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A Silken Diplomacy:

Venetian Luxury Gifts for the Ottoman Empire in the Late Renaissance

Luca Molà

In 1585 the Venetian Republic received a tempting proposal from King Philip II of Spain and Portugal. The monarch offered Venice to purchase the Royal monopoly of the pepper trade carried to Europe through the Cape of Good Hope, which had proven difficult to manage by the Spanish crown. A long debate ensued among the Venetian ruling class, enticed by the possibility of plugging the city's commercial structure into a global network, but also wary of binding its fate too closely to the international politics of Philip II. After years of inconclusive talks, the decision of retaining the traditional Mediterranean trading structure prevailed in the state councils, and the pepper deal was never done.¹ The provision of Asian spices through the Portuguese routes under Spanish military protection would have meant the end of Venice's diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire, a naval power that posed a continuous threat to the eastern possessions of the Republic but at the same time was its main trading partner.

Indeed, in the second half of the sixteenth century the Ottoman markets absorbed great part of the flourishing Venetian production of silk and woolen cloth, the two most important products

¹ Innocenzo Cervelli, "Intorno alla decadenza di Venezia: un episodio di storia economica, ovvero un affare mancato," *Nuova Rivista Storica* 50 (1966), 596-42; Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 1: 558-60.

of the city and a source of employment for tens of thousands of people.² Large and valuable shipments of Venetian silk cloth are regularly recorded in the commercial correspondence between Venice and Istanbul in this period.³ They were sold on the open market or went to supply the insatiable appetite for luxury fabrics at the court of the Sultan.⁴ The Ottoman elites frequently placed orders directly in Venice through the intermediation of local, Jewish or Turkish merchants and agents. In 1589, for instance, 2,000 *braccia* (each silk *braccio* was equal to 0,63 metres) of the most valuable cloth of gold were bought for the needs of the Imperial Palace, something that was done at regular intervals.⁵ In the same year, the Great Admiral of the Ottoman fleet ordered 1,100 *braccia* of silk satins and damasks, in 22 different colours.⁶ In the late sixteenth century around 100,000 *braccia* (63 kilometres) of precious silk fabrics made in Venice were sent each year to the Syrian market.⁷ The manufacture of woollen cloth was even more tied

² Domenico Sella, *Commerci e industrie a Venezia nel secolo XVII* (Venice and Rome: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1961), 1-15; Id., "L'economia," in *Storia di Venezia dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, ed. Gaetano Cozzi and Paolo Prodi (Rome: Istituto Treccani, 1994), 666-9; Ugo Tucci, "Venezia nel Cinquecento: una città industriale?," in *Crisi e rinnovamenti nell'autunno del Rinascimento a Venezia*, ed. Vittore Branca and Carlo Ossola (Florence: Olschki Editore, 1991), 61-83; Luca Molà, *The Silk Industry of Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

³ See, for example, the commercial letters in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia (from now on ASV), Miscellanea Gregolin, buste 12 ter I and 12 ter II.

⁴ On the role of silk cloth at the Porte see: Nurhan Atasoy et al., *İpek. The Crescent and the Rose. Imperial Ottoman Silks and Velvets* (London: Azimuth, 2001), 21-35.

⁵ Maria Pia Pedani and Alessio Bombaci, eds., *I "Documenti Turchi" dell'Archivio di Stato di Venezia* (Rome: Ministero per i beni ambientali e culturali, 1994), n. 991; Atasoy, *İpek*, 185-6.

⁶ ASV, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli (from now on SDELC), filza 7, 9 June 1589.

⁷ Guglielmo Berchet, *Relazioni dei Consoli Veneti nella Siria* (Turin: Paravia, 1866), 79-80.

to demand from the Ottoman empire. According to a report from a Florentine spy compiled in 1592, around three quarters of the 27,000 bolts (each about 50-55 braccia long) produced in Venice were exported to different parts of the Ottoman realm. Istanbul consumed 3,000 bolts of the best quality; Egypt 4,000; and Bosnia and the Balkans 5,000. Syria absorbed an even larger share of this production, with 10-12,000 bolts imported each year, partly to be sold to local customers and partly to be traded by Armenian merchants to Persia and other Asian regions.⁸ The Venetian Consul based in Aleppo estimated that between 1589 and 1592 the silk and woollen cloth trade to Syria was worth one million ducats a year.⁹ The same Florentine spy mentioned earlier tells us that in 1592 considerable amounts of Murano glass and mirrors were also shipped to the three main centres of the Ottoman Empire: to Istanbul (for a total value of 10,000 ducats); to Alexandria and Egypt (5,000 ducats); and to Syria and Aleppo (20,000 ducats). These areas accounted for almost one third of the total export of glass from Venice.¹⁰

These three products – silk fabrics, woollen cloth and glass – were not just items of trade. They also constituted the greatest part of the gifts that the Venetian Republic sent to the Porte during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Seminal studies by Antonio Fabris, Deborah Howard, Julian Raby and Maria Pia Pedani have shown the relevance of gifts in the relations between Venice and the Ottoman Empire, describing the wide range of luxury items involved in

⁸ Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Miscellanea Medicea, 27 III, fol. 1070r-v, 1592; the document is briefly mentioned in Ruggiero Romano, “La storia economica. Dal secolo XIV al Settecento,” in *Storia d’Italia. Volume secondo. Dalla caduta dell’Impero romano al secolo XVIII* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), 1910.

⁹ Berchet, *Relazioni*, 77.

¹⁰ Gino Corti, “L’industria del vetro di Murano alla fine del secolo XVI in una relazione al Granduca di Toscana,” *Studi Veneziani* new series 13 (1971), 649-54.

this diplomatic exchange and highlighting some of its complexities.¹¹ Building on this solid ground, the analysis of new archival material and a closer study of some key episodes will allow us to obtain a more systematic view of Venetian gift-giving to the Sublime Porte, thus understanding in greater detail its evolution and its importance not only in the field of international politics but also for the economic and technical development of Venice in the late Renaissance.

Baili and Ambassadors

There were two main types of occasion for the delivery of large amounts of diplomatic presents to the Ottoman Court. First, and more commonly, with the arrival of a new Venetian permanent representative in Istanbul, who since Medieval times received the title of *Bailo*. The government selected one of the most experienced Venetian noblemen for this task, and his position was to be renewed every two to three years (even though at times, due to various circumstances, *Baili* remained in Istanbul for longer periods).¹² The second occasion took place when the Venetian

¹¹ Antonio Fabris, “Artisanat et culture: recherches sur la production Venitienne et le marché Ottoman au XVIe siècle,” *Arab Historical Review for Ottoman Studies* 3/4 (1991), 51-60; Deborah Howard, “Cultural Transfer Between Venice and the Ottomans in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in *Forging European Identities, 1400-1700*, ed. Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 138-77; Julian Raby, “The Serenissima and the Sublime Porte: Art in the Art of Diplomacy, 1453-1600,” in *Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797*, ed. Stefano Carboni (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 90-119; Maria Pia Pedani, *Venezia porta d'Oriente* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010), 100-9.

¹² On the Venetian Bailo see: Tommaso Bertelè, *Il palazzo degli ambasciatori di Costantinopoli a Venezia* (Bologna: Apollo, 1932); Eric R. Dursteler, “The Bailo in Constantinople: Crisis and Career in Venice’s Early Modern Diplomatic Corps,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 16, no. 2

government appointed a special envoy with the title of ambassador. This diplomat had only a limited and circumscribed mission, tied to a particular event, such as the signing of a peace treaty, the congratulations for a major Turkish military victory, the festivities for the circumcision of the Sultan's sons or the coming to power of a new ruler. After their appointment and before their departure from Venice, the Senate allotted the money for commissioning or buying the gifts that had to be formally presented to various members of the Ottoman court. The amount spent on each occasion was considerable, ranging from almost 14,000 to over 20,000 ducats.¹³ The financial and organizational effort involved can be easily gauged considering that the Republic sent 70 nobles as ambassadors or Baili to the Porte between 1500 and 1600.¹⁴

The most complete and detailed list of gifts to be found in the Venetian archives relates to the mission of Bailo Vincenzo Gradenigo in 1599. It was drawn up as usual by the Venetian state office in charge of diplomatic gifts, the *Ufficiali alle Rason Vecchie*, which punctiliously recorded the names of all suppliers and the expenditure involved, down to the cost of the paper and strings needed to wrap and tie the most fragile objects and their containers, and the drinks offered to

(2001), 1-30; Stefan Hanss, "Baili and Ambassadors," in *Il Palazzo di Venezia a Istanbul e i suoi antichi abitanti / İstanbul'daki Venedik Sarayı ve Eski Yaşayanları*, ed. Maria Pia Pedani (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2013), 35-52.

¹³ The cost of the gifts sent from Venice to Istanbul with Baili and Ambassadors was (in ducats) in 1573: 15,825 ducats; 1575: 18,455; 1582: 20,758; 1590: 13,904; 1591: 14,180; 1599: 16,270; and 1602: 17,587. Biblioteca del Museo Civico Correr di Venezia: Mss. Donà dalle Rose 148, fols. 138r-139r, 19 July 1573, 28 May 1575 and 29 March 1582; Mss. P.D. 943, fasc. 6, 9 April 1590. ASV, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli: reg. 8, fol. 81v, 27 November 1591; filza 9, 6 July 1599; filza 10, 22 April, 7 June and 31 August 1602; filza 12, 5 November 1611.

¹⁴ Maria Pia Pedani, "Elenco degli inviati diplomatici veneziani presso i sovrani ottomani," *Electronic Journal of Oriental Studies* 5, no. 4 (2002), 1-54.

porters. Silks abounded with almost 3.5 kilometres of various kinds of fabrics, the most precious of which was the regal cloth of gold (*soprarižo d'oro regal*) for the Ottoman Sultan that at 40 ducats per braccio cost 550 ducats alone. Woolen cloth followed suit, with 22 bolts shipped at a value on average of 200-220 ducats each. Almost 1,200 pieces of Murano glass came in a surprising variety of names, shapes, sizes, colours and decorations. There were large vases, smaller vases for flowers with different numbers of sprouts (probably for holding tulips), basins, home or mosque lamps (*ferali* and *cesendelli*), drinking vessels with lids (*mastrapani*), drinking glasses (*ziati*), plates (*tapsi*), bottles and cruets (*acanini* and *zame*), and the many *bembi*, *ocche*, *cattelani* and *soltanie* that still defy historians' understanding.¹⁵ Several of them had a form that was defined as 'cut' (*tagiadi*), 'twisted' (*torti*), 'pine-like' (*a pigne*) or 'strawberry-like' (*a fragole*). Most of these pieces were gilded, catering probably to a specific Turkish taste for glitter that was testified also in the Ottoman preference for textiles interwoven with precious metals and the frequent embellishment of porcelain and jade with gold. Hundreds of spectacles made of crystal glass were also part of the list of the Bailo's gifts to the Porte, together with those of rock crystal and mirrors.¹⁶

Fifteen densely written pages record a myriad other luxury objects or consumables: ivory boxes, sand and mechanical clocks, chairs and musical instruments, gloves, perfumes and perfumed

¹⁵ For the identification of some of these glasses see: Astone Gasparetto, "Vetri veneziani da un naufragio in Dalmazia e da alcuni documenti dell'ultimo Cinquecento," *Studi Veneziani* 17/18 (1975-76), 411-46.

¹⁶ The Ottoman taste was partly at odds with the contemporary choices of consumers in China. As a Florentine merchant visiting the market of Canton in 1599 reported, the Chinese appreciated Venetian "glasses, particularly those in the shape of vases and plates, with white canes inside, and also of other types, so long as they were not gilded, which they did not esteem in the least; and similarly spectacles of all kinds, and particularly those with coloured lenses". See Francesco Carletti, *Ragionamenti del mio viaggio intorno al mondo* (Milan: Mursia, 1987), 138.

compositions, animals, candles, sugar, Parmesan cheese (particularly appreciated in Istanbul), and a variety of sweet and spicy preserves as well as marzipan fruits in the shape of apples, pears, figs, cherries, apricots, peaches, plums, carobs and broad beans (Table 2.1). Many of these luxury goods were the characteristic gifts that Venice offered to the members of the Ottoman Court on many occasions.

INSERT HERE TABLE 2.1

They were the best among the Venetian products, and therefore an advertisement for the city's industrial and artisanal skills. A small army of highly specialized craftsmen was mobilized for their production and preparation every time a Bailo or an ambassador left Venice. There must have been a clear understanding among these artisans of the political importance and prestige resulting from their work, and perhaps some of them became local celebrities in connection with their supplying the Ottoman Court. Finally, the packaging and presentation of all these luxuries was of the highest importance: the list mentions hundreds of large and small golden boxes, golden chests, copper vessels and other miscellaneous containers in which food, perfumed oils and smaller items were stored. The most valuable cloths were carefully arranged into costly envelopes made of cheaper fabrics, and even the plain boxes containing the largest artefacts had a lion of St. Mark drawn on them by a painter.

Other lists of Baili's gifts have survived for 1590 and 1611, including a similar range of artefacts.¹⁷ The presents for the ambassadors' missions followed the same pattern, but in this case the Republic - starting in 1573 - used to add a set of elaborate silver objects for the table composed

¹⁷ Biblioteca del Museo Civico Correr di Venezia (from now on BMCCV), Mss. P.D. 943, fasc. 6, 9 April 1590; ASV, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli (from now on DELC), filza 12, 5 November 1611.

of cups, bowls, flasks, basins, buckets, candlesticks and saltcellars.¹⁸ On particular occasions the ambassadorial gift was truly unique and extraordinary. In 1531, for the circumcision of the sons of Suleyman I and acceding to a direct and insistent request from Ibrahim Pasha, Pietro Zen presented the Sultan with one of the three pieces of the unicorn that were kept in the treasury of the Church of St. Mark.¹⁹ Likewise, in 1573, when Andrea Badoer reached Istanbul to seal the peace agreements after the War of Cyprus, the Senate decided to send along 25 Turkish slaves all dressed in Venetian woolen cloth.²⁰

The Gift-Giving System: Ordinary and Extraordinary Presents

Cloths of gold, velvets, satins, damasks and several other types of silk fabrics constituted around two thirds of the total value of the Baili's and ambassadors' gifts. The precious cloth was provided by a limited number of top mercers and merchant-entrepreneurs of Venice. The leading suppliers in the late sixteenth century were Bartolomeo Bontempelli dal Calice and Agostino dal Ponte, who ran the best silk shops in the city - the first one located in the Mercerie, the main shopping street in Europe, the second on the Rialto bridge – and were renowned for their trading

¹⁸ BMCCV, Mss. Donà dalle Rose 23, fols. 76r-80v, 390r; BMCCV, Mss. Donà dalle Rose 249, fasc. 3; SDELC, reg. 4, fol. 43r, 22 May 1573; SDELC, reg. 6, fol. 71r, 16 December 1581; SDELC, reg. 9, fol. 25r, 30 March 1595.

¹⁹ Carla Coco and Flora Manzonetto, *Baili veneziani alla Sublime Porta. Storia e caratteristiche dell'ambasciata veneta a Costantinopoli* (Venice: Stamperia di Venezia, 1985), 87-8; Giovanni Curatola, "Marin Sanudo, Venezia, i doni diplomatici e le merci orientali islamiche," in *Islamic Artefacts in the Mediterranean World. Trade, Gift Exchange and Artistic Transfer*, ed. Catarina Schmidt Arcangeli and Gerhard Wolf (Venice: Marsilio, 2010), 176.

²⁰ SDELC, reg. 4, fol. 43r, 22 May 1573; fol. 44r-v, 9 June 1573.

connections with Istanbul.²¹ The two of them, for instance, gave the government 137 of the 260 robes (*veste*) handed over to Ambassador Leonardo Donà in 1595, and a large part of the 256 robes sent in 1599.²²

Veste, however, were not real tailored garments, but a ghost luxury unit of measure, like the ducat or lira of account that were commonly used instead of minted coins for easing transactions and calculations. Starting in the 1540s, in fact, the Venetian Republic developed a diplomatic gift system for the Ottoman Empire that was based principally on the presentation of fixed measures of silk, the *veste*, each presumably equal to the amount of fabric needed to make a single robe (Figure 2.1). During the sixteenth century this unit ranged between 13 and 14 braccia of cloth, but a law of the Senate issued in 1605 limited its length to 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ braccia, so as to reduce the costs of official gifts to the Porte.²³ By contrast, Venetian diplomats in Istanbul received real robes of honour (*hi'llat*) when they had the first meeting with the Sultan and when they presented their successors before leaving the city, plus occasionally as a special token of respect from eminent members of the court. The Venetian Republic, too, had adopted the Asian tradition of giving ceremonial silk robes to the Ottoman envoys since the fifteenth century. Usually Turkish ambassadors were entitled to two or three valuable garments on their departure, while other robes, some of them made of wool, were granted to members of their retinue.²⁴

²¹ Michela Sermidi, ed., *Le collezioni Gonzaga. Il carteggio tra Venezia e Mantova (1588-1612)* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2003), nn. 394 and 828. On Bontempelli see also Gigi Corazzol, “Varietà notarile: scorci di vita economica e sociale,” in *Storia di Venezia dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, 775-91.

²² BMCCV, Mss. Donà dalle Rose 148, fol. 76r ff., and reference in note 14 above.

²³ SDELC, filza 10, 16 February 1605.

²⁴ Maria Pia Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore. Inviati Ottomani a Venezia dalla caduta di Costantinopoli alla guerra di Candia* (Venice: Deputazione Editrice, 1994), 75, and 90-1.

INSERT HERE FIGURE 2.1

Veste were thus at the heart of a complex and continuously evolving strategy of gift-giving to the Porte. Hundreds, and at times thousands, of *veste* were handed out at different occasions each year, and following a rooted Ottoman tradition of redistribution they circulated among Turkish elites in the form of presents.²⁵ They constituted the bulk of the so-called ‘ordinary gifts’ (*presenti* or *donativi ordinari*), which followed a precise protocol guiding the actions of the Republic’s diplomats. A handbook that Bailo Giovanni Moro drew up in the late 1580s for the needs of his mission, based on the records left by his predecessors over the decades and his own experience, provides detailed information on what different members of the Ottoman court expected to receive from the Venetian resident diplomats.²⁶ First of all, the handbook lists how the Bailo’s presents were distributed upon his arrival to specific individuals according to their rank. For instance, in addition to the regal cloth of gold, the Sultan was given a *veste* with silver thread, another of velvet with the pile cut at different heights (*velluto altobasso*), two of satin, and lengths of scarlet and purple woolen cloth; the Grand Vizier had a *veste* of crimson and gold velvet, two of plain velvet, four of satin and damask, and two of woolen cloth; the Great Admiral of the Turkish fleet received two *veste* of velvet, six of satin and damask, and two of woolen cloth; and so on for their lieutenants and other court members and officers who usually received only a single *veste* or some cash.

²⁵ On the Ottoman Court’s tradition of gifts see: Tim Stanley, “Ottoman Gift Exchange: Royal Give and Take,” in *Gifts for the Sultan. The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, ed. Linda Komaroff (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 149-66.

²⁶ BMCCV, Mss. Donà dalle Rose 23, fols. 430r-442r; copy made by the ambassador Leonardo Donà for his mission in 1595.

Bailo Giovanni Moro recorded also a number of specific cases during a Bailo's period of office that would require additional gifts. The wedding of a Grand Vizier's daughter required five veste (of velvet, damask, satin, tabby and brocatel), a large mirror and a writing desk, both inlaid with mother-of-pearl, whereas 24 veste (fourteen of silk and ten of wool) were given if one of the Viziers married a daughter of the Sultan. More important, any new appointment at court taking place during the period in which the Bailo was in Istanbul required its own gift, frequently of the same nature as the one given at the beginning of his term to the equivalent official. This tradition created major problems in the last decades of the sixteenth century, when the growing instability of the Ottoman government meant a constant replacement of the Grand Viziers, reaching a record four new appointments in 1595. Frequently the men that had been removed just a few years or even months earlier came back to power after a short period of time. In such a fluid political situation, the Venetian government decided to widen its ordinary gifting policy to include also the dismissed Grand Viziers (*bassà dismissi*), so as not to alienate their favour if they got back to their former position. In the meantime, the total number of Viziers grew from the usual four to six and then eight, while also several other key positions in the Empire that were included in the roll of ordinary gifts changed hands at a higher rate of speed.²⁷

The Great Admiral deserved special attention, given his capacity to influence the expansionist policies of the Sultans against the dominions of Venice in the Levant. The Bailo offered him nine veste and a form of Parmesan cheese when he left Istanbul with the fleet in the spring, seven veste when he was back and another one every time he ordered the construction of a new galley

²⁷ See the Baili's reports of the 1580s and 1590s in Eugenio Alberi, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, series 3, vol. 2 (Florence: Tipografia all'Insegna di Clio, 1844) and vol. 3 (Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 1855). For a clear statement on the quick rotation of Viziers, and the need to give them silk *veste* instead of cash, see DELC, filza 9, 30 December 1597.

in Constantinople's Arsenal.²⁸ The Admiral, however, received gifts not just from Venice, as ordinary presents were given to him on a yearly basis by the governors of Corfu and Zante (Zakhintos), two key islands of Venice's maritime state in the Ionian Sea, when the Turkish navy cruised in the Eastern Mediterranean.²⁹ On another front, the Venetian officials presiding over the cities of Zara (Zadar), Spalato (Split), Traù (Trogir), Sebenico (Sibenik) and Cattaro (Kotor) on the Adriatic coast maintained a similar obliging attitude towards the provincial and regional Ottoman governors (*sanjacks* and *beylerbeys*) of the areas bordering the possessions of the Republic in the Balkans.³⁰

Indeed, the gifts that Venice offered to Ottoman officials outside Istanbul formed a parallel and quite complex system of diplomatic exchange in its own right, which was almost unidirectional. It too involved a large amount of *veste* and other items, frequently in the shape of glass and sweets, called respectively 'kindnesses' (*gentilezze*) and 'refreshments' (*rifrescamenti*). Therefore the whole organization of timed ordinary presents for the Ottomans, both at the Porte and in the eastern

²⁸ BMCCV, Mss. Donà dalle Rose 23, fols. 433v-434v.

²⁹ DELC, reg. 4, fols. 81v-82v, 20 April 1574; DELC, filza 7, 28 March 1589 (with copy of the gift of Zante in 1586); DELC, filza 9, 27 February 1598; DELC, filza 10, 3 July 1601 (with copies of the gifts of Zante in 1596, 1598 and 1600); DELC, filza 11, 26 June 1608 (with copies of the gifts of Corfu in 1592, 1601 and 1603).

³⁰ DELC, reg. 2, fols. 71v-72v, 24 September 1562 (Zara, Sebenico, Traù and Spalato); DELC, reg. 4, fol. 89r-v, 24 August 1574 (Cattaro); DELC, filza 4, 3 March 1578 (Zara, Sebenico, Traù and Spalato, also with list of gifts in 1573); DELC, filza 6, 13 July 1587 (Zara); DELC, filza 7, 3 November 1590 (Sebenico and Zara); DELC, reg. 8, fol. 62r, 1 June 1591 (Traù); DELC, filza 10, 7 June 1602 and 5 June 1604 (Cattaro); DELC, filza 11, 5 March 1608 (Traù); DELC, filza 12, 19 May 1612 (Traù and Sebenico).

territories of Venice, needed a steady supply of silks, woollens and other luxury goods that Baili and Venetian governors carefully kept at hand.³¹

Fabrics and a panoply of different luxury items were perhaps even more important for the constant though unpredictable distribution of ‘extraordinary gifts’ (*presenti straordinari*). These were necessary in critical moments in order to oil the wheels of the Ottoman government or appease tense situations. Obtaining commercial concessions, liberating Christian slaves, settling territorial disputes, solving military confrontations or legal cases between Venetians and Turkish subjects could frequently be eased through the use of presents. The initiative would be taken directly by the Bailo on the spot or after consulting the home government and receiving its approval, by using his stock, buying the items from Venetian merchants in Istanbul or waiting for the goods to be shipped from Venice. More commonly, it originated from the explicit demands of the Ottoman court and governors. Glass products, for instance, were among the most prized gifts. Single orders of hundreds of lamps and thousands of round and square window panes for a new mosque, for the Topkapi Palace or other public buildings in the capital were not uncommon, as were requests for crystal glasses for private consumption (Table 2.3). For the Senate it was of crucial importance that a clear distinction be made between ordinary and extraordinary gifts, so that the latter would not become a tradition (*kanun*, or *canon* in Venetian) and thus enter into the previous category as things to be expected at regular intervals.³² Equally important was the timely delivery of presents. The Sultana was very pleased when in 1584 the Venetian government, unable to find any ships that were leaving for Turkey, hurried the consignment of thirteen silk

³¹ For the supply of Venetian governors see, for instance: DELC, reg. 8, fol. 159v, 22 January 1594; DELC, filza 12, 19 May 1612; Hanss, “Baili,” 48-51.

³² For some examples see DELC, reg. 8, fol. 68r-v, 10 August 1591; fol. 72v, 2 September 1591; fols. 73v-74r, 15 September 1591; fol. 111r-v, 14 October 1592.

veste to her by sending men who carried them on their shoulders all the way to Istanbul.³³ Incidentally this caused great envy on the part of the Grand Vizier, who just a month later asked for a richly adorned chair and wanted it to be delivered as soon as possible overland, saying he knew it could well be done if the Bailo wanted.³⁴ When important matters were at stake, the Republic's representative would postpone discussing them with the Grand Vizier until a valuable gift - that had often been asked and promised - was ready available.

The high expenditure on extraordinary gifts and the promptness and zeal required to respond to every whim of the Ottoman elites were the source of numerous complaints and sometimes a sense of frustration among the Venetian ruling class. In 1568 the Senate, annoyed at the persistent requests of glass window panes coming from the Porte, proposed to let the Turks know how much these goods cost, thus making them aware of the value of Venetian gifts.³⁵ A Bailo could caustically remark that if he had to satisfy all the people who, "like bees around honey", asked for presents, then the embassy would be busier than a shop on the Rialto bridge.³⁶ By the late sixteenth century the issue of extraordinary gifts, their handling and the necessity to moderate them, or at least place greater attention to their distribution, recurs regularly in the Baili's dispatches and becomes almost a *topos* in their final reports to the Senate when they returned to Venice. Bailo Lorenzo Bernardo, writing in 1592, judged these gifts degrading and thought they should be used like wine, which doctors prescribe on two occasions: in people's sanity and in their extreme infirmity; in the first case a moderate amount of wine keeps the body

³³ ASV, Senato, Dispacci Costantinopoli (from now on DISPC), filza 20, fol. 10r, 4 September 1584.

³⁴ DISPC, filza 20, fols. 85r-86r, 2 October 1584.

³⁵ DELC, reg. 3, fol. 119v, 6 May 1568.

³⁶ Alberi, *Relazioni*, 2: 407. For similar remarks see also Maria Pia Pedani, "Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy," *Turcica* 32 (2000), 12.

always in good shape, in the second it could remedy a desperate situation and revive a dying patient. Likewise, small presents given with measure in normal and peaceful circumstances smoothed the relations with the Turks; if they were used in extraordinary occasions, as in the threat of war, but in large amounts, they could avert disaster. Bailo Cristoforo Valier, reporting in 1616, was of a different opinion. He understood better interpersonal relationships in the Ottoman Empire, based as they were mainly on donations, a practice commonly and universally approved. Even fathers and sons, or brothers, would deal with each other through gifts, “as the true sign of honour and the true fruit of love”. For Valier gift giving was like a spiral starting at the bottom with an individual offering to his superior, and ascending through the social scale all the way to the Sultan, who then donated back to all. To show the power of presents in that society, he translated in Venetian a Turkish proverb saying that “a hand that brings [gifts] to the Porte and gives [them] is never cut” (*man che porta alla Porta e che dà, mai non vien taglià*).³⁷ With similar perceptiveness, other Baili considered that if Ottoman requests needed to be quickly satisfied, the timely delivery of gifts showed interest and care for the person making the request, who in due time would reciprocate the donor with favours.

Technical Challenges and the Ottoman Taste for Novelties

The frequent demands of the Ottoman court for silk fabrics of unusual or altogether new patterns, measures or colours posed serious technical challenges to the Venetian government and craftsmen. In 1543, for instance, the Bailo sent to Venice samples of a pure silk fabric and of cloth of gold that had been requested for the Sultan’s Treasury, together with a detailed list of the quantities that had to be produced. After careful investigation, the Senators replied that while the

³⁷ Alberi, *Relazioni*, 2: 404-10; Nicolò Barozzi and Guglielmo Berchet, eds., *Le relazioni degli stati europei lette al Senato dagli ambasciatori veneziani nel secolo decimosettimo. Serie V. Turchia* (Venice: Pietro Naratovich, 1866), 305-7; Coco-Manzonetto, *Baili*, 87, and 89-90; Pedani, *Venezia*, 108-9.

silk-only fabrics could be made without delay and in ever greater numbers than required, those with gold thread were too narrow for the standards of the city's artisans and there were no looms or other implements that could be adapted to the task. The only possibility of accommodating Suleyman's requests was to weave the cloth according to the Venetian measures, even though – probably because of the need to adapt the design – it would take a long time.³⁸ Again, in June 1562, during a meeting at the Divan, the Great Vizier Alì Pasha ordered that a sample of cloth of gold be brought from the Sultan's treasury and gave it to the Venetian dragoman, asking the government of Venice to make over 200 braccia of fabrics of the same quality and design for the Sultan. The reason for such a request derived in part from the huge amount of robes that had been recently sent to the Persian Shah as gifts. Even more important, Suleyman I had distributed many other silk fabrics for the wedding of the three daughters of Prince Selim, who had arrived in Istanbul in March in order to be married respectively with the Head of the Jannissaries, the Great Admiral and Alì Pasha himself. These two events had left the imperial treasury almost empty of silk robes, which could not be found even among the European merchants or in the Grand Bazaar.³⁹ Similarly complex was the request in 1584 by the Chief Chamberlain (*Capi Ağâ*) of the Sultan for 100 braccia of satin of a peach-like colour (*persegbin*). He wanted them to be made in Venice and not bought elsewhere. The Venetian government had to commission them for the purpose since the shade was uncommon in the city.⁴⁰ Indeed, in the past that colour had been usually associated with fabrics coming from the East, such as the Levantine bolt of *ermisino*

³⁸ ASV, Senato Secreta, reg. 63, fol. 25r, 16 March 1543.

³⁹ DISPC, filza 3C, fol. 194r-v, 16 June 1562. For the arrival of Selim's daughters, the order of 100.000 ducats in gems and jewellery, and the distribution of money and vests for this reason see *ibid.*, fols. 148r-149v, 22 March 1562.

⁴⁰ DISPC, filza 18, fol. 426r-v, 24 January 1584; DISPC, filza 19, fol. 16r, 6 March 1584; DELC, reg. 6, fol. 165v, 14 April 1584.

persegin deposited in the shop of a silk merchant at the Rialto in the 1550s.⁴¹ After 1584, however, the peach-like colour appeared frequently among the cloth sent as a present to the Ottoman Court.⁴²

An important example of long and complex cross-cultural and cross-linguistic textile productions is represented by two commissions that Grand Vizier Rustem Pasha placed to the Bailo Antonio Erizzo. First, in October 1555, he asked for a set of gold and silk fabrics that had to furnish a chamber on the occasion of his daughter's marriage. After the initial arrangements were discussed between the Venetian representative and an agent of Rustem Pasha, the Vizier's master tailor was dispatched to the Bailo's residence in order to explain the details of the order through the means of some drawings containing annotations and the measures of the fabrics, papers that were then forwarded to Venice. In February 1556, Erizzo excused himself with the Vizier for the delay in fulfilling his requests, explaining that such fabrics were not commonly produced in Venice and that only few artisans were able to make them. Indeed, the first master who had been entrusted with the task had totally spoiled the cloth, so that the government had been forced to find a more skilled weaver. Besides, Venetians faced serious problems regarding the interpretation of the instructions. As the Senate wrote to Erizzo in March, a recent consultation with a group of master weavers had raised a series of questions on the three drawings sent from Istanbul. The

⁴¹ ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Miscellanea Notai Diversi, busta 39, n. 43, inventory of the shop of the late Pietro Verde, 18 November 1556.

⁴² It is included, for instance, in the Great Admiral's list of satins ordered in 1589, together with 21 other colours: "cremexin, paonazo, lagiverdi, turchino, latado, biancho, sguardo, persegin, color d'argento, color de chaveli, arzentin fratescho, col d'anera, rosasecha, incarnado, zallo, paiescho, verde, festechin, canelado, rovan, agua de mar, naranzato" (see note 6 above). For another example see BMCCV, Mss. Donà dalle Rose 236, Dispacci del Bailo Venier, fol. 13v, 15 October 1594.

first inscribed image represented a cloth with a gold-thread design that, according to the artisans, should be reversed, while it was not clear if the colour of the fabric beneath should be black or the deep green that was usually called ‘duck neck’ (*collo d’anera*). The second one did not specify if it was intended to be a velvet or a satin, and regarding the third, which appeared smaller and narrower, there were doubts about its width. In May the Bailo, after a second consultation with the Vizier’s master tailor, replied clarifying in detail all points. It took another two years, though, to finish all the pieces, which the special ambassador Marino Cavalli carried with him to the Ottoman capital and presented to a delighted Grand Vizier only in August 1558.⁴³

Rustem Pasha, however, was certainly not a man who could be so easily satisfied: a year later, in 1556, he asked for silk cloth for making cushions (*minderi*) in velvet and gold of a width of seven quarte. This was once again a technical challenge as the standard measure adopted by Venetian producers and regulated by the guild was of just four quarte (or a braccio). At first the Bailo and the government tried to take time, alleging a lack of expertise and the plague epidemic that afflicted the city. In the end, due to the insistence of the Grand Vizier, the Senators decided to send a more articulated explanation in February 1557. They reported to have conducted an investigation among Venetian artisans who, in a written statement, remarked not just the difficulty but the technical impossibility of weaving such a large cloth in velvet and gold. They were ready to make the fabric with the usual width of four quarte, but in that case the design submitted – certainly through another drawing – would need to be altered so much that the patterns would be unrecognizable. What the masters proposed as a solution, then, was to weave a seven braccia cloth in satin and gold, which preserved the harmony of the pattern and presented less of a technical challenge. In March the artisan’s report reached the new Bailo, Antonio

⁴³ DISPC, filza 1A, fol. 181v, 18 October 1555; fol. 222 r-v, 7 February 1556; fol. 280v, 2 May 1556; DELC, reg. 1, fol. 17v, 7 March 1556; fol. 18v, 12 March 1556; fol. 77v, 2 May 1558; fol. 98v, 29 September 1558.

Barbarigo, in Edirne, where he had followed the Ottoman court. During a meeting with the Grand Vizier, after discussing international politics, Barbarigo presented the report which had been translated into Turkish. Rustem insisted that he wanted the fabrics made exactly as he had instructed, stating that they could be produced in Turkey. Then, struck with a new idea elicited by what he had just read, he proposed that the Venetian government should commission for him two cloth with his desired measures, one of velvet and gold and another of satin and gold, so that he could see how they turned out.⁴⁴

It is easy to detect an element of challenge in the words of the Grand Vizier, a willingness to push Venetian productive skills to their limit and test their capacity to satisfy his wishes. Several other members of the Ottoman court seem to have vied with each other for obtaining ever changing types of cloth, producing frequently a cautious and at times worried reply from Venice. Such requests included, for instance, a chequered damask, “which is a new work”, in 1559; covers with a new design of difficult production in 1560; crimson and purple satin of unusual measures, in 1563; saddle-cloth of velvet with gold and silver thread, never made before in Venice, in 1578; complex fabrics for cushions and cloth of gold in 1583; *veste* of an unseen type, requiring a careful search for suitable weavers in 1593; or challenging printed satin and velvet in 1595.⁴⁵ Some of these fabrics were meant to copy Turkish designs, based either on the cloth produced in the main textile centre of Bursa or in the court workshop that Grand Vizier Rustem Pasha created in

⁴⁴ DISPC, filza 1A, fol. 228 r-v, 7 February 1556; fol. 358r, 30 November 1556; DELC, reg. 1, fols. 39v-40v, 6 February 1557; DISPC, filza 1A, fol. 397v, 30 March 1557.

⁴⁵ DELC, reg. 1, fol. 121v, 8 July 1559; DELC, reg. 2, fol. 22r, 20 June 1560; fol. 103r-v, 14 December 1563; DISPC, filza 12, fols. 303v-304r, 2 November 1578; DISPC, filza 18, fols. 235r-237r, 29 November 1583; DELC, reg. 8, fols. 121v-122r, 6 February 1593; DELC, reg. 9, fol. 44v, 22 September 1595.

Istanbul in the 1540s and 1550s and that employed over a hundred weavers.⁴⁶ It is also possible that the development of this state manufacture involved experimentations in new patterns and weaves that could be performed through the efforts of the Venetian artisans. Moreover, the Ottoman commercial and diplomatic exchanges with other empires involved the arrival in the capital of a wide range of Asian silk textiles, samples of which might have been sent to Venice for their reproduction. For sure, by the end of the sixteenth century Venetian weavers had acquired a good competence in producing silk fabrics that imitated traditional Ottoman patterns. The veste in the Bailo's 1599 list of ordinary gifts include milky velvet with pyramids on a silver background (*veludo latado a piramide fondi d'arżento*); crimson velvet with coquilles St. Jacques (*veludo cremesin a cape sante fondi d'arżento*); crimson damask with little flames and balls (*damasco cremesin a fiamole e bale*) or with leeches (*damasco cremesin a sansuge*); white and silver *canevaža* with moons and stars (*canevaža bianca e arżento a lune e stele*); or deep pink on a light blue and silver background velvet with tulips and moons (*veludo sguardo con fondi turchin e d'arżento a tulipanti e lune*). This documentary evidence complements recent findings by textile experts regarding the presence of late sixteenth- / early seventeenth-century fabrics made in Venice with Turkish designs among the kaftans of the Topkapi Palace's collections.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Murat Çizakça, "A Short History of the Bursa Silk Industry (1500-1900)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 23 (1980), 145-52; Gülru Necipoğlu, "A Kânûn for the State, a Canon for the Arts: Conceptualizing the Classical Synthesis of Ottoman Art and Architecture," in *Soliman le Magnifique et son temps / Süleymân the Magnificent and His Time*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: La Documentacion Française, 1992), 198-201; Atasoy, *İpek*, 152-75.

⁴⁷ Atasoy, *İpek*, 187-90; Sandra Sarjono, "Ottoman or Italian Velvets? A Technical Investigation," in *Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797*, ed. Stefano Carboni, 192-9.

Gifts of glassware to the Ottomans were the cause of further technical challenges for Venetian producers. Usually, orders of lamps, crystal glass and other items included drawings and descriptions with the desired shapes and measures (Figures 2.2 and 2.3).⁴⁸

INSERT HERE FIGURES 2.2 AND 2.3

Sometimes the objects commissioned were so oversized that the craftsmen of Murano could make them only with great difficulty, as in the case of the 400 pieces ordered in 1563.⁴⁹ In other instances old techniques, almost forgotten, had to be revived. In 1590 the Sultana Safiye wanted 75 glass vases imitating chalcedony stone, a type of artefact invented in Venice around 1460 and of great popularity until the early decades of the sixteenth century, but totally out of fashion by the end of the century. The Senate had trouble in finding the only master in the city still able to produce chalcedony glass, someone who was not even particularly skilled at that: he managed to complete just ten vases with great effort, breaking many others in the process.⁵⁰ An even more complex request came in 1583, when the wife of Grand Vizier Mehmed Sokollu asked to receive from Venice the smallest gold chains possible and the biggest mirror ever made, with a height of two braccia and a width of one braccio (136x68cm). At first, the Sultana had contacted Guglielmo Helman, a rich international merchant of Flemish origins based in Venice, who was

⁴⁸ Fabris, “Artisanat,” 52; Howard, “Cultural Transfer,” 157-61; “Pedani, *Venezia*, 103-4; Ayşe Aldemir Kilercik, “I vetri veneziani nei territori ottomani,” in *Venezia e Istanbul in epoca ottomana / Osmanlı Döneminde Venedik ve İstanbul* (Milan: Electa, 2009), 182-91; Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan. Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), *ad vocem* ‘glass’.

⁴⁹ DELC, reg. 2, fol. 103r-v, 14 December 1563.

⁵⁰ DELC, reg. 8, fol. 35r, 23 September 1590; fol. 49r-v, 19 January 1591.

unable to find an object of the size required.⁵¹ Then the Republic took the matter directly in its hands, opening a public competition for the making of an even larger mirror of two by one-and-a-half braccia (136x102cm). Since nothing of the kind had been produced before in crystal glass, an artisan came forward proposing to make the mirror in polished steel and was officially entrusted with the task; once the mirror was completed, however, he asked the exorbitant sum of 3,000 ducats, which the Senate refused to pay. At that point another craftsman, Piero Ballarin - who ran one of the most important furnaces in Murano and was the official purveyor of luxury glass for the gifts sent by the Venetian state to the Ottoman empire - offered to “put all his energies and skills in experimenting how to make such a mirror in crystal”. Asking just financial help to cover the high costs of the enterprise, in 1585 the Senate granted him a loan of 100 ducats to be deducted from the final compensation if he succeeded.⁵² His attempt, however, must have failed as in 1591 two other glass-makers claimed to have succeeded in making such a big mirror and petitioned the state to obtain a patent for the monopoly on its production for thirty years (Table 2.2).⁵³

INSERT HERE TABLE 2.2

⁵¹ ASV, Miscellanea Gregolin, busta 12 ter I, letter of Guglielmo Helman from Venice to Antonio Paruta in Istanbul, 27 August 1583. On Helman see Maartje Van Gelder, *Trading Places. The Netherlandish Merchants in Early Modern Venice* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009), ad vocem.

⁵² ASV, Senato Mar, reg. 47, fols. 131v-132r, 19 December 1585. For Ballarin’s products included in the Bailo’s gift of 1590 and his request of a patent for a new colour for glass in 1595 see Luigi Zecchin, *Vetro e vetrai di Murano. Studi sulla storia del vetro* (Venice: Arsenale Editrice, 1989), 1: 166-7.

⁵³ ASV, Collegio, Risposte di dentro, filza 9, n. 263, 13 March 1591. One of the two artisans, Bernardino Bigagia, was the supplier of glassware for the Bailo’s gift of 1611.

Requests for new and unusual artefacts increasingly came to characterise the Ottomans' gifts from Venice. This was probably due to the growing competition among individuals and factions at the Porte, which was played out also through the conspicuous display and redistribution of luxury goods. In 1584, for example, Bailo Giovan Francesco Morosini obtained the liberation of 25 out of 30 slaves in the Sultan's Hamam who were subjects of Venice; when he asked for the freedom of the remaining ones, the Grand Vizier replied laughing: "when a ship from Venice will arrive, send me some nice object of these new things that are made in those parts, and I promise to free the last five of them".⁵⁴ In 1592 the Venetian representative advised the Senate on the opportunity of "sending every year some new things that could be agreeable to the Sultan".⁵⁵ A similar reference to curiosity and novelty is to be found in the instructions of the Senate for the production of silk fabrics with extravagant colours (*colori stravaccanti*), or "of new and charming works" (*opera nova et vaga, opera nova et bella*) for various members of the Porte.⁵⁶ In 1593 the Venetian government thanked officially the Sultana Safiye for the detailed advice she had provided the Bailo on the "veste and new things that are sent to Istanbul as a present" both to her and Sultan Murad III.⁵⁷ The taste of her son, Sultan Mehmed III, for Venetian luxuries is also well known. Bailo Girolamo Cappello recorded an entire conversation that he had in the garden of the *Capi Agà* of the Sultan in July 1598. When Cappello asked for tips on the matter, he was told to send frequently small objects, "because the Sultan is like a child, whatever he sees, he likes it and then he wants it. He had some rock-crystal balls the size of playing balls, and now two of them are lost and he greatly desires to have new ones; if they could be obtained from Venice he

⁵⁴ DISPC, filza 19, fols. 1r-2r, 6 March 1584.

⁵⁵ DELC, reg. 8, fol. 113r-v, 31 October 1592.

⁵⁶ DISPC, filza 19, fol. 16r, 6 March 1584; DELC, reg. 8, fol. 181r, 24 September 1594; DELC, filza 10, 9 September 1603.

⁵⁷ DELC, reg. 8, fol. 156v, 13 November 1593.

would consider them as very dear”. This was a wish that the Venetian government could not ignore, shipping six crystal balls to Istanbul right away.⁵⁸

The importation of new items into Istanbul by Venetian merchants could sometimes produce unexpected consequences. In early August 1594 the all-powerful Safiye, already defining herself as the mother of Sultan Mehmed III, penned a fiery and highly menacing letter to the Bailo:

You should know that with the last ships coming from Venice some aigrettes (*penachi*) have been brought here, which being a new thing we bought them all, so that they will not fall into other people’s hands. For this reason you will write to the Lords of Venice that they have to forbid such works that resemble aigrettes, and as a consequence they will not be brought here anymore. Otherwise, due to the displeasure I feel, our friendship will be broken, and I will not favour your negotiations anymore. But make sure that the Lords of Venice issue a prohibition that similar works of feather-like aigrettes should not be made and brought here, and if they will still be seen I declare that our friendship will be over. Write therefore to those Lords of Venice that they should not let them be manufactured, having the possibility of allowing the production of many other kinds of merchandise that could be carried here, but not these in any way. And if you want to see a sample of them I will send you one, so that once seen you will send it back, and beware that no one will see it. [Signed:] The Mother of Sultan Mehemet.

Taken aback and not knowing anything regarding these new objects, the Bailo tried to understand what was the matter of complaint. He collected information and soon realized that the *penachi* the Sultana resented so much were composed of “several thin glasses in various colours, put together in a way to resemble the feathers of herons and other birds, which look beautiful and compete

⁵⁸ DISPC, filza 47, fols. 302r-303v, 25 July 1598; DELC, reg. 9, fol. 119v, 29 August 1598.

successfully with the true feathers and aigrettes that are worked with great craftsmanship and at high cost". He replied to the letter assuring Safiye that the government of Venice would be duly informed, in order "to calm her down, seeing how distressed she was". Then he suggested the Senate to comply immediately with the Sultan Mother's wishes, since she had been one of the major supporters of the Republic.⁵⁹

It must have been unclear if the request to stop the importation of the glass *penachi* under the threat of dissolving Safiye's ties with Venice derived from her desire to have the exclusive privilege of wearing them. Considering the emotional response, she was probably offended by the arrival of a fanciful and original object that should have been brought as a prized gift, and not put on offer in the open market. The Venetian Senate presented its apologies, stating that the glass imitations had been exported "as a new and charming thing", not imagining that this could cause any disappointment. An order was immediately issued that no future consignment of *penachi* could be made to Istanbul under the penalty of confiscation, while the Bailo alerted the Venetian merchants in Turkey of the new prohibition. A public officer was then sent touring the glass furnaces in Murano and a series of shops in Venice, warning artisans and mercers of the new regulation. The craftsmen and traders promised to comply with it, even though noticing that they could not possibly know or check where people would take the glass feathers after buying them. Moreover, as the Senate itself remarked, those aigrettes were produced also in the states of other Italian Princes and sent directly from there to the Ottoman markets.⁶⁰ Indeed, we can

⁵⁹ DISPC, filza 39, fol. 607r-v, 6 August 1594. On the power of the Queen Mothers at the Porte during the last decades of the sixteenth century see Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem. Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 91-112, and 222-28. On Safiye in particular see Pedani, "Safiye's Household," who also mentions briefly this episode.

⁶⁰ DELC, reg. 8, fol. 181r, 24 September 1594; ASV, Bailo a Costantinopoli, busta 269,

recognize such a fragile object - which by its very nature had no chances of surviving over the centuries and being kept until today in collections and museums - in the drawings of the fantastic glass vessels made by the painter Jacopo Ligozzi in the early seventeenth century for the Grand Duke of Tuscany's court in Florence, where the *penachi* were also probably manufactured (Figure 2.4). At any rate, soon afterwards the problem vanished as quickly as it had arisen. In November 1594 the Sultan's Mother wrote again to the Bailo, saying he should not bother to prohibit Venetian merchants from importing *penachi* anymore: "let in the future come as many as they want, because they [the aigrettes] are already in no esteem at all, and if they want to send a thousand ships of them, let them come".⁶¹

INSERT HERE FIGURE 2.4

Jewels and Caskets

Venice had a long-standing tradition of producing luxury objects in rock crystal, jewels, hard stones and gold or silver works for the courts of Asian princes. Such a specialization dated back to the times of Marco Polo and the opening of the silk roads to western traders.⁶² By the early sixteenth century, Venetian jewellers, in collaboration with other artisans, took a new step in the creation of highly elaborate and imaginative pieces for Asian rulers and elites. In 1512, for instance, the merchant Martino Merlini wrote from Venice to his younger brother in Syria, asking

Protocollo Atti e Sentenze 382, fol. 58r, 31 October 1594.

⁶¹ BMC Correr, Mss. Donà dalle Rose, 236, Dispacci del Bailo Venier, fols. 45v-46r, 25 November 1594.

⁶² Luca Molà, "Venezia, Genova e l'Oriente: i mercanti italiani sulle Vie della Seta tra XIII e XIV secolo," in *Sulla Via della Seta. Antichi sentieri tra Oriente e Occidente*, ed. Mark Norrell et al. (Turin: Codice Edizioni, 2012), 137-9.

him to send either a real middle-eastern armour or a model in leather, wood, cloth or a drawing on paper. Martino had devised the audacious plan of creating a unique object, “of a kind that a similar one won’t be found in the whole world”: a full battle-set for a mounted warrior - composed by a helmet, cuirass, gauntlets and all other protections for shoulders and legs - made in crystal-glass and splendidly decorated with enamelled silver, rubies, diamonds, emeralds and sapphires, so “that in the sun and in full light there won’t be a man who could stare at it, because of the great brightness that will reverberate from all those jewels, glass and enamels”. The Venetian merchant, of course, was not so naive as to think that the armour would be apt for fighting, but, as he said, it could be used “as adornment, to be worn by a slave who would precede the Sultan, for pomp and lustre”. The craftsman who could produce such a wonder was the glass-maker Vettor dei Anzoli of Murano, who had just finished a crystal saddle and had insisted with him to have suggestions for “a new fantasy” that could be made for the Levant. The plan was to sell the armour to the Mamluk Sultan, possibly through the intermediation of one of his top officers. In another letter, Martino proposed even to create a second identical set for the Persian Shah, emblazoned with this ruler’s coat of arms.⁶³

The same adaptability of a luxury object to different Asian princes emerged in 1527, when a round chess-board “wrought with gold and silver and set with chalcedony, jasper, and other jewels”, and chess pieces “made of the purest crystal”, was brought to the Ducal Palace and shown to the Doge and Senators. This unique artefact had been commissioned more than ten years earlier by a Venetian nobleman with the aim of selling it to the Mamluk Sultan al-Ghawri.

⁶³ Giuseppe Dalla Santa, “Commerci, vita privata e notizie politiche dei giorni della lega di Cambrai (da lettere del mercante veneziano Martino Merlini),” *Atti del Reale Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* 76 (1916-17), 1566-69. See also Benjamin Arbel, “The Last Decades of Venice’s Trade with the Mamluks: Importation into Egypt and Syria”, *Mamluk Studies Review* 8 (2004), 57-58.

However, after the fall of the Mamluk dynasty in 1517 the chessboard had remained in the family possessions. It was now proposed to the government - for the considerable price of 5,000 ducats - as a possible gift to be sent to Suleyman the Magnificent with the new Bailo leaving for Istanbul.⁶⁴ Over the following years partnerships of Venetian goldsmiths and merchants, several of them belonging to the nobility, invested large sums of money and employed the most skillful workers to produce a number of refined and valuable ‘gadgets’ and ritual objects in response to the passion for jewellery prevailing at court in Istanbul under Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha (1523-1536). This was the case, for instance, of the gold ring with a miniature watch shown by Francesco Zen around the Rialto in 1531, that was intended for sale in the Turkish capital. Even more remarkable was the output of two partnerships operating in the following years, each of which invested over 100,000 ducats in the production of objects for the Ottoman court: they created the famous four-tiered imperial crown, a jewel-studded saddle, a throne, a sceptre, a horse cloth with precious stones and pearls, a – supposedly –perpetual-motion clock and other valuable things. Several of these marvels were paraded in the Ducal Palace before leaving the city, demonstrating that even private commercial enterprises had a public dimension when they concerned the exchange between Venice and Istanbul.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Marin Sanudo, *I diarii di Marino Sanuto* (Venice: Fratelli Visentini, 1895), 43: col. 599; Curatola, “Marin Sanudo,” 175; Patricia H. Labalme and Laura Sanguineti White, eds., *Venice, Città Excelentissima. Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 263-4.

⁶⁵ Curatola, “Marin Sanudo,” 178; Otto Kurz, “A Gold Helmet Made in Venice for Sultan Sulayman the Magnificent,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 74 (1969), 249-58; Gülru Necipoğlu, “Süleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal Rivalry,” *The Art Bulletin* 71 (1989), 401-27; Ennio Concina, *Il Doge e il Sultano. Mercatura, arte e relazioni nel primo ‘500 / Doç ve Sultan. 16 yüzyıl başlarında ticaret, sanat ve ilişkiler* (Rome: Logart Press, 1994), 136-45.

The interplay between Venetian mercantile profits and state diplomatic gifts, and between the Ottoman elite's generic demand for jewels and the official requests for luxury presents, can be further investigated through the analysis of the production, sale or donation of luxury caskets. Grand Viziers had asked the Republic to receive such items as presents already in the 1550s and 1560s,⁶⁶ but the problem of constructing box-like jewels of large dimensions became crucial for Venice in the 1580s, when a commission came from Great Admiral Uluc Ali (in Venice called 'Occhiali' - Spectacles), a Calabrian convert who since his appointment in 1571 had kept a threatening stance towards the Venetian dominions in the Levant. In November 1583 his moves were carefully monitored by the Venetians. After his return to Istanbul with the fleet, rumour spread that he was openly speaking about attacking Crete.⁶⁷ According to Bailo Giovan Francesco Morosini's informers, the Great Admiral had even drafted a written proposal to that effect for the Sultan, and it was only thanks to the strong opposition of the Queen Mother Nur Banu that he decided to put aside his military project.⁶⁸ Nur Banu, who claimed to be a Venetian noblewoman abducted by the Turks at a young age, was one of the main supporters of Venice at the Porte. This was in connection with a particular fondness for new and extravagant Venetian

⁶⁶ DELC, reg. 1, fol. 104r, 31 December 1558; fols. 105v-106r, 20 February 1559; fol. 112v, 27 April 1559; fol. 132r, 14 October 1559; fol. 140r, 7 November 1559; DELC, reg. 2, fol. 12r, 15 March 1560; fol. 14r, 2 May 1560; fol. 17v, 4 May 1560; fol. 23r, 5 September 1560; fols. 56v-57r, 11 April 1562; fol. 75v, 28 November 1562; fol. 77r, 16 January 1563; fol. 82r, 17 April 1563; fol. 85r, 12 June 1563; DISPC, filza 3C, fol. 220r, 1 September 1562; fol. 248r, 7 November 1562.

⁶⁷ DISPC, filza 18, fols. 202r-204r, 29 November 1583.

⁶⁸ DISPC, reg. 18, fol. 242r, 13 December 1583; Emilio Spagni, "Una sultana veneziana," *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* 29 (1900), 241-348.

silk fabrics, which she continuously requested to the Bailo.⁶⁹ Averting the Ottoman conquest of Crete, however, was the last act that the Sultan's Mother could perform in favour of the Republic. She had been ill for some time with strong abdominal pain – maybe cancer, perhaps because of poisoning – until she finally died on 7 December 1583, only days after ordering new cloths of gold from Venice and without knowing that three bolts of satin she was waiting to receive had been lost in a shipwreck off the coast of Dalmatia.⁷⁰ After the death of its main ally, the Republic and its Bailo were understandably concerned when in January the following year a request arrived for an expensive casket of rock crystal and silver from Uluc Ali. On the occasion of the prince's circumcision he had bought a similar casket worth 5,000 ducats for the Sultan from the merchant Antonio Helman, the brother and partner of Guglielmo who was based in Istanbul. The casket, made in Venice by the jeweller Ancileo Diana, had pleased Murad III so much that now he wanted an exact copy of it as quickly as possible, forcing the Great Admiral to seek the help of the Bailo.⁷¹

⁶⁹ On Nur Banu's orders of silk cloth see Raby, "The Serenissima," 111-12; Susan A. Skilliter, "The Letters of the Venetian 'Sultana' Nūr Bānū and her Kira to Venice," in *Studia turcologica memoriae Alexii Bombaci dicata* (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1982), 527 and 536. On her pretended origins see: Benjamin Arbel, "Nūr Bānū: A Venetian Sultana?," *Turcica* 24/25 (1992-93), 241-59.

⁷⁰ DISPC, reg. 18, fol. 190r, 15 November 1583. For the satins and the shipwreck see: DELC, reg. 6, fol. 151v, 9 November 1583; *Gnalic'. Blago potonulog broda iz 16. Stoljec'a* (Zagreb: Hrvatski Povijesni Muzej, 2013).

⁷¹ DISPC, filza 18, fols. 377r-379v, 21 January 1584; fols. 448v-449r, 14 February 1584; DISPC, filza 19, fol. 111v, 3 April 1584. On the government's commission to Diana of three lamps in gilded silver for the Sultan in 1599, of which a drawing has remained, see Ennio Concina, ed., *Venezia e Istanbul. Incontri, confronti e scambi* (Udine: Forum, 2006), 148-9; Maria Pia Pedani, ed.,

Morosini forwarded the measures to Venice, knowing that the matter would not be easily solved. Between late March and early April 1584, the Senate dedicated long debates to the casket. The difference of opinions show the crucial importance of making the right choice in delicate circumstances. The search for a ready-made object of the shape and size needed was unsuccessful, so the government decided to order a new one from Venetian artisans.⁷² But the men who accepted the commission went back to the council a few days later stating that it was impossible to produce it in less than a year, even if they put ten masters to work on it. The jeweller Diana, asked for his opinion, confirmed the difficulty of creating such a beautiful thing rapidly; he himself had spent two-and-a-half years to complete the original casket. In the meantime, another container had been found, which was slightly smaller but of high quality and could be purchased at the reasonable price of 1,900 ducats. Even more importantly, it could be sent only after some final touches were made. Two groups opposed each other in the Senate: the first group wanted to send the measures and description of the smaller casket to Uluc Ali and wait to see if he liked it, otherwise a new one was to be ordered; the second party, considering the urgency of the situation and the universally known fact that artisans could not be trusted for meeting a deadline, suggested to ship what was at hand without delay. After several inconclusive votations, the second option reached the required majority and the casket was loaded onto a vessel due to leave in a few days, “being sure that this rapidity will give the highest satisfaction” to the Great Admiral.⁷³ It is likely that the owner of this casket was Guglielmo Helman. In a letter sent to his agent in Istanbul in September 1583 he had asked to get a note from Nur Banu in order to avoid problems at the customs when collecting “a very beautiful and rich jewelled crystal

Inventory of the Lettere e Scritture Turchesche in the Venetian State Archives (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), nos. 588-89; Pedani, *Venezia*, 104.

⁷² DELC, reg. 6, fol. 163r, 24 March 1584.

⁷³ DELC, reg. 6, fol. 164r-v, 5 and 10 April 1584.

casket, and also a similar and very rare jewelled crystal cabinet, both with a structure in gilded silver”, which he planned to send in the following spring.⁷⁴

When in late May the Bailo received the letters of the Senate reporting its decision, he strongly approved it. The only worry he still had concerned the timing of the casket’s arrival, which he hoped would be in his hands before the return of Uluc Ali and his fleet from the Black Sea.⁷⁵ Fortunately, things went according to plan. In his visit to the Great Admiral in July 1584, Morosini first explained the decision taken by his government and then proudly had the casket brought in and opened, saying it was a gift from the Republic of Venice. At this, Uluc Ali expressed many times his thanks to the Signoria, with “extraordinary signs of happiness and pleasure” and “with such an abundance of words that more could not have been desired”. A box full of gold sequins would not have pleased him better, he said, and he promised to keep perpetual memory of these “acts of love”, intending to reciprocate them at the right time. As a final gesture of gratefulness, he freed a Venetian caulker who was a slave in the admiral-galley.⁷⁶ Uluc Ali’s high spirits, however, must have lasted for just a short time. Less than a week later he informed the Bailo about the Sultan’s reception of the present. Murad III had simply reiterated his wish of having a casket of the measures he had sent, of the greatest possible beauty, even if it took two-and-a-half years to complete it. This time Morosini was not totally disappointed. As he wrote to the government informing of the new request, keeping the Great Admiral waiting for the casket such a long time might refrain him from harming the interests of Venice during the whole period. In the meantime, “God knows what could happen, maybe he will die, or will be

⁷⁴ ASV, Miscellanea Gregolin, busta 12 ter I, letter of Guglielmo Helman from Venice to Antonio Paruta in Istanbul, 26 September 1583.

⁷⁵ DISPC, filza 19, fol. 229r, 22 May 1584.

⁷⁶ DISPC, filza 19, fols. 354v-355r, 4 July 1584.

removed from his office, or other occurrences will save us from this expense”.⁷⁷

On 29 August 1584 a resigned Senate accepted Morosini’s advice and deliberated the manufacturing of the casket, but without hurry.⁷⁸ A sudden change of pace took place in early November, though, when news reached Venice of a savage attack perpetrated by Venetian ships near Cefalonia against a galley taking the Bey of Gerba, his mother (widow of the Governor of Tripoli) and several women and dignitaries of their court from the Barbary Coast to Istanbul. Most of the people on board had been massacred, others had been sold as slaves. The fabulously rich cargo of the galley had disappeared: sacks of coins, gold ingots, jewels, 40 boxes of silk fabrics and even a unicorn’s horn. These were items that in large part the Bey was carrying as gifts to the Porte, for the Sultanas and especially for his close ally Uluc Ali. To appease the fury of the Great Admiral and the Sultan, on 10 November the same year the Senate gave Morosini the power of spending up to 10,000 sequins in presents for several members of the Ottoman Court.⁷⁹ The council then went back to the casket with renewed energy.⁸⁰ In January 1585 the Senators approved a contract agreement with the goldsmith Giovan Battista Rizzoletti - whom the Republic had already employed for making the caskets sent as gifts to the Habsburg Empress

⁷⁷ DISPC, filza 19, fols. 363r-364v, 13 July 1584.

⁷⁸ DELC, reg. 6, fol. 173r, 29 August 1584.

⁷⁹ For a detailed reconstruction of the incident see Antonio Fabris, “Un caso di pirateria veneziana: la cattura della galea del Bey di Gerba (21 ottobre 1584),” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 8 (1990), 91-112. The instructions to the Bailo are in DELC, reg. 6, fols. 176r-177r, 10 November 1584.

⁸⁰ DELC, reg. 6, fol. 181r-v, 29 December 1584.

and the Duke of Mantua – and the ‘illuminator’ (*miniador*) Francesco Moro.⁸¹ The two craftsmen promised that their workshops would operate in synergy and complete the artefact in eighteen months, at a cost of 7,125 ducats. They also prepared a drawing of the casket on parchment, illuminated with gold, which the new Bailo, Lorenzo Bernardo, took with him to Istanbul in the spring as proof that the actual box was being made.⁸²

Meanwhile, rumours spread among foreign diplomats in Venice regarding the Porte’s rage for the galley’s incident and the Republic’s strenuous attempts at defusing it. The making of the casket became common knowledge in the city, and in the public imagination its value reached the astronomical sum of 12,000 sequins, growing over time to 25-30,000 scudi.⁸³ In the following two years the Senate constantly informed Uluc Ali about the progress of the work, slowed down unfortunately by the untimely death of Francesco Moro. In June 1587, finally, the ship *Fontana* set sail for Istanbul with the casket, while a cargo note had been sent to the Bailo in advance so as to

⁸¹ See the declarations of Rizzoletti in DELC, filza 7, 10 November 1589; Raffaella Morselli, ed., *Gonzaga. La Celeste Galeria. Le raccolte* (Milan: Skira, 2002), 281-2, 306-7, for the casket given to the Duke of Mantua in 1582.

⁸² DELC, filza 6, contract signed on 22 January 1585; DELC, reg. 6, fol. 186v, 23 January 1585; DELC, reg. 7, fol. 36r, 6 June 1585.

⁸³ Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Archivio Gonzaga, busta 1515, f. I, fols. 25-26, 26 January 1585; busta 1518, f. I, fols. 142-143, 30 May 1587; documents consulted from the database of the website *Collezionismo Gonzaghesco 1563-1630*, Centro Internazionale di Cultura e d’Arte di Palazzo Te e Archivio di Stato di Mantova, <http://banchedatigonzaga.centropalazzote.it/collezionismo/index.php?page=Home> (last accessed on 18 September 2015).

confirm its next arrival to the Great Admiral.⁸⁴ A contemporary Venetian chronicle contains a drawing and a detailed description of the famous casket (Figure 2.5). It was composed of 4,000 pieces, screws included, that could be assembled and disassembled very easily; the body was of massive gilded silver with arabesqued decorations both outside and inside; and it was surrounded by 24 twisted columns, five large convex pieces - on the four sides and on top - and several smaller ones made of rock crystal. Uluc Ali would have been very happy to see it, had he still been alive when the *Fontana* dropped its anchor in Istanbul. Bailo Morosini was a good prophet in foreseeing the Admiral's death before its delivery, though not as much on the possible savings for the Republic. The casket's final cost reached 9,640 ducats, plus the cost of the black leather box lined with crimson velvet and adorned outside with gold fringes in which it was packaged. It pleased the Sultan, as shown by the four robes of gold and silver brocatel with flowers made in Bursa that he handed out to Lorenzo Bernardo's secretary and the three Venetian dragomans who brought him the splendid gift.⁸⁵

INSERT HERE FIGURE 2.5

After this famous incident, rock crystal and silver caskets became even more popular in diplomatic exchanges and as elite luxuries. Already in 1588 the Ottoman Governor of Rumelia (*Beylerbey of Greece* in the sources), one of the most powerful individuals in the Empire, asked the Venetian government for a smaller casket. And the Senate once again chose Giovan Battista

⁸⁴ DELC, reg. 6, fol. 203r, 7 February 1585; DELC, reg. 7, fols. 40v-41r, 7 September 1585; fol. 69r-v, 2 August 1586; fol. 72v, 8 November 1586; fol. 84r, 23 May 1587.

⁸⁵ Lionello Venturi, "Cassetta d'argento decorato e cristallo di rocca eseguita in Venezia prima del 1587," *Arte italiana decorativa e industriale* 15 (1906), 99-100; Amato Bacchini, "Un prezioso dono artistico della Rep. di Venezia alle Sultane di Costantinopoli," *Arte e Storia* 6th series, 34, no. 1 (1915), 6-13.

Rizzoletti for the task, with another contract for a lower sum and a shorter period of time.⁸⁶ But when in 1589 another complex commission arrived from the Sultan himself, Rizzoletti was put in competition with the jeweller (and art collector) Domenico dalle Due Regine.⁸⁷ In 1590 both men presented a project with a cost estimate and drawings: dalle Due Regine offered to produce the object in 30 months for 10,000 ducats, materials included; Rizzoletti proposed a slightly lower sum of 9,800 ducats and the same time for completing the work. He suggested also the opportunity of moving the enterprise inside the state Mint in St. Mark's Square, for two reasons: firstly because there the work would not be seen by too many people, avoiding the possibility of having his design copied; secondly because the precious metals and stones would remain in a safer place. Clearly the large fame obtained in the city thanks to the previous caskets had made him more cautious about plagiarism and thefts. In the end Rizzoletti won the competition, and again the Porte kept constantly pressing the Bailo for the casket until its completion and shipment in September 1593.⁸⁸ In the following decade there is further information on luxury

⁸⁶ DELC, reg. 7, fols. 112v-113r, 19 March 1588; DELC, filza 7, 13 December 1589 and 10 November 1589 for the contract.

⁸⁷ On his life see the biographical entry by Michel Hockmann, "Domenico dalle Due Regine (Domenico Franceschi detto dalle due Regine)," in *Il collezionismo d'arte a Venezia. Dalle origini al Cinquecento*, ed. Michel Hockmann, Rosella Lauber and Stefania Mason (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), 268.

⁸⁸ DELC, reg. 7, fol. 176r-v, 15 April 1589; DELC, reg. 8, fol. 35r, 23 September 1590; fols. 42v-43r, 24 November 1590; fols. 45v-47r, 7 December 1590; fol. 48v, 22 December 1590; fol. 51v-53r, 9 February 1591; fol. 68r-v, 10 August 1591; fol. 80r, 28 October 1591; fols. 99v-100r, 5 June 1592; fols. 100v-101r, 25 July 1592; fol. 109v, 24 September 1592; fol. 115v, 14 November 1592; fol. 120r, 6 February 1593; fols. 131v-132r, 22 April 1593; fol. 137v, 21 June 1593; fol. 143r-v, 10 August 1593; fol. 146v, 27 August 1594; fols. 154v-155r, 28 October 1593; DELC, filza 7, 24 May 1590 (in the file of the decree of 29 June 1590) for the competition between Rizzoletti and

containers of a similar type offered for sale in the Venetian market by private dealers or given as diplomatic gifts. In 1594 and again in 1600, the ambassador of the Duke of Mantua proposed his lord to buy a casket made of rock crystal and silver, in the second case sending a drawing with exactly the same measures as those of Uluc Ali;⁸⁹ in 1603 the Persian envoy to the Doge left the city with one of those caskets;⁹⁰ and in the early seventeenth century Venetian merchants presented a particularly showy casket to the Sultan of Hormuz, an object that is now in the Museu de Arte Antiga in Lisbon – while other public and private collections around the world still preserve several of these precious jewels made in Venice (Figure 2.6).⁹¹

INSERT HERE FIGURE 2.6

Conclusion

In 1591 the Venetian silk-cloth producers and merchants discussed the miserable situation of their ancient guildhall, located in the crowded district of Cannaregio since the early fourteenth century. They decided it was time to find a more dignified and reputable seat at Rialto. After a long search and a rebuilding campaign, in 1602 Bartolomeo Bontempelli and the other members of the committee in charge of the operation could proudly look at what no other Venetian guild could boast: a three-storey guildhall standing along the Grand Canal, just a few steps from the

dalle Due Regine. A brief mention of Rizzoletti's caskets for the Ottoman court is also in Fabris, "Artisanat," 53.

⁸⁹ Sermidi, *Le collezioni*, nn. 262, 264, 458.

⁹⁰ DELC, filza 10, 16 February 1605.

⁹¹ Hans Huth, "A Venetian Renaissance Casket," in *Museum Monographs I. Papers on Objects in the Collection of City Art Museum of St. Louis* (St. Louis: St. Louis Museum of Art, 1968), 42-50.

Rialto Bridge.⁹² The Ottoman Court's ceaseless request for gifts of luxury fabrics had certainly enhanced the prestige of silk entrepreneurs in Venice, and together with the flourishing trade in the Levant it helped increase their wealth. The technical difficulties faced in order to satisfy the Porte certainly contributed to a continuous refinement of the city's textile technology, with a specialization in products for the Asian markets that remained a hallmark of Venice in the following centuries. The government of the Republic supported this evolution through its diplomatic and political structures, providing the logistics for the exchange of information across space, time and languages that made possible an intercontinental production of fabrics.

The need of diplomatic gifts for the Ottomans, moreover, acted as a lever for technological growth also in other artisanal sectors. By calling for public competitions among craftsmen and employing scores of them for the production of extremely refined objects almost every year, the Senate favoured the professional improvement of glass makers, jewellers, producers of furniture and other specialized artisans. And the need to promote ever new designs and better quality objects and fabrics necessarily sparked an innovative dynamic in the industrial world of Venice. Of course, this combined effort of Venetian nobles, merchants and craftsmen in making and delivering the right gifts on time to the Porte had a purely political dimension. It was crucial for keeping smooth relations with the Ottomans during more than half a century after Lepanto, and probably contributed to saving Venice from military attacks on its maritime dominions in the same period. Against all these benefits, one should consider the financial cost of sustaining this material diplomacy, a cost that is difficult to assess. The Baili could mention with disdain the Ragusans, who had to pay 12,500 ducats every year to the Ottomans to preserve their freedom, but they probably knew that Venice itself was willingly accepting to pay a covered tribute that

⁹² The guild of the silk merchants remained in this building until the fall of the Republic in 1797, even though the fact is unknown to the Venetian historiography. A forthcoming publication on the history of this guildhall will provide full information and references soon.

was even bigger.⁹³

This essay has considered the production and offer of gifts to the Ottoman empire from the Venetian perspective. However, like the Ragusans other European and Asian states followed a parallel and partially different gift policy in their relations with the Porte. Between the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century more and more diplomats appeared in Istanbul with luxury presents, coming from France, the Habsburg empire, Spain, England, the Dutch Republic, Genoa, Florence, Russia or Persia. While there are studies discussing single cases, there is still no systematic investigation on the interplay or clash among the gift strategies of different countries. A future research on the competition among states in this field, of the circulation of information among ambassadors and politicians and the reactions of the Ottoman Court to their choices, would certainly constitute a stimulating and novel contribution to the history of diplomatic gift-giving.

⁹³ Alberi, *Relazioni*, 2: 403. On Ragusa's tribute and gifts see James D. Tracy, "The Grand Vezir and the Small Republic: Dubrovnik and Rüstem Paşa, 1544-1561," *Turkish Historical Review* 1 (2010), 196-214.