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This thesis is dedicated to Br. Nathan Cochran, O.S.B.
The Renaissance, spanning the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, is known as the great link between the Middle Ages and the Modern world. The term generally conjures the idea of Europe, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and especially Italy where the revival of Classical themes and approaches first took root. It is a celebration of cultural rejuvenation and significance. The period brought new ideas, a restored enthusiasm in antiquity, and expanded cultural interests accentuated by trade. The Arab world was, for Europeans of this era, the commercial connection between the Mediterranean and the Far East of Asia. Through Eastern cities and ports spices, textiles, and raw materials flowed to the Italian peninsula. The Crusades, from the late eleventh to the mid thirteenth century, brought Europeans into contact with the Arab world, served as a catalyst for the increased trade of goods and of influence, giving Europeans their first taste of Middle Eastern culture. Middle Eastern influences can be found throughout a host of Italian Renaissance paintings, ceramics and architectural works.
French historian Jules Michelet coined the term “Renaissance”, meaning rebirth, in his 1855 book *History of France.* He stated that the Renaissance, “...went from Columbus to Copernicus, from Copernicus to Galileo, from the discovery of the earth to that of the heavens. Man re-found himself.”

Michelet’s views of the Renaissance influenced Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, who believed that Italy alone was responsible for the advancement out of the Middle Ages into the golden age of the Renaissance. He gave no praise to non-Western, or non-Italian influences, and presented the reader with the belief that the Renaissance and its beloved artistic masters cultivated their talents within the confines of the Italian city-states. Burckhardt argued that the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were two separate entities and that Renaissance humanism was an autonomous response to the darkness of the Middle Ages. Through Burckhardt’s lens, the Renaissance in Italy was an independent movement that occurred with no European or Eastern influences. Burckhardt and Michelet’s views set the stage for future studies of the Renaissance. Eastern influence was pushed to the side and a romanticized view

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1 *Histoire de France*
3 Ibid.
of Italy emerged. Their works built Italy into a vast machine, self reliant and brilliant, conjuring its own magic to push itself into the next stage of history.\(^5\)

Contrary to Michelet’s and Burckhardt’s views, recent research indicates that the Renaissance was not just a result of Italy cultivating their own golden age, rather, it was much more an invasion of new ideas. Contemporary historian Dr. Jerry Brotton suggests that the approach taken by Michelet and Burckhardt on Renaissance is flawed because it was a reflection of the biases and prejudices of 19th century Europe in which they lived.\(^6\) Brotton asserts Burckhardt and Michelet’s views were romanticized perception of Italy as a country that was self-sufficient and projected dominance in international affairs. However, they failed to acknowledge the achievements that enabled Italy and the rest of Europe to develop into the Renaissance. Such cultural achievement could not develop within the confines of Italy alone; it needed the spark and the influence of other societies.\(^7\) Brotton suggests that Michelet and Burckhardt’s works are flawed; they could not see beyond their own Eurocentric centered prejudices. These authors are suggesting that Italy is a commanding global power, possessing a self-proclaimed superiority. However, a host of influences from outside Italy as disparate as Northern Europe, Spain, Africa, Byzantium, and the East mingle in Italy and influence the Italian Renaissance. This thesis focuses upon the eastern, Muslim presence in Italian Renaissance art.

\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Ibid.
Islamic influence is depicted throughout fifteenth and sixteenth century Renaissance paintings. Islamic influence is further used in the daily life of Italians. Use of Eastern goods and motifs are used to suggest opulence and wealth. Michelet notes that there are two great achievements of the Renaissance; “the discovery of the world and the discovery of man.”8 The discovery of the world is in part how the Italian Renaissance came to be. Through trade and commerce with societies in the Middle East the world came to Italy’s doorstep.

It was the age of rediscovery. Italy was cultivating valuable commercial relationships from Europe to China and their biggest trade partner, the Ottoman Empire, offered them material goods that influenced Italian art for centuries. Europe and the Middle Eastern world were conjoined in a complex, yet rich relationship. Built on trade and frequent turmoil, the two cultures have been a vital force in the development of each other’s lands. The Renaissance was a product of social and economic change taking place in Europe. While the traditional presentation of the Italian Renaissance as an internal Italian manifestation plays a role in the development of this period new scholarship is bringing to light the role the social and cultural exchange with Asia plays in the making of the Italian Renaissance.

During the Renaissance the idea of wealth and luxury goods shifted. This was in part due to the social and political upheaval that was caused by

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widespread wars and famine. The Black Death was one of many crises to ravage Europe in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. By June of 1348 the Black Death had spread throughout the Italian mainland targeting cities like Venice, Florence, Genoa, and Pisa.\(^9\) Disease intensified the economic slump already felt throughout Europe by crippling commercial activities that were bustling in northern Italian cities. The effect the Black Death had on Italy was detrimental, with fifty to eighty percent of the population succumbing to the disease.\(^10\)

Although the Black Death contributed to the largest collective loss of life in Italian history, other circumstances resulted in an equal shift. The Genoese-Venetian wars (1291-9, 1350-5, 1378-81) and the Hundred Years War (1336-1453) shifted the societal and economic foundations upon which Italy had been grounded.\(^11\)

The Hundred Years war was fought predominantly in northern Europe, and yet the consequences were deeply felt in the Italian Peninsula. These cultural roadblocks that emerged as a result of these wars fluctuated the economic dynamic in terms of trade and agriculture. This resulted in a shift in the delicate pattern of price and flow of goods over time, inflation and deflation. This culminated in a very small percent of the population controlling the majority of the wealth.\(^12\)

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\(^10\) Daileader, Philip, "The Late Middle Ages," audio/video course, compact disc.
\(^12\) Ibid.
Commerce between the Ottoman Empire and Italians was a vital force of cultural influence. Trade relationships between Europe and the Levant stretch back to the seventh-century, with the Italian city of Amalfi setting up trade ports in the ports of Alexandria and Beirut. The trade partnership between the Italian peninsula and the Levant underwent major expansion with the dawn of the Crusades. The Crusades were military campaigns for the sake of religion waged by the Roman Catholic Church between 1096 and 1271. Their goal was to reclaim the lands around Jerusalem from the Muslims in the name of Christendom. Bloody and violent, their outcome gave the Italian peninsula an influx of Arabian goods that ultimately shaped the West. Historian Karen Armstrong notes that;

Until the Crusades, Europe had been a primitive backwater, isolated from other civilizations and lost in a dark age that had descended on Western Christendom after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. By the end of the crusading venture, Europe had not only recovered but also was on a course to overtake its rivals and achieve world hegemony. This recovery was a triumph unparalleled in history, but it was also a triumph that involved great strain and whose unfortunate consequences reverberate even today. 

When the Crusades ended, Italian city-states such as Venice, Pisa, Florence and Genoa vied to be the dominant trade partner with the East. Venice

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13 Margaret Newett, Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494, (Manchester: Victoria University of Manchester, University Press., 1907), 4.
won the trade privileges, creating trade partnerships with civilizations on the coasts of the Red and Mediterranean Seas as well as the Indian Ocean. Their major stops were cities such as Alexandria, Cairo, Damascus and Aleppo. In the thirteenth-century Venice gained prominence as the biggest trade port in Italy. Venice was the prime location as the meeting place for Eastern and Western transaction. Situated on the Adriatic Sea, Venice acted as an intermediary, sending Eastern goods to the cities of northern Europe using the Brenner Pass. Their support of the Crusaders had also brought a convergence of pilgrims to the city.

After the crusades, Venice held the title of most prominent trade port in Italy well into the sixteenth-century. Throughout this period the Eastern cities that Venice traded with were under the control of various Muslim dynasties from Egypt and Syria, stretching back as far as the eighth-century. The hostile relationship between Italian city-states and their Eastern neighbors has already been noted, but further discussion needs to be presented to capture the adversity in their relationship.

There are numerous points in history in which the fragile relationship between the East and West sustained significant blows. The Ottoman invasion of Otranto proved to be one such blow. The Italian city of Otranto, located on the southeast coast, offered easy access to the Ottomans. In July of 1480 twenty

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16 Ibid.
thousand Ottomans invaded Otranto, using the initial invasion to set into motion the plan to conquer Italy. After a fifteen-day siege the walls of the city came down, and much of the Christian population was enslaved or slaughtered. In one instance eight hundred men we captured and told to give up their Christian roots and convert to Islam or be massacred. The men refused to convert and were hence martyred. Their sacrifice is still celebrated in present day Otranto, with all eight hundred individuals canonized as saints by the Catholic Church in 2013.

The European response to the invasion at Otranto was severe. Pope Sixtus IV called for a crusade against the Ottomans at Smyrna. In 1481 a European Christian army besieged the city in hopes of regaining control. Two days into the battle Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II died. This and the succession dilemma that followed contributed to Otranto being reclaimed by Christian European reinforcements. Invasions such as these soured the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the Italian Peninsula. These tensions can be found throughout Renaissance art and will be discussed in further chapters.

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18 Today, many scholars believe that it is unlikely that the citizens of Otranto were slaughtered, and suggest that it is far more likely they were sold into, or used as slaves.
19 This call for a crusade never materialized into any battle or invasion worth noting.
A major shift in power took place in 1453 a tremendously vital year in the development of trade relations between Europe and the East, because the Islamic Ottoman Empire lead by Sultan Mehmet II conquered Constantinople. Constantinople was the link that connected classical Rome with fifteenth-century Italy. The fall of the city sent Byzantine scholars migrating into Europe, which in turn contributed to the revival of interest in Greek and Roman art.\textsuperscript{21} Many Italian humanists equated Constantinople with ancient Rome, and the loss of the city sparked a major blow to Christendom.\textsuperscript{22} The overthrow of Constantinople solidified the Ottomans Empire’s status as one of the most powerful empires in the Western world. Their political and cultural importance exerted a great influence over Europe, and subsequently aided in the shaping of the art of the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{23} Sultan Mehmet II was the first Ottoman ruler to engage in a cultural affiliation with the West. He acquired a vast library filled with Western texts on philosophy, medicine, science, and religion.\textsuperscript{24} Although the relationship between the East and West was tumultuous politically, trade was rarely affected

\textsuperscript{21} Deno Geanakoplos, Constantinople and the West: Essays on the Late Byzantine (Palaeologan) and Italian Renaissances and the Byzantine and Roman Churches , (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 38.
\textsuperscript{23} Jerry Brotton, The Renaissance Bazaar, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). pg. 28
by such incidents. Throughout various conflicts their commerce remained intact, which aided the cultural development of the two entities.25

Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries’ goods from the East were flowing into Western ports. Spices such as black pepper, nutmeg and salt were changing the way Europeans approached food. Textiles like muslin, satin, silk and velvet became a wanted commodity. The Italian elite quickly bought opium, carpets, horses, precious stones and various dyes. These material items changed that way that Europeans functioned in their day-to-day lives. The small elite class wanted goods that publically displayed their wealth, and textiles became a popular choice. Diet, food preservation and preparation were improved by the influx of spices and perishables. The Italians exported wood and iron from central and northern Europe, as well as wool, linen and hard currency.26 Artists also utilized Eastern goods, using paint pigments such as lapis lazuli, vermilion, and cinnabar, which could only be found in the East.

The influx of Levantine luxury items quickly elevated the status of Italian merchants, such as the Medici family, which extensively traded in and collected objects.27 The Medici Bank of Florence was responsible for banking, accounting,

25 This continuous trade pushed the boundaries of exploration and discovery. This inevitable exploration at the time of the Renaissance sparked the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which cast a long shadow over European history.
27 Ibid.
maritime insurance and the circulation of the bills of exchange.\textsuperscript{28} Their wealth allowed them to collect the precious luxury items that flowed from the East. Furthermore, Often, this luxury trade made its way into art. Thus, art commissioned by these merchant families that contained luxury goods from the East provided visual examples of the family’s wealth. These families were instrumental in Italian politics and orchestrated a vast amount of wealth, towards consolidating their position within the social-political hierarchy in the community, which led to commissioning artworks and thus artistic innovation.

This remarkable influx of goods did not go on without notice. In his 1494 discussion of trade with the Ottomans, Catholic Canon Pietro Casola noted in a description of Jerusalem that;

\textit{Indeed it seems as if all the world flocks here, and the human beings have concentrated there all their force for trading…. Who could count the many shops so well furnished that they almost seem warehouses, with so many clothes of every make – tapestry, brocades and hangings of every design, carpets of every sort, camlets of every color and texture, silks of every kind; and so many warehouses full of spices, groceries and drugs, and so much beautiful wax! These things stupefy the beholder.}\textsuperscript{29}

This thesis will maintain that it was trade with the Middle East that helped jumpstart Italy into its rejuvenation. Italy did not develop due to an autonomous


\textsuperscript{29} Margaret Newett, Canon Pietro Casola’s Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494, (Manchester: Victoria University of Manchester, University Press.1907), pg.129.
response to the uninspiring Dark Ages; rather, Italian culture was influenced by
the innovations of the Middle East. The evidence for this influence lies in
Renaissance works of art. In many ways artists were the first cultural historians,
able to create works that depicted the material and social changes inspiring Italy
during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Further chapters will expand on
these works and on the reasons Ottoman items, in particular, were featured so
heavily in works of the Renaissance.

CHAPTER II

ORIENTALISM

In discussing Middle Eastern influence on the Italian Renaissance, the
issue of Orientalism must be addressed. Orientalism is a term developed by the
West to describe anything in relation to the countries of the Eastern world, such
as The Middle and Far East. The word “orient” derives from “oriēns”, which is the
present participle for the Latin word “orior”, meaning, “to rise”. This “rising”
refers to the sun, rising in the east, the home of the Orient, and setting in the
West. The East was referred to as the “orient” dating back as early as the

thirteenth century. In Geoffrey Chaucer's famous work, *The Canterbury Tales* (circa 1475) Chaucer notes, “That they conquered manye regnes grete. In the orient, with many a faire cite. Apertenaunt unto the magestee Of Rome”.\(^{31}\)

In this example Chaucer is referring to the orient as the lands east of the Mediterranean. The appearance of the term “orient” suggests that it was understood and utilized when discussing the lands of the East. Thus, describing the East as “orient” is an early occurrence in written history.

Another common term that alludes to the lands of the East is Levant.

Levant is barrowed from the middle-French term *Levante* which derives from levere, meaning to lift or rise, referencing the rising of the sun.\(^{32}\) The term broadly refers to the regions of present day Lebanon, Cyprus, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Syria, southern Turkey and Egypt.

A more modern definition of the term “orientalism” is, “the study of languages, literature, religions, thought, arts, and social life of the East in order to make them available in the West.”\(^{33}\)

The context of this definition was changed in 1978 when scholar Edward Said published his study, *Orientalism* in which he illustrates the negative connotations that the word implies. Said’s work has been a foundational piece

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\(^{31}\) A handy translation of this phrase is, “That they conquered many great realms, In the orient, with many a fair city, Belonging unto the majesty Of Rome.” This translation can be found at Dr. Larry D. Benson’s, *The Monk’s Prologue and Tale: An Interlinear Translation*

\(^{32}\) Further explanation of the term may be found at the Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome.

used in postcolonial studies that effectively point out biases within the Western perspective. Said observes that the word “Oriental” in its various forms alludes to Western ownership of Eastern cultural entities. Said believed it created an idea that the people of the East were inferior in comparison to those of the West. He also noted that Western ideas of Orientalism reflected an exotic fantasy that many Westerners wrongly connected to their vision of the East. The term can imply a patronizing look at various cultures as seen through the eyes of the West.

This draws upon the question of why Middle Eastern goods were used within Renaissance paintings. During the Renaissance, Middle Eastern societies, especially those of the Ottoman Empire, did not subscribe to Western norms. Italians viewed Ottomans as lacking civility with unfamiliar customs, which were considered barbaric. The humanists of the Renaissance were well versed in Greco-Roman philosophy, writings, and prejudices. For the Greek and Roman empires anyone that lived outside their civilization was deemed barbaric. Due to the great impact the classics had on Renaissance Italy the same ideas ascribed by classical authors to barbarians were attributed to the Ottomans by the Italians. It is this idea that Said argues created a toxic “us versus them” mentality. Such a mentality inherently discourages honest thought or objective appraisal from one party to another, creating an innate predisposed judgment on

35 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
“them”. Said notes this mentality goes beyond a simple “us verses them”, for Renaissance humanists it was viewed as civilization versus barbarianism.\textsuperscript{38} These ideals became common themes throughout Western art in the nineteenth century, but it is in the Renaissance that they become readily available to public eye.

Travels and studies within the Middle East were uncommon, which leads one to wonder why goods of an unfamiliar culture became such a precious commodity. Furthermore, the sour relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and Muslims during the Crusades would carry over into the Renaissance, drawing further curiosity as to why goods of an “inferior” people were so sought after. A scholar of Middle Eastern art, Anna Contadini, suggests four main points explaining the influx of Middle Eastern influence during the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{39}

Her first point details the accumulation of wealth through luxury trade. It was in the Renaissance that the phenomenon of mass consumption was first seen. However, only a small circle of the Italian elite could afford such exotic traded goods, and could afford to take part in such commerce.\textsuperscript{40}

Contadini’s second point alludes to the materials that were being traded. Ownership of exotic materials showed wealth, and the wealthy wanted to show


\textsuperscript{40} Jerry Brotton, \textit{The Renaissance Bazaar}, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). pg. 27.
their prestige by including these objects in paintings. The appearance of these objects in art announced the power, prestige and status of the patron as the commissioner or subject of the work. This couples with the first point but reminds the viewer that not only can the patron commission the work, but can also include priceless materials within it from the Ottoman world.

Thirdly, Contadini’s point addresses the intent of showing Ottoman goods within a painting and suggests that this was done to experiment with new themes or ideas. The end of the Crusades allowed artists to interact with Islam and Middle Eastern culture in a new way. Before the Renaissance, Islam symbolized an inferior pagan religion that needed to be extinguished by Christians. By the end of the Crusades a begrudging tolerance of Islam and its Middle Eastern counterparts emerged, which allowed artists to explore new artistic ideas. Furthermore, characteristics of the Levant suggest a connection to the Holy Land. When pseudo-Arabic texts, and textiles are depicted in works of the Italian Renaissance, especially religious works, they evoke a Levantine setting. This allowed viewers to interact with Islamic aesthetic in Renaissance art as a visual pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Finally Contadini examines the concerns the artists’ abilities to imitate and learn from these new influences.41 Artists embraced these new themes as a challenge. With the influx of goods coming from the Ottoman Empire there were suddenly foreign objects, unseen by the majority of society at the time. The

41 Ibid.
emergence of new textiles, scripts and metalwork presented artists with a new challenge. They began incorporating Ottoman styles of dress, Arabesque text, and textiles with delicate precision. There was room for the viewer of the art object to learn from the pieces; furthermore, it offered an opportunity for artists to communicate their talent.

It is an inarguable fact that Ottoman goods represented political and financial wealth and status within Italy. It is equally inarguable that Ottoman trade enriched the lives of the Europeans. Italians included Ottoman goods in their lifestyle, with the general knowledge that these goods enriched their lives. However, Italians failed to communicate the importance of the Ottoman artisans that produced said goods. This is not entirely shocking due to the tumultuous relationship the East and the West shared. However, it does discredit the aesthetic innovations that the Levant created and utilized which ultimately influenced the artisans of the West. Said’s orientalism debate can be revisited at this point. His argument revolved around the idea that the interest in the goods and lives of the Ottomans was due to a self-affirmation of their Italian identity, meaning that Italians valued themselves and their innovations over the innovations of the Levant. 42 Even when the commerce with the Levant proved successful and aided their golden age, Westerners still saw barbarianism in the peoples and culture of the East.

In 1954, Bernard Lewis postulated the idea that, “in the West the history of the Arabs has chiefly been written by historians who knew no Arabic and by Arabists who knew no history.”

This quote can be applied directly to the discussion of Ottoman goods. Items coming from the Ottoman world were simply exotic objects and Western knowledge about the goods and the culture that manufactured them was based on nothing more than superficial stories or ignorant assumptions. Because a limited artists visited the Levant, thus proper research into the cultures of the Levant were unfulfilled. These cultural inaccuracies made their way into Italian Renaissance art, offering a skewed perspective on a complex culture. Thus Middle Eastern goods and exports were a symbol of pre-colonial Orientalism, visual evidence of the conquering of this foreign culture, by using their goods to accessorize Italian lives.

Middle Eastern imagery in the art of the Italian Renaissance offers clues about how the East was perceived and studied during the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The art offers insight on the complex relationship that the East and the West were engaged in. In further chapters the imported objects themselves—Ottoman scripts, metalwork, and textiles will be discussed, as well as their placement in the paintings of the Italian Renaissance.

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44 This argument can be made save for Jacopo Bellini who visited present day Turkey, and returned to Italy with notes and images of the Eastern world. He will be mentioned further in this thesis.
Increased commerce with the Levant meant that decorative luxury goods of Ottoman and Mamluk origin were vigorously imported in the Italian Peninsula. The rarity and exoticism of these imports influenced artists to include them within artworks. Perhaps one of the most prevalent influences is the use of Oriental scripts. Oriental scripts refer to varying texts of the East, including Arabic and Hebrew. Oriental scripts are prevalent throughout a host of Renaissance paintings and sculpture. Fictitious scripts comparable to Arabic were developed and featured in

45 Though the “Oriental” argument has already been made, it is important to express the scripts in their original historical jargon. Modern research has generally dropped the original Oriental terminology for other names, which will be
artwork as early as the thirteenth-century. Considered exotic, these scripts were used as accessories within art objects. Although scattered examples do appear in the thirteenth and fourteenth century artworks, such scripts appear with regular frequency in fifteenth century art of the Italian Renaissance.\textsuperscript{46} This was due to increased commerce between the East and West, and seems to have been particularly spurred on by the rise of goods coming into Italian ports that displayed foreign text.

There are many different terms for fictitious Arabic-like scripts with the most common described as Pseudo-Arabic. This term refers to Arabesque script elaborated for artistic rather than communicative purposes.\textsuperscript{47}

The term \textit{Kufic} refers to one of the oldest types of Arabic scripts often depicted through calligraphy, which is prevalent throughout Middle Eastern art and design. In contrast, the Pseudo-Arabic scripts are decorative motifs that heavily feature \textit{Kufic} but also contain elements of other languages. Pseudo-Arabic scripts might only feature a single language, but may depict it in a way that makes no literary sense to the viewer.

However, Pseudo-Arabic is not the only type of Oriental script to appear in Italy. There were many forms of Arabic scripts each utilized a different way. A bold cursive script known as \textit{thuluth}, used throughout Egypt and Syria during the mentioned further in this paper.

\textsuperscript{47} Rosamond Mack, \textit{Bazaar to Piazza}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
time of the Mamluk Sultans, is also found in works imported to Italy. This cursive-like script was used as ornamentation on textiles, ceramics, glass and metalwork from the Mamluk Empire. These goods were imported to Italian city-states and hence made their way into numerous upper and middle class Italian households.

*Thuluth* differs from the traditional *Kufic* by replacing the straight and angular lines with curves and oblique lines. Another important script, *Naskh*, depicts a simpler form of traditional *Kufic* and allows for faster copying and transcribing. It is most often found in the Qur’an, handwriting, and various literary texts. All these various scripts influenced Italians to copy and recreate them within their art.

It must be emphasized that then these scripts were appropriated within works of Italian production; Italian artisans used them as a decorative or ornamental tool. If an artist wished to convey a particular message within the piece, Latin or Italian would be used, as both were the predominantly understood language in Italy at that time. Arabic and other Eastern languages, save Hebrew, were largely unknown to Europeans. There was no recourse to learn these languages. They were exotic and foreign to those unable afford the

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48 This would be occurring between the fifteenth and sixteenth century.
imported goods that featured the scripts. It was not until 1513 to 1517 that Arabic and other Semitic languages made their way into the Italian mainstream as areas of study. Pope Leo X decreed in 1513 that psalters, breviaries and Bibles were to be printed in Arabic, Aramaic, and Syriac for the use of Eastern Christians. The use of Arabic in these texts allowed moderately educated Italians to take part a, insufficient but relevant cultural recognition of the Levant.

Europeans recognized that Arabic was a language found in the Holy Land but failed to acknowledge that the scripts used for that language is derived from Islamic practicing peoples. That being said, the scripts were not directly connected to Christianity, rather, they were taken out of their Islamic context and alluded to no Christian doctrine. Christians of the West had numerous misunderstandings about the Arabic language. They thought Arabic was the language spoken during the time of Jesus. Arabic was utilized in antiquity but only in spoken form. Nabatean Aramaic was used as a written communicator until the sixth-century CE, thus Arabic would not have been seen. However, Arabic and pseudo-Arabic scripts were still symbolic for Western Christians. For the devout, these scripts represented the Holy Land, the birthplace of Christianity. Pseudo-Arabic scripts incorporated a quality of the Holy Land that could be understood without being witnessed firsthand. The viewer did not have to be in the Levant to understand that the scripts implied that setting. Thus, these

52 Ibid.
scripts provided a visual pilgrimage, allowing the viewer to be transported to the Holy Land without stepping away from the art object.

Although Pseudo-Arabic scripts represent no factual language their use in artworks is not random. Pseudo-Arabic scripts found within religious works rarely communicate a religious message, most of the time being composed of uncomprehending copies of pastiches of unrelated Arabic texts derived from imports of the Levant. Rather, these scripts would be used to promote a Levantine setting within the piece. They do not address specific Biblical text, thus, bypassing the Judeo-Christian tradition. Yet they are heavily featured within religious works, making appearances in the gilding of halos, frames, and ornamentation for textiles such as silks and carpet.

For Italians, Pseudo-Arabic script implied both exoticism and religious symbolism, regardless of the work it was used in. This exoticism used in a religious context establishes that, between the visual scene and the scripts the setting of the piece is outside the Western world.

Mamluk luxury objects contained a large amount of *thuluth* calligraphy. The Arabic forms that were found in Mamluk objects influenced a majority of the script seen within Renaissance works. The Mamluk were a caste of Egyptian

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54 Ibid.

55 Alexander Nagel, "Twenty-Five Notes on Pseudoscript in Italian Art," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 59 (2011): 1. Nagel suggests that it was possible that the scripts featured in paintings allude to other-worldliness. Most of these scripts appear in paintings that depict Biblical or religious connotations. The legibility of these scripts is unknown to the mortal world, but in the heavenly realm they are understood.
slaves that served rulers of the Ayyubid dynasty between the twelfth and fifteenth
century. It is important to note that they were not associated with the Ottoman
Empire, however, in 1517 the Mamluks were taken over by the Ottoman Empire.
Their decorative arts, costuming, and textiles differed significantly from the
Ottomans; this stylistic difference will continue to be explained in further chapters.

The Mamluk were responsible for creating an extensive amount of
decorative objects such as glasswork, metalwork, and ceramics. Because of
intensified trade with the embassy in Cairo these objects were imported into Italy
during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For Renaissance artists Mamluk
metalwork proved to be highly influential for the use of Pseudo-Arabic scripts.
Mamluk metalwork can refer to serving vessels, incense burners, candleholders,
or inlaid boxes. Most common were circular brass plates decorated with floral
or geometric patterns and adorned with the pseudo-Arabic *thuluth* script around
the circumference. *Thuluth* scripts depicted in the metalwork were not always
readable, even though they were produced in countries that would understand
Arabic languages. The Malmuk artisans realized that these imports were going to

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58 Ibid.
59 "Box with a lid [Syria]" (91.1.538) In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–.
non-Arabic speaking countries, thus, aesthetic appeal outdid legibility. These scripts, circular in depiction, became an inspiration for artists wishing to ornament halos in religious painting.

An example of such script comes from Gentile da Fabriano’s *Adoration of the Magi* (ca. 1423). The altarpiece depicts a traditional nativity scene. The Virgin Mary and newborn Jesus are situated in the bottom left of the piece. The rest of the painting contains angels, magi and saints all coming to pay homage to the newborn king. The painting contains impressive example of Arabic-like script depicted within the halos of the Virgin and Joseph, as well as in the hems of their clothing. The scripts within the halos are comparable to the rosettes of text found on the Mamluk brasswork. None of da Fabriano’s pre-Florentine work depicts the use of pseudo-Arabic scripts. Thus, it must be considered that da Fabriano witnessed the influx of foreign commerce in Florence, and was influenced by Mamluk metalwork he encountered there. The practice of adding these scripts would thus give the pieces a foreign flair. It is also possible that these scripts were used as a binding between two cultures. Certain scholars believe that when this is the case it alludes to a treaty Italian city-states, in this case Florence, negotiated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the

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Mamluk Sultan of Egypt. Scholar Sylvia Auld discusses the scripts saying, “[the inscriptions] may represent an interpretation of the common bond between Christianity and Islam with regard to the Virgin as a sort of public relations exercise for the Mamluk and the church of Florence.” This role is appropriate as the Madonna is an important figure in both Christianity and Islam. The act of painting pseudo-Arabic scripts binds together a shared reverence in these two religions.

Depicting pseudo-Arabic scripts on clothing in art became popular in the thirteenth century. Islamic textiles known as tiraz influenced Italian artists utilizing this practice. These textiles were bands of inscriptions that ran across the hem and sashes of garments. In the Islamic world these textiles were designated for the use of a caliph. However, the term tiraz further developed in meaning to include royal weaving establishments. The prestige that was associated with the word alerted traveling Crusaders, who, recognizing the importance of the textiles, brought them back to Italy as luxury goods. Scripts in the hems and

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65 The Madonna is one of the most venerated women in Islamic tradition. She has a chapter dedicated to her life in the Quran, and is considered to be one of the holiest women to have lived, with Islamic sects considering her to be a prophet. Although Islamic tradition does not consider her, or her son Jesus to be divine, she is assumed to be the holiest of women because of her virtuous state.
67 Ibid.
lining of clothing were modeled after these textiles.\textsuperscript{68} In the fourteenth century Italy began to produce their own silk, and they were eager to copy Eastern patterning, with the scripts included.\textsuperscript{69} Andrea Mantegna’s painting of the \textit{Adoration of the Magi} (ca.1500) is an example of text represented in textiles. The lining of the Virgin’s robes around her wrist and neckline feature a delicately embroidered gold pseudo-Arabic script.

Examples such as these would be seen by Italian Renaissance painters and would have offered inspiration for their own works, which contributed to the spike in popularity of the pseudo-scripts during the time of the Renaissance.

Further examples of Pseudo-Arabic gilt haloes are witnessed in Antonio Vivarini’s \textit{Portrait of St. Louis of Toulouse} (ca.1450). The painting of St. Louis of Toulouse was presumably part of a polyptych. It depicts the saint wearing the traditional bishop attire of a miter, crosier and Holy Book in hand. Within his Halo are scripts similar to the ones seen in da Fabriano’s work. Within the rings of the thick golden halo are thin sweeping lines reminiscent of Arabic. The script in his halo correlate to the Arabic letters \textit{alif} and \textit{lam}. These large letters repeated a multitude of times are without the necessary diacritical dots that enable Arabic to convey meaning.\textsuperscript{70} Thus, the artist was able to copy the script with accuracy, but without awareness as to what the script referred to.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Rosamond Mack, and Mohamed Zakariya, "The Pseudo-Arabic on Andrea del Verrocchio’s David," \textit{Artibus et Historiae}, 30, no. 60 (2009): 157-172,
Jacopo Bellini’s *Madonna of Humility* (ca. 1470) features Pseudo-Arabic text within the Madonna’s halo and within the trim of her elaborate garment. Once again the scripts depicted in the halo are reminiscent of Mamluk brasswork, with the rosette of text ornamenting the piece.

Famed Renaissance painter Andrea Mantegna also featured these scripts within his work. *Minerva Chasing the Vices from the Garden of Virtue* (ca. 1502) depicts the goddess Minerva casting out the vices from her garden. On the left of the piece is a scroll twisting its way through an olive tree. The anthropomorphic tree appears to be shouting the writing on the scroll at Minerva as she races through the garden. The scroll itself depicts what are thought to be texts in three different languages: Latin, pseudo-Greek, and Hebrew.\(^71\) The first, at the top of the scroll is Latin. The phrase translates to, “Come divine companions of the Virtues who are returning to us from Heaven, expel these foul monsters of Vices from our seats.”\(^72\) The other two scripts in the painting are illegible, although some historians suggest that the second set of text is nothing more than a highly embellished form of Latin.\(^73\) Regardless of their actual language, this painting shows that pseudo-scripts can be derived from languages other than Arabic.

Andrea del Verrocchio’s bronze sculpture, *David* (1473-75), is one of the most notable sculptures to feature pseudo-Arabic scripts. David was a popular subject in Renaissance art. Numerous artists portrayed the young vindicator of the Israelites in

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72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
sculpture but only Verrocchio included pseudo-Arabic script. Verrocchio’s David is depicted as a beardless and lean youth, wearing a simple light tunic. He is shown in the moments after he has killed Goliath, weapon at his side and his hand on his hip. Between his feet lies the decapitated head of Goliath, the Philistine giant. David wears a playfully smug expression on his face, a clear acknowledgement of the great task he has just completed.

The pseudo-Arabic text can be seen in the bands of his tunic around the waist and across the chest and shoulders. The reason for the pseudo-Arabic scripts in this piece is not clear, although it is probable that Verrocchio was aware of the Mamluk objects featuring scripts that were imported into Italy. It is further suggested that the addition of the scripts could be the wish of the patron, Piero de’ Medici. Medici’s inventory is documented as having an extensive collection of “objects from Damascus”, all of which were created during the Mamluk period. The Medici collection is documented to have acquired thirty-six pieces of brass and fifteen pieces of glass from the Middle East. These objects, especially the metal works, would include a significant amount of script, specifically the thuluth form of calligraphy. It

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74 For many years after the completion of this piece the placement of the head of Goliath has been a source of contention. The head of Goliath was separated from the sculpture in the seventeenth century, only to be returned to the piece in the late eighteenth century. The sword held by David is also not original, and it is not accurate to the Biblical narrative. The original weapon David held has been lost since the seventeenth century.

75 The Medici family was known to have commissioned the work, but for a considerable amount of time it was unclear which member of the family it was for. Art historian Rosamond Mack suggests that the piece was intended for Pietro.


77 Ibid.
can then be assumed that scripts added to the sculpture of David were in accordance with the stylistic taste of the patron. The scripts in the sculpture are consistent throughout the hems and linings of his tunic, broken up only by small rosettes. These rosettes allude to knowledge of the round Mamluk brass plates where the *thuluth* can originally be found.

Much like the scripts in da Fabriano’s work, Verrocchio includes repetitive patterns of the letters *alif* and *lam*. No words within the piece are legible, however, one band bares great resemblance to the Arabic term *Lillah*. Lillah is an Arabic term meaning to or for God.\(^7\) Due to the illegibility of the piece it is thought that this term was an accidental creation. Verrocchio could have seen the form and wished to recreate it, or he could have simply gotten lucky with his development skills.\(^8\)

There are two ways to interpret the usage of pseudo-Arabic scripts in Italian Renaissance art. First, the usage of these scripts in a religious context enabled artists to suggest a setting of the East in their paintings. Scripts with foundations of Hebrew and Arabic placed in a religious setting such as halos and clothing worn by Saints or the Holy Family suggest an artists wish to convey a Levantine setting. Even if these scripts consist of no legible meaning their general portrayal suggests a detailed attempt to situate the works in the Levant.

The second point is the exoticism that these scripts represent. Many of the works with no religious connotation have scripts that make no literary sense. The

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\(^8\) Ibid.
purpose of these objects is to appear aesthetically pleasing. Italians would have been aware of their connection to the Oriental world, and thus consider them an object of exotic appeal.

After 1520 pseudo-Arabic and pseudo-scripts in general are not seen in Italian art. There are a few possibilities for the decline in script depiction. This could be a result of cultural and diplomatic progress. For instance, due to increased commerce between the East and West and the printing of Arabic Bibles, languages were becoming more commonplace in Italian culture. Thus, Italians were beginning to understand foundational principles of Arabic and other similar languages and the idea of falsifying such knowledge may have seemed redundant or not useful. The more plausible explanation resides in the fate of history. Historian Alexander Nagel suggests that the sixteenth century, which witnessed the rise of the Protestant reformation and a dramatic artistic shift is the main reason for the lack of pseudo-Arabic scripts in Italian art.

Regardless of the reason behind the decline, pseudo-Arabic in Italian art supports the argument that luxury goods of the Ottoman and Mamluk Empires influenced Italians. The textiles of the Levant that were brought back by Crusaders and now appear in Italian art furthers this argument. Italian artists were using these scripts as devices to bring the Holy Land into their art. Luxury

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
goods from the Orient were influencing the development of exoticism in the West. These scripts were relics of the Holy Land. Foreign and exotic they were able to add decorative meaning that was beyond linguistic understanding.

CHAPTER IV
TEXTILES, CARPETS, AND DECORATIVE OBJECTS

Textiles and carpets were a major Middle Eastern export heavily sought after by Europeans. Both were staples of international luxury trade since the Middle Ages. Silk, satin, cotton, velvet, and muslin were popular imports to Italy. Oriental carpets appear frequently in Italian Renaissance art. Both the East and West saw clothing and carpeting as a luxury item. Clothing had the ability to signify the authority or rank of the intended wearer. Carpets, symbolized high social status, reverence and education. Often carpets were seen in paintings depicting the Holy Family, and thus were used to show devotion. For Italians there was no better way of communicating power, wealth and reverence than through textiles. The influx of Islamic goods into Italy meant that these items were being utilized in Italian private life. These imports shown in Renaissance art stand as a visual communicator, implying their stance as luxury items and the status that they symbolized.
Italian city-states with bustling ports that engaged in foreign commerce were the hubs for Islamic luxury objects finding their way into art. For example, by the fifteenth century Venice became the dominant trade center for goods coming from fellow European nations and the Middle East.\textsuperscript{83} They had the best understanding of Islamic imports and used such understanding as a form of cultural appropriation. This appropriation is best witnessed in the usage of Islamic carpets and textiles in Italian paintings.

Of all the goods coming into Italian ports the ones most difficult to track are wearable textiles. This is due, in part, to the poor condition of wearable textiles surviving from the fifteenth century. The fabrics that do exist are not always able to have a defined origin. This is due to the shared influence that occurred within textile trade. The Levant and Italy often engaged in the trading of goods that the other did not possess. However, in terms of textiles there was an exchange of goods in both directions.\textsuperscript{84} Both the East and West engaged in textile manufacturing, and traded these goods with one another. This allows for quite a bit of confusion when discussing the origin of certain textiles. Known for its fabric production since the Middle Ages, sixteenth century Italy was a major producer of silks and similar luxury textiles.\textsuperscript{85} Silkworms, the insect that enabled silk production, were able to thrive in the Mediterranean climate, and thus

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{83} Stefano Carboni, \textit{Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797}, (New York, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 175.
  \item \textsuperscript{84} Stefano Carboni, \textit{Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797}, (New York, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 175.
  \item \textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
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contributed to Italy’s expansive silk production. This is one of the reasons that textile trade between the East and West was so balanced. The Medieval period in Europe saw many innovations, such as the water-powered loom and the foot-pedal loom. These industrial innovations created an influx of textiles that focused on quantity over quality, and allowed for mass production. It can thus be suggested that there was a European dominance in textile production.

Both European and Islamic cultures heavily utilized textiles. Specific pieces of clothing held distinct ritual and religious significance in Islamic and Christian cultures. For example, both religions would utilize specific garments and colors to distinguish members of the religious communities. Each article of clothing was laden with symbolism from embroidery to color and patterning, thereby making them recognizable.

In the Ottoman Empire silk textiles used as clothing alluded to power and authority. The type of fabric, patterning, coloring and form of headgear further distinguished the wearer’s place in Ottoman society. Some silks were embellished with gold and silver thread, or pearls and gems sewn into the fabric. Iridescent shot silk was used to emphasize power in court figures.

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86 Silk production started in Italy as early as the eleventh century.
89 Shot silk is today considered taffeta. When manufactured the warp and weft are two different colors, which often creates a luminous effect. These fabrics
Many silks from the Middle East that came to Italy are embellished with Islamic patterns and phrases. Christians often overlooked the Islamic references and would attach Christian connotations to them instead. Italians utilized Islamic fabrics not in terms of dress or costuming, but for furnishing and clerical garments. However, in painting, especially when depicting a Biblical scene, artists would utilize costuming of Islamic cultures. This costuming would help create a setting within the painting. For example, Andrea Mantegna’s *Adoration of the Magi* (ca. 1505) utilizes textiles in traditional Levant style to create a scene that can visually be placed in the Levant. The figures in the piece are depicted in various costuming of the Levant. The magus figure in white turban and red taj is clearly dressed in Ottoman attire. The exoticism of the other two magi suggests they are of African and Far Eastern descent. The Madonna is clothed in rich silks, with a layer of her dress bearing pseudo-Kufic text. There is no background detail in the piece to suggest a setting, but the costuming reminds the viewer that this is a scene that took place in the Levant.

By the end of the sixteenth century Italian manufacturers were creating textiles using Islamic models. Many of these textiles include patterning and assemblage consistent with the textiles produced in the Levant. This could have been done in an effort to appeal to the Ottomans in terms of diplomatic relations or commerce. Regardless of the reasoning it is pivotal to point out the influence that Islamic textiles were used during the fifteenth and sixteenth century, but they were most popular in eighteenth and nineteenth century clothing.

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had on the Italians. Even though history suggests that the Europeans had an advanced textile manufacturing system, Islamic patterning left a significant impression on Italians.

Islamic carpets imported from the Levant were deeply favored by Italians. Carpets had been imported to Europe since Greco-Roman times. References to pile carpets of possible Near-East origin can be found in Greek literature and the Old Testament. In the seventh century, Berbers from northern Africa invaded the Iberian Peninsula, and conquered Spain. Now known as the Moors, they established Cordoba as their religious and cultural center. The carpet trade in this area flourished, lasting much longer than the Moorish Empire, and their products were traded with the cities of Northern Europe.

Outside of Moorish rule, carpets from Syria, Egypt, and Anatolia made their way into Europe as early as the thirteenth century. Marco Polo noted in his travels that carpets created in Konya, present day Turkey were among the best ever produced. It was between the fifteenth and seventeenth century that carpets became a treasured commodity in Italy. Numerous trade records from Venice and the Ottoman Empire document the abundance of these carpets from

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92 Ibid.
93 Although these carpets were prominent throughout the Iberian Peninsula starting in the eighth century very little exists today that can allude to their general design. However, Moorish carpets from the fifteenth century still exist. There are some, though very few examples of small geometric carpets recorded in Italy painting before the fourteenth century but their origin is unclear. Also of uncertain origin are carpets that appear in paintings during the fourteenth century which feature stylized animal motifs.
present-day Turkey. The city of Venice was responsible for the greatest influx of carpets from the Middle East, becoming a major hub of carpet dealing, directing these imports throughout Europe.

Many of the carpets sent to Italy were hand-knotted pile carpets. Pile carpets traditionally depicted an intricate, geometrical design. These were considered one of the most prestigious luxury goods shipped in from the Islamic world.94

Carpets have a long history of symbolizing luxury and elite social status. As there were no significant carpet manufacturers in Italy, the only option for buyers was to look to the East.95 Unlike textiles, carpets were not produced in Italy, adding to their value. Their prestige came from two distinct factors which enhanced their market value; the first being that the carpets, especially those of great size, were very limited. Large carpets were rare and they were cherished. They were fragile, and difficult to transport which only increased their value.

The second factor was that only the wealthiest buyers could afford them. Because of their rarity most elaborate carpets were as valuable as paintings and sculptures.96 This creates a delicate supply and demand relationship. The supply of available carpets is low, but the demand is significantly high. In the fifteenth century

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94 Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2002). pg. 75
95 Ibid.
96 Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2002). pg. 76. Scholar Rosamond Mack gives an example that rests in the numbers of Lorenzo d'Medici inventory. In the inventory one table carpet of geometric pattern cost between 70 and 30 florins. In contrast Antonio Pollaiulo’s three large *Hercules* paintings were work 20 florins each.
paintings were used as a means for visually depicting wealth. Both portraiture and commissioned non-secular pieces depicted carpeting as a way to show luxury and reverence. Thus, these carpets were displayed in households and paintings as elite status symbols, the more carpets featured within a painting, the wealthier the owner.97

The influx of the carpet trade and their representation in artworks rose significantly for three main reasons. First, there was a shift in painting style. Portraits were being painted that included personal touches from the sitter or patron to indicate wealth. Second, the arrival of contemporary high quality carpets which featured geometric patterns affected the market for these goods. The geometric patterned carpets of the Ottomans gained immediate acclaim, so much so the design generated exceptional revenue. Third, there was an increased interest in collecting and displaying luxury domestic goods in one’s household. Paintings depicted how the carpet trade triggered a new attitude towards domestic objects and a residential environment. Because the carpets symbolized wealth, status, and taste, Italians would incorporate them in paintings, giving viewers a window into the lifestyle of the super wealthy.98

Up until the mid-fifteenth century carpets were depicted as being placed on the floor. Figures would traditionally be presented standing or kneeling on the carpet. This use of the carpet would be especially true in Islamic tradition. Prayer rugs, are a staple of Islamic worship, aiding the worshiper in providing a clean

98 Ibid.
space to pray. However, for the carpets depicted in Renaissance Italy there is no
pictorial evidence of these carpets being used in accordance with Islamic
tradition. Carpets also give some distinction about the sanctity of the space;
depictions of holy figures seated on carpets alluded to their sanctity.

The function of the carpet varies between Islamic and Christian cultures.
In Islam carpets were reserved for prayer, or as a sitting place in a residence.
Christian Europe is seen using carpets as more of a status symbol. Because
carpets were either coming in from the Levant or being created in Spain they held
many of the same decorative characteristics, thus is it their function that makes
them most easily distinguished. Historian Richard Ettinghausen notes,

In the East one sits and rests on the carpet, in closet physical and
visual contact with it, so that its imagery can be readily studied,
especially as it is unencumbered by massive furniture of a different
material. In the West the carpet is not an object of similar scrutiny:
one sits high up on a chair, in a room filled with table, sofas, and
fauteuils which obstruct sight of the extensive floor-covering, while
paintings, tapestries, or painted wallpaper provide further
distraction.¹⁰⁰

Thus, Italians held no reverence for these carpets other than in terms of
wealth. They were simply luxury items to be seen and appreciated at face value.

In fifteenth century Italian painting, it was rare to portray a carpet upon the
ground, unless it rested under a throne of the Madonna or a Saint, in a way to

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⁹⁹ Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, (Berkeley: University of California Press,
2002). pg. 67.
Kyriam Rosen-Ayalon (Berlin: Mann Verlag 1984), 1078.
depict reverence. Rulers would also be shown standing on carpeting suggesting their power. In contrast, most of the paintings by and large portrayed carpets hanging or draped, so that their intricate design may be witnessed. In both secular and religious paintings carpets have a new placement, upon tables, hung over benches, across a cassone, or out open windows. This depiction changes the function of the carpet. Italians originally used carpets as floor coverings. However, they now became decorative objects in paintings, depicted as if they themselves were works of art. They were also used as means of expression. During festivals and holiday celebrations they would often be hung outside on balconies and out of windows. This act represented independent and communal prosperity.

Carpets were also a way for artists to show off their talents in the imitation of the detailed geometric patterns. Andrea Prevital's Annunciation (ca. 1508) is an example of the practice of carefully transcribing a geometric carpet. The piece features the carpet covering a table and provides a catching backdrop for the figures of the Madonna and Gabriel in the forefront. The carpet is rich in detail as a complex geometric design weaves its way through the fibers. A thick kufesque border lines the edges while decorative octagons encompass the center. The

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101 Ibid.
102 A cassone refers to a large wedding chest.
103 Rosamond Mack, Bazaar to Piazza, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). pg. 76.
105 Ibid.
carpet in this painting is stylistically related to the Holbein carpet. The Holbein carpet refers to carpets painted in pieces by the artist Hans Holbein the Younger.\footnote{Hans Holbein’s famous piece \textit{The Ambassadors} (ca.1533) features such a carpet, and will be discussed in a later chapter.}

Many times, carpets in Renaissance art are referred to by the last name of an artist in relation to the respective artists who depicted said carpet in his paintings. This practice began with art historians and leading carpet scholar Kurt Erdmann, whose categorizations are still utilized today.\footnote{Rosamond Mack, \textit{Bazaar to Piazza}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). pg. 83.} The terms are specific to each respective artist and the patterns they utilized consistently in carpet depiction from painting to painting. The traditional Holbein carpet features “endless-knot” borders and heavy geometric work, which featured medallions in a knot-like pattern. Abstract octagons with knotted borders can be found in the center of these carpets. Carpets with this stylistic technique were commonly manufactured in Turkey during the fourteenth century.\footnote{John Mills, \textit{The Eastern Carpet in the Western World from the 15\textsuperscript{th} to the 17\textsuperscript{th} Century}, (London: Hayward Gallery, 1983), 52.} It is pivotal to note that Holbein, and the other artists whose namesake is given to carpets, were not the first or the only artists to create these specific carpets.\footnote{Marta Ajmar-Wollheim, and Flora Dennis, \textit{At Home in Renaissance Italy}, (London: V&A Publications, 2006), 315.} For example, Prevital’s \textit{Annunciation} has what historians refer to as a Holbein carpet, despite it not being created by Holbein.

There are numerous examples of namesake carpets, some of which can
be attributed to Lorenzo Lotto. Many Lotto carpets are thought to be Turkish, originating from the region around Ushak. This location would allow for easy trade with cities along the Aegean coast.\textsuperscript{110} That being noted, these carpets quickly grew in popularity. They can be distinguished by their repetitive red and gold patterns. These patterns traditionally consist of geometric interlocking forms, and a deep blue used sparingly as an accent color. In the center are distinct octagon forms, which were more unambiguous in depiction than those in the Holbein carpets.\textsuperscript{111} In a select few pseudo-Kufic text is also depicted along the borders.

Lorenzo Lotto’s \textit{Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine with the Patron Niccolo Bonghi}, (ca. 1542) depicts a carpet with such pseudo-Kufic text. The painting depicts the Virgin, with the Christ-child in hand as he places a ring on the finger of Saint Catherine. Meanwhile, the patron and an angel look on. The carpet is depicted in the background, draped over a window ledge, which has since been cut out of the painting. The pseudo-Kufic text can be made out on the edges of the rectangle end of the keyhole design in the center of the piece. The “keyhole design” is seen throughout Turkish carpets and gained its name because the central pattern looks like a keyhole.

A curious detail within the painting shows the carpet edge closest to the patron’s head folded over. This shows the delicate knots on the underside of the

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} John Mills, \textit{The Eastern Carpet in the Western World from the 15\textsuperscript{th} to the 17\textsuperscript{th} Century}, (London: Hayward Gallery, 1983), 11.
carpet, alluding to its fine workmanship and thus, worth. The patron’s depiction in the piece and the carpet so beautifully laid out in the background imply the patron’s wealth, and power.

A striking similarity with the carpet in this Lotto painting is seen in a Turkish carpet from the Ushak region. This carpet depicts both the pseudo-Kufic text and the keyhole design, although in the painting the keyhole design opens in the opposite direction. However, this carpet is an excellent surviving example of a carpet that artists would be working from. Lotto manages to capture the delicate patterning within the carpet and make it identifiable to a particular place.

Gentile Bellini also worked with Islamic carpets in his paintings. *Madonna and Child Enthroned* (ca. late fifteenth century) depicts an enthroned Madonna in folds of red fabric holding the Christ Child with a red carpet draped at her feet. Scholar Rosamond Mack notes that Bellini’s piece is one of the few surviving today that depicts the Madonna’s throne situated on a carpet that is an Islamic prayer rug. As previously stated, Bellini is recorded to have spent time in Turkey, but whether he knew of the significance of the rug in Islamic culture is unknown.

\[\text{\footnotesize 112} \text{ Lotto would have been comfortable painting this luxury item, as he is noted to be one of the only Renaissance painters that owned a Turkish rug.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 113} \text{ Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). pg. 83.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 114} \text{ Ibid. It is distinguishable as an Islamic prayer rug due to its ornamentation, and design, which is consistent with the design of rugs produced in the Levant.}\]
The carpet in this piece is predominantly red, with gold and green embellishments. It boasts a striking similarity to fifteenth century carpet created in western Anatolia, which features a thick geometric border and traditional “keyhole” design.\(^{115}\) The Madonna is seated on the luxury good, alluding to her sanctity and righteousness.

These carpets, symbolic of luxury and power, portrayed with such care and detail, appear in numerous Renaissance paintings with such care and detail. They are displayed more than utilized, proclaiming their socio-economic significance.

The biggest struggle that comes with studying Islamic carpets from the fifteenth century is that, more often than not, their existence is today only known through the paintings. For the vast amount of carpets produced few examples of Ottoman carpets that were sent to Italy still exist.\(^{116}\) This is, in part, due to the conditions that they had to endure. The damp, humid climate of Venice was not conducive to the long-term upkeep of these textiles. A contrasting situation can be witnessed in Florence, where numerous examples of carpets can be found but the documentation, providing them with a date and origin cannot be found.\(^{117}\)

\(^{115}\) Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, (Berkeley: University of California, Press 2002). pg. 83. The relevance of the keyhole design is up for debate. It is suggested the keyholes allude to the mihrab, pointing the way to Mecca. They may also symbolize a gated opening or a mosque. More information on the subject can be found in John Mills, *The Eastern Carpet in the Western World from the 15th to the 17th Century*, (London: Hayward Gallery, 1983).


\(^{117}\) Ibid.
The carpets depicted in Renaissance paintings detail the concept of luxury culture in fifteenth and sixteenth century Italy. These carpets were thought of as one of the most significant luxury good that the Levant had to offer. These carpets never lost favor with the elite; even in modern times luxurious carpets are still a proclamation of wealth. Unlike pseudo-scripts, which stopped appearing in paintings by the late sixteenth century, carpets in painting continued to rise in popularity. They never stopped being a visual expression of wealth and high socio-economic status. Because of the affluence associated with carpets they were portrayed with loving care. For Italian artists it was an exercise in detail, upon which was lavished great care, which resulted in a foreign luxury object being depicted as an art object, rather than a utilitarian import. This practice celebrated Islamic carpets, making them an artwork inside an artwork, bridging the gap between the Levant and the West.

Although this thesis focuses on the pictorial arts and textiles it should be noted that the decorative arts forged their own rich relationship between the Islamic world and Italy. For centuries glasswork and ceramics were manufactured in both the Italy and the Levant. The crusades, trade, and diplomacy aided in the exchange of influence between the two entities. Existing examples of Italian glasswork in Italy dates back as far as the fifth century.\(^{118}\) The first notable account of Italians coming in contact with Islamic glasswork was in 1204 CE. Pope Innocent III sent a crusade to capture Constantinople. The city was pillages

and Italians came away with Byzantine artifacts and Islamic glasswork, which were brought back to Venice. Throughout the centuries Venice utilized Islamic technique in their creation and embellishment of glass vessels. Venetian glassmakers were most influenced by the gilded and enameled glass created by the Mamluk in Egypt during the thirteenth and fourteenth century. These enameled glassworks included vibrant polychrome ornamentation and were an achievement for Mamluk artisans as well as a cherished commodity for Italian collectors. Because both Italy and the Levant had substantial knowledge of glass manufacturing, techniques were traded in the hopes of furthering the abilities of the artisans.

This same approach was taken with ceramics. Out of all the visual and decorative arts it is ceramics that kept the most contestant contact with the Oriental world. Both the Levant and Italy practiced the manufacturing of ceramics since antiquity. The first notable use of Islamic ceramics in Italy occurred in the eleventh century. Italians utilized Islamic bacini to cheaply and colorfully embellish the façade of buildings, specifically churches. In 1557 Cavaliere Cipriano Piccolpasso wrote the first Italian pottery manual titled Arte del

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120 Ibid.
122 Ibid. Bacini refers to Islamic bowls or dishes that were tin glazed and painted and then set into the façade of a building.
This manual utilized Islamic artistic tradition in the creation of ceramics. Piccolpasso makes note of popular decorating techniques such as strapwork, geometric patterning, Islamic arabesque design and knots, all of which were utilized by Islamic artisans. This indicates that Italian artisans were aware of and practicing Islamic techniques.

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123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 The history of influence between Islamic and Italian artisans and their creation of glasswork and ceramics is vast. The topic shall not be covered here, however, Catherine Hess, Linda Komaroff, and George Saliba’s The Arts of Fire: Islamic Influences on Glass and Ceramics of the Italian Renaissance, is an excellent source with brilliant visual examples for all those that wish to more fully understand the complexities of the decorative arts in the East and West.
CHAPTER V
IMAGES OF THE LEVANT IN RENAISSANCE ART

Western documentation of the Ottomans and their heritage is best represented through their portrayal in paintings from various artists. These artists showcase Italian thought on the Ottomans and offer a glimpse into the world of the Ottoman through Western eyes. Though flawed by limited Western awareness of the Middle East, these images do allow viewers to be conscious of the Italian perspective on the Orient. Furthermore, Italian artists brought Ottoman culture into the Western world. These works are able to serve as a viewpoint as to how the Ottomans, their culture, decorative art, and architecture were utilized and regarded in Italian art.

The decorative arts, costuming and settings, found in a majority of Western paintings featuring the Ottomans are inaccurate, as will be explored further on in this chapter. There is little documentation that Italian artists traveled East with the goal of amassing Ottoman art. When they did travel into the Ottoman Empire it was at the wish of their Ottoman patron. That being noted, there was a small minority of artists who managed to create accurate
representations of Ottoman culture. Of these factual depictions many are derived from direct life observation and limited travel to the region.\textsuperscript{126}

Giotto di Bondone was the first artist to include accurate representations of the Levant. His frescoes throughout Scrovegni Chapel (ca. 1305) feature numerous examples of pseudo-Arabic scripts upon textiles. His \textit{Mocking of Christ} scene from the same chapel gives acute attention to the features of the individuals. For example, the figure of Pontius Pilate is classical and beardless, while Christ and the Pharisees are bearded, with long pointed features and a darker skin tone that is Semite in origin. Furthermore, he includes a person of color with the mockers of Christ, adding to the diversity of the piece. Giotto never traveled to the Middle East. It is probable that his resource for these foreign figures came from the black Muslim slaves of Spain and North Africa.\textsuperscript{127}

The work of Giotto featuring foreign parties represents the first wave of exoticism in art. This somewhat authentic representation of figures from the Middle East would be replaced by \textit{simili}, or stock depictions.\textsuperscript{128} These depictions consisted of more of an inflated stereotype than factual depiction. A contrast to this exoticism and stereotypical use of imagery is witnessed in the paintings of artists that were commissioned by Ottoman rulers.

\textsuperscript{126} Rosamond Mack, \textit{Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art 1300-1600}, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2002), 149.
Costanzo da Ferrara (1450-1524) is one of the few artists who was able to travel to Constantinople to immerse himself in Ottoman culture. He is considered one of the dominant artists on the subject, attempting to accurately depict the nuances of Ottoman culture.\(^\text{129}\) In 1475 he was sent by Ferrante I of Naples to travel to the courts of Constantinople to work for Sultan Mehmet II.\(^\text{130}\) Mehmet II was the ruler of conquered Constantinople and of the Ottoman Empire between 1451 and 1481.\(^\text{131}\) Following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Italian city-states maintained a strained relationship with the Sultan. Sultan Mehmet II thought himself the next Caesar, pegged to rule Constantinople and eventually invade Italy. This naturally incurred hostility between the two entities. He often requested Italian artists to travel to his court in Constantinople and sponsored artistic talent. Portraiture in the Islamic world was not unheard of, but its usage tended to be reserved for works of religious or political reverence.\(^\text{132}\) Italian city-states, wanting ties between their Ottoman neighbors to remain on good terms and wishing not to be invaded, sent their best artists. Da Ferrara was one such artist.

One of the surviving works created by da Ferrara is his bronze cast of a \textit{Medal of Sultan Mehmet II}, completed in 1481. The medal, one of two created by da Ferrara, depicts the Sultan in a strong profile. He is portrayed wearing a \textit{taq}, a

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predominantly white turban that is worn by men and wrapped tightly around a red cap. The Ottoman style of headgear highlights the exoticism, or “otherness” of the Sultan. This medal was to be distributed on an international level in an effort to show the world the man who conquered Constantinople. Thus, the Sultan’s image was idealized for the artwork. The reverse of the medal depicts an equestrian scene with Sultan Mehmet on horseback.

Medals such as these were inspired by Roman coins, with the rulers portrayed in profile on the obverse and allegorical symbols on the reverse. A second medal created by da Ferrara at this time shows little variation from the first work other than the size itself. It was reproduced and sent throughout the Empire and into Europe. The large amount of medals depicting the portrait of the Sultan that have survived to the present day suggests the fascination that Europe had with the East.

This- and other medals portraying the Sultan became an inspiration to other artists wishing to portray this Oriental exoticism within their own works. The equestrian figure of the Sultan on the reverse of the medal went on to influence Albrecht Dürer’s *Ottoman Rider* (ca.1495). The borrowing, or usage of figures from artist to artist allows for some inaccuracy to develop within the work. For

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134 Ibid.
example, da Ferrara traveled to the Ottoman Empire and created this medal from life. Dürrer, seeing the medal, was influenced to create a similar scene. However, Dürrer did not have the privilege to create such imagery from life; he is relying on the limited viewpoint of another artist. Art historian Rosemond Mack, notes, “artists tended to adapt a small repertory of authentic images to a variety of representational uses.”

There were, however, authentic representations of the Orient that circulated during the fifteenth century. Bernhard von Breydenbach illustrated *The Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam*, a travel book with hand colored woodcuts depicting imagery of the Levant. The book, published in 1486, included woodcuts by Erhard Reeuwich, a Dutch artist and travel companion of von Breydenbach. His woodcuts within the book depict cityscapes of Egypt and the Holy Land, as well as figurative costuming. The book was published after von Breydenbach traveled on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, with Reeuwich accompanying him. *Peregrinations* became a staple for artists across Europe that wished to depict cities and costuming of the Levant within their artwork.

This vast use of a small minority of factual depictions allows stereotypes of the Orient to surface. Despite the abundance of trade and diplomacy between the Orient and the West, artists struggled to convey figures of the Levant as

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138 Twelve additions of the book in various languages were published between 1486 and 1522.
within their designated, Levantine setting. This leads to the exoticism and Orientalist views that overtake Western works depicting the Oriental world.

The phenomenon of Italian artists being commissioned to travel to Constantinople was not isolated to Naples. The Venetian Gentile Bellini also traveled to Constantinople to depict the Ottomans; his activity there has since long overshadowed da Ferrara’s impact.

Bellini was considered one of the most coveted artists in Venice during the fifteenth century and was the official court painter for the Venetian Republic. In 1473 the Sultan requested a “good painter” from the Venetian court. Venice, wanting to continue to secure commerce privileges, and contentment with the Ottoman Empire sent Bellini, the most talented artist in their arsenal. His role was far more than a courtly painter. He would become an ambassador on behalf of Venice. His tenure in Constantinople lasted less than two years, but during that duration he was able to grasp the foundation of Ottoman artistic principles, and depict Ottoman objects and people with accuracy. Much like the art of da Ferrara, his paintings, notes and journals became a source for future artists such as Albrecht Dürer, who also wished to depict the culture of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴²

¹⁴² More on Dürer and how he was influenced by Italian Renaissance artists can be found in Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art 1300-1600*, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2002), 149, and Olga
Having spent less than two years in Constantinople, only two pieces by Bellini produced there, exist today, a painting and a medal. The most famous of the surviving pieces, the *Portrait of Sultan Mehmet II*, (ca.1480) offers a view of the way the Sultan wished to be presented to the world. Bellini’s painting features a three-quarter profile view of Sultan Mehmet II. His figure is thinner and less dominating than in da Ferrara’s medals. This depiction of his physicality is considerably more lifelike. Compared to the medals created by da Ferrara, Bellini’s portrait depicts not a strong young ruler, but a gaunt, ill one. He is cloaked in traditional Muslim attire, the voluminous white *taj* tied tightly around a red cap. He is clothed in a red *kaftan*, covered by a brown fur cloak. A stone parapet and decorative archway frame his figure, both used to symbolize his divine triumph as ruler. The floating gold crowns on either side of the archway represent the kingdoms conquered under Mehmet II’s rule. On either side of the parapet are inscriptions. Due to the poor condition of the painting the inscriptions are almost illegible, however, the phrase *Victor Orbis*, or, “conqueror of the world”, can still be seen.

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143 This figure does not consider Seated Scribe (ca.1480). While the painting is attributed to Bellini, historians still dispute the artist attributed to it.


Mehmet II and his court enthusiastically received Bellini’s portrait. Famed historian, Giorgio Vasari, noted that; “Gentile had been there no long time when he portrayed the Emperor Mahomet from life so well, that it was held a miracle.” Bellini gained great acclaim in the Ottoman Empire with Sultan Mehmet II presenting him with the thick gold chain of the Sultan and a new title; “Eques Auratus.”

The Portrait of Sultan Mehmet II is an artifact of the tumultuous relationship between Venice and the Ottoman Empire. A work featuring such a realistic subject would be unprecedented for the Ottomans at the time. In this way it represents a blending of cultures. Mehmet II, Eastern patron and subject, but depicted by Western portrait conventions. This portrait is symbolic of what a multifaceted relationship the East had with the West—art, transcending war, trade and turmoil. Mehmet II, ruler of the Ottoman Empire and adversary to Italy, depicted by one of their most coveted artists. Thus, this piece has a deep historical significance; two cultures in constant turmoil, melting together in a single portrait.

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147 Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 55. This term essentially refers to Bellini as a golden knight.
148 Portraiture was not common in the Islamic art before the fifteenth century. This portrait stayed in the royal family until Bayezid II, son of Sultan Mehmet II sold his father’s collection of Western art. It not until 1865 that the painting was seen again, purchased from a collector in Venice to famed archeologist Augustin Layard.
The second surviving piece Bellini created during his tenure in Constantinople is the *Medal of Sultan Mehmet II* (ca. 1479). Portrait medals were a popular commission; as previously noted, da Ferrara created two. Bellini designed two similar bronze medals. Fellow Venetian companion, Bartolomeo Bellano, cast the medals. The Bellini medals depict a realistic profile of the Sultan. His likeness is very distinct, with the long pointed nose- and strong brow seen in Bellini’s painted depiction. The white fabric is tied around the *taj* depicting the common Ottoman headgear. On the reverse of the coin are the three crowns alluding to the kingdoms that the Sultan has conquered during his rule. The inscription on the front and reverse of the coin contain a declaration of the sitter, Sultan Mehmet II, and the artist, Bellini. Much like the medals created by da Ferrara, multiple castings of this medal survive, revealing the importance of the medal in Christian Europe.

Ottoman influence is best witnessed in the works produced by Gentile Bellini upon his return from Constantinople. Years after his visit to the foreign land he continued to include Oriental components in his paintings. Bellini’s, painting of *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria* (ca. 1507), created for the Scuola di San Marco combines Oriental influence and Western

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The massive piece shows St. Mark preaching in the city square with Alexandria as his backdrop. In the painting, St. Mark, the patron saint of Venice, stands in front of a non-Christian crowd preaching the gospel while bystanders of the East and West communicate in a cultural exchange. Biblically, the story of St. Mark’s traveling ministry to Alexandria is an important one. St. Mark’s goal was to travel to the foreign city and bring the good news of Christianity to a non-believing people. Acting as the first Bishop of Alexandria he founded their first church. This piece depicts that scene, when St. Mark first comes to the foreign land, preaching to a group of pagans.

A massive cathedral, representational of Alexandria’s Boucolis, looms in the background. However, Bellini’s setting for the painting is Piazza San Marco in Venice, but he paints the famous square with an Oriental influence. Structures that could be directly found in Constantinople, plus exotic animals and figures clothed in Malmuk and Ottoman dress litter the scene. Bellini had never been to Alexandria, but his experience in Constantinople allowed some familiarity with architecture of the Ottoman Empire.

The buildings portrayed within the piece are a conglomeration of architectural elements from three different cultures, Alexandria, Venice, and

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150 This painting would prove to be his last, he died before it could be completed. This led his brother Giovanni to complete some of the figures as well as the buildings on either side of the main piazza.
151 Acts 15:36–41
152 The Boucolis refers to a church in Alexandria founded by Saint Mark.
Constantinople. The center of the background largely consists of a massive cathedral complex. The façade of the cathedral is a hybrid between Venice’s Saint Mark’s Basilica and the Scuola di San Marco, while the buttresses are reminiscent of Constantinople’s Hagia Sophia.\textsuperscript{154}

Elsewhere in the background Bellini recreated ancient Alexandrian monuments. The Column of Diocletian, also known as the Pillar of Pompey is situated on the far right, while the opposite end of the painting depicts the Pharos Lighthouse.\textsuperscript{155} The towering minaret with a staircase coiling around the exterior is representational of the Ibn Tulun Mosque, located in Cairo.\textsuperscript{156} Flanked on both sides of the square are residences that feature small upper story windows and open rooftop terraces. The intricately carved tops of the minarets and the small windowed symmetrical residences would be stylistically in accordance with Malmuk tradition. Having never visited Alexandria or Cairo, Bellini could have utilized written accounts of other Italians that had traveled to Egypt. For the architecture Bellini would have consulted Bernhard von Breydenbach’s \textit{Peregrinatio in terram sanctam}, which was a visual depiction of cities, animals, and people of the Levant.\textsuperscript{157} He would have also been familiar with the letters of Italian humanist Ciriaco de’ Pizzicolli, more commonly known as Ciriaco

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\item \textsuperscript{155} Rosamond Mack, Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art 1300-1600, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2002), 165.
\item \textsuperscript{156} Stefano Carboni, \textit{Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797}, (New York, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 128.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
d’Ancona, who traveled to Egypt and the Greek Isles.\textsuperscript{158} In his letters, which were circulated throughout Italy, he notes exotic animals such as giraffes and elephants, even going so far as to include drawings.\textsuperscript{159} Pizzicolli’s description of the giraffe notes that it was;

A very handsome beast, wondrous to look upon, which towered [above us], with a neck of disproportionate length and legs that were one and one third times longer in the front than in the back… but in other respects, the color of its spotted skin looked very like that of a stag does.\textsuperscript{160}

This description accurately depicts the off-putting and disproportionate depiction of Bellini’s giraffe in the right of the background of Bellini’s painting. Bellini’s brother-in-law, Andrea Mantegna, is noted to have used the letters for his own references. Thus it can be assumed that through Mantegna, Bellini had access to these letters and utilized their descriptions within his work.

Bellini painted St. Mark’s cloak to match the biblical setting and the style of garment specific to the first century when he was preaching. The crowd, however, is more modern, clothed in garments of the fifteenth century. The style of clothing is from the Mamluk and Ottomans. There is something surprising about the way he chooses to depict this foreign costuming. There is only one figure dressed in traditional Ottoman attire. He stands, back turned to the viewer, closest to the pulpit where St. Mark is preaching, clothed in the traditional white

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid,
\textsuperscript{159} Clove Foss Ciriaco,, \textit{Later Travels}, (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 2003), 57.
\textsuperscript{160} Idib.
*taj* with cap and a kaftan with fur lining, suggesting an upper-class social status.\textsuperscript{161} The rest of the figures are clothed in Mamluk attire, a foreign style of dress that Bellini would have been unfamiliar with even with his travels to Constantinople.

Bellini likely used Reuwich’s woodcuts as a guide for Mamluk fashion in the painting.\textsuperscript{162} The women are pictured seated, their faces obscured by a white fabric known as a tartar. The men don white turbans and layers of robes.\textsuperscript{163} As a final note to the viewer, Bellini paints in a clandestine self-portrait. Clothed in red and standing just behind the preaching St. Mark, Bellini proudly dons the medallion given to him by his Ottoman patron, Sultan Mehmet II.\textsuperscript{164} This depiction of his royal honors abroad gives the viewer a taste of his comfort and familiarity with the Orient.

This scene of St. Mark’s conversion of the local population to Christianity, which is Biblically important, is not frequently portrayed in art. This gave Bellini a freedom to portray the painting in a unique, although fanciful, setting of his choosing. The goal of the painting is to depict a dramatic scene of St. Mark trying to advise and convert the infidels. However, his scene depicts more than St.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{163} Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art 1300-1600*, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2002), 165.
\textsuperscript{164} Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art 1300-1600*, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2002), 165. Furthermore, Vasari generously outlines the praise and gifts given to Bellini from Sultan Mehmet II in his *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters Sculptors and Architects*. 
Mark preaching to the nonbelievers. It is an intermingling of cultures, representing two time periods; the historical Alexandria of Early Christianity and the modern one coming together within the painting.\textsuperscript{165}

The amount of Oriental details included within the painting suggests that Bellini was using the piece as evidence of his mastery of Orientalist imagery. That is, he used this painting as a conglomeration of Oriental imagery to solidify his place as an Orientalist painter. His goal was to bring a multitude of influences together to create the quintessential Oriental scene, setting himself apart as a painter who could capture every characteristic of the Orientalist mode.

Bellini’s place as an Orientalist painter during the Italian Renaissance has recently come under fire. Historians argue that the accomplishment of Bellini as an ambassador was more of a success than Bellini as an artist depicting accurate representation of Ottoman culture.\textsuperscript{166} Western depiction of Ottoman and Mamluk imagery did not increase in popularity or artistic application following his Orientalist paintings.\textsuperscript{167} Other than solitary figure studies of Ottoman costume no documentation exists that attributes any work of Bellini depicting Ottomans or

\textsuperscript{166} Art historians Lisa Jardine, and Jerry Brotton attribute pieces by Bellini such as \textit{Seated Scribe} and figurative drawings to da Ferrara They further suggest that Bellini’s works undermine the accomplishments of da Ferrara. More on this topic can be found in \textit{Global Interests: Renaissance Art are of the East and West}, coauthored by both Jardine and Brotton.
Mamluk in their Levant setting.\textsuperscript{168} Even the depictions of Oriental men and women seen in costuming of various social standing cannot in complete certainty be attributed to Bellini.

Thus, it is less likely that Bellini was responsible for creating the Orientalist mode of the Renaissance, although he was able to depict it. \textit{St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria} is a conglomeration of various Levant cultures. He uses buildings and costuming that would not traditionally exist in one space to create a fanciful Orientalist view. In contrast, the painting \textit{Reception of the Ambassadors in Damascus} (ca.1511), created by an unknown artist that was skilled in the Venetian style of painting, accurately depicts an actual Ottoman scene.\textsuperscript{169}

Damascus was an important trade partner where Venice merchants frequently visited. The scene depicts a traditional welcoming of a Venetian trade party by a Mamluk governor, or, \textit{na'ib}. This piece differs from traditional Italian Renaissance narrative pieces. For example, architecture is utilized not so much

\textsuperscript{168} Historian Julian Raby notes in “The Sultan of Paradox: Mehmed the Conquerer as a Patron of the Arts” that there are at least two documented commissions by Mehmet II for Bellini, an erotic scene and a Madonna and Child. The Madonna and child were to be added to his extensive collection of Christian relics. Little is known about the works and it is believed that if completed they were sold by Mehmet’s son, Bayezid II after his father’s death.

\textsuperscript{169} Rosamond Mack, Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art 1300-1600, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2002), 165. Mack, author of \textit{Bazaar to Piazza} suggests that this piece is attributed to “the circle of Gentile Bellini”, but a specific artist has never been named. The date of this painting was considered to be much earlier, between 1488 and 1495 in accordance to the date the Western Mamluk-style minaret was completed. However, recent restoration work indicated that the piece was actually from much later. Catarina Schmidt Arcangeli notes in \textit{Venice and the Islamic World: 828-1797} that during the restoration process the year 1511 was found just left of the iwan, underneath the leg of the horse.
to evoke Islamic characteristics, but to create an actual setting.\footnote{Stefano Carboni, *Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797*, (New York, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 133.} This portrayal is an accurate representation of fourteenth century Damascus, with the large dome of the Great Umayyad Mosque looming in the background.\footnote{Ibid.} On the right side of the painting stands a traditional Mamluk minaret, which was completed in 1488.\footnote{Ibid.} Miradors, residences with open terraces, occupy in the background of the piece. A long stone wall decorated with the emblem of Sultan Qa’itbey lines the city, broken only by an iwan, jutting into the foreground with a pointed bi-colored horseshoe arch.\footnote{An iwan refers to a room or hall, usually opened on one end by means of a horseshoe vault.} These various architectural characteristics display the artist’s knowledge of structures in the area, and suggest that he painted this on site or acquired detailed written or visual resources.

The na’ib is seated on a vibrant red dais, flanked on either side by officials in red turban-like hats. The Venetians can be spotted all wearing black caps. The detail of the costuming, architecture and reception protocol suggests two things.

First, that this painting was in fact composed from life. This scene of detailing trade relationships bears a striking similarity to the Venetian trade protocol that was documented in the embassy in Cairo.\footnote{Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art 1300-1600*, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2002), 161.} Coincidentally, until the mosque in the background was recognized as Damascene, it was thought that this scene was an actual depiction of the Cairo embassy.
Second, the painting, so specific in narrative, was most likely commissioned by a Venetian that attended such an event. The early date that had been attributed to the painting and the accurate depictions of Mamluk costuming had early on suggested to scholars that this painting served as a visual encyclopedia for Mamluk style. The figures in the painting are almost identical to the figures that Bellini depicts in *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria*. However, the newly discovered date of 1511 means that this painting was created after other Oriental depictions. Previously, this piece was considered a certain influence on Bellini. This leaves the issue of Islamic influence in the Western world up to interpretation. The uncertainty of the origin and date of the painting reminds viewers of the ambiguity that revolves around the exploration of foreign lands and how they are depicted in art.

The painter best known for his depictions of the Oriental mode in the Italian Renaissance was Vittore Carpaccio. Carpaccio studied with and was remarkably close to the Bellini family. This created ties that proved to be fruitful in term of Eastern depictions within his art. He also utilized the *Peregrinations* woodcuts extensively. Carpaccio’s use of luxury objects within a different series has already been discussed in previous chapters, however, many of his works specific in their Levant detail, should continue to be touched upon here for closer analysis.
One such work, *of St. Stephen at Jerusalem* painted by Carpaccio (ca.1514) was one of five works painted by Carpaccio dedicated to the saint.\(^{175}\) The *Sermon*, set in Jerusalem, depicts St. Stephen, wearing a deacon’s tunic, preaching to a crowd made up of Easterners and Westerners.\(^{176}\) This partially destroyed podium from where he speaks indicates the victory of Christendom over paganism. The church of the Holy Sepulcher can be seen looming in the on the hill in the background of the piece.

Diversity is paramount in this piece; the crowd of listeners represented Western Europeans, Byzantine Greeks, Ottomans and Malmuk.\(^{177}\) The diversity portrayed in this piece is symbolic of the message of God transcending language and cultural barriers. Two men wearing pointed headgear represent the Byzantine Greeks. The men in turbans represent the Malmuk and the Ottomans, with the Malmuk wearing plain white turbans and the Ottomans utilizing the red *taj*.\(^{178}\) The women represented are all Muslim, with their tartars pulled back in a way so that their faces are revealed. Numerous Jerusalem landmarks can be seen within the piece including the Dome on the Rock, and the Holy Sepulcher.\(^{179}\) Like Bellini, Carpaccio was heavily influenced by Bernhard von

\(^{175}\) This piece was the second of five in the cycle. Out of these five only four remain today.

\(^{176}\) Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 298.


\(^{178}\) Ibid.

Breydenbach’s *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam*. Carpaccio would have used these drawings of the Holy City as a reference for this piece. An element that would not have been found in woodcuts of sixteenth century Jerusalem are traditional Roman columns and the classical triumphant arch. These additions symbolize the Roman Empire’s mark on the land and appeal to the Italians adoration of antiquity.

Carpaccio’s works provide more than visualizations of Levantine influence. They also depict the troubled relationship between the East and West. The visual rhetoric in Carpaccio’s *Life of Saint Ursula*, a nine painting cycle is more confrontational than the *Sermon*. In particular *The Martyrdom of the Pilgrims and Funeral of St. Ursula* (ca. 1490s) depicts a violent clash between East and West. The piece offers more than a look into the life of St. Ursula. It is a commentary on the geopolitical situation happening between the Ottomans and Italian city-states. The piece was commissioned by the Venetian Loredan family, who ran the Scuola di Sant’ Orsola, dedicated to Saint Ursula. The family had a very personal, and fierce relationship with the Ottomans. Antonio Loredan defended Shkodra in 1474 from Sultan Mehmet II and the Ottoman Empire.¹⁸⁰

To understand the intense rhetoric of the piece the viewer must be familiar with the legend of St. Ursula. St. Ursula, a Breton, lived during the fourth century. Ursula was the daughter of the King of Brittany who was to be married to a pagan

English, Armorican governor.\textsuperscript{181} She agreed to the marriage but only if she was first able to take a pilgrimage to Rome. She was accompanied on her voyage by numerous companions, including eleven thousand virgins, the Pope and a bishop of Ravenna. During the journey, a Hun army massacred the group near present-day Cologne.

Carpaccio’s painting of the Martyrdom depicts two moments in the life of Saint Ursula. The first is the violent moment that the pilgrimage was overtaken by the Hun army. The second is a moment of sorrow at the funeral of the departed saint. The right of the painting depicts pilgrims being slaughtered, massacred as they kneel in prayer. Saint Ursula is depicted kneeling and wearing a crown, patiently waiting for the arrow that will take her life. The Huns are traditionally depicted as fair skinned and blond.\textsuperscript{182} However, Carpaccio includes nontraditional Huns within this piece. Within the chaos of the scene a rider on horseback, blowing a horn, is clearly depicted wearing the attire of the court of Mehmet II. He is clothed in the traditional red 	extit{taj} and white turban distinguishing the raiders as Ottomans. He is not the only figure depicted in attire of the Levant. Another figure, fair skinned but wearing a similar turban is depicted near the treeline. In the foreground, a flag depicting Sultan Mehmet’s three crowns billows in the breeze. Thus, this painting depicts Ottomans as the Huns. It is probable that the Loredan family wished for this painting to depict the violent relationship

\textsuperscript{181} Armorica refers to the land between three rivers, the Gaul, Seine, and Loire, situated on the northwest coast of France.

between the Venetians and Ottomans by presenting them as pagans murdering
the sinless and righteous. The painting is a warning, noting how Islam and the
Ottomans are present day Huns, pagan and without mercy, wishing to overtake
and massacre Christianity.\textsuperscript{183}

As previously noted, Venice was entangled in a tumultuous relationship
with the East. The city was at constant threat of invasion and experiencing the
decline of their socio-economic power, due, in part to the Ottomans. Yet, the city
was also needing to maintain a trade relationship with the Ottomans to ensure
continued importation of luxury items from the East. Carpaccio managed to
depict this situation by equating the threat of the fifteenth century Ottomans to the
rampage of the fifth century Huns.\textsuperscript{184} As much as the art of the Renaissance
depicts the influential exchange between the East and the West, it also depicts
the downfall of their relationship.

Additional works that will be discussed in this chapter visually depict the
exchange of ideas that took place between the East and West. Perhaps the
greatest illustration of the Eastern and Western exchange of influences can be
seen in the \textit{Seated Scribe} commissioned by Sultan Mehmet II and attributed to
Gentile Bellini titled \textit{Seated Scribe} (1480). The piece, beautiful and richly
composed, leaves a fair amount of unanswered questions. An added Persian text
in the upper right corner reads “work of Ibn Muezzin who was a famous painter

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
among the Franks.” Historians have no doubt that this painting was created by a European, or a “Frank”, as the text suggests, and yet they struggle when it comes to attributing an artist to it. However, It is most commonly thought to be a work completed by Gentile Bellini.  

*Seated Scribe* depicts a richly dressed member of the Ottoman court bent over a writing pad with a tablet and stylus in hand. His clothing is very similar to that of the Ottoman tradition and Sultan Mehmet II’s court. The figure wears a navy kaftan, with gold stitching that creates a delicate floral design. Voluminous folds of white cloth wrap around a red taj—a headpiece attributed to the court of Sultan Mehmet II. The painting has been created in accordance with Ottoman and Persian techniques and principals. The painting was first sketched out using pen and ink. It was then filled with watercolor and gilded filling. This technique means that the piece lacks a significant amount of dimensionality, creating a flat, but rich color. This style of painting was not foreign to the Ottomans, but was unseen in Western art. This would suggest that during Bellini’s time in Constantinople he learned the principles of Islamic painting. Should Bellini have created this work it can be claimed that this is his greatest

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186 Jerry Brotton, *The Renaissance Bazaar*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). pg. 31. Art Historians Jerry Brotton and Lisa Jardine suggest in their book *Global Interests: Renaissance Art Between East and West* that the painting was completed by Costanzo da Ferrara, the Neapolitan artist that completed medals of Mehmet II.
188 Ibid.
moment of diplomatic exchange. Bellini grasps the concept of Eastern aesthetics with painstaking attention to detail. This creates a piece that threatens to transcend and combine Eastern and Western aesthetic principles. This instance of an Italian artist partaking stylistically in Islamic painting is unheard of throughout the Italian Renaissance. However, this paintings offers proof that just because it was rare to happen did not mean it was impossible. The exchange of influence was not one sided. Years after Bellini’s *Seated Scribe* the figure reappears, this time painted by a Persian artist. The sixteenth century painting is a clear copy of Bellini, featuring a scribe bent over his tablet in the process of creating a portrait. The existence of the painting is an example of the swapping of influence that has taken place. Both Eastern and Western artists have come together to create similar imagery, learning from one another’s aesthetic approach to create two paintings that transcend the boundaries of East and West.

Although this thesis focuses on Italian art Ottoman influence was, however, not isolated to the Italian Peninsula. Throughout the centuries the influence of the Levant trickled north into the Burgundian court and Flemish Netherlands. Depictions of textiles, pottery and goods from the Levant can be seen throughout the work of northern artists. Albrecht Dürer, who made two trips to Italy in 1495 and 1505, utilized Ottoman figures and costuming in many of his works.

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189 Ibid.
190 Art historians Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton suggest that the painting belongs to the Persian artist Bihzad. However, the provenance of the painting is still under significant scrutiny.
He was, as previously stated, influenced by Bellini’s sketches of Ottoman figures in traditional dress. He was not the only northern painter to utilize Levantine influences. Perhaps the greatest example of the conglomeration of global influences lies in Hans Holbein The Younger’s *The Ambassadors* (ca.1533). Commissioned by French ambassador Jean de Dinteville, the piece is flush with diplomatic and cultural imagery. The painting depicts two richly dressed men, de Dinteville and his close friend George de Selve, Bishop of Lavaur. They are leaning against a table that is scattered with luxury goods. The table features two shelves of objects from the European and Eastern world. On the lower shelf a large lute takes up most of the space. Two books are also placed upon the shelf. One of them is a book of hymns, the other a merchant’s arithmetic book. A terrestrial globe and a set of flutes also inhabit the space. The top shelf features a similar arrangement of objects. Scientific instruments such as a sundial, torquetum, quadrant and celestial globe are depicted. All of these items are placed on top of a Turkish carpet, which is draped over the upper shelf.

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194 Donald King, and David Sylvester, *The Eastern Carpet in the Western World: From the 15th to the 17th Century*, (London: The Arts Council of Britain, 1983), 14. The carpet featured in *The Ambassadors* is one of the first to be identified using the artist’s last name in order to communicate a repeated depiction of a style of carpeting.
The objects upon these two shelves represent the seven liberal arts that serve as a foundation for sixteenth century learning. Grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, music, astronomy and geometry are all represented within the painting. These liberal arts help set the groundwork for humanism. For the Italian Renaissance, humanism was a combination of looking back at classical antiquity and looking forward to scientific innovation. The Renaissance was born out of this way of thinking. Thus, in an essence *The Ambassadors* depicts the modern European identity. It is a conglomeration of luxury items and cultural treasures. The ambassadors themselves are the very definition of Renaissance men, surrounded by a variety of various educational and cultural tools. The globe in the piece alludes to the exploration that was taking place. It depicts a strikingly accurate representation of the world as it would have been known in the sixteenth century. “Europa” was depicted, as were the newly discovered Americas. The globe also depicts parts of Africa and Asia, as sixteenth century Europeans thought of them. This globe is a nod to the ever-expanding world, and it puts Europe at the center of it. The carpet draped over the table suggests an Oriental influence. Holbein depicted the carpet’s delicate geometric patterning, including knotted medallions and a bold border. It is representative of the traditional characteristics of carpets from the Ottoman Empire. This suggests that

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196 Ibid.
197 Ibid.
the Levant was not only a part of this cultural exchange, but also a contributor to the cultural and commercial foundation of the Renaissance.

Figures of the Orient in European art give a pivotal insight into Western thought. Artists such as Bellini, da Ferrara, and Carpaccio solidified their place in history using the people and the places of the Levant. Painting is a way to capture the visual aspects of history. It depicts more than a historical, or Biblical scene. It captures the very essence of thought on a particular topic. The pieces discussed in this chapter were selected for the role that they played as a depiction of Western thought. In the fifteenth and sixteenth century the world was at a point of expansion, and these pieces depict that development. Throughout the conflict and wars between the East and West commercial and diplomatic relationship still prevailed. These paintings then suggest that although there were political and cultural barriers during the time of the Renaissance, they were transcended by the greatest unifier, art.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

For Italy the Renaissance was a golden age. It was the age of exploration, rich with the discoveries of humanism, art and the profits of thriving commercial activity

The fifteenth and sixteenth century saw the steady decline of Venice as a political and economic power. For decades Venice was the “eye of all the West”, solidifying its power through commerce and military finesse.\footnote{198} However, by the mid-fifteenth century there were numerous circumstances that aided in its gradual decline. The political tension between Sultan Mehmet II and the West, especially the Sultan’s aptitude for declaring war on the Italian Peninsula, was a large factor. The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 created a power struggle with the Ottoman Empire that lasted nearly three hundred years.\footnote{199} Rather than possess the Mediterranean as a political and economic leader Venice was forced to defend itself against invasion. Furthermore, during this time


\footnote{199} Caroline Campbell, and Alan Chong, {	extit{Bellini and the East}}, (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum: Boston, 2005), 12-13.
Venice endured two crippling bouts of the plague, which cut its population by one third.\textsuperscript{200}

By the late fifteenth century another circumstance, the beginning of the age of exploration, occurred. The discovery of the “New World” shifted the focus of trade and exploration off of the Levant and into the Americas. Trade between the Levant and the West declined, with a bulk of the trade that was focused on the Mediterranean Sea finding a new target in the Atlantic. However, this did not decrease the fascination that Europeans had for the East. For Europeans the Middle East was a place of fantasy and exoticism. The art of the Italian Renaissance that featured imagery of the Levant set a foundation for future waves of Orientalist art that occurred in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Trade between the East and West resulted in more than an exchange of influences; it alleviated tension between the two entities. However, as previously noted, this did not mean there were no hostilities between Italy and the Levant. The geopolitical situation indicates that it was harder to fight an empire that possessed vital trade agreements. Thus, cultural exchange between the East and West transcended war to create mutual achievement. Although Italian fifteenth century depictions of the Islamic world contained orientalism and exoticism they were groundbreaking because for the first time Europeans were

given a realistic interpretation of the Levant. This interest in the East was not one
sided, with Eastern rulers wishing to utilize Renaissance artists in their courts,
and Islamic artisans experimenting with Italian textile production.

Modern historians agree that Michelet and Burckhardt’s idea of the
Renaissance is much like looking through a fogged lens. They were able to
acknowledge the triumphs of Italians during the Renaissance but failed to
recognize the bigger picture that shaped the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
They did not take into consideration the converging cultures, political tensions,
and diplomatic innovations that helped render and shape the landscape of the
Renaissance. Historian Randolph Starn offers an insightful judgment on the
development of the Italian Renaissance. He notes;

Rather than a period with definitive beginnings and endings and consistent
content in between, the Renaissance can be (and occasionally has been)
seen as a movement of practices and ideas to which specific groups and
identifiable persons variously responded in different times and places. It
would be in this sense a network of diverse, sometimes converging,
sometimes conflicting cultures, not a single, time-bound culture.  

What Starn is suggesting is that the Renaissance, often thought of as a
distinct period of time with a specific cast of characters, it is better described as a
fluid period with revolving and interchanging influences and cultures. In short, it is
akin to a global Renaissance. Without the influence of the Levant, Italy would not

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have excelled in artistic creation. It is Levantine influence that allowed Italy, and eventually the rest of Europe, to develop and flourish. In allowing trade and diplomacy with the Levant to flourish, Italian city-states were able to push themselves into their enlightenment. The Italian Renaissance was a collaboration, a conglomeration of Levantine influences that shaped the artistic landscape of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as well as the development of Europe right into the modern age.


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Figure 2. Andrea Mantegna, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1500. The Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Wikiart.

Figure 3. Antonio Vivarini, *Saint Louis de Toulouse* (detail), 1450. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Wikiart.
Figure 5. Andrea Mantegna, *Minerva Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue*, 1502. Musée du Louvre. Wikiart.

Figure 7. Andrea Previtali, *The Annunciation*. 1508. Chiesa di Santa Maria Annunziata di Meschio, Vittorio Veneto. Wikiart.
Figure 8. Lorenzo Lotto, *The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, 1542. Academia Carrara. Wikiart.
Figure 10. Giotto di Bondone, 33 Scenes from the Life of Christ: No. 17: Flagellation. 1304-1306. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua. Wikiart.

Figure 11. Costanzo de Ferrara. Medal of Sultan Mehmet II. 1481. Victoria & Albert Museum, London. V&A.
Figure 12. Albrecht Dürer, *Ottoman Rider*, 1495. Albertina, Vienna. Artsy Inc.

Figure 16. Unsigned, *The Reception of the Ambassadors in Damascus*. 1511, Musée du Louvre. Wikiart.


Figure 20. Unknown Persian Artist, *Seated Scribe or Portrait of a Painter.*