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DEATH IN DAMASCUS: VENETIANS IN SYRIA IN THE MID-FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Served by the regular galley convoys that sailed under official state protection from Venice to Beirut, Damascus was a major center for Venetian trading activity in the Levant (fig. 1).¹ That the city was never conquered by the Crusaders seems, ironically, to have given stability to the Venetian trading presence there. Always opportunistic, the Venetians were ambivalent about the aims of the Crusades, unless some evident commercial benefit could be assured. They preferred to protect and reinforce their mercantile contacts with the great markets of the Muslim East.

Trading privileges in both Syria and Egypt were regularly renegotiated with the Mamluk Sultans, to protect the rights of the Venetian overseas “colonies.” In 1421 the Venetian Senate asked to have these privileges inscribed on a stone tablet at the main crossroads in the heart of Damascus.² Although the relative importance of Aleppo increased during the fifteenth century, Damascus was still the hub of Venetian trade in Syria, thanks to its important links to Central Asia and Arabia via the caravan routes and to India via the Red Sea.

Damascus offered particularly congenial conditions to Venetian residents.³ This was one of the few Eastern emporia where they were allowed to rent a house or apartment in, the city or elsewhere, outside the Venetian *fondaco* (trading post).⁴ In the 1480s there were around forty Venetian residents in Damascus, as well as numerous visiting merchants from Venice, who did not necessarily choose to live in the Christian quarter.⁵ Sources suggest that their contacts with local Syrian Christians were minimal, whereas they had frequent interaction with Muslim trading partners.⁶ Venetian merchant letters from the later fifteenth century often refer to their Syrian merchant contacts in friendly and even affectionate terms.⁷

This article offers an introduction to the inventories of the property of four Venetians who died in Damascus between 1455 and 1457. These inventories are a chance survival in the Venetian State Archives.⁸

Obviously such a limited sample cannot be analyzed as a corpus, as were the 628 Damascus inventories from around 1700 studied in a series of publications by Jean-Paul Pascual.⁹ More inventories from the *oltremare* (places overseas) may be lurking on the archive shelves in Venice, but even as a small sample, these four provide an illuminating window into the expatriate life of individuals in Syria in the mid-fifteenth century. In addition, they offer valuable evidence of a flourishing local manufacturing and craft tradition in Damascus.¹⁰ In the discussion that follows, the function and character of the documents will be assessed, in order to establish the usefulness of the evidence. The material culture revealed in the inventories will then be analyzed, first to elucidate the Islamic items listed, and afterwards to set them against the Christian background of the four deceased Venetians.

THE INVENTORIES

The belongings of the four were inventoried by the chaplain to the Venetian community, Cristoforo del Fiore, who also served as their notary.¹¹ After a Latin introduction, each inventory is compiled in Venetian dialect. Interpreting the language is no easy task, however, for the documents are infused with Arabic. A phrase such as *tachia de ixaro* cannot be unraveled using any Italian or dialect dictionary, but only from sources on Arab clothing and textiles. It refers to a *tāqīyya* (skullcap) made from *izār*, the cotton cloth used for wrapping turbans.¹²

Cristoforo del Fiore was already experienced in such duties. Having served as priest-notary on the Alexandria galley in 1454, he officiated in the Venetian colonies in both Beirut and Aleppo, as well as in Damascus.¹³ According to Mamluk trading protocol, the Venetian notary had to be present at every trading transaction between Venetians and Arabs and keep a written record. Thus Cristoforo del Fiore would al-

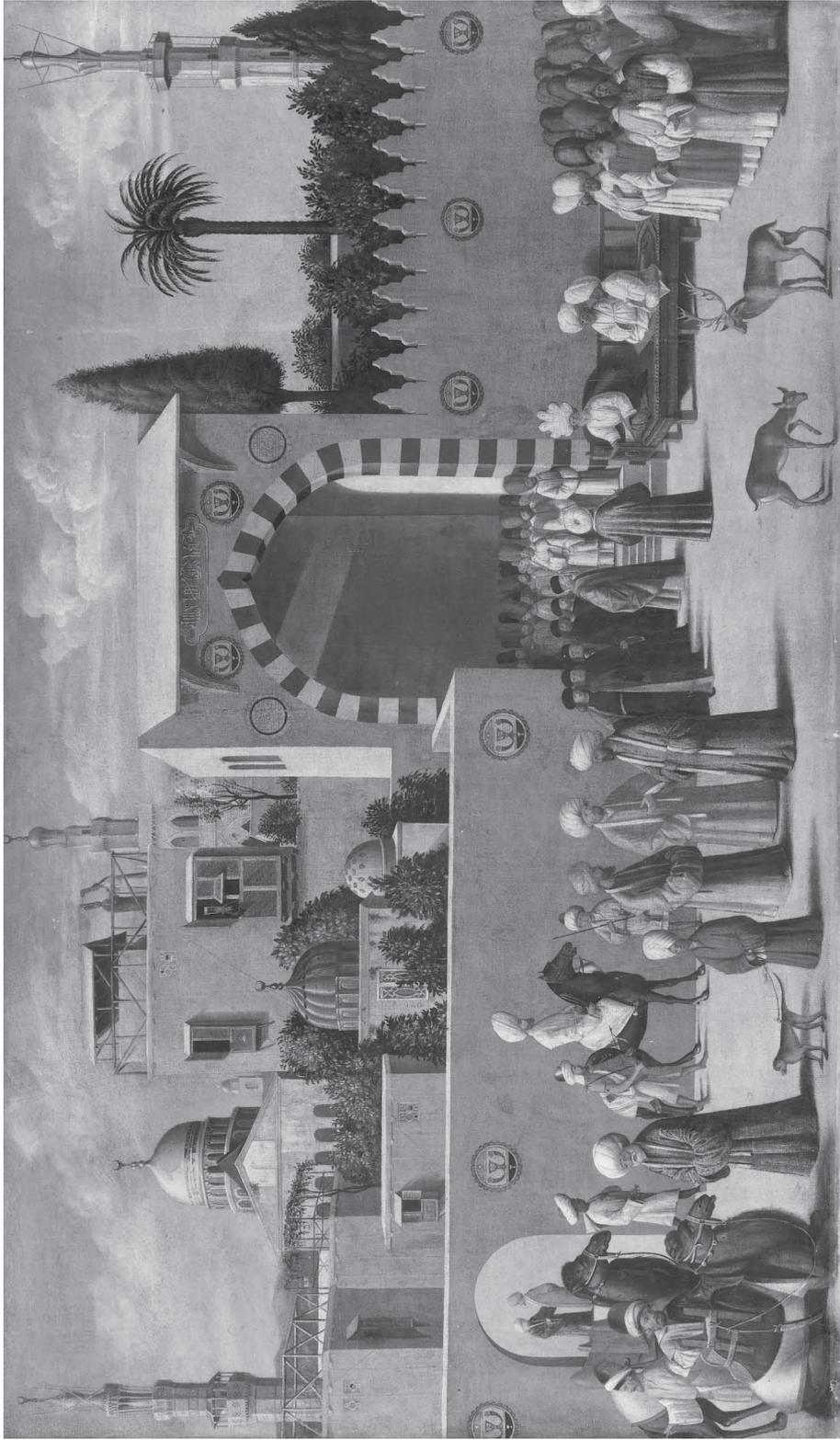


Fig. 1. Anonymous Venetian, circle of Gentile Bellini, *Reception of the Venetian Ambassador in Damascus*, late fifteenth century. Paris, Musée du Louvre. (Photo: © Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris)

ready have become familiar with East-West mercantile activity;¹⁴ indeed there is evidence that while in Damascus in the 1480s the Venetian chaplain was himself actively involved in trade.¹⁵

It is important to remember the purpose of the inventories: they were not probate valuations, but simply descriptions of the decedents' possessions, made before these articles were packed up and dispatched back to Venice. In the case of merchandise and coinage, quantities are given; otherwise, the sizes of objects are indicated by loose terms such as "large" or "small." The condition of objects that are already old or damaged is clearly specified by expressions such as "torn," "shabby," or even "sad."

Cristoforo del Fiore was evidently familiar with Islamic material culture, for numerous items are described as "Moorish" (*moresco*), "Arab-style" (*arabesco*), or "in the style of Damascus" (*alla damaschina*). Occasional items are described as "Western" (*alla franca*), or "German." One of the deceased owned a German roasting spit operated by counterweights. An inkwell is "Florentine-styled" (*alla fiorentina*), while a box containing twelve knives is described as "Milanese" (*milanese*). Little is specified as "Venetian," apart from some of the coinage and a consignment of glass beads from Venice. Otherwise, one can only guess at the origin of the objects.

The items are sorted only according to where they were found. Among the contents of any one room or chest, objects are listed in random order, with household objects mixed up with commercial commodities; indeed, it is not always easy to distinguish merchandise from personal effects. The documents convey a vivid impression of the lifestyle and surroundings of the owners, even if none of the objects described can be precisely identified today. The profusion of miscellaneous articles, ranging from the exotic—"medium-sized piece of dragon's blood" (a resin used as a red pigment)—to the prosaic—"old dirty shirt" and "torn handkerchief with blue embroidery"—adds to the intimacy of the documents.¹⁶

Before analyzing the evidence of the inventories, it is necessary to introduce the four owners of the objects.

Stefano Ravagnino

Stefano Ravagnino died in 1455 at his Damascus residence, located in the house of the Venetian nobleman Luca Loredano, son of Giacomo, a merchant then

based in the city. Ravagnino's will, made on August 15, 1455, tells us that he was the son of Apollonio and lived in the parish of San Giovanni Nuovo in Venice.¹⁷ His property was inventoried on August 17, 1455.¹⁸ Most of the items were found in his home, but some goods were stored in a warehouse in the *qaysāriyya*.¹⁹

Ravagnino seems to have been a jeweler by profession. (Fig. 2, although presumably depicting a Flemish sitter as St. Eligius, provides useful evidence of the tools and possessions of a mid-fifteenth-century jeweler.) Not only did Ravagnino leave copious quantities of precious stones and jewelry; he also owned jeweler's equipment, such as touchstones, scales for weighing jewels, files, a goldsmith's polishing stone, and a jeweler's pear-wood block.²⁰

In addition, he seems to have served as an agent for stay-at-home merchants in Venice. The goods in the *qaysāriyya*, stored in a warehouse belonging to a certain Ebene Lara (presumably an Arab name such as Ibn al-Ara), consisted of consignments of textiles and ceramics belonging to two Venetians, Marco Santon and Mathio Zusto.²¹ Found among Ravagnino's papers were several debit notes in Arabic from Arab traders owing another Venetian, Tommaso Zorzi. In his house were Northern items—namely, gold leaf from Cologne and a bundle of white wool belonging to the Venetian noble Tommaso Zane.

Stefano di Bossina

The second Venetian who met his end in Damascus was Stefano di Bossina, son of Andrea, who was living in the house of two Venetian noblemen, Zuanne Lando and Polo Erizzo.²² Both of these landlords witnessed the inventory, drawn up just over a week after Ravagnino's, on August 29, 1455.²³ One of them, Polo Erizzo, clearly had special interest in the majolica objects in the inventory, since an annotation states that he intended to buy them for himself.

Di Bossina's possessions were numerous, varied, and often lavish. He too owned jewelry and implements such as a punching tool and a chisel, but his possessions also included substantial quantities of spices, cloth, leather, thread, rope, candles, porcelain, and ceramics. It is not obvious from the inventory whether he was himself dealing actively in commodities, or whether he simply used his own profits to accumulate a wide range of valuable goods to take home to Venice. Unlike Ravagnino, he does not seem to have



Fig. 2. Petrus Christus, *St. Eligius (Bridal Pair in the Goldsmith's Shop)*, 1449 (detail of right side). New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

acted as an agent on behalf of stay-at-home merchants in Venice.

Marino da Molin

The third inventory, drawn up on May 4, 1457, listed the possessions of Marino da Molin, son of Filippo, the consul to the Venetian colony in Damascus.²⁴ Two years earlier, he had issued a codicil to his will, requesting that in the event of his death his slave Joanne be freed and his possessions sent back to Venice.²⁵ We know from another document of 1456 that the consul's home was *in seraia*, that is, located within the Venetian *fondaco*.²⁶

A striking aspect of da Molin's inventory is the huge quantity of clothing, particularly formal robes, many of them fur-lined, with various kinds of sleeves.²⁷ Furnishings such as rugs, carpets, cushions, tapestry bed-hangings, and chests suggest that a gracious diplomatic lifestyle was expected of the consul; also notable is the large quantity of kitchen equipment and tableware, implying that the provision of lavish entertainment was part of his role. Since consuls were not allowed to engage in trade, we assume that all the goods were for his own use, whether official or private. According to the Venetian-Mamluk treaties, the consul's stipend was to be paid by the host country, that is, by the local admiral (*diwan*).²⁸

Nicolò de Ruzino

The fourth inventory belongs to Nicolò de Ruzino, who, having died aboard the Beirut galley, never even reached Damascus. His goods were itemized on November 12, 1457;²⁹ because his untimely death deprived him of the opportunity to buy local artifacts and merchandise, this inventory is much shorter.³⁰ It is no less interesting than the others, however, since it tells us what he put in his hand luggage and what was stowed in the hold. On deck, he had money, warm clothes, and two books: St. Jerome's *The Lives of the Saints* and Boccaccio's *Elegy of the Madonna Fiammetta*. De Ruzino's chest in the hold was mainly filled with clothing, but it also contained a sugar loaf, garlic, candles, books, documents, and rosaries.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Having introduced the four Venetians, we may now consider what the inventories reveal about items of

local manufacture found among their possessions. The mid-fifteenth century is normally regarded as a fairly low point in Mamluk craft activity. In present-day museum collections of Islamic art, Egyptian art is much better represented than Syrian, and objects made during the period of the Bahri Mamluks—that is, before 1382—far outnumber those of the fifteenth century.³¹ Under the Circassian Burji sultans who succeeded the Bahris, elite patronage declined, and, presumably because the clientele was less exalted, fewer items have been preserved. Artistic production in Damascus itself, badly affected by Tamerlane's incursion in 1400–1, is assumed to have declined sharply in the first half of the fifteenth century and to have enjoyed a brief revival only in the reign of Sultan Qaytbay (1468–96).

These inventories seem to confirm that Ravagnino and di Bossina had both adopted many aspects of the local lifestyle. Moorish-style items found in a private bedroom, for instance, are unlikely to have been intended for sale. Di Bossina had a pair of Moorish underdrawers, while Ravagnino had ten new pairs, presumably bought locally (fig. 3). Most of the handkerchiefs, belts, buckles, and skullcaps were of local Syrian workmanship, although a few kerchiefs are specified as “from Friuli.” Listed in their wardrobes were a large number of *zuponi*, a term that in Venice designated a short, tight-waisted jacket, but may in these cases have referred to Moorish-style, knee-length coats equivalent to the Arabic *jubba*.³²

The offices of Ravagnino and di Bossina were equipped with numerous local artifacts: inkwells, scales, pen boxes, writing tablets, document wallets, candlesticks, a tinder box, purses, and money boxes.³³ Even Ravagnino's prayer book containing the shorter office of our Lady (*offizieto*), had a damascene cover (*con choverta damaschina*), and he owned some small books from the bazaar, presumably bought in the book market that still survives today near the Umayyad Great Mosque. Items such as account books, books of tariffs, scales, and rulers were obviously essential to a mercantile career, but the range of objects strongly suggests a degree of conscious self-fashioning. Pomanders, rose-water sprinklers, bells, gilded scissors, musk, seals, and rosaries were articles that could be found in the most sophisticated Venetian *studiolo*.³⁴ (Fig. 4, although a somewhat later image, may help give substance to Cristoforo del Fiore, the priest-notary who made the inventories.)

The fact that two pillows were the only furnish-

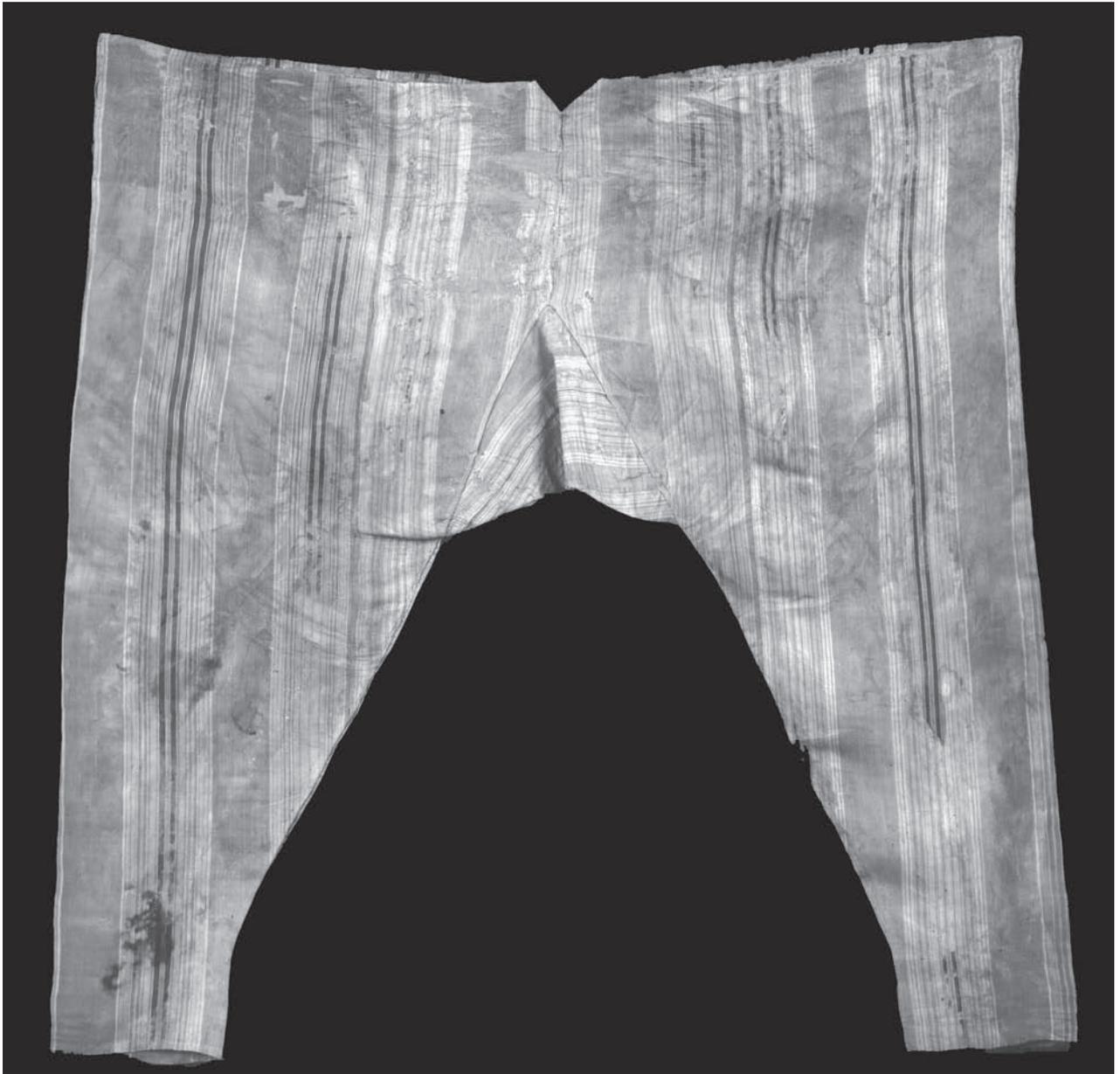


Fig. 3. Mamluk underdrawers. Brussels, Musée du Cinquantenaire. (Photo: courtesy Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire)

ings in de Ruzino's luggage on board the Beirut galley would suggest that travelers acquired their household objects locally. Since most furniture in Eastern homes was built-in, the only large pieces mentioned in these inventories are chests, cushions, and beds with straw or feather mattresses. Carpets and rugs of various sizes are specifically described by terms such as "for mastabas," or "woven with patterns *alla mores-*

ca," "made of jute," or "thick" (fig. 5). Since fifteenth-century Mamluk carpets of Syrian workmanship are almost unknown today, the inventories offer fascinating evidence of a local carpet-weaving industry.³⁵ One, described as a "*tapedo chaierim* woven with a Moorish pattern," may have been a carpet procured from the Karimi guild of merchants who monopolized the India trade in the Mamluk period.³⁶ Consul da Molin's



Fig. 4. Lorenzo Lotto, *An Ecclesiastic in His Study*, ca. 1530. London, British Museum, 81-07877. (Photo: courtesy British Museum)

house was particularly well equipped, with two “large carpets for mastabas, used but quite good”; two “middle-sized, thick-piled carpets, used”; and three “small, thick-piled carpets, old.”³⁷ Di Bossina had nineteen gondola mats of double thickness and one of single thickness. His two “new small carpets” were presumably bought locally. Ravagnino owned a red jute carpet described as “good”, and a small jute mat dismissed as “sad” (*tristo*).³⁸

An abundance of textiles appears in these inventories—not only clothing, but also raw fiber, thread, and manufactured cloth: linen, cotton, canvas, waxed

canvas, sailcloth, fustian (a type of cotton twill), muslin, sackcloth, silk, and velvet.³⁹ Woolen fabrics, coarse canvas, and linen were brought from Venice to be traded on the Syrian market, whereas silk, muslin, and cotton were purchased locally for export to the Rialto.⁴⁰ Damascus was well located for the purchase of furs from Central Asia and Russia;⁴¹ Consul da Molin had the largest quantities of furs, even though his office—in theory at least—did not allow him to engage in trade.⁴²

All three Damascus households owned tableware acquired locally. Di Bossina’s inventory mentions sev-



Fig. 5. Mamluk rug, Cairo (?), ca. 1500. Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst, 82,704. (Photo: courtesy Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz)

eral pieces of porcelain (*porzelana*): one blue-and-white bowl described as “cracked”; four small green bowls; and a large bowl containing ground ginger. Consul da Molin owned no fewer than five large porcelain bowls. If we can assume that the chaplain-notary was experienced enough to distinguish between porcelain and other ceramics, these bowls were presumably of Chinese origin, imported via the Silk Route. (The period of the Xuan-de emperor (1426–35) had yielded especially fine blue-and-white porcelain, manufactured at Jingdezhen; the best specimens, however were not exported.)⁴³ Although local Mamluk workshops produced both blue-and-white and celadon-green Chinese-style ceramics that might have been confused with genuine porcelain (fig. 6),⁴⁴ di Bossina’s inventory specifically describes his underglaze-painted bowls of Syrian manufacture as “majolica” and lists them separately. Di Bossina also owned an albarelo containing sugar syrup.⁴⁵ Among the ceramic entries, the most remarkable notes a stack of 280 large spice jars, described as “black with some red and white, glazed (luster),” stored by Ravagnino in the *qaysāriyya* on behalf of another Venetian, Marco Santin. Interestingly, except for an inkwell and a reliquary phial referred to below, glass vessels are not mentioned.

In such a renowned center of metalwork production as Damascus, it is not surprising to find a wide range of evidently ornate metal objects.⁴⁶ Both di Bossina and Ravagnino had several Moorish knives in sheaths, and Ravagnino owned a scimitar in a scabbard as well as a sharpening stone in a *moresca* sheath. The frequent identification of watered steel with Damascus suggests that the city was an important source of its manufacture, although this is a controversial issue among scholars.⁴⁷ In the inventories, candlesticks of copper and silver were often described as “gilded” (fig. 7). Smaller articles included Arab-style jewelry (rings and earrings), jewel boxes of gilded silver, and the already mentioned desk articles, such as pomanders, writing sets, and bells. Although most of Consul da Molin’s tableware was pewter—likely to have been of English origin—he also owned a Moorish cooking pot and an Arab-style copper *tazza* (deep bowl) described as “inlaid and tin-plated.”

THE CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

We have seen the extent to which these Venetians liked to live *alla moresca* in their Damascus homes.

Nevertheless, it is striking that all four owned devotional objects that clearly identified their Christian religious faith. The jeweler Ravagnino had two coral rosaries in his stock; his will reveals that these were to be sent back to his “beloved sister” in Venice.⁴⁸ In his study was a rosary of twenty-five beads of coral and chalcedony. He also owned a cross from Jerusalem with relics inside. Among his books were the already mentioned *offiziato*, or shorter office of our Lady, and a small book with the seven psalms “on good paper.”⁴⁹

Di Bossina owned eleven sheets of paper painted with scenes of the Passion, presumably the stations of the cross (with some missing). He appears to have made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a short journey that offered solace to Venetian merchants in Damascus, and he may even have acquired pilgrim souvenirs for sale.⁵⁰ Among his possessions were eight wooden rosaries from the Holy Land, four “[images] of Jesus, inlaid with gold, from Jerusalem,” and even six “ropes . . . for measuring the Holy Sepulcher.” In a separate wooden chest he had several pieces of pilgrim’s luggage with two “crosses from Jerusalem with relics inside”; one “German purse of black leather, tooled”; one “*Agnus Dei* with a glass with some relics from Jerusalem inside”; one “crimson belt inlaid with silver and worked in niello”; three “gilded candlesticks and big *benedeti* (candles) of three ounces each”; and five “small one-ounce candles.”

Consul da Molin owned an old pilgrim’s habit and a small altarpiece depicting Christ on the cross, our Lady, and St. John. Among the contents of his third chest was a “small pouch with relics from Jerusalem inside, with one cross and one ‘Peace.’”⁵¹ In the small room occupied by his son Piero hung a small altarpiece depicting the dead Christ.

As we have seen, a copy of St. Jerome’s *The Lives of the Saints* was found in Nicolò de Ruzino’s deck luggage, together with Boccaccio’s *Elegy of the Madonna Fiammetta*. *The Lives of the Saints* was a standard textbook prescribed in Venetian vernacular schools for the teaching of reading; the version used was the Italian translation by the fourteenth-century Dominican friar Domenico Cavalca, who had transformed the stories into exciting chivalric romances.⁵² With their racy accounts of Eastern travel and adventure enlivened by mishaps and temptations, both books offered ideal reading on board ship. In his hold baggage, de Ruzino had packed away some pilgrim girdles and rosaries from Jerusalem, perhaps suggesting that this



Fig. 6. Blue-and-white underglaze vase with Italian provenance, Damascus, fifteenth century. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, C19–1920. (Photo: courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum)



Fig. 7. Brass candlestick inlaid with silver and gold, Damascus, fifteenth century. The European coat of arms may be that of the Boldù family of Venice. London, British Museum, OA1878.12-30.721. (Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum)

was not his first voyage to the East. Two more books in his sea chest, namely, “one book of stories of Griselda and Walter” (from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*) and “one *offizieto* of our Lady and other things” (i.e., prayers), offered the same combination of fourteenth-century secular reading and devotional literature.

CONCLUSION

These inventories provide four intimate vignettes of Venetian life in fifteenth-century Syria, where Mamluk objects were everyday articles as well as treasured possessions. The purpose of the inventories was to ensure that the estates of the deceased were correctly repatriated; thus they document a highly effective means of channeling Mamluk material culture back to Venice. The absence of women’s articles in the inventories is worth noting: a pair of lady’s scissors is the only specifically female implement mentioned.⁵³ Every Venetian consul, for instance, was obliged to leave his wife at home in Venice. The fact that this expatriate existence was emphatically male meant that the rest of the family would not only hear travelers’ anecdotes but would also inherit a wide range of everyday objects from the East. As we have seen, these articles could be precious, exotic, costly, rare, and exquisitely crafted; or they could be banal and worn out. The important point is that such a profusion of miscellaneous Eastern commodities was inventoried for return to the heirs in Venice. Whether utilitarian or intended for display, this array of oriental visual culture found its way directly into the heart of Venetian family life.

Not only do the inventories illuminate the material acquisitiveness of Venetians in the *oltremare*, they also offer valuable evidence of a lively craft production in fifteenth-century Damascus, in a wide range of media including ceramics, textiles, carpets, and metalwork. Despite the relative scarcity of fifteenth-century Syrian art, comparable surviving items in museum collections help to give material substance to the colorful range of items left by the four unfortunate Venetians who never returned from their Syrian exploits.

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NOTES

Author’s note: This article introduces a body of evidence to be published in more extensive form in the 2003 issue of *Studi veneziani*. In the fuller version, entitled “Life and Death in Damascus: The Material Culture of Venetians in the Syrian Capital in the Fifteenth Century” and prepared in collaboration with Dott. Francesco Bianchi of the University of Parma, the documentary sources will be examined in more detail. The inventories and wills will be published in full as an appendix, together with a glossary and a data base of all the Venetians recorded in Damascus in the years 1455–57.

Since this research covers such wide-ranging areas of expertise, I have greatly benefited from advice and information from numerous scholars. My Italian colleagues Reinhold Mueller and Francesco Bianchi have been especially generous with their ideas and knowledge. Dott. Bianchi has prepared a complete transcription of all the documents for publication. I should also like to acknowledge with gratitude the valuable help received from James Allan, Jeremy Johns, Rosamond Mack, Gülru Necipoğlu, Julian Raby, Jeffrey Spurr, Dora Thornton, and Heghnar Watenpaugh.

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1. See especially W. Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au moyen-âge*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1885–86; reprint, Amsterdam, 1967); E. Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J., 1983); and Éric Vallet, *Marchands vénitiens en Syrie à la fin du XV^e siècle* (Paris: ADHE, 1999). A useful general overview of trade in Mamluk Syria is contained in Robert G. Irwin, “Egypt, Syria, and their Trading Partners 1450–1550,” in Robert Pinner and Walter B. Denny, eds., *Carpets of the Mediterranean Countries 1400–1600: Oriental Carpet and Textile Studies II* (London, 1986), pp. 73–82. Rosamond Mack’s richly illustrated new book, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300–1600* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002) offers an invaluable overview of the exchange of artifacts between East and West during this period and the artistic impact of this commerce.
2. Archivio di Stato di Venezia (henceforth ASV), Senato Misti, reg. 53 (copia), fol. 482, December 23, 1421.
3. For an introduction to life in Damascus in this period, see Nicola A. Ziadeh, *Damascus under the Mamluks* (Norman, Okla., 1964). See also Ira M. Lapidus, “Muslim Urban Society in Mamlūk Syria,” in *The Islamic City: A Colloquium* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 195–205. The position of Western merchants in the city is examined in Taha Thalji Tarawneh, *The Province of Damascus during the Second Mamluk Period (784/1382–922/1516)* (Mutah University, Jordan, 1994), pp. 130–31.
4. John Wansbrough, “Venice and Florence in the Mamluk Commercial Privileges,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 28, 3 (1965): 495: “E possa i diti marchadanti star in caxa e habitar in che parte i vuol de la terra pagando

- el suo fito.” One Venetian resident, in a legal document regarding his property, referred in January 1457 to his “domus et possessionibus,” suggesting that he may have owned his house in Damascus (ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, b. 83 (II), reg. III, fols. 20–20v (Cristoforo del Fiore), Ludovicus Ziola son of Benedictus, Jan. 20, 1456 *more veneto* (=1457).
5. Vallet, *Marchands vénitiens*, p. 105.
 6. Deborah Howard, *Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on the Architecture of Venice 1100–1500* (New Haven and London, 2000), pp. 36–42.
 7. Vallet, *Marchands vénitiens*, pp. 178, 213.
 8. ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Notaio Cristoforo del Fiore, b. 83 (II), reg. III, fols. 4v–7 (Stefano Ravagnino, August 17, 1455); fols. 7v–10v (Stefano di Bossina, son of Andrea, August 29, 1455); fols. 23–24v (Marino da Molin, Venetian consul, May 4, 1457); fols. 27–28v (Nicolò de Ruzino, November 12, 1457).
 9. See, for example, Jean-Paul Pascual, “Aspects de la vie matérielle à Damas à la fin du XVII^e siècle d’après les inventaires après décès,” in Thomas Philipp, ed., *The Syrian Land in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century: The Common and Specific in the Historical Experience* (Stuttgart, 1992, pp. 165–78); Colette Establet and Jean-Paul Pascual, *Familles et fortunes à Damas: 450 foyers damascains en 1700* (Damascus, 1994); Colette Establet and Jean-Paul Pascual, *Ultime voyage pour La Mecque: Les inventaires après décès de pèlerins morts à Damas vers 1700* (Damascus, 1998). I am grateful to Heghnar Watenpaugh for introducing me to these sources.
 10. This is corroborated in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries by eye-witnesses such as Rabbi Bassola, who visited Damascus in 1522 and reckoned that there were perhaps even more manufacture and trade there than in Venice. Rabbi Bassola’s observation is cited by Jean-Paul Pascual in *Damas à la fin du XVI^e siècle: Trois actes de waqf ottomans*, vol. 1 (Damascus, 1983), p. 11.
 11. Like the parish clergy of Venice, the chaplain to a Venetian overseas colony usually performed the functions of community notary. On the extent of overlap between the functions of notary and *plebano* (parish priest) in medieval Venice, see Attilio Bartoli Langeli, “Documentazione e notariato,” ed. Lelia Cracco Ruggini et al., *Storia di Venezia dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, vol. 1, *Origini-età ducale* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1992), pp. 858–60.
 12. For *al-izār*, see Carl John Lamm, *Cotton in Mediaeval Textiles of the Near East* (Paris, 1937), p. 243. For *tāqīyya*, see Establet and Pascual, *Familles et fortunes à Damas*, pp. 113, 193. For other useful glossaries, see R. B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles: Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest* (Beirut, 1972), index I; Leo A. Mayer, *Mamluk Costume: A Survey* (Geneva, 1952); Carl F. Petry, “Robing Ceremonials in Late Mamluk Egypt: Hallowed Traditions, Shifting Protocols,” in Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture* (New York, 2001), pp. 372–73. The terminology of textiles of Western manufacture is best elucidated with reference to Dominique Cordon, *La Draperie au Moyen Âge: Essor d’une grande industrie européenne* (Paris: CNRS Éditions), 1999.
 13. It was previously thought that a notary’s register from Alexandria, drawn up in 1426–27, was also compiled by Cristoforo del Fiore (ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, b. 83 (II), Notaio Cristoforo del Fiore, fasc. 1). Francesco Bianchi has recently shown, however, that this register, misfiled in the ASV, in fact belonged to a notary called Francesco. See Francesco Bianchi and Deborah Howard’s forthcoming article, “Life and Death in Damascus: The Material Culture of Venetians in the Syrian Capital in the Fifteenth Century” in *Studi veneziani*.
 14. In the early 1450s, Cristoforo del Fiore had already inventoried the belongings of two Venetians who had died on the Alexandria galleys (ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, b. 83 (II), Protocollo 1449–59, fols. 5–6v and 7). The first of these inventories, that of Giorgio Ruzzini, son of Francesco, was published in Pompeo Molmenti, *Venezia nella vita privata*, vol. 1 (Bergamo, 1905–8), pp. 446–47. The second listed the possessions of a galley oarsman, Andrea da Raguxio, who died at his bench on deck.
 15. Vallet, *Marchands vénitiens*, pp. 201, 267.
 16. On dragon’s blood, see F. Pegolotti, *La pratica della mercatura*, ed. A. Evans (Cambridge, Mass., 1936; reprint, New York, 1970), p. 429. Julian Raby noted an Islamic-style handkerchief with blue embroidery depicted in Marco Marziale’s *Circumcision of Christ* in the Accademia Gallery in Venice (personal communication, Oxford, February 25, 2002).
 17. ASV, Archivio Notarile, Testamenti, b. 682, Notaio Cristoforo del Fiore, pp. 61v–62.
 18. ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Notaio Cristoforo del Fiore, b. 83 (II), reg. III, fols. 4v–7, August 17, 1455.
 19. The name of the *qaysāriyya* is not specified, but we should note that before the Ottoman period most of the markets for non-perishable goods were in the street leading eastward from the Great Mosque, with other luxury items sold to the south of the mosque. See Dorothee Sack, “The Historic Fabric of Damascus and Its Changes in the Nineteenth and the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” in Thomas Philipp and Birgit Schaebler, *The Syrian Land: Processes of Integration and Fragmentation: Bilād al-Shām from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Stuttgart, 1998), p. 188. On the location of *qaysāriyyas* in the Ottoman period see Establet and Pascual, *Familles et fortunes à Damas*, pp. 83–85 and map III.
 20. On Renaissance jewelry techniques, see Anna Somers Cocks and Charles Truman, *Renaissance Jewels, Gold Boxes and Objets de vertu: the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection* (London, 1984), pp. 38–50. Venice is mentioned as a jewel-trading center on pp. 1–2.
 21. Jeremy Johns kindly discussed with me possible Arabic forms of this name (personal communication, February 26, 2002).
 22. Di Bossina’s will, drawn up on August 22, 1455, tells us that he lived in the parish of Sta. Giustina in Venice (ASV, Archivio Notarile, Testamenti, b. 682, Notaio Cristoforo del Fiore, fol. 62–62v).
 23. ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Notaio Cristoforo del Fiore, b. 83 (II), reg. III, fols. 7v–10v, August 28, 1455.
 24. ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Notaio Cristoforo del Fiore, b. 83 (II), reg. III, fols. 23–24v, May 4, 1457.
 25. ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Notaio Cristoforo del Fiore, b. 83 (II), reg. III, fol. 4, August 14, 1455.
 26. ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Notaio Cristoforo del Fiore, b. 83 (II), reg. III, fol. 15v, May 20, 1456.
 27. See Stella Newton, *The Dress of the Venetians 1495–1525* (Alder-

- shot, Eng., 1988), especially pp. 75–93.
28. Wansbrough, “Venice and Florence,” p. 514.
 29. ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Notaio Cristoforo del Fiore, b. 83 (II), reg. III, fols. 27–28v.
 30. He was probably not a kinsman of the nobleman Giorgio Ruzzini, son of Francesco, who died on the Alexandria galley just seven years earlier in 1450, and whose inventory was published by Molmenti in 1905. See above, note 14.
 31. See, for instance, Esin Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks* (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), pp. 17–18, 53–55, 150–51.
 32. The subject of Mamluk costume is a tangled one; few items survive, and since Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, recommends Venetian art as a source of information, the discussion can easily become circular. For a definition of *jubba* see Petry, “Robing Ceremonials,” p. 372.
 33. On Mamluk penboxes, see for instance, Esin Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam*, cat. nos. 23–24; James W. Allan, *Islamic Metalwork: The Nuhad es-Said Collection* (Sotheby’s, 1982), p. 90, cat. no. 16; Rachel Ward, *Islamic Metalwork* (London, 1993), p. 107.
 34. See especially Dora Thornton, *The Scholar in his Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London, 1997), pp. 74–75 and *passim*. An example of a Mamluk rosewater sprinkler may be found in Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam*, cat. no. 31. For examples of pomanders, see Esin Atıl et al., *Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art* (Washington, D.C., 1985), p. 62, and Ward, *Islamic Metalwork*, pp. 110, 115.
 35. On Mamluk rug and carpet manufacture see Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam*, cat. nos. 125–29 and Irwin, “Egypt, Syria” p. 80.
 36. Jeremy Johns, Oxford, personal communication, February 26, 2002.
 37. The first of these entries reads “Tapedi grandi damastabe uxadi asa boni.” (ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Notaio Cristoforo del Fiore, b. 83 (II), fasc. V, c. 24).
 38. These may be the cheap mats known to Europeans as “hambels.” See Irwin, “Egypt, Syria” p. 75.
 39. On textile manufacture in Mamluk Syria, see Lamm, *Cotton in Mediaeval Textiles*, pp. 164–65, 179–80, 226–31; Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, pp. 114–21; Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam*, cat. nos. 113, 119, 122, 123.
 40. See Cordon, *La Draperie du Moyen Âge*, and Luca Molà, *The Silk Industry in Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore, Md., Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).
 41. On the range of furs used in the Islamic world, see Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, pp. 209–11.
 42. On restrictions on trade by consuls, see Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, p. 414.
 43. See especially Regina Krahl, *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapı Saray Museum, Istanbul: A Complete Catalogue: Part 1, Yuan and Ming Dynasty Celadon Wares*, 3 vols., ed. J. Ayers (Sotheby’s Publications, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 102–3, 109; vol. 2, pp. 414–38. In this work, the article by Julian Raby and Ünsal Yücel, “Chinese Porcelain at the Ottoman Court,” vol. 1, pp. 27–56, mentions “valuable porcelain bowls” at the circumcision of Mehmed’s sons Bayezid and Mustafa at Edirne in 1457, although the presence of such items in this ceremonial, elite context does not necessarily mean that they were widely available in the Levant at this time. Julian Raby, “The Porcelain Trade Routes,” vol. 1, pp. 55–63, nevertheless stresses the importance of the overland caravan route via Damascus. The problem of how to interpret the use of *porcelana* in Italian inventories is examined in Marco Spallanzani, *Ceramiche orientali a Firenze nel Rinascimento* (Florence, 1978), pp. 36–43 and further discussed on pp. 58–59, 74–75, 84–85, 96–97. On pp. 164–65 he publishes a document mentioning the acquisition by Filippo Strozzi in 1475 of porcelain from Venice. See also Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, pp. 104–6.
 44. For examples of fifteenth-century Syrian underglaze blue-and-white ware, see Atıl, *Renaissance of Islam*, cat. nos. 74–76. Important information on Syrian fifteenth-century ceramics is contained in Spallanzani, *Ceramiche orientali*, pp. 42–51, 104.
 45. For examples of Syrian albarellos in Italian collections, see Spallanzani, *Ceramiche orientali*, pp. 50–51, 59, and Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, pp. 97–99.
 46. As in the case of ceramics and textiles, it is usually assumed that manufacturing and crafts declined during the first half of the fifteenth century, before a partial revival under Sultan Qaytbay. See, for example, James W. Allan, “Sha‘bān, Barqūq, and the Decline of the Mamluk Metalworking Industry,” *Muqarnas* 2 (1983): 85–94.
 47. See, for example, Mayer, *Mamluk Costume*, pp. 44–45, and Atıl et al., *Islamic Metalwork in the Freer*, pp. 50–51.
 48. Vallet, *Marchands vénitiens*, p. 86.
 49. At the time when paper manufacture was newly becoming established in the Veneto, Venetians were particularly alert to the special qualities of different kinds of paper. See Howard, *Venice and the East*, pp. 55–59, and Jonathan M. Bloom, *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (Yale University Press, 2001).
 50. On August 17, 1457, da Molin’s successor as consul in Damascus, Stefano Malipiero, was given permission by the Senate to visit the Holy Sepulcher (ASV, Senato Mar, reg. 6, fol. 34). One of the Venetian merchants in Damascus, Barbon Morosini, who made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1514, left a manuscript account, ms. Marc. It. Cod. VI (=5887), fols. 1–30, now in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice. The Franciscan friar Francesco Suriano records that Venetian merchants in Syria sponsored Franciscan preachers in the Holy Land (Fra Francesco Suriano, *Treatise on the Holy Land*, trans. Fr. Theophilus Bellorini OFM and Fr. Eugene Hoade OFM (Jerusalem, 1949), p. 126. Damascus was also one of the two principal starting points for the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca; see Establet and Pascual, *Ultime voyage pour La Mecque*. The Venetian nobleman Caterino Zeno wrote an account of the hajj, including the departure from Damascus, in his *Scritti* of 1550, cited in Ennio Concina, *Dell’arabico* (Marsilio, Venice, 1994), pp. 109–10.
 51. *paxe*: likely to have been a small image of the head of Christ that would be kissed during the celebration of the Mass (information kindly provided by Jeffrey Hamburger). The Museo Correr in Venice contains a collection of small religious objects, typically ivory relief statuettes, known as *paci* (information kindly provided by Reinhold Mueller). On the use of relics in general, see Henk van Os, *The Way to Heaven: Relic Veneration in the Middle Ages* (Amsterdam and Utrecht, 2001).

52. See Paul F. Grendler, "What Zuanne Read in School: Vernacular Texts in Sixteenth-Century Venetian Schools," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 13, 1 (1983): 41–54, republished in idem, *Books and Schools in the Italian Renaissance* (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 47–48.
53. A document regarding the settling of Ravagnino's estate refers to "una veste muliebre" (ASV, Archivio notarile, Testamenti, b. 982 (Cristoforo del Fiore), fol. 63, February 17, 1457 (1456 *more veneto*)).