



Twelve Cities – One Sea

Early Modern Mediterranean Port Cities
and their Inhabitants

edited by

GIOVANNI TARANTINO and PAOLA VON WYSS-GIACOSA



QUADERNI DELLA RIVISTA STORICA ITALIANA

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Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane

This publication complies with the peer review requirements set forth by the «Rivista Storica Italiana».

The volume is based upon work from COST Action ‘People in motion: Entangled histories of displacement across the Mediterranean (1492–1923)’, CA18140, supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

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**Funded by
the European Union**

A cura di TARANTINO, Giovanni e VON WYSS-GIACOSA, Paola
Twelve Cities – One Sea: Early Modern Mediterranean Port Cities and their Inhabitants
Collana: Quaderni della Rivista Storica Italiana
Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2023
pp. IV+264; 24 cm
Cover: Winkler, Jakob: [Map of the Eastern Mediterranean]. [1569]-[1571]. Zentralbibliothek
Zürich, Ms F 19, I 68r, <http://doi.org/10.7891/e-manuscripta-16633> / Public Domain Mark
(detail)
ISBN 978-88-495-5369-7

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80121 Napoli, via Chiatamone 7

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I diritti di traduzione, riproduzione e adattamento totale o parziale e con qualsiasi mezzo (compresi i microfilm e le copie fotostatiche) sono riservati per tutti i Paesi.

Questo volume è stato impresso nel mese di ottobre dell'anno 2023
per le Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane s.p.a., Napoli.
Stampato in Italia / Printed in Italy

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VENICE – TALES OF DISPLACEMENT AND SPACE INVADERS

‘Reader, to satisfy your desire, I did not fail to bring with me, to this illustrious city of Venice, a Moor from Ethiopia’. This is how the Capuchin missionary Dionigio Carli introduced his travelogue *Il moro trasportato nell’inclita città di Venetia* (1687), describing his missions to Africa, America, Asia and Europe. If a book title is a kind of promise, Carli certainly knew how to keep one. To avoid misunderstanding, he explains that, while his religious order strictly forbade him to ‘trade in slaves and other infinite curiosities’ from Congo and Angola, he did allow himself to treat the Moor as a living synecdoche: not as an individual Black man but as the concrete embodiment of African ‘customs, rites and religion’.¹

An eye-catching illustration before the title page shows the Black slave’s transportation to Venice as a global evangelisation drama blessed by the Lion of St Mark (Fig. 12.1). The scene takes place in front of the two victory columns at the entrance to the mole in the Piazzetta. Pointing his finger skyward, Carli stands in the centre holding hands with a docile, nearly naked Black man with a pearl earring, who is smoking a *cazimbo*² while gazing up at the winged lion in the clouds. Styled like a living icon of St Mark preaching to the pagans of Alexandria, the missionary frames this act of proselytisation with an inscribed quotation

¹ Dionigio Carli, *Il moro trasportato nell’inclita città di Venetia, ovvero curioso racconto de costumi, riti e religione de popoli dell’Africa, America, Asia et Europa* (Bassano: Gio. Antonio Remondini, 1687). All translations from the Italian are my own.

² Carli, *Il moro*, 48. *Cachimbo*: the Kimbundu word for pipe. See Benjamin Breen, ‘Where There’s Smoke, There’s Fire: Pyric Technologies and African Pipes in the Early Modern World’, *Osiris* 37 (2022): 139–62.

of Christ's command to his disciples taken from Mark 16: 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation'. On the left, a native American woman is bending slightly towards her suitably naughty and endearing child who reaches up for the dove on her arm. At the water's edge, two turbaned men sit cross-legged on the ground, with their heads upraised to the heavenly apparition. This ethnographic assemblage also includes displaced indigenous animals and objects that during this period were uprooted from their contexts to become commodities in global networks of trade and human trafficking. The small monkey is a graphic allusion to the European fashion for exotic pets as well as hinting at the 'comedy' of Brazilian apes vividly described by Carli. But it is also a visual marker of animalisation that destabilises the border between beasts and sub-Saharan Africans, objectifying both as property with an exchange value. Similarly, the symbolic significance of the hookah brings together fascination with Ottoman material culture, as evinced in Carli's description of exquisite water pipes, and demeaning assumptions about its cross-legged owner as a lazy oriental.

What can we glean from this image of tangled displacements – of people, animals, artefacts and practices – and their relocation to Venice? Beginning with the half-title page, Carli proclaimed that his travelogue contained nothing short of 'the four parts of the world'. The engraving aspired to condense the known world into a single picture that would put animate and inanimate specimens on display in a manner reminiscent of cabinets of curiosities, ceremonial processions and allegories of the four continents. Despite the inclusive visual messaging, the image is not a homage to diversity. Instead, it centres the missionary's Christian voice at the expense of the silenced infidels, who look mesmerised by the miraculous lion – although it is unclear whether they attributed the sight to the thaumaturgic power of the missionary's speech, or to the psychotropic effect of the puffs of smoke intoxicating this multisensory theophany.

Venice is not merely a backdrop to this conversionary preaching performance. Both the iconotextual presence of its patron saint and the grand architectural setting celebrate the city as the global capital of Christianity. The lion's open book – bearing the promise of peace – and the dove – a manifestation of the Holy Spirit and a symbol of ecumenical concord – further project the myth of republican pacifism. This is a Venetocentric religious revelation that envisions the globe as a *pax veneta* filled with undesirable foreigners tokenised for the Venetian gaze. By bringing together different ethnicities and cultures in a ritualistic act of voluntary submission, the picture emphatically tells viewers that

Venice is the ultimate salvation. One of the dedicatory poems included in Carli's book mirrors the same scene of subjection: the 'entire world' arrived in Venice to bow to the doge, offer him 'their rites ... to be corrected' and 'beg for dogmas and laws'.

Religious instruction and political loyalty were closely interconnected in early modern Venice. In effect, the ceremonial crossing of the liminal zone between the columns of St Mark and St Theodore would indicate the rite of passage of the converts who, as the diversity optics of the image suggest, received the blessings of the Venetian rule without any colour discrimination. Providing another focal point in the background, the clock tower blends technological innovation and historical time, symbolically hailing the synchronisation of the globe and reconfiguring displacement as progressive improvement. At the top of the tower, bronze effigies of two wild men signify Venice's less civilised enemies, who 'have been pacified and forced eternally to sound the hours and the harmony of the Venetian state'.³ As Cristoforo Ivanovich's poem *Orologio de' mori in piazza di S. Marco* (1675) noted, 'with the blows of the hammer, the unknown spirit of the concave metal takes the talkative voice and motion from the Ethiopian hand'.⁴ Popularly known as 'the Moors', the two automated bell jacks echo the well-documented presence of black Africans in Venice.⁵ But they also serve as an illustration of the Aristotelian view of the slave as an 'instrument that wields many instruments' – as well as a reminder of the force of Frantz Fanon's 'machine-animal-men'.⁶

The charged political script that lies behind the image is also reflected in the personalities that were involved in the publication of the book, namely the Venetian patrician Pietro Donà and his father, former *bailo* in Istanbul, Giovanni Battista Donà. Addressing the doge in his dedicatory epistle, Pietro extols Carli's missions across 'barbaric nations'. Linking missionary activity to the expansion of the Venetian empire, he

³ Loren Partridge, *Art of Renaissance Venice 1400–1600* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 15.

⁴ Cristoforo Ivanovich, *Poesie* (Venice: Gio. Battista Catani, 1675), 19.

⁵ See, e.g., Paul H. D. Kaplan, 'Black Turks: Venetian Artists and Perceptions of Ottoman Ethnicity', in *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye, 1450–1750: Visual Imagery before Orientalism*, ed. James G. Harper (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 41–66; Kate Lowe, 'Visible Lives: Black Gondoliers and Other Black Africans in Renaissance Venice', *Renaissance Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2013): 412–52.

⁶ Aristotle, *Aristotle's Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 6; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (1967; London: Pluto, 2008), 171.

notes that Carli ‘would have brought the people themselves tributary’ to the Republic, eager as he was ‘to see so many dispersed unhappy people united under that royal mantle, which deserves to be expanded for the serenity of empire like Heaven’. In his letter to the reader, the printer Giovanni Antonio Remondini praises Giovanni Battista’s initiative to publish the travelogue for ‘public glory’. During his stay in Istanbul, the missionary had met the dragoman Gian Rinaldo Carli, one of Giovanni Battista’s scholarly collaborators, as well as the friar Cristoforo, brother of the dragoman Tommaso Tarsia and a prominent member of the local Capuchin community. Travel knowledge was, of course, intimately tied to Venetian state building and empire formation – all the more so at the level of foreign policy, where these two processes were interdependent. Missionaries were prized sources of information and their accounts contained crucial local knowledge that served both as a tool of imperial decision-making, and – not unlike the notion of a ‘Turkish literature’ advanced by Donà’s *Della letteratura de’ Turchi* (1688) – as a form of cultural capital, produced and reproduced through print. But the sponsorship of Carli’s travelogue also highlights the close connections between missionaries and the Donà family. From their publishing projects to their involvement with the Pia Casa dei Catecumeni (a charitable institution for converts to Catholicism), missionary enterprises were a household affair for the Donà,⁷ who were firmly embedded in Venice’s imperial presence in the Mediterranean.

The publication of Carli’s travelogue is significant in that it captures a moment that for many Venetians represented the beginning of a new imperial age. While Venice led the world in Carli’s *pax veneta*, it was simultaneously waging a war against the Ottomans (1684–1699), rapidly expanding its overseas territories and provoking extensive population movement. Empires at war often present themselves as global peace-makers: ‘they make a desert and they call it “peace”’, wrote Tacitus (*Agricola* 30). To celebrate the new conquests, Pietro Donà published celebratory accounts in Latin⁸ and the state cosmographer Vincenzo Maria Coronelli dedicated an erudite yet extremely violent image of the

⁷ Paolo Preto, *Venezia e i turchi* (1975; Rome: Viella, 2013), 201–7; Francesca Lucchetta, ‘Lo studio delle lingue orientali nella scuola per dragomanni di Venezia alla fine del XVII secolo’, *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 5, no. 6 (1987–1988): 479–98; Francesca Scarpa, ‘Per la storia degli studi turchi e armeni a Venezia: il sacerdote armeno Giovanni Agop’, *Annali di Ca’ Foscari* 39, no. 3 (2000): 107–30.

⁸ Pietro Donà, *Dies inter fastos Serenissimae Reipublicae* (Venice: Andrea Poletti, 1688).

Greek archipelago to Giovanni Battista Donà – his fellow co-founder of the *Accademia degli Argonauti*, who at the time oversaw military matters as *provveditore all’Arsenale* and *provveditore alle Artiglierie*. The map’s cartouche shows terrified Muslim civilians in Thrace desperately trying to cross over to Asia to escape from an aggressive, torch-bearing Lion of St Mark, who has set ablaze their house – a crumbling building called *Arcipelago* (Fig. 12.2). Not surprisingly, another dedicatory poem in Carli’s book linked Venetian expansion in Thrace and the submission of the ‘defeated Moors’ to the missionary’s achievements in Congo: how he baptised the Black African man, cleansing him from ‘the horrors of his dark mind and treacherous soul’; how he shed light on ‘strange rites’; and how, after all his voyages around the globe, he returned to Venice, ‘the centre of the entire tour of the world’.

War and military violence accelerated mobility, pushing more displaced people to Venice, where non-Christians would be instructed on how to become ‘good’ migrants at the Pia Casa dei Catecumeni under the guidance of Giovanni Battista’s brother, the abbot Andrea. Andrea worked closely with the Armenian missionary Giovanni Agop, a member of the former *bailo*’s retinue in Istanbul and author of an Ottoman grammar dedicated to the abbot.⁹ Carli’s account, with its declared ideals of charity and conversion, must have resonated with Andrea’s pastoral work. Carli wrote that he would not exchange the ‘spiritual pleasure’ he took in baptising endless queues of natives in Congo ‘for all the gold in the world’. Such excesses of religious fervour could be found at the Pia Casa during the war, when the institution’s premises were extended to accommodate more newcomers¹⁰ as ‘Turks, Moors, and Jews continuously arrive[d] ... from all parts of the world to receive the holy baptism’.¹¹

Public rituals of conversion maximised the symbolic potential of the displacement forced upon the new subjects by war, inscribing empire-building in the daily life of the city. This is how a 1689 description of the Church of San Maurizio, written by Don Michelangelo Mariani, presented conversional baptisms of refugees as a continuation of war by other means:

⁹ Giovanni Agop, *Rudimento della lingua turchesca* (Venice: Michel’Angelo Barboni, 1685).

¹⁰ Pietro Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri. Conversioni a Venezia e nel Friuli Veneto in età moderna* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2008), 89.

¹¹ Luigi Ruzino, *Istruzioni, ed avvisi pastorali al clero, e popolo della città, e diocesi di Bergamo coll’occasione di Quaresima dell’anno santo 1700* (s.l.: s.n., 1700).

Besides the expansion of the temporal empire, which in the past five years of war has taken place in Epirus, the Peloponnese, Dalmatia and Albania, there have followed such conversions of infidels to the Christian cult that they have populated from time to time the Pia Casa dei Catecumeni in Venice. And without mentioning the solemn baptisms celebrated in the Temple of S. Salvatore in the year 1686 and in the Church of the Frari in the year 1687 [and] in the Temple of S. Gio and Paolo this year 1689, forty-two catechumens among Turks, Moors and Jews of both sexes ... children and adults, dressed in white, solemnly baptised ... by the hand of Monsignor Patriarch Giovanni Badoaro, with the assistance of the godfathers – all personalities of the Venetian nobility, who generously lavished alms. The service was crowned by the confirmation of the neophytes and finally by a speech by the Patriarch ... thus leaving the audience not only edified but softened in their hearts.¹²

Emotions played a prominent role in baptism ceremonies, which served to communicate relations of power between immigrants and their noble godparents. Softened hearts and tender ties facilitated the converts' transition to their new religious congregation but also marked inequalities of position and reaffirmed existing social hierarchies. The text locates these affective negotiations of exclusion and inclusion within an urban topography marked by the presence of earlier refugee communities, specifically the Albanian community whose confraternity building was adjacent to the church of San Maurizio. Mariani records the relief sculpture commemorating the Ottoman siege of Scutari (1474) on the façade of their *scuola*. In doing so, he co-opts a prominent monument of the Albanian confraternity to stir up the desire for long-lost overseas colonies in the context of current imperial aspirations:

it is to be desired – having taken Castel Nuovo, which is the key to Albania – that the city of Scutari be reduced to our power so that, with the conquest of a Kingdom of such importance, the Albanian or Epirotic nation, so distinguished in arms and piety and with invincible faith in Saint Mark, may renew its devotion to its altar.¹³

¹² Michele Angelo Mariani, *Il S. Maurizio nella sua chiesa parrocchiale collegiata di Venetia, con la sacra esposizione dell'anno 1689* (Venice: Gio. Francesco Valvasense, 1689), 31–2.

¹³ Mariani, *Il S. Maurizio*, 17.

The affirmation of the Albanians' heroism in the above passage exemplifies how ethnic identity and pride were appropriated by the Venetian war machine. Badges of honour for military services rendered in the past could not, however, compensate inadequate performances of corporate piety in the present. This is why, in a rather unexpected way, Mariani scrutinises the conspicuous absence of the Albanian *scuola* from the decoration of the church's square during the annual votive procession on 15 June, the feast day of saints Vito and Modesto and the anniversary of the failure of the Tiepolo conspiracy. Although his comments hint at the limited financial resources and decline of the Albanian community, Mariani expresses strong disapproval and urges the confraternity to intensify its religious engagement in conformity with its own long tradition.¹⁴ Devotional zeal and loyalty to the local parish operate as affective tools to bring the Albanian confraternity into line with models of civic behaviour deemed more useful and moral. They forge compulsory attachments to the state, ensuring that diverse communities joyfully embrace the performative roles assigned to them by the host society: roles like displaying tapestries and setting up tents in the square of San Maurizio, for instance, affirmed standard images of the holy republic whilst offering the immigrants the illusion of agency and inclusion.

The politics of exposure as seen in the Albanian case highlights a key tension at the core of Venetian migration management: the fraught relationship between concessions and obligations, protection and repression, diversity and containment. To a certain extent, this was a metropolitan version of the enduring political dilemma of all empires: how to strike a balance between the incorporation of new people and a hierarchical distinction that maintained the power of the ruling elites.¹⁵ The deployment of exposure as a form of public scrutiny and embarrassment of the Albanian confraternity puts such power on display. Public shaming is 'structurally and systematically tied to relations of power'.¹⁶ By exposing the failure of the Albanians to meet social expectations, Mariani reasserted the authority of the Venetian Church within a colonial continuum that extended from the ways the Republic governed its colonies overseas to its ethnic populations at home.

¹⁴ Mariani, *Il S. Maurizio*, 19–20.

¹⁵ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 11.

¹⁶ Ute Frevert, *The Politics of Humiliation: A Modern History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 185.

Receiving permission to live in somebody else's city has always involved exposing oneself to the distribution of differential degrees of vulnerability. It is worth remembering that immigrants in Venice were easy targets for accusations of religious dissent directed not only 'from above' but also 'from below'. Concerns about religious deviance reveal collective anxieties about immigration that were shared by ruling elites and common people alike. Indeed, as has been suggested, the success of the Inquisition was linked to increasing xenophobia among the people from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. Asked if he knew why he had been summoned before the Holy Office in 1575, the printer Pierre de Huchin replied: 'My lord, no, nor can I even imagine it, but I will tell you one thing: I am a foreigner here in Venice, even though it's been nearly twenty-eight years'.¹⁷ In many other cases, Greek immigrant women accused of witchcraft made similar points about the selective victimisation and instrumentalisation of their foreignness: 'maybe they call me a witch because I am Greek?'; 'because I am Greek, that's why they call me a witch'.¹⁸

These examples spotlight lived experiences of negativity that test the fable of Venice as a melting pot, a metaphor that still holds a powerful grip on the historical imagination today. If a prolonged stay of twenty-eight years was not long enough for immigrants to be considered members of a single community, what else could foster a sense of local belonging and connectedness that took precedence over ethnic identity? The use of ethnic profiling as a common practice for turning poor, immigrant women into perpetual suspects also shows how colonial relations – established according to ethno-religious hierarchies and complicated by gender, sexuality and class dynamics – were imported back into the imperial metropole. As an anonymous accuser said in 1584 about Elena *greca*, 'doing her business as a Greek, her name alone would be sufficient without testimonies' to support her guilt.¹⁹ If, as it has often been asserted, identities in the early modern Mediterranean were fluid and flexible, why did the outsider status of margin-

¹⁷ John Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies: Italian Heretics in a Renaissance City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 194.

¹⁸ Dionysia Gialama, *Ελληνίδες μάγισσες στη Βενετία, 16ος–18ος αι.* (Athens: Estia, 2009), 411, 417–18. Also, Sally Scully, 'Marriage or a Career? Witchcraft as an Alternative in Seventeenth-Century Venice', *Journal of Social History* 28, no. 4 (1995), 857–76; Franca Romano, *Laura Malipiero strega. Storie di malie e sortilegi nel Seicento* (Rome: Meltemi, 1996); Monica Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), ch. 4.

¹⁹ Gialama, *Ελληνίδες μάγισσες*, 408.

alised Greek women draw them disproportionately into the criminal justice system? Why did their accusers use their Greek-language spells and Greek orthodox rites to uphold differentiation, even though these women's herbal remedies were part of contemporary popular medicine and, more crucially, made use of the medicinal plants of the eastern Mediterranean so eagerly sought by metropolitan botanists, physicians and pharmacists?

Cosmopolitan interpretations of Venetian history tend to play down the pain of particular historical experiences: of discrimination, coercive external categorisations and institutional violence. In so doing, they risk minimising the role of powerful agents of identification, such as the state and its bureaucracies, but also 'the myriad ways that stereotypical claims of difference permeated daily life and culture',²⁰ reproducing exclusionary and traumatising official discourse in everyday neighbourhood interactions. Unwittingly or not, modern accounts of Venice as a cosmopolitan hub have all too often confused descriptive with normative concepts of cosmopolitanism, mistaking the *de facto* ethnic and religious heterogeneity of the city's population for a fusion of different ethnicities and cultures. In their quest to avoid the pitfalls of essentialism, such descriptions have also reproduced early modern images of Venice as 'a world summed up in a city'.²¹ In his *Dialoghi storici*, for instance, Gregorio Leti presented Venice as an accessible city without solid boundaries or fixed entry points:

D. Can you enter Venice by night and by day as you wish?

M. Yes, because there are no gates or walls.²²

Praising the Republic for 'protecting, welcoming and caressing foreigners', Leti cited a Roman pasquinade, in which Pasquino explained to Marforio: 'I am leaving Rome because there is no liberty for anyone and am going to Venice where everyone is welcomed with such humanity'. It was Venetian 'kindness towards strangers', Leti concluded, that

²⁰ Giovanni Tarantino and Charles Zika, eds, *Feeling Exclusion: Religious Conflict, Exile and Emotions in Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 2.

²¹ Diego Zunica, *La calamita di Europa attrattiva de' forestieri in cui si describe la sapienza ... del Senato veneto ...* (Bologna: Pier-Maria Monti, 1694), 2.

²² [Gregorio Leti], *Dialoghi storici* (Rome: Francesco Moneta, 1665), 3:278.

gave rise to ‘the common proverb that it is better to be a foreigner in Venice than a citizen in Rome’.²³

In a similar vein, Mariani extolled Venice as a city ‘without gates, without guards and regardless exposed indifferently to all, both inhabitants and travellers, at sea and on land, day and night, every hour, at all times, both in peace and war’.²⁴ When Mariani was writing these lines, the Venetian colony of Crete was under attack by the Ottomans, and many refugees were fleeing the war to Venice. Two decades later, the same author dedicated his *Il Trionfo di Nettuno* to the engineer Antonio Mutoni, Count of San Felice, ‘who invented terrible bombs’²⁵ during the War of the Morea, when more people were forced to flee hardship at home, now occupied by the Venetians. But does cosmopolitanism not involve detachment from war and expansionist ventures?

We think of port cities as complex sites of cross-cultural encounter, exchange and mobility, but our concepts of this complexity do not always seem intricate enough to account for the wide variety of geopolitical flows that shape urban space: capital, migration and labour, but also militarisation, military logistics and the mobilisation of war-making resources. Ports are the very ‘sinews of war and trade’, Laleh Khalili reminded us recently.²⁶ Like other early modern port cities, Venice was a ‘fiscal-military hub’,²⁷ namely a prime example for studying the relationship between urban spatiality and the business of war. Located among civilians and celebrated as ‘the heart of our state’ (*cor Status nostri*),²⁸ the Arsenal was ‘an imperial institution’: a nexus of trade and violence sustained by a mobile workforce, it was ‘one of the city’s most

²³ Gregorio Leti, *Il ceremoniale storico, e politico* (Amsterdam: Giovanni and Egidio Janssonio à Waesberge, 1685), 6:276–7.

²⁴ Michele Angelo Mariani, *Le maraviglie della città di Venetia* (Venice: Giacomo Zattoni, 1666), 90.

²⁵ Emmanuele Antonio Cicogna, *Delle iscrizioni veneziane*, vol. 4 (Venice: Giuseppe Picotti, 1834), 629.

²⁶ Laleh Khalili, *Sinews of War and Trade: Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula* (London: Verso Books, 2020).

²⁷ Peter H. Wilson and Marianne Klerk, ‘The Business of War Untangled: Cities as Fiscal-Military Hubs in Europe (1530s–1860s)’, *War in History* 29, no. 1 (2022): 80–103.

²⁸ Alberto Tenenti, ‘Il senso dello stato’, in *Storia di Venezia dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*. Vol. 4. *Il Rinascimento. Politica e cultura*, ed. Alberto Tenenti and Ugo Tucci (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Treccani, 1996), 325.

imperial zones, intimately connected by experience, labor, and sufferings²⁹ with the *Stato da Mar*.

‘I came to Venice by the Po and stayed for a month and a half in the Frezzaria, in the lodging of a man employed at the Arsenal’, Giordano Bruno told his inquisitors in 1592 about his first sojourn in the lagoon.³⁰ Outside the formal military industrial structure, several *arsenalotti* families were involved in the private rental sector, subletting rooms in their houses to immigrants to earn extra income; likewise, women in the Arsenal community specialised as innkeepers, or *locandiere*.³¹ But the fusion of military and civilian within the accommodation sector extended further, in tandem with the expansive drive of the Council of Ten. Indeed, it was the Republic’s top military and political security council that in 1583 delegated the registration of persons of alien language and jurisdiction, as well as control over inns and lodging houses, to the *Esecutori contro la bestemmia*, a magistracy originally created to prosecute blasphemy.³² In one of his dialogues, Leti discusses how the *esecutori* tried to monitor mobility through the management of information and the coercive enlistment of hosts:

D. Do many foreigners come to this city?

M. It is believed that there are always thirty thousand foreigners passing through every day.

D. Are they obliged to say their name when entering the city?

M. Not to law officials, except in times of plague. But to those hosts where they go to lodge, under very serious penalties, it is forbidden for anyone to receive strangers into their homes without bringing their name and surname to the Tribunal of Blasphemy. In any case, this is overlooked, and I know this because the first time I went to Venice, together with one of my comrades,

²⁹ Robert C. Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal: Workers and Workplace in the Preindustrial City* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 116.

³⁰ Giordano Bruno, *Le deposizioni davanti al tribunale dell’Inquisizione*, ed. Antonio Gargano (Naples: La città del sole, 2007), 13.

³¹ Davis, *Shipbuilders*, 108.

³² Renzo Derosas, ‘Moralità e giustizia a Venezia nel ’500–’600. Gli Esecutori contro la bestemmia’, in *Stato, società e giustizia nella Repubblica Veneta (sec. XV–XVIII)*, ed. Gaetano Cozzi (Rome: Jouvence, 1980), 431–528 (452); Gaetano Cozzi, ‘Religione, moralità e giustizia a Venezia: vicende degli Esecutori contro la Bestemmia (secc. XVI–XVIII)’, *Ateneo veneto* 29 (1991): 7–95 (47); Vittorio Frajese, ‘L’evoluzione degli “Esecutori contro la bestemmia” a Venezia in età moderna’, in *Il vincolo del giuramento e il tribunale della coscienza*, ed. Nestore Pirillo (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 171–211 (198).

we stayed a month in the house of signora Alesandrina *padovana* in San Luca without anyone asking us our names.³³

Leti assures the reader that he was able to stay in Venice undisturbed by the local authorities, because their bureaucratic mobility policies were practically incoherent and inconsistently applied. Yet, a sceptical reader might also argue that state surveillance and intelligence infrastructures were not meant to be coherent, but to scare people. The whole point of anti-immigrant rhetoric is that it has nothing to do with whether others are or are not on the move, and everything to do with encouraging people to be afraid of foreigners.

But what, exactly, was so scary about a foreigner? A close look at a printed proclamation on ‘blasphemy and dishonest words’ issued by the *esecutori* in 1689 gives us a glimpse of how official discourse turned mobile individuals into dangerous space invaders whilst entrenching patrician hegemony over domestic society (Fig. 12.3). Noting that ‘scarce reports and information’ obstructed the work of justice against the ‘punishable freedom’ of undocumented people in ‘ferries, taverns and inns’, the *esecutori* ordered the managers of these places to keep a check on their customers and submit monthly reports to the magistracy (even if no blasphemy had been heard), with the warning that they would be punished themselves if they failed to tell the truth. Conversely, prizes were promised to those who took appropriate action to assist the work of the *esecutori*. Copies of the decree were to be posted in lodging houses, inns, taverns and ferries ‘for the clear understanding of everyone’.

The proclamation draws attention to three main points. First, in contrast to literary representations of public venues such as the *hosterie* as a ‘rare treasure of the world’, where ‘one could try for once to be a *signore*’,³⁴ the proclamation exacerbated these places’ reputation for vice and disorder as associated with people on the move. Emotionally charged words, including ‘delinquents’, ‘corruption’, ‘indecent’, ‘scandalous’, ‘obscene’ and ‘crime’, spread anxiety around itinerant people and stigmatised unpredictable mobility as a threat to the safety of the community. Although the blind street singer Paolo Britti sang of

³³ [Leti], *Dialoghi*, 28–9.

³⁴ Francesco Beccuti (known as il Coppetta), ‘Capitolo in lode dell’hosteria’, in *Delle rime piacevoli ... Parte seconda* (Vicenza: Barezzo Barezzi, 1603), 26v–30v.

the pleasures (and pleasure traps) Venice offered to its visitors³⁵ and Coronelli's guidebook listed the city's lodging houses, inns and wine shops for them,³⁶ negative images of foreigners dominated the debates around migration. In his political *Dialogue*, the patrician Giovanni Maria Memmo recommended caution in accepting too many foreign merchants into the city and considered 'a multitude of foreigners gathered together dangerous'.³⁷ As reason-of-state theorist Ludovico Zuccolo argued, the selective admission of foreigners contributed to the preservation of public virtue: 'the discipline of the city remains intact, and the citizens well disposed towards the rites and laws of the fatherland' too because they are unable to tell if 'elsewhere one either lives with more gusto or enjoys greater happiness'. The Spartans never admitted foreigners, Zuccolo added, and 'today Venice hardly admits them, but for a number of plebs'.³⁸

Second, as the governance of urban mobility provided administrative headaches for the patrician elite, professional groups, such as boatmen and innkeepers, were used as state proxies to defend the city against intruders – from immigrant workers to convicts, from vagabonds to the displaced and the dispossessed. Surveillance work was promoted as a model of good subjecthood – a good Venetian subject was a vigilant subject. However, subjecthood is a status built inherently upon deference. It would be naive, in fact, to equate ordinary subjects' complicity in the policing of day-to-day mobility with political agency and increased political participation. As Edward Said suggested in another context, 'to accept the form of action prescribed in advance by one's professional status – which in the system of things is institutionalized marginality – is to restrict oneself politically and in advance'.³⁹ The bureaucratic inclusion of subaltern residents in the everyday routines of security governance is better understood as an aspect of a wider process of rationalising governmentality through what today we would call public-private partnerships. These replicated the gaze of the state and assisted the enforcement of law and order to socially engineer a

³⁵ Paolo Britti, *Nova canzonetta nella qual s'intende li gusti, e spassi ch' hà riceuto un forestier nella città di Venetia ...* (Venice: Domenico Lovisa, [1625?]).

³⁶ Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, *Guida de' forestieri ...* ([Venice]: s.n., 1700), 41.

³⁷ Luigi Robuschi, ed., *Il Dialogo politico di Giovanni Maria Memmo* (Aracina: Aracne, 2017), 171.

³⁸ Lodovico Zuccolo, *Discorso dello amore verso la patria* (Venice: Evangelista Deuchino, 1631), 61–2.

³⁹ Edward W. Said, 'Interview: Edward W. Said', *Diacritics* 6, no. 3 (1976): 30–47 (39).

complex multi-ethnic city. But conscripting commoners into defensive governance must not be viewed simply as a tool for waging war on irregular migrants. It also involved a crucial element of social reproduction, insofar as the patrician ruling class incorporated the *popolani* into its hierarchical system so as to implement its immigration agenda and, by so doing, maintain social stability without the risk of domestic threats.

Finally, the proclamation helps us rethink the perceived associations between ‘out-of-place’ foreigners and unruly public speech through the lens of empire and colonialism. The proclamation explicitly threatened troublesome outsiders with harsh penalties, including corporeal punishment, prison, exile and the dreaded but strategically crucial galley service. As Vittorio Frajese has aptly observed, in addition to overseeing civic morality, the *esecutori* tried to achieve two further aims: first, ‘to lighten the demographic pressure ... of those foreign immigrants whose act of blaspheming would single out as turbulent and dangerous’; and, secondly, ‘to supply the fleet with forced labour through the penalty of galley labour’.⁴⁰ Issued during wartime, the proclamation underlines the intimate links between the criminalisation of migration and the creation of a pool of deportable workforces, urgently required by the Venetian navy. In effect, the institutionalised distrust and forced removal of expendable migrants were not just a domestic issue, but part and parcel of a continuous history of imperial competition between Venice and the Ottoman empire.

By stressing the importance of understanding how Venice’s mobility regime cut through colony and metropole, the above observations have suggested an alternative methodological perspective that considers port city life as the effect of multiscale power structures and processes. By refusing to separate space and place, this approach prioritises what geographer Doreen Massey called a ‘progressive sense of place’: an open-ended and processual understanding of locality as a constellation of multiple power geometries and unequal relations. Such relations, however, ‘are actually constructed on a far larger scale than what

⁴⁰ Frajese, ‘L’evoluzione’, 194.

we happen to define for that moment as the place itself'.⁴¹ From this perspective, Venice – an archetypical extroverted trading port – can be seen as a contact zone shaped by uneven processes of connectivity and boundary-making. Far from being a passive site of transit, it provides an exemplary case for a deeper exploration of the co-production of the local and the global. Attending to such relational dynamics paves the way to more critical lines of enquiry that do not reduce mobility and urban history to empirical topics but treat them as analytic frameworks, or 'optics',⁴² through which to unsettle 'Venetian cosmopolitanism' and the larger histories of imperial worldmaking within which it was embedded.

Going back to where this essay began, Carli's Black African slave offers a further reminder of how Venetian urban life and knowledge production related to the wider development of racialised systems of enslaved labour in the Mediterranean and across the Americas in the seventeenth century. Upon sailing from Africa to the New World, the Capuchin missionary witnessed the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade and in his narrative included the following anecdote of an enslaved woman's attempted suicide:

our pilot, having one of his black women in the second deck who did not want to eat, had her come upstairs, so that she could get some fresh air and be consoled by the people and also exhorted to eat. However, one day, seeing that she was not being observed, she threw herself over the edge of the ship with her head forward to drown herself, as would have happened if the pilot – who did not lose sight of her due to the suspicion they have – had not seized her quickly by the foot and pulled her into the vessel. So much and such is the stubbornness of these Ethiopians.⁴³

We are often told that Venetian print culture nurtured a non-colonial geographical imagination and that – unlike missionaries and other empire builders – Venetian diplomats, bureaucrats and merchants

⁴¹ Doreen Massey, 'Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place', in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Chance*, ed. J. Bird et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 59–69 (66).

⁴² Gary Wilder, 'From Optic to Topic: The Foreclosure Effect of Historiographic Turns', *American Historical Review* 117, no. 3 (2012): 723–45 (744–5).

⁴³ Carli, *Il moro*, 90–1. For similar stories, see Terri L. Snyder, *The Power to Die: Slavery and Suicide in British North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), ch. 1.

produced ethnographic knowledge that projected a sophisticated globalist perspective. And yet today one wonders, upon reading Carli's anecdote whilst thinking about social networks of Venetian statesmen and missionaries, the circulation of Murano glass beads in Congo,⁴⁴ and promotional texts that presented the Venetians as the discoverers of the New World and Australia:⁴⁵ Would a Venetian reader have felt the same annoyance as Carli did with enslaved people's acts of self-destruction? Would a reader have agreed with Carli in disconnecting slave suicide from enslavement and attributing it to ethnicity and temperament? Would a reader have deemed the tragic story of the 'stubborn' African woman, who refused to eat and jumped into the ocean, a form of cosmopolitan education?

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Abstract

This article reexamines the image of early modern Venice as a melting pot, a metaphor that still holds sway in current historiography. Standard accounts of the city as a cosmopolitan hub have all too often confused descriptive with normative notions of cosmopolitanism, mistaking the de facto ethnic and religious heterogeneity of its population for a fusion of different ethnicities and cultures. In so doing, they have focused on cross-cultural connections but have overlooked key aspects of displacement and migration: discrimination, coercive external categorisations and institutional violence. The present article suggests an alternative approach that does not reduce mobility and urban history to empirical topics but treats them as critical lenses through which to unsettle the romanticised ideal of 'Venetian cosmopolitanism' and the larger histories of imperial worldmaking in which it was embedded. In placing migrants and non-migrants in the same analytical field, the article moreover argues that the bureaucratic inclusion of subaltern residents in the policing of foreigners was part of a wider process of rationalising governmentality and entrenching patrician control over domestic society.

Keywords: Venice, migration, port cities, empire, governmentality

⁴⁴ Carli, *Il moro*, 45, 64.

⁴⁵ Vitale Terra Rossa, *Riflessioni geografiche circa le terre incognite distese in ossequio perpetuo della nobiltà veneziana* (Padua: Cadorino, 1686).



Fig. 12.1. Giacomo Ruffoni, *Antiporta*, in Dionigio Carli, *Il moro trasportato nell'inclita città di Venetia, ovvero curioso racconto de costumi, riti e religione de popoli dell'Africa, America, Asia et Europa* (Bassano: Gio. Antonio Remondini, 1687). Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice.



Fig. 12.2. Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, *Parallelo geografico dell'antico col moderno Arcipelago* (detail), in Coronelli, *Isolario* (Venice, 1696). Biblioteca della Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice.

The COST Action ‘People in Motion: Entangled Histories of Displacement across the Mediterranean (1492–1923)’, or ‘PIMo’ for short, unites its researchers in the conception of the Mediterranean as a flexible locus for a multitude of cultural transactions. Their primary goal is to restate the region’s significance as a historic site of engagement and exchange. In this volume twelve Mediterranean port cities are considered as places of distance and proximity, conflict and cooperation, autonomy and control.

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