson, *Palgrave Advances*, 52–70, 66.

What do we make of the differences between the often optimistic views of cross-cultural exchanges that emerge from studies of material artifacts and the more somber conclusions deriving from studies of written texts? How should we conceptualize the relationship between culture and economics given that so many exchanges between Christian Europe and the Muslim Mediterranean were mediated via trade? And if we are not to conceive of the Renaissance and this period of Italian history in isolation, should we not also move toward a new connected history of the Mediterranean?

Nowhere has a positive appreciation of the aesthetic borrowings from the East been more pronounced than in a successful exhibition, Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797, that opened at the Metropolitan Museum in March 2007. Its principal curator defines Venice's relations with the Islamic Near East as guided by an "almost perfect balance and interaction of religious spirit, chameleonic diplomacy, and an unsentimentally practical mercantile system."[71] Later in the summer of 2007, the exhibition traveled to Venice and to Paris. In Venice, miniatures, tapestries, brocades, porcelains, book covers, metalwork, and other luxury objects went on display in the large room of the Palazzo Ducale in which the rulers of the Venetian republic assembled until 1797. The opening panel and the affordable, abridged guide posited that "Venice was always to maintain a rational approach to the Islamic world."[72] Yet those visitors who happened to raise their eyes above the glass cases containing magnificent artifacts saw massive paintings representing the Venetian participation in the Fourth Crusade, two naval battles against the Turks fought in the 1470s, and celebrations of the Venetian military commander at Lepanto. The adjacent rooms host even more belligerent anti-Ottoman representations. True, many of these paintings date to after 1577, when a fire destroyed much of the Ducal Palace and a more aggressive anti-Ottoman discourse emerged in Venice after the battle of Lepanto.[73] The disjuncture between the exhibition's message and its setting was nonetheless startling. And yet, it has gone unnoticed. In the pages of the *New York Review of Books*, the exhibition was described as "a subtle rebuke to those who like to see the relationship between the Christian and Islamic worlds exclusively and simplistically as a matter of jihads and crusades, clashes, violence, and destruction"; the artwork on display was invoked to demonstrate that "the lure of

[71] Stefano Carboni, "Moments of Vision: Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797," in *Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797* (New Haven, CT, 2006), 12–35, 16.

[72] Monica da Cortà Fumei, *Venezia e l'Islam 828–1797: Exhibition Guide* (Venice, 2007), 8.

[73] Umberto Franzoi, Terisio Pignatti, and Wolfgang Wolters, *Il Palazzo Ducale di Venezia* (Treviso, 1990), 242–56, 319–32.

profits and hardheaded mercantile pragmatism consistently overcame both religious prejudice and political idealism."[74]

Insofar as the academic scholarship on Renaissance Italy (particularly in the Anglophone world) remains deeply intertwined with the fascination that this period exerts over the educated public at large, it would be wrong to dismiss these events and comments as simplifications for public consumption. After all, Howard contributed to the exhibition's catalog and both her *Venice and the East* and Jardine and Brotton's *Global Interests* embrace a similar view. In contrast, Bisaha raises the question of the discrepancy between the sense of "cultural openness and respectful exchange between East and West" (190 n. 13) that we evince from recent studies of material goods, the visual arts, and architecture and the more antagonistic picture that emerges from reading humanists' accounts of Muslims.[75] Now that the distance between these two perspectives has been registered, the challenge is how to integrate it into the study of the circulation of people, goods, and ideas across the religious divides of the Mediterranean.

Attempting to do so, art and architectural historians take it largely for granted that trade and travel fostered mutual recognition and esteem. Howard gathers much and sometimes new information about Venetian merchants and travelers to Egypt and the Levant, but in stating that commerce forms the "backdrop" (15) to her subject, she comes close to implying a causal relation between economics and culture.[76] Obviously, commerce has historically created new avenues of cultural and material exchange. Commerce also requires a reasonable degree of safety and mutual understanding to sustain investments and limit the effect of contraband, piracy, and extortion. But precisely what degree and what kind of mutual understanding commerce required and generated is rarely examined. Did curiosity and respect necessarily go together with a rational calculation of profit? Howard is careful to recall instances when Venetian merchants overseas felt menaced, both individually and collectively; she nonetheless concludes that "routine interactions among [Venetian and Muslim] merchants was more commonly a peaceful experience" (42). In another passage, she sidelines physical and ideological violence altogether

[74] William Dalrymple, "The Venetian Treasure Hunt," *New York Review of Books*, July 19, 2007, 29–31, 30 and 29, respectively. Dalrymple cites the presence of Italian silk fabrics at Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, e.g., as evidence of "a two-way flow of tastes and influences—a mutually beneficial interpretation and dialogue of civilizations" (30).

[75] Dana E. Katz, *The Jews in the Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Philadelphia, 2008), identifies an opposite tendency whereby written documents offer a more favorable portrayal of Jews in Renaissance Italy than do visual representations.

[76] See also Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 15–25.

to assert that "the crusader period offered the most favourable conditions for artistic exchange" (207).[77]

All of the recent works cited here leave us wondering what Venetian, Genoese, and Florentine merchants thought of their business clients and partners in Alexandria, Pera, and Damascus beyond the strict financial transactions they performed with them. Because they focus on the patterns and technicalities of trade, most economic historians tend to emphasize pragmatic utilitarianism more than they glorify deeper cultural comprehension in cross-cultural Mediterranean commerce. Thus, when Goldthwaite stresses "the excitement even modest [Florentine] entrepreneurs must have felt about the new market prospects opening up at Constantinople" in the years after 1453 and the ensuing negotiations with Ottoman rulers to secure favorable conditions for Tuscan merchants, he hastens to recall the concomitant efforts made by Pius II to launch a new crusade.[78] We should feel compelled to investigate further the relation between the nuts and bolts of cross-cultural trade and the flourishing of mutual cultural understanding.

At a basic but important level, the studies reviewed here demonstrate beyond any doubt that old narratives of the displacement of the Mediterranean by the Atlantic are inadequate for an understanding of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. One is reminded that Columbus, in the account of his fourth transatlantic voyage, written in July 1503, urged the Spanish monarchs to use the wealth of the New World not only to evangelize China but also to reconquer Jerusalem.[79] But to explore fully what a Mediterranean perspective can bring to the study of Renaissance Italy and the Italian Renaissance, a new

[77] On this point, see Vladimir P. Gross, ed., *The Meeting of Two Worlds: Cultural Exchange between East and West during the Period of the Crusades* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1986), esp. 441–45 corresponding to Oleg Grabar, "Patterns and Ways of Cultural Exchange."

[78] Goldthwaite, *Economic History*, 185. In several contributions Marco Spallanzani has painstakingly documented the presence of Asian luxury goods in Renaissance Florence. See his latest *Oriental Rugs in Renaissance Florence* (Florence, 2007). Rarely do economic historians pause on the relationship between commerce and other forms of cross-cultural exchanges. Mere hints at this issue appear in Kate Fleet, *European and Islamic Trade in the Early Ottoman State: The Merchants of Genoa and Turkey* (Cambridge, 1999); Éric Vallet, *Marchands vénitiens en Syrie à la fin du XVe siècle* (Paris, 1999); Bernard Doumerc, *Venise et l'émirat hafside de Tunis (1231–1535)* (Paris, 1999). More valuable are some essays in David Abulafia, *Mediterranean Encounters, Economic, Religious, Political, 1100–1550* (Aldershot, 2000).

[79] Christopher Columbus, *Accounts and Letters of the Second, Third, and Fourth Voyages*, ed. Paolo Emilio Taviani et al. (Rome, 1994), 153–55. Roberto González Echevarría kindly called my attention to this text. On the importance of the North/South axis (rather than the East/West axis) in Columbus's Atlantic enterprise, see Nicolás Wey Gómez, *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies* (Cambridge, MA, 2008).

generation of scholars with adequate linguistic and philological skills will have to probe the putative "two-way process of recognition" that engaged the inhabitants of the peninsula and its eastern neighbors. A broader range of European and non-European sources and more creative analytical frameworks are needed to reconstruct the mixture of genuine curiosity, selective accommodation, and outright rejection that, in varying combinations, dominated all interactions between Europe and Islam during the Renaissance.