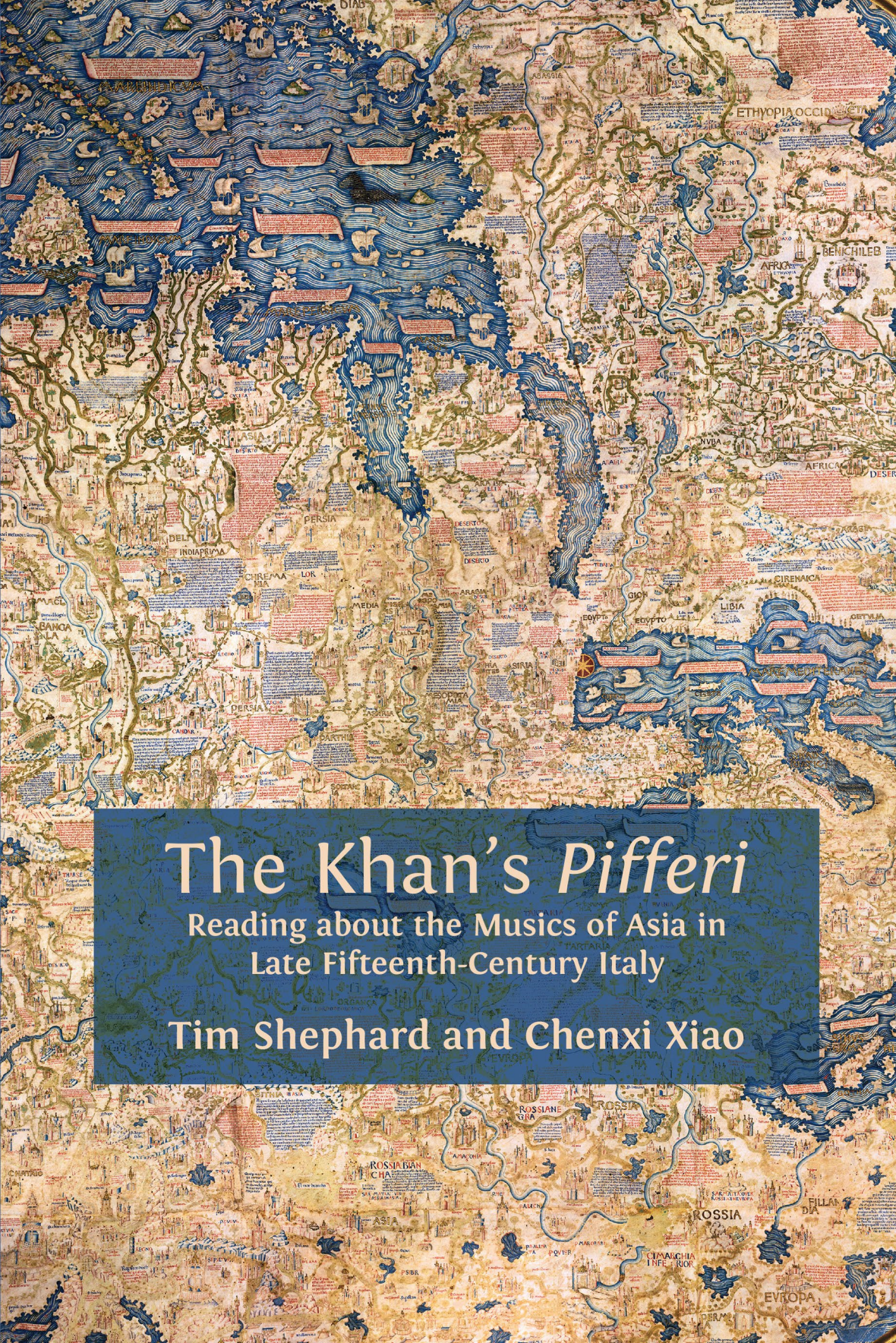




The Khan's *Pifferi*

Reading about the Musics of Asia in
Late Fifteenth-Century Italy

Tim Shephard and Chenxi Xiao

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0. Introduction

This short monograph sets out from a deceptively simple question: what might an Italian of the late fifteenth century have been able to learn and to know (accurate or otherwise) about musical cultures and practices located outside of Catholic Europe by reading printed books?¹ Literature describing foreign travel entered the arena of type in Italy quite quickly after the inception of Italian print, in the 1470s, and by the 1490s books relating both eastward and westward travel were issued quite regularly.² Recounting the experiences of pilgrims, merchants, diplomats, soldiers, adventurers, and an enslaved Christian, in the Eastern Mediterranean, Türkiye, Persia, India, and China, as well as the earliest European description of the Americas (mistaken for India), these tales include occasional and in some cases regular references to musical practices.³ As

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- 1 As such, this study forms part of a broader project to reconstruct the everyday “musical worldview” current in Italy around 1500, continuing on from the research reported in Tim Shephard, Oliver Doyle, Ciara O’Flaherty, Annabelle Page, and Laura Ștefănescu, *Sounding the Bookshelf 1501: Music in a Year of Italian Printed Books* (Open Book Publishers, 2025). Several aspects of the basic framing and methodology of that earlier publication, discussed in detail in its Introduction, are shared by the present volume, even though here they are used to underpin a discussion of quite different themes.
 - 2 The process by which travel literature was established as a print genre in fifteenth-century Europe is studied in F. Thomas Noonan, *The Road to Jerusalem: Pilgrimage and Travel in the Age of Discovery* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 17–48; of course, travel literature still circulated in manuscript, but here we use the lens of print to give our short monograph a narrow and achievable scope. For a usefully capacious definition of “travel literature,” see Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Travel Writing as a Genre: Facts, Fictions and the Invention of a Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Europe,” *Journeys* 1, no. 1 (2000): 5–35. The affordances of travel literature as a source for musicology are evaluated in Donatella Restani and Letterio Mauro, “Il racconto di viaggio,” in *Il discorso musicale: La musica e i suoi generi testuali nella storia*, ed. Francesco Finocchiaro, Paolo Gozza, and Stefano Lombardi Vallauri (Accademia University Press, 2023).
 - 3 Throughout this study, our use of the language of slavery and enslavement attempts to balance respect for the humanity of those who endured unfree conditions, with precision in referring to specific historical legal categories and

the list of destinations indicates, in practice almost all of this literature concerns regions of Asia, and therefore we use the continent of Asia as a geographical frame defining the scope of our discussion.

The ten titles on travel in Asia printed in Italy by 1500 that provide our main case studies encompass a wide range of regions and polities, and fall into two categories, one neat, the other heterogenous. Five are books about pilgrimage to the "Holy Land." The Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC) lists three surviving editions of an anonymous pilgrim guidebook entitled *Peregrinationes totius terrae sanctae* printed in Venice from the 1470s to the 1490s; among these we have used a 1491 edition issued by Giovanni Battista Sessa as our exemplar.⁴ The *Itinerario* by the Paduan aristocrat and lawyer Gabriele Capodilista, printed about 1475 in Perugia, recounts a pilgrimage undertaken in 1458 together with his cousin Antonio and servant Tommaso, setting off in a Venetian galley together with a hundred other pilgrims.⁵ Santo Brasca, an administrator and diplomat for the Sforzas in Milan, also wrote an *Itinerario* describing his pilgrimage of 1480, printed in Milan in 1481, in which he borrows quite a bit from Capodilista.⁶ The Milanese friar Girolamo Castiglione began his pilgrimage in 1486, and an account of his journey was printed in both Rome and Messina in 1491.⁷ Castiglione's account was actually an update and abridgement of the *Libro d'oltramare* by the Tuscan friar Niccolò da Poggibonsi, whose journey in 1346–50 encompassed not only Jerusalem and its environs, but also Damascus, Beirut, Alexandria, Cairo, the Sinai, Gaza, and Tripoli. Niccolò's account, in turn, was printed, though anonymously, in an illustrated folio edition in Bologna in 1500, and went on to become the most widely circulated pilgrimage

their period terminology. In this, our approach is modelled on Hannah Barker's *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), which is the most comprehensive and up-to-date study of slavery in the late medieval Eastern Mediterranean.

- 4 *Peregrinationes totius Terrae Sanctae* (Venice: [Leonardus Wild, c.1479] – repr. 1480, 1491). All bibliographic information on incunabula is derived from the Universal Short Title Catalogue (www.ustc.ac.uk); we list reprints up to 1501 only. A chronological list of the printed books describing Asia mentioned throughout this study can be found in the Appendix.
- 5 Gabriele Capodilista, *Itinerario in Terra Santa* (Perugia: Petrus Petri de Colonia, c.1475), <https://archive.org/details/ita-bnc-in2-00001629-001>
- 6 Santo Brasca, *Itinerario alla santissima città di Gerusalemme* ([Milan]: Leonardus Pachel and Uldericus Scinzenzeler for Ambrogio Archinto, 1481 – repr. 1497), <https://archive.org/details/ita-bnc-in2-00002262-001>
- 7 Girolamo Castiglione, *Fior de terra sancta* (Rome: Eucharius Silber, [c.1491]; Messina: Georg Ricker, 1491 – repr. 1499).

account in print in Italy for the next three centuries.⁸ These five books related to pilgrim travel are the topic of Chapter 3 below.

In the second category we find five books recounting the (in one case dubious) eyewitness testimony of various kinds of travellers throughout Asia. Three of these are by Venetians engaged in trade and diplomacy: Ambrogio Contarini, Niccolò de' Conti, and Marco Polo were all Venetian patricians from mercantile dynasties with very extensive international experience. Contarini, who was still alive when his travel account reached print in Venice in 1487, spent a long while in Constantinople as a merchant, served at sea during the First Ottoman-Venetian War, and was sent by the republic to Persia in 1474 to find allies against the Ottomans, returning in 1477 via Moscow.⁹ Niccolò de' Conti was a Venetian merchant in the first half of the fifteenth century, who spent years living in Damascus before setting out on an epic journey around India and Southeast Asia, travelling as a Muslim (a common strategy among Christian merchants in Asia, for reasons of safety). On his return to Italy more than two decades later, he attended the Pope to seek absolution for his apostasy, and described his experiences to Poggio Bracciolini, the Pope's secretary, who incorporated them into his *De varietate fortunae*, completed in 1448. The portion of the treatise presenting Niccolò's travel account was printed in Milan in or around 1492 under the title *India recognita*.¹⁰ In 1496 a Venetian press issued the first Italian printed edition of Marco Polo's famous account of travel to China, originally transcribed in Franco-Italian by Rustichello da Pisa in a Genoese prison.¹¹ Among the various versions of this very widely-circulated work, that which entered print in Italy is a translation into a distinctly Venetian Italian.

Contarini, Conti, and Polo all—with many qualifications—present relatively sober and dispassionate observations on Asian societies and their customs. Similar in this respect is the account of Georgius de Hungaria, who spent twenty years enslaved in Türkiye, moved to Italy after gaining his freedom in 1458, and published a description of the

8 [Niccolò da Poggibonsi], *Viaggio da Venezia alla santa Gerusalemme e al monte Sinai* (Bologna: Justinianus de Ruberia, 1500). During the sixteenth century, the name of an apocryphal author, Noè Bianchi, became attached to this work.

9 Ambrogio Contarini, *Viaggio ad Usun Hasan re di Persia* (Venice: Hannibal Foxius, 1487).

10 Poggio Bracciolini [and Niccolò de' Conti], *India recognita* (Milan: Uldericus Scinzenzeler, c.1492).

11 Marco Polo [and Rustichello da Pisa], *Delle maravigliose cose del mondo* (Venice: Johannes Baptista de Sessa, 1496 – repr. 1500).

customs of the Turks in Rome in the early 1480s—not a travel account in the conventional sense, but sharing several features of the genre.¹² The most popular “travel account” in fifteenth-century Italy, meanwhile, differs entirely: Mandeville’s famous travels, written around the 1350s and encompassing practically the whole of Asia, are now generally regarded as the work of an armchair traveller who created the author “Sir John Mandeville” as a part of his fiction. This work straddles our two categories, since it begins as a pilgrimage (the most reliable part, possibly founded in direct experience), and then continues on eastward more in the manner of an adventure, driven purely by curiosity rather than by the pragmatic motives that propelled Contarini, Conti and Polo. The first known Italian edition (both in Italy and in Italian) of this work, which was also exceptionally widely-circulated in manuscript, was issued in Milan in 1480, and the USTC lists a further eleven editions up to 1500, in Milan, Bologna, Florence, and Venice—the most extensive print distribution of a travel book in late fifteenth-century Italy.¹³ These five books are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Clearly, travel accounts do not provide transparent reports of objective facts; each account is characterised by the biases, agendas, and idiosyncrasies of those individuals who described, transcribed, copied, translated, and/or adapted it. Moreover, many of the descriptions of regions and cities of Asia circulating in late fifteenth-century Italy were already centuries old—that is, their observations were out of date, from an objective perspective—when they reached print. Their descriptions of musical practices are located (at least notionally) in Asia, and sometimes originate in direct observation, but they are processed through a Catholic European imaginary, shaped by especially French and Italian late medieval narrative and rhetorical traditions, and read (in our Italian printed copies) from within the affordances of an Italian late fifteenth-century musical worldview. Furthermore, such descriptions originate, for the most part, with observers who were not musical experts, and who experienced their musical encounters in passing rather than as the object of focussed attention (as did, for the most part, their European readers). Thus, travel books offer a deeply compromised and even in

12 Georgius de Hungaria, *De moribus conditionibus et nequicia Turcorum* ([Rome: Georgius Teutonicus and Sixtus Riessinger, c.1481]).

13 “John Mandeville,” *Itinerarius. Tractato de le piu maravegliose cosse* (Milan: Petrus de Corneno, 1480 – repr. 1488x2, 1491, 1492x2, 1496x2, 1497x3, 1500).

some cases entirely misleading witness to the actual contemporaneous historical situation of music in Asian regions.¹⁴ But on the other hand, they offer an unparalleled witness to the ways in which musical practices understood to be found in Asia might be imagined by Italian readers.

Owen Wright characterises European descriptions specifically of Ottoman music from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries as following “the simple but typical formula of factual report followed by denigratory comment,” while musical representations he finds to be characterised by the kind of “distortion” that Ralph P. Locke and others have discussed under the heading of Orientalism.¹⁵ These summaries may fit the sources from the sixteenth century on (i.e. those contemporaneous with the inception and development of the main early modern European colonial projects), but they do not accurately describe the sources circulating in fifteenth-century Italy that we discuss in this study. Our sources can certainly be considered “Orientalist” to the extent that they construct an impression of cultures and societies located to the east of Catholic Europe that serves the rhetorical and ideological objectives of Catholic European authors and readers. However, the kind of Orientalising discourse they present in many cases differs substantially from that of later sources, its objectives varying quite widely between different authors, and even between different translations or recensions of a single work. In fact, none of the passages that we quote and discuss in this book use any variant of the term “Orient” to refer to Asia as a whole, or describe “Oriental music,” or “Asian music,” or imply that the musical cultures of “the East” exhibited any sort of common quality or

14 Nonetheless, some of the travel accounts we will discuss have indeed been mined by other scholars for their historical information on musical practices in Asian regions; see e.g. Li Su'e 李素娥, “‘Make Boluo Xingji’: Suo Zai Yuandai Yinyue Shiliao Gouchen” 《马可波罗行纪》所载元代音乐史料钩沉 [An Investigation of Yuan-Dynasty Music Historical Materials Recorded in *The Travels of Marco Polo*], *Zhongguo Yinyuexue* 中国音乐学 90 (2008): 84–87. The affordances and challenges of this approach are evaluated in Katherine Brown, “Reading Indian Music: The Interpretation of Seventeenth-Century European Travel-Writing in the (Re) construction of Indian Music History,” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 9, no. 2 (2000): 1–34. See also, with an approach more similar to ours (though discussing later sources), David R. M. Irving, “Comparative Organography in Early Modern Empires,” *Music and Letters* 90, no. 3 (2009): 371–98.

15 Owen Wright, “Turning a Deaf Ear,” in *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World*, ed. Anna Contadini and Claire Norton (Routledge, 2016), 147–48. Locke comes closest to our period in *Music and the Exotic from the Renaissance to Mozart* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), with scattered comments on the fifteenth century at 51–58, 169–70, and 184–86.

feature that united them under a single, essentialised musical identity.¹⁶

There are three main strands of musical discourse evident in the travel accounts we discuss—detailed in Chapters 3–5 of this study—none of which is concerned in any prominent way with negative aesthetic evaluation. First, we read of Catholic pilgrims in the Holy Land, who adopt strategies of singing and listening that deliberately call to mind and imitate the genesis of Catholic liturgy in the devotions of the Gospel protagonists at the holy sites of the Eastern Mediterranean. This can easily be read as a form of historical sonic colonisation—bypassing modern-day inhabitants to claim the heritage of Palestine, Syria, and the Sinai, in much the same way that fifteenth-century Italian humanists bypassed their Eastern Roman contemporaries to lay claim to the intellectual heritage of Greek antiquity.¹⁷ However, for pilgrims living the experience of the holy sites in the fifteenth century this dynamic was constantly disrupted by the necessity of sharing spaces and liturgies with various Eastern Christians, whose rites are described with interest and in some cases with obvious fellowship and respect in our pilgrim accounts.

Second, we find very sparse musical elements in the large portfolio of fables concerning Alexander the Great, Saint Thomas, and Prester John in South and East Asia. These stories were all old already in the fifteenth century, some of them repeated from ancient sources, and in many ways they comprise an Orientalist repertoire precisely in the sense intended by Edward Said, attached primarily to the nebulously-defined land of “India.” However, in the retellings of the stories of the Blemmyae, the Cynocephali, the Trees of the Sun and Moon, and similar, that appear in our fifteenth-century printed sources, musical elements are absent, or so brief and passing as to give us little to interpret. Furthermore, there are clear indications that such stories were approached with due skepticism

16 On the history and historiography of continental and hemispheric adjectives in writing about music, see David R. M. Irving, *The Making of European Music in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2024), esp. 19–55 and 99–106. Irving argues that the use of continental adjectives for music in European languages—as distinct from hemispheric adjectives—arose in the long eighteenth century. He offers an example of the term “Asian music” (in French, as “La Musique Asiatique”) dating from 1749.

17 With reference to Anthony Kaldellis, *The Case for East Roman Studies* (Arc Humanities Press, 2024), we avoid the term “Byzantine,” and instead refer to the Eastern Roman Empire, an approach which accurately reflects the terminology of the fifteenth century: the people now commonly called the “Byzantines” referred to themselves as “Romans,” and so did their regional neighbours.

at least by some Italian readers, and thus could be recognised already in the fifteenth century as a literary rather than an ethnographic corpus.

Third, we encounter a much larger portfolio of musical descriptions in eyewitness accounts—some of them very recent—of Türkiye, Persia, India, and China. In these sources, for varying reasons, musical elements are sometimes emphasised as a source of difference from the reader's immediate experience, but more often they are used to generate familiarity, and to build relationships of likeness between the distant and the local. So, for example, we read that Kublai Khan has *pifferi* (wind players) to entertain him at dinner (the *pifferi* mentioned—perhaps a little glibly—in the title of this study), sponsors the singing of “monks,” and employs military trumpeters, all of which exemplify his *magnificentie*, just as they comprised the musical magnificence of any Italian ruler in the late fifteenth century. Similarly, the religious rituals of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others, entail—in the language of our printed accounts—“monks” and “priests” singing or reciting “hymns” to honour “saints” in “churches” and “monasteries,” and inspire pious “martyrs.” Although our sources present many nuances, on the whole such descriptions encouraged Italian readers to hear the musics of Asia in their mind's ear as essentially similar to those familiar from their everyday experience.

Rather than approaching these sources primarily as examples of Orientalism, in our study we choose to imagine Italian readers receiving them as resulting from, or branching out from, the rich practical relationship between Italy and the Eastern Mediterranean in the fifteenth century. The international engagements of Italian states were by long tradition oriented towards the Greeks (or Eastern Romans), the Ottomans and the Mamluks, and beyond to Persia. These relationships did not flow from the voyages of the 1490s sponsored by the Spanish and Portuguese crowns, but emerged much earlier, particularly from the thirteenth century in the wake of the Holy Land crusades. They took territorial form in a series of island and coastal colonies as well as enclaves in key ports, owned for the most part by Genoa and Venice, and they took diplomatic form in a series of treaties and diplomatic contacts with Ottoman, Mamluk, Eastern Roman, and Persian rulers. These engagements unfolded in a distinctive geopolitical context at the intersection of the Eastern Roman, Ottoman, and Mamluk empires, each considerably larger and more powerful than any Italian state of the period (even Venice, with a significant empire of its own), among which the Ottomans over the course of the fifteenth century

emerged decisively to dominance.

In Chapter 1, we make a first attempt to evaluate the implications and impacts of this particular Italian global dynamic upon the musical experiences of Italians, both within Italy and in the Eastern Mediterranean region. We briefly trace the colonial, mercantile, diplomatic, and military activities of Genoa and Venice, which brought Italians to live in Cyprus, Istanbul, Caffa, Damascus, and many other islands and cities in the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea region, for years and even whole lifetimes; and simultaneously prompted many migrants particularly from the Greek and Grecophone sphere to settle in Italy, as well as diplomatic visitors to Venice and elsewhere, creating varied sites of interaction—we might join Emily Wilbourne and Suzanne Cusick in calling them “contact zones”—between Italian, Greek (or more broadly Balkan or Grecophone), Turkish, Arabic, and Tatar musical practices.¹⁸ We consider the linked phenomena of pilgrimage and inter-confessional religious diplomacy, which took many Italians and other Europeans east to the Holy Land on Venetian ships, and at the same time brought various Eastern Christians (particularly Armenians and Ethiopians) to Italy to spend time in Rome, creating the conditions for encounters between distinctive musical rites. And we consider the possible musical outcomes of the vigorous Eastern Mediterranean circulation of people enduring various forms of unfreedom—via the Black Sea slave trade, which brought many enslaved Tatars, Circassians, and Russians to work for Italian and Mamluk owners via especially Genoese intermediaries; via the Ottoman child levy system which conscripted many Balkan Christian children into military training; and via raiding among all parties, including of Italians (such as much of the population of Otranto, following its Ottoman occupation in 1480). These factors all, in different ways and under different cultural and hegemonic dynamics, entailed a continuous circulation of people between Italy and Western Asia in the fifteenth century which inevitably produced musical outcomes, even though research to uncover them is only in its infancy. All ten of our main case studies among the travel literature are

18 Emily Wilbourne and Suzanne G. Cusick, “Introduction,” in *Acoustemologies in Contact: Sounding Subjects and Modes of Listening in Early Modernity*, ed. Wilbourne and Cusick (Open Book Publishers, 2021), 6–7. We note, though, that the power dynamics operating within the “contact zones” discussed in the present study are not identical to those current in the later periods and different contexts considered in Wilbourne and Cusick’s important book.

directly related to some aspect of these phenomena.

Kate van Orden has identified the Mediterranean as a place “from which to unsettle Eurocentric histories of music,” conclusively disrupting “nationalistic and European narratives of cultural wholeness.”¹⁹ At the opening of her seminal anthology *Seachanges* she boldly declares that “it is no longer tenable to conceive of early modern cultures as bounded, fixed, and primordial,” because studies of musical mobilities have “shattered the coherence of static accounts rooted in national, religious, and ethnical identity into a glittering array of new subjects privileging hybridity, cosmopolitanism, and the global.”²⁰ This study seeks to use musical mobilities to a similar end. Scholarship on the musical culture of fifteenth-century Italy has to date remained remarkably entrenched within a European-polyphony paradigm that finds its defining internationalism in the migration of highly-trained musicians from France, the Netherlands, and Germany to work in Italian courts and cathedrals. By adopting Italy’s Eastern Mediterranean entanglements as the frame within which to discuss our travel literature, we aim to begin the process of re-thinking Italian musical culture in the fifteenth century as much more globally connected, and inevitably inflected by flows of people, objects, and experiences that trace their routes, in both directions, far outside the supposed boundaries of Catholic Europe.

Just as the global history approach offers new possibilities for the study of Italian musical culture in the fifteenth century, fifteenth-century Italy also has something to offer the “Global Music History” in return. Luisa Nardini has observed that “Initiatives in global musicology tend to overlook early (medieval) periods ... because of the general misconception that globalism does not apply to premodern times.”²¹ Like *Seachanges*, a majority of the inspiring work to establish a pre- and early-modern global history of music published in recent years has set the beginning of its timeframe in the early- or mid-sixteenth century,

19 Kate van Orden, “Introduction: Music and Mobility,” in *Seachanges: Music in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds, 1550-1880*, ed. van Orden (I Tatti, 2021), 14 and 18.

20 Van Orden, “Music and Mobility,” 9.

21 Nardini, “Introduction to the Global History of Medieval Music,” in *Bloomsbury Medieval Studies* (Bloomsbury, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350883017.008>. Nardini’s essay represents an important contribution towards addressing this problem, with a valuable bibliography. See also Lars Christensen and Gabriella Currie, “Soundscapes in the Global Middle Ages,” in *Teaching the Global Middle Ages*, ed. Geraldine Heng (Modern Language Association, 2022).

implicitly or explicitly positioning the voyages of Vasco da Gama and Cristoforo Colombo in the 1490s as the *terminus post quem* of the discourse, and the Iberian and American colonial campaigns that rapidly followed on as therefore its primary subject matter.²² These features leave Italy in a complex position. Certainly Italy participated in diverse ways in early modern colonialism: the long-standing Genoese and Venetian colonies in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea furnished models for colonial projects elsewhere; individual Italians, such as the Genoese Cristoforo Colombo and the Vicentine Antonio Pigafetta, were key protagonists in the enterprises of other states; Italian rulers and readers enjoyed learning about the new “discoveries;” Italians participated in the trade in enslaved people that resulted from the colonial projects of other European states; and the Roman church played a pivotal role in missionisation.²³ But on the other hand, unlike in the cases of Spain and Portugal (and later of France, England, the Netherlands, and others), none among the patchwork of Italian states was in a position to pursue its own global empire in the Americas, Africa, or South or Southeast Asia. This study proposes new ways to adopt a global perspective on the musical culture of Italy in the century before da Gama and Colombo, attuned to its earlier and distinctive set of international relationships and interactions. In the process, our study offers the opportunity to encompass new chronological, geographical, and rhetorical parameters within the emerging account of the global history of pre-modern music, pushing its early horizon back into a century that has so far seen rather limited engagement with the global turn in music studies.

22 Valuable recent summaries of this literature, giving further citations, include Olivia Bloechl, “Music in the Early Colonial World,” in *The Cambridge History of Sixteenth Century Music*, ed. Iain Fenlon and Richard Wistreich (Cambridge University Press, 2019); and Evan A. MacCarthy, “Exchange: Conduits, Objects, and Earwitnesses,” in *A Cultural History of Western Music in the Renaissance*, ed. Jeanice Brooks and Richard Freedman (Bloomsbury, 2024). (Note that there is no equivalent chapter in *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth Century Music*.)

23 The key study is Elizabeth Horodowich and Lia Markey, eds., *The New World in Early Modern Italy, 1492–1750* (Cambridge University Press, 2017). Musical notices in Pigafetta’s *Relazione del primo viaggio intorno al mondo*, which falls outside the chronological scope of this book, are studied in F. Alberto Gallo, “I racconti dei Pigafetta,” *Itineraria* 6 (2007): 175–96; and David R. M. Irving, “Global Soundscapes from the First Voyage of Circumnavigation, 1519–1522,” in *Soundscapes of the Early Modern Hispanophone and Lusophone Worlds*, ed. Victor Sierra Matute (Routledge, 2025). On enslaved musicians in early modern Italy, see especially Emily Wilbourne, *Voice, Slavery, and Race in Seventeenth-Century Florence* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

1. Italy, the East, and Music

The division of the world's known landmasses into Asia, Africa and Europe was a product of ancient Greek geography. Although its validity was questioned as early as Herodotus (*Histories* 4.45), who observed that all three supposed continents are in fact contiguous, a division running roughly up the Nile (or the Red Sea), through the Aegean, across the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov, and up the Don river was accepted throughout the Middle Ages, and reinforced with the revival of interest in ancient Greek geography and cartography in fifteenth-century Italy.¹ Note that this scheme places within Asia some regions that are now considered to fall within Africa and Europe, in particular the eastern bank of the Nile (stretching down to Ethiopia) and the eastern shore of the Black Sea.

Whilst the world of the eastern Mediterranean and the eastern Black Sea—roughly Western Asia—was familiar to Italians from long direct experience, broadly speaking medieval European ideas about Central, South and East Asia were dominated by information gleaned from the Bible, and by myths elaborated in the Alexander Romance and in the stories concerning the eastern mission of St Thomas, and the Christian rule of Prester John, which Mary B. Campbell has dubbed collectively the “Matter of the East.”² The period of the Pax Mongolica, from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth centuries, allowed a long phase of relatively safe eastward travel, producing numerous European eyewitness and earwitness accounts of Asia (among which is that of the Venetian Marco Polo), which offered to varying extents the opportunity

1 Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (University of California Press, 1997), 21–25; Iain Macleod Higgins, *Writing East: The “Travels” of Sir John Mandeville* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 3–4.

2 Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (Cornell University Press, 1988), 47–86. See also Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe, Vol. 1, Book 1* (University of Chicago Press, 1965), 20–30.

for a more precise and detailed account of the furthest regions of the continent.³ The decline of the Mongol Empire and the widespread outbreak of plague in the mid-fourteenth century closed the door temporarily on the generation of new empirical observations, but prospects for travel from Europe across Asia recovered somewhat in the fifteenth century, allowing the creation of several new travel accounts, before the Portuguese navigation of the Cape of Good Hope at the end of the 1490s changed the situation again entirely.⁴ Italian views of Asia in the fifteenth century were, of course, also strongly coloured by the threat of the Ottoman Empire, and corresponding efforts to clearly differentiate a Christian West from a Muslim East, a task of forceful othering that helped to produce the modern notion of Europe.⁵



Fig. 1 Claudius Ptolemy, *Cosmographia* (Bologna: Dominicus de Lapis, [1477]), Tabula 1 (fols. 61v-62r). Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Rar.124, urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00032959-2. Image ©CC PDM 1.0.

- 3 Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, 87–212; Lach, *Asia*, 30–48. Musical aspects of this phase of engagement are studied in Jason Stoessel, “Voice and Song in Early Encounters between Latins, Mongols, and Persians, ca.1250–1350,” in *Studies on a Global History of Music: A Balzan Musicology Project*, ed. Reinhard Strohm (Routledge, 2018).
- 4 Lach, *Asia*, 59–65.
- 5 See especially Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). The story of the fifteenth-century song *L’homme armé* has been widely interpreted as relating to this phenomenon: see, most recently, Nicolò Ferrari, “New Findings on the Origin and Making of Napoli, Biblioteca Nazionale, Ms VI E 40,” *Muzyka* 66 (2021): 148–84.

The Asia to be seen on Italian maps of the fifteenth century is essentially that established by Ptolemy's *Geographia*, which circulated in manuscript in Italy from the beginning of the fifteenth century and found its way into print in the 1470s.⁶ In the maps accompanying the Bolognese edition of 1477, prepared by Nicolaus Germanus in Florence around 1460 (Fig. 1), the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf are recognisable, but the outward projection of India is enormously understated, while Sri Lanka is much too large; the mainland of Southeast Asia is present but the islands are omitted; and an imaginary southern landmass encloses the Indian Sea. The map created c.1450 by the Venetian Fra Mauro (Fig. 2), which incorporates new information from fifteenth-century travel accounts into the Ptolomaic scheme, gives a similar profile to India and Sri Lanka, but in other respects is much more detailed and (within the scope to be expected of the time) accurate, omitting the southern landmass to allow an open Indian Ocean and adding many islands in Southeast and East Asia, including Japan.

Following the labels on the Fra Mauro map (which indicate approximate regions rather than boundaried states), an eastward journey over land beginning on the Mediterranean coast of Western Asia would cross Judaea and Palestine (with Asia Minor to the north-west); Syria, with Arabia to the south; Mesopotamia between the Tigris and the Euphrates; then Media in the south, aligned with Assyria, Armenia and Parthia in the north; then the large territory of Persia, encompassing parts of modern Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.⁷ Next we reach India, differentiated into India Prima (to the west of the Indus), India Seconda (between the Indus and the Ganges), and "India Cin" or India Terza (between the Ganges and China, encompassing mainland Southeast Asia). (The map attached to the 1477 printed *Geographia* gives a simpler version of the same division of India, viz., India Intra, west of the Ganges, and India Extra, east of the Ganges.) Off the coast of the first and second Indias is the large island of Saylam (Sri Lanka, also sometimes called Taprobana), and off the coast of the third India are the islands of Southeast Asia, including Giava (Java) and Taprobana (in this case, Sumatra). China, meanwhile, is split into Mango (Mangi, southern China) and Chataio (Cathay, northern China).

6 Lach, *Asia*, 65–71. See also Sean E. Roberts, *Printing a Mediterranean World: Florence, Constantinople, and the Renaissance of Geography* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

7 Of course, we do not mean to imply that maps such as the Fra Mauro Map were ever used practically during travel. On the nature and purposes of medieval Christian and Muslim maps, see, among many others, Elka Weber, *Traveling Through Text: Message and Method in Late Medieval Pilgrimage Accounts* (Routledge, 2005), 8–21.



Fig. 2 Fra Mauro, *Mappamundo*, c.1450. Parchment on panel, 230 x 230 cm. Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice. Image courtesy of the Ministry of Culture – Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana. Reproduction prohibited.

It is well known that both Italy as a whole, and several individual Italian states, were strongly engaged in the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Asia during the fifteenth century, for purposes of trade, diplomacy, security, and pilgrimage. The port cities of Venice and Genoa maintained coastal and island colonies along the Balkans, the Aegean and the Black Sea, and operated enclaves in key ports of Western Asia such as Trebizond and Antioch.⁸ Genoa and Venice especially maintained regular diplomatic

8 From among a large literature, on Venice see recently Georg Christ and Franz-Julius Morche, eds., *Cultures of Empire: Rethinking Venetian Rule, 1400–1700* (Brill, 2020); and Erin Maglaque, *Venice's Intimate Empire: Family Life and Scholarship in the Renaissance Mediterranean* (Cornell University Press, 2018). On Genoa, Michel Balard, "The Genoese in the Aegean (1204-1566)," in *Latins and Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean*

contact with the Ottoman and Mamluk sultans, with whom they had detailed treaties setting out the legal basis for fair and safe trade and travel; towards the end of the fifteenth century Florence began to develop similar arrangements.⁹ Venice and Genoa ran a systematic and extensive schedule of galley voyages around the ports of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, carrying both goods and people.

An inevitable result of this activity was that members of numerous Venetian and Genoese mercantile dynasties spent months and years travelling and living in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and Western Asia, as galley captains, colonial administrators, soldiers, diplomats, and merchants. These circumstances must have generated ample, rich opportunities for fifteenth-century Italians to observe and hear at first hand musical instruments and practices characteristic of Western and even Central Asia, and at the same time to bring their own musical practices into Asian regions. Research on this phenomenon in the fifteenth century has barely begun, but we can already attempt to sketch the probable outlines of the general situation.¹⁰

The Venetian and Genoese concessions at Tana on the Sea of Azov, for

after 1204, ed. Benjamin Arbel, Bernard Hamilton, and David Jacoby (Frank Cass, 1989); Thomas Kirk, "The Republic of Genoa and Its Maritime Empire," in *Empires of the Sea: Maritime Power Networks in World History*, ed. Rolf Strootman, Floris van den Eijnde, and Roy van Wijk (Brill, 2019); and Evgeny Khvalkov, *The Colonies of Genoa in the Black Sea Region: Evolution and Transformation* (Routledge, 2018).

- 9 On the Mamluks, John Wansbrough, "Venice and Florence in Mamluk commercial privileges," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 28 (1965): 483–523. On Genoa and the Ottoman Empire see, among others, Kate Fleet, *European and Islamic Trade in the Early Ottoman State: The Merchants of Genoa and Turkey* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Cristian Caselli, "Genoa, Genoese Merchants and the Ottoman Empire in the First Half of the Fifteenth Century: Rumours and Reality," *Al-Masāq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean* 25, no. 2 (2013): 252–63. On Venice and the Ottoman Empire see, among very many others, Stefano Carboni, ed., *Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797* (Yale University Press, 2007). The relationship between European powers and the Ottoman Empire is explored in a more general way in many publications, including Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Anna Contadini and Claire Norton, eds., *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World* (Routledge, 2016).
- 10 Some recent studies have considered earlier and later periods, particularly in Crete. See, for example, Jamie L. Reuland, *Music and the Making of Medieval Venice* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 19–78 (on Crete in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries); and two articles by Alexandros Maria Hatzikiriakos on the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries: "'Cantare alla greca con citere e violini': Western Musical Transfers and Localisations in Early Modern Crete," *Muzyka* 67 (2022): 116–35; and "'A Maniera Greca': Vitsentzos Kornaros's 'Erotokritos' and the Localisation of Italian Music in Early Modern Crete," *Il Saggiatore Musicale* 28 (2021): 147–72.

example, lay in Tatar territory under the Golden Horde, and comprised an important mercantile access point to Asia.¹¹ The magistrates of both Italian communities had the additional diplomatic role of dealing with the Tatar rulers on behalf of their respective states. The Italian concessions included several churches, a reminder that wherever they went across their maritime empires, the Venetians and Genoese brought with them the soundscape of the Roman rite; but nearby was the Greek enclave with its Orthodox church, as well as the Tatar, Circassian, Russian and Jewish settlements.¹² Concessions and colonies also had garrisons, and in some cases there is documentation of the employment of drummers and trumpeters, usually brought in from Italy but sometimes hired locally.¹³

Meanwhile, Tana was not only a point of arrival for merchants and colonial staff, but also a point of departure for locals heading back in the opposite direction. The trade in enslaved people from the Black Sea to Venice, Genoa and other ports around the Mediterranean was vigorous and lucrative.¹⁴ Many Tatars, and also Russians, Circassians, Jews, and others, the majority children and young adults, found themselves enslaved for domestic service or agricultural labour in Italy in this period.¹⁵ Those enslaved were given new Italianate names when they were bought in Venice, Genoa, Florence, or elsewhere, usually Christian in significance but sometimes referring to their particular skill; the female name "Melica" was assigned to several individuals who were bought as slaves in fifteenth-century Genoa and may refer to musical

11 See especially Michael E. Martin, "The Venetians in the Black Sea: A General Survey," *Byzantinistica* 3 (1993): 227–48; Evgeny Khvalkov, "Everyday Life and Material Culture in the Venetian and Genoese Trading Stations of Tana in the 1430s," *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 64 (2012): 84–93; and Khvalkov, *The Colonies of Genoa*, esp. 112–14.

12 Khvalkov, *The Colonies of Genoa*, 113.

13 Khvalkov, *The Colonies of Genoa*, 161 (referring specifically to the Genoese Black Sea colonies of Caffa, Soldaia and Cembalo).

14 Martin, "The Venetians in the Black Sea," 240–43; Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise*; and Steven A. Epstein, *Speaking of Slavery: Color, Ethnicity and Human Bondage in Italy* (Cornell University Press, 2001). Enslaved black Africans were also present in Italy in significant numbers from the mid-fifteenth century on: see Sergio Tognetti, "The Trade in Black African Slaves in Fifteenth-century Florence," in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, ed. T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe (Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Kate Lowe, "Visible Lives: Black Gondoliers and Other Black Africans in Renaissance Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013): 415–52.

15 Of course, the trade also went in the opposite direction: Italians could find themselves captured by raiders or pirates and sold into slavery in the Muslim societies of the Eastern Mediterranean.

abilities.¹⁶ It seems likely that, where enslaved people were prized for their musicianship, it was in Italian musical idioms that they performed for their enslavers; but presumably those enslaved also brought with them some aspects of the musical culture of their natal societies.

The Venetian enclave in Damascus, meanwhile, was a community numbering several dozen individuals in the second half of the fifteenth century, centred on the Venetian consulate with its consul and chaplain, and comprising merchants, tradespeople, physicians, and enslaved servants—mostly male, as few brought their families with them from Venice.¹⁷ Damascus itself was a diverse city lying at the western end of the Silk Route, with a majority Muslim citizenship living alongside significant populations of Syrian Christians (with whom the Venetians little associated) and Jews. Thanks to Francesco Bianchi and Deborah Howard, we have a specific example of a Venetian merchant resident in Damascus taking an interest in the local musical practices. In an inventory of the possessions of Stefano Ravagnino, dated 17 August 1455, we read the following two entries:

sonaii moreschi pezi 2
Two Moorish cymbals

vergeta morescha da balotar con do chorde e con la coverta de pano negro 1
A Moorish small [or thin] stick to be plucked, with two strings and a cover of black cloth.¹⁸

In other words, Stefano owned two regional musical instruments, which he had presumably acquired in Damascus. The two “Moorish cymbals” are perhaps *zills*, the paired finger cymbals common across Western and Central Asia.¹⁹ We take the “stick” with strings for plucking to be a sketchy description of a *tanbur*, or another similar lute-type plucked instrument

16 Epstein, *Speaking of Slavery*, 24–33, Melica at 31. However, Mamluk customers were much more interested than Italians in Black Sea slaves’ musical skills: see Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise*, 65, 71, 86, 87, 101 and 106.

17 Deborah Howard, “Death in Damascus: Venetians in Syria in the Mid-Fifteenth Century,” *Muqarnas* 20 (2003): 143–57; and Francesco Bianchi and Deborah Howard, *Life and Death in Damascus: The material culture of Venetians in the Syrian capital in the mid-fifteenth century* (Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 2003).

18 Bianchi and Howard, *Life and Death in Damascus*, 272 and 275. Our thanks to Arianna Rigamonti for passing on this reference, and to Arianna, Vincenzo Borghetti, and Alexandros Maria Hatzikiriakos for helping us decode it. All translations are the authors’ unless otherwise credited.

19 On the highly flexible use of the term “moro” in Italian at this date, see Lowe, “Visible Lives,” 417.

used in the region, such as a *dotār*.²⁰ The inventory does not tell us whether Stefano owned these instruments in order to play them (or have them played), or to display them as ornaments, or indeed both; their musical nature was presumably relevant to his interest in them, but his interest need not have overlapped precisely with their local use and meanings.²¹

In addition to merchants and colonial administrators, fifteenth-century Venice was the port of embarkation for many pilgrims, Italians, and others, heading to the Holy Land.²² The journey, which in total took several months, encompassed not only the Holy Land itself, but also numerous ports of call along the Balkan coast and the islands of Crete, Rhodes, and Cyprus, where the Venetians maintained secure facilities for resupply. Some pilgrims chose to add on a visit to the Sinai via Gaza, sometimes continuing on to Cairo, and Alexandria where transport home could be found. As well as encountering local auditory phenomena, of course pilgrims brought with them their own musical practices, and sometimes even their own musicians. For example, a group of four pilgrims of means setting off from Venice in 1483 took with them seven servants, among them a barber-musician, and passed the time during their voyage in singing and playing lutes, pipes, and other instruments.²³ Music was also integral to the practical

20 The *dotār* answers the description more precisely since it had two strings (in fact the name *do-tār* means literally “two-strings”), whereas by the fifteenth century the tanbur usually had three. However, musical instruments described in domestic inventories in this period are often in an imperfect state of repair, so the fact the notary saw two strings does not necessarily mean that they were the instrument’s full complement.

21 Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall observe that the meanings of objects frequently shift when they are collected across cultures: Bleichmar and Mancall, “Introduction,” in *Collecting across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, ed. Bleichmar and Mancall (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 2.

22 On Venice’s role in Holy Land pilgrimage see especially Eliyahu Ashtor, “Venezia e il pellegrinaggio in Terrasanta nel basso medioevo,” *Archivio Storico Italiano* 143 (1985): 197–223. A few pilgrims embarked instead at Genoa: Giovanna Petti Balbi, “Mare e pellegrini verso la Terra Santa: il reale e l’immaginario,” in *L’uomo e il mare nella civiltà occidentale: Da Ulisse a Cristoforo Colombo* (Società ligure di storia patria, 1992), 102–03. For a general introduction to Holy Land pilgrimage in this period, see Nicole Chareyron, *Pilgrims to Jerusalem in the Middle Ages*, trans. W. Donald Wilson (Columbia University Press, 2005); and, with a specific focus on Italian pilgrims, Franco Cardini, *In Terrasanta: Pellegrini italiani tra Medioevo e prima età moderna* (Il Mulino, 2002).

23 Benjamin Arbel, “Daily Life on Board Venetian Ships: The Evidence of Renaissance Travelogues and Diaries,” in *Rapporti mediterranei, pratiche documentarie, presenze veneziane: Le reti economiche e culturali (XIV-XVI secolo)*, ed. Gherardo Ortalli and Alessio Sopracasa (Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2017), 188 and 212. As Arbel notes, whilst the majority of passengers were Catholic Christians, Jews also travelled from Venice on pilgrimage, among them the Italian Meshullam of Volterra

functioning of the galley, including trumpets to mark the time and signal important occurrences, and the practice of sung communication between pilot and helmsman during the night watch.²⁴ The galley itself was a multicultural community, comprising sailors and passengers from throughout Catholic Europe and around the Mediterranean coast, and its soundscape must have reflected that diversity.²⁵

Venetian imperial adventuring in the Eastern Mediterranean, and particularly along the Balkan coastline, generated a reciprocal flow of migrants that produced significant communities of Albanians, Slavs and Greeks in Venice.²⁶ These communities swelled dramatically during the phase of vigorous Ottoman expansion under Sultan Mehmed II, encompassing the conquests of Constantinople in 1453, Serbia in 1459, the Morea in 1460, and Bosnia in 1463, followed by the defeat of the Albanian prince Skanderbeg in 1466. The Albanian community in Venice founded a confraternity, the Scuola degli Albanesi, in 1442; the Slavs (Scuola degli Schiavoni) in 1451; and finally the Greeks (Scuola di San Nicolò) in 1498.²⁷ Although members of these communities became involved in varied roles right across Venice's economy, they were particularly known as oarsmen, sailors, and soldiers, mirroring the roles that had been played by their ancestors for Venetian colonial authorities in the Balkans. From the 1460s on, Venice became especially reliant on the light cavalry mercenaries

whose 1481 trip is recorded in his travel account (which, however, was not printed in the fifteenth century). Weber, *Travelling through Text*, covers Christian, Jewish and Muslim pilgrims, making extensive use of Meshullam's account.

24 Arbel, "Daily Life on Board," 211–12. See also, on Neapolitan galleys (albeit of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), Nathan K. Reeves, "The Oar, the Trumpet, and the Drum: Music and Galley Servitude in Spanish Naples," in *Music, Place and Identity in Italian Urban Soundscapes circa 1550–1860*, ed. Simone Caputo, Franco Piperno, and Emanuele Senici (Routledge, 2023), 155–62.

25 Arbel, "Daily life on board," 186–90 (on the nationalities of passengers), and 211–13 (on the on-board soundscape).

26 A very valuable summary of what is known about these groups in Venice can be found in Benjamin Ravid, "Venice and its Minorities," in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400–1797*, ed. Eric Dursteler (Brill, 2013). Important attempts to review the musical and sonic outcomes of Venetian multiculturalism, though mostly focussed on a later period than this study (sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries), include Iain Fenlon, "'Other' Musics in Sixteenth-Century Venice," in *Sleuthing the Muse: Essays in Honour of William F. Prizer*, ed. Kristine K. Forney and Jeremy L. Smith (Pendragon, 2012); and Rosa M. Salzberg, "The Sounds of a 'Migropolis': Listening to Early Modern Venice," in *Migration and the European City: Social and Cultural Perspectives from Early Modernity to the Present*, ed. Christoph Cornelissen, Beat Kümin, and Massimo Rospocher (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022).

27 Ravid, "Venice and its Minorities," 457–58 and 464.

known as *stradioti*—principally Albanian, including many Albanians previously settled in Greece as well as those from Albania itself—who came to comprise a major component of the city's military power on land.²⁸



Fig. 3 Lorenzo Costa, *Coronation*, c.1505. Oil and tempera on canvas, 165 x 198 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Image ©RMN-Grand Palais / Adrien Didierjean, Sylvie Chan-Liat / Dist. Foto SCALA, Florence.

Immigrants from the Balkans constituted a point of interface between Catholic Europe and the Ottoman Empire, both practically in that the advancing western frontier of the empire lay across their homelands, and to an extent culturally.²⁹ That Italians thought of the Greeks as part of the broader category of “Easterners” is clear from the tendency sometimes

28 M. E. Mallett and J. R. Hale, *The Military Organisation of a Renaissance State: Venice c.1400-1617* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 73–74; and in more detail Paolo Petta, *Stradioti: Soldati albanesi in italia (sec. XV-XIX)* (Argo, 1996); and Stathis Birtachas, “Stradioti, Cappelletti, Compagnie or Milizie Greche: ‘Greek’ Mounted and Foot Mercenary Companies in the Venetian State (Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries),” in *A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea*, ed. Georgios Theotokis and Aysel Yıldız (Brill, 2018).

29 Bisaha characterises refugees from the Balkans in the fifteenth century as “straddling east and west:” *Creating East and West*, 94–134.

to represent them wearing turbans. In Lorenzo Costa's *Allegory of Isabella d'Este's Coronation* of 1505–6 (Fig. 3), for example, turbans adorn the heads of the Greeks Pythagoras (holding a monochord) and Aristoxenus (tuning a viola da mano).³⁰ The *Guerino Meschino*—written around 1410 by Andrea Mangiabotti (aka Andrea da Barberino) and partly set in Albania—describes Albanian soldiers as “wild,” bearing strange arms and uttering war cries like those of the Turks:

Et con una gente se apresava alaltra con grande crida li Albani ad usanza deturchi et li cristiani piu a usanza piu taliana che francesca Eran diverse arme con stranii et diversi instrumenti pocho che bandere haveano li albani. Avederli venire pareano gente salvatica con poco ordine con grande grida.³¹

And with one group pressing against another, with great cries, the Albanians in the manner of Turks and the Christians more in a manner more Italian than French; there were diverse arms with strange and varied instruments, [and] the Albanians had few banners. To see them come, they seemed like wild people, with little order [and] with great shouting.

Modern editions of the text of the *Guerino* specify that the “instrumenti” mentioned here are “da guerra,” i.e. combat equipment rather than musical instruments, but this is ambiguous in the text circulated in print in the late fifteenth century, particularly since the term “instrumenti” is used in reference to music elsewhere in the book; thus, a contemporary reader could justifiably assume that this passage mentions strange and varied *musical* instruments used by the Albanians. Meanwhile, descriptions of the *stradioti* in action in Italy in the late fifteenth century comment on their “Turkish” scimitars, which can be seen clearly in a French engraving of the Battle of Fornovo of 1495 (Fig. 4; the *stradioti*, one of whom has a drum fixed to his horse's saddle, can be seen at bottom left raiding the baggage train).³² Contemporary accounts also note Turks, as well as Greeks and Albanians, among their ranks, and in one case report *stradioti* wearing turbans.³³

30 Tim Shephard, *Echoing Helicon: Music, Art and Identity in the Este Studioli* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 68–69. On the othering of Greek costume and style in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, see in more detail Peter Bell, “Barbaric and Assimilated Hellenes: Textual and Visual Images of Greek Scholars between Lapo da Castiglionchio (c.1405–1438) and Paolo Giovio (1483–1552),” in *Receptions of Hellenism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Natasha Constantinidou and Han Lamers (Brill, 2019).

31 Andrea Mangiabotti, *Guerino Meschino* (Padua: Bartholomaeus de Valdezoccho and Martinus de Septem Arboribus, 1473), fol. 15r-v.

32 See, for example, the observations of the Brescian notary Jacopo Melza during the War of Ferrara, quoted in Petta, *Stradioti*, 46.

33 See the accounts of Marino Sanuto and again Melza, both concerning the War of

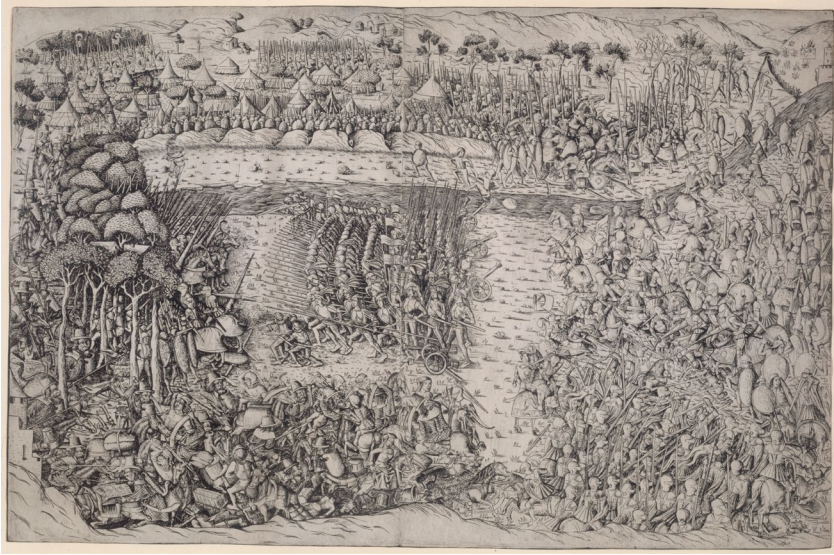


Fig. 4 Anon. (French), *The Battle of Fornovo*, c.1495 (engraving) / 1506 (printing). Engraving printed on two sheets of laid paper joined at center, 40.9 × 63 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Image ©CC0.

The Balkan region in this period was the site of varied musical encounters and intersections. Western European styles and instruments were cultivated especially in areas deeply impacted by Venetian colonial administration, and Balkan immigrants in Italy certainly contributed to “mainstream” Italian musical culture (well-known examples include the Croatian composer and music printer Andrea Antico, and the Bosnian lutenist Franciscus Bossinensis).³⁴ At the same time, some of the characteristic musical instruments of the Balkans, such as the tambura, zurna and davul, were (and are) shared, in multiple variants, with Western and Central Asia. Ensembles playing zurna and davul (albeit approximately rendered) can be seen in Vittore Carpaccio’s *Triumph of St George* (1502) and *The Baptism of the Selenites* (1507), painted for the

Ferrara, quoted in Petta, *Stradioti*, 45–46. See also Georgios Pelidis, “Morire per honor di la Signoria: Gli stradioti Greci a Venezia,” in *Dēmosia hilaria, Pubblica celebrazione: 500 anni dalla fondazione della comunità dei Greci Ortodossi di Venezia, 1498–1998* (Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies, 1999), 30–31.

34 See Ivano Cavallini, “The ‘Other’ Coastal Area of Venice: Musical Ties with Istria and Dalmatia,” in *A Companion to Music in Sixteenth-Century Venice*, ed. Katelijne Schiltz (Brill, 2017).

Scuola degli Schiavoni in Venice (Figs. 5 and 6).³⁵ Whilst the ensemble is certainly apt to the Western Asian setting of the St George story, very likely it was also familiar to the painter's Balkan clients.³⁶



Fig. 5 Vittore Carpaccio, *Triumph of St George*, 1502. Tempera on panel, 141 x 360 cm. Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, Venice. Image ©Cameraphoto / Scala, Florence.



Fig. 6 Vittore Carpaccio, *Baptism of the Selenites*, 1507. Tempera on panel, 141 x 285 cm. Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, Venice. Image ©Cameraphoto / Scala, Florence.

More research is required to uncover the impact of Balkan secular musical traditions on the soundscape of fifteenth-century Venice, and Italy more widely; but a clearer case can be made in relation to sacred song. Despite

35 Tim Shephard, Sanna Raninen, Serenella Sessini, and Laura Ștefănescu, *Music in the Art of Renaissance Italy 1420-1540* (Harvey Miller, 2020), 293.

36 The location of the St George story differs in different sources. Candidates include Cappadocia (in the earliest accounts); "Lybia," usually taken to mean a region immediately to the west of the Nile (in the *Legenda aurea*); and near Beirut (e.g. in Chapter 157 of Niccolò da Poggibonsi's pilgrim account).

a general climate of hostility towards Greeks in Italy on account of their schismatic church, the Greek rite was celebrated unofficially in private houses and churches in Venice throughout the first half of the fifteenth century.³⁷ Following the Council of Florence (1438–45), which brought a more precise framework to ecumenical relations, the situation began to shift towards a more official basis, and finally in 1470 the Council of Ten restricted the Greek community to the church of San Biagio in Castello for this purpose.³⁸ Greek and Albanian communities were also present elsewhere in Italy, maintaining their own religious observances.³⁹ The Kingdom of Naples, for example, certainly accommodated migrants from the Balkans in this period who sought to maintain distinctive cultural traditions—their modern descendants are the Griko people and the Arbëreshë; Giuseppe Sanfratello has attempted to reconstruct the liturgical chants they brought with them to Italy in the fifteenth century.⁴⁰

The Balkan interface gives us an interesting lens through which to view a musical encounter reported by Johannes Tinctoris in Naples. In *De inventione et usu musicae*, Tinctoris lists the tanbur among the instruments derived from “the *lyra* popularly called the ‘lute’” (*lyra populariter leutum dicta*):

Illud autem exile ac parvum instrumentum, quod Turcharum, exiliori ac minori ingenio, ex *lyra* itidem tractum, eorum lingua “tambura” nuncupatur, formam quasi coclearis magni continens, tres chordas habet ad diapason, diapenten, ac diatessaron temperatas, digitis aut penna ad sonandum impellendas.⁴¹

37 James Ball, “The Greek Community in Venice 1470–1620” (PhD diss., University of London, 1984), 26–31. Evidence regarding music for Greek liturgies in Venice in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is brought together in Fenlon, “‘Other’ Musics,” 469–70.

38 Ball, “The Greek Community in Venice,” 36–42; Ravid, “Venice and its Minorities,” 464.

39 See most recently Gerassimos D. Pagratis, ed., *Diaspora neo-greca nell'Italia centro-meridionale della prima età moderna (sec. XV–XVIII)* (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2025).

40 Giuseppe Sanfratello, “Byzantine Chant in the Albanian-Sicilian Colonies since the Time of Bessarion,” in *Bessarion and Music: Concepts, Theoretical Sources, and Styles*, ed. Silvia Tessari (Fondazione Levi, 2021). On migration from Greece and Albania to the Kingdom of Naples in the fifteenth century see Petta, *Stradioti*, 13–17. Relations between southern Italy and the Balkans more generally are surveyed in Dora Catalano, “Guardando a levante: Pittura post-bizantina nel Meridione d'Italia e altri fatti adriatici,” in *Rinascimento visto da Sud: Matera, l'Italia meridionale e il Mediterraneo tra '400 e '500*, ed. Dora Catalano, Matteo Ceriana, Pierluigi Leone de Castris, and Marta Ragozzino (Artem, 2019).

41 Tinctoris, *De inventione et usu musicae*, ed. Jeffrey J. Dean, IV.iv. <https://earlymusictheory.org/Tinctoris/texts/deinventionetetusumusice/#>

But that slender and small instrument, drawn in the same way by the Turks from the *lyra* with a more slender and smaller ingenuity, that is called in their language a “tambura,” containing a shape like a great spoon, has three strings tuned to an octave, a fifth, and a fourth, struck to be sounded by the fingers or a quill.⁴²

A little further along in the treatise, Tinctoris describes the source of his direct knowledge of this instrument:

Et quom Turcharum immanissima gens, qui pontificatus Sixti pape quarti anno decimo Hydrontum Apulie metropolim dolo expugnaverant, post quattuor mensium obsidionem Alfonso Calabrorum duci strenuissimo se internecionis metu dedidisset, quosdam eorum illo instrumento quod (ut supra diximus) ab eis “tambura” vocatur nonnullos cantus (ut privatim (quod possent) se in terra consolarentur aliena) Neapoli edere persensi, adeo nimirum incomptos ac insulsos quod solum id ad eorum ostendendam barbariem omnino sufficebat.⁴³

And when the most savage race of Turks, who were deceitfully assaulting Otranto, the chief city of Apulia, in the tenth year of the pontificate of Pope Sixtus IV [1480/81], after four months’ siege gave themselves up for fear of massacre to the most vigorous Alfonso, duke of Calabria, I heard some of them in Naples play some pieces of music on the instrument that (as we said above) is called by them a “tambura” (in order privately, as far as they could, to console themselves in a strange land), so indisputably artless and tasteless that only this altogether satisfied their conspicuous barbarity.⁴⁴

Tinctoris is certainly not wrong in stating that the “tambura,” or tanbur, was used by the Turks; but nonetheless, the situation may be more entangled than he makes out. The Ottoman professional infantry, the janissaries, were conscripted through the *devşirme* child levy system. Mehmed II expanded the *devşirme* system following the capture of Constantinople, especially targeting Christian families in the Balkans.⁴⁵

42 Tinctoris, *De inventione et usu musice*, trans. Jeffrey J. Dean, IV.iv. <https://earlymusictheory.org/Tinctoris/texts/deinventioneeetusumusice/#>

43 Tinctoris, *De inventione et usu musice*, ed. Jeffrey J. Dean, IV.v. <https://earlymusictheory.org/Tinctoris/texts/deinventioneeetusumusice/#>

44 Tinctoris, *De inventione et usu musice*, trans. Jeffrey J. Dean, IV.v. <https://earlymusictheory.org/Tinctoris/texts/deinventioneeetusumusice/#>

45 Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 58. On the capture of the Turkish garrison in Otranto, which included both janissaries (infantry) and *sipahi* (cavalry), and the negotiations for their release, see, among others, Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, “Otranto’nun Zaptından Sonra Napoli Kralı ile Dostluk Görüşmeleri” [Friendly Meetings with the King of Naples after the Capture of Otranto], *Belleten* 25 (1961): 593–608.

(The commander of the campaign against Otranto, Gedik Ahmed Pasha, was himself also from the Balkans; specifically, Serbia.)⁴⁶ Thus, it is quite possible that the “Turkish” prisoner whose playing was overheard by Tinctoris was born in Greece or Albania, and that his tanbur, whilst quite possibly Turkish, was also not a big step away from the instruments he recalled from early childhood.

Balkan Christians were not the only “eastern” group to be accommodated in the practice of their rite in Italian cities. The Armenian mercantile community in Venice also celebrated their own rite in their own church, and had done so since the fourteenth century.⁴⁷ Indeed, there were Armenian communities celebrating in their own churches in numerous Italian cities in the fifteenth century, particularly but not only communities of Basilian monks, who probably acted as a kind of hostel network, assisting Armenian pilgrims en route to Rome, as well as merchants.⁴⁸ Fragments of evidence relating to the church of San Basilio in Florence, where Armenian monks celebrated their liturgy from 1321 to 1491, imply that Catholic fellow citizens noticed the difference of the Armenian ritual soundscape, and at least in some cases responded to it unkindly.⁴⁹

Another community in fifteenth-century Italy that might be said to straddle East and West, or indeed to confound the distinction, was that of the Jews. Of course, substantial Jewish communities had been established across Europe for centuries, including in Italy, with distinct linguistic and cultural practices.⁵⁰ Jewish communities were also present around the eastern Mediterranean and Western Asia, where they sometimes lived alongside Italian merchants and colonies, as we have already seen. Thus, Jewish merchants and immigrants were as likely

46 Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (State University of New York Press, 2003), 116.

47 Ravid, “Venice and its Minorities,” 459.

48 See especially Levon B. Zekiyan, “Le colonie armene del medioevo in Italia e le relazioni culturali italo-armene (Materiali per la Storia degli Armeni in Italia),” in *Atti del primo simposio internazionale di arte armena (Bergamo, 28-30 giugno 1975)*, ed. Giulio Ieni and Levon B. Zekiyan (San Lazzaro, 1978).

49 Alessandro Orenco, “Gli Armeni in Italia, ed in particolare in Toscana, nel Medioevo ed oltre,” *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Moyen Âge* 130, no. 1 (2018): 86–88.

50 On the Jewish communities in pre-modern Italy, see, for the overview, Yaron Harel and Mauro Perani ed., *The Jews in Italy: Their Contribution to the Development and Diffusion of Jewish Heritage* (Academic Studies Press, 2019); and, for the details, the numerous volumes in the Brill series *Documentary History of the Jews in Italy*.

to arrive in Italy from the north and west as they were from the east, and did not necessarily comprise a homogenous group, either among themselves or with native Italian Jews. The contributions of Jewish musicians to “mainstream” Italian musical culture in the Renaissance have been extensively studied, in the fifteenth century with a particular focus on the dancing master Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro and the court of Urbino.⁵¹ Recent research has illuminated anew the musical practices distinctive to the Jewish communities in early modern Italy, although to date the majority of this new wave of work has focussed on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and further research is needed to bring the fifteenth century fully into the discussion.⁵²

Rome was a magnet for foreigners and a centre of cosmopolitan culture in the fifteenth century, but for different reasons from the trading powers. Travellers from beyond Catholic Europe arrived in Rome regularly, both as pilgrims, and as representatives of Eastern churches—such as the Syrian, Armenian and Ethiopian churches—engaged in diplomatic maneuvers. Ethiopian visitors, who were often referred to and referred to themselves as “Indians” in Italy, are particularly well documented across the fifteenth century.⁵³ By the 1490s

51 Concerning the fifteenth century, see, among others, Daniel Jütte, “The Place of Music in Early Modern Italian Jewish Culture,” in *Musical Exodus: Al-Andalus and Its Jewish Diasporas*, ed. Ruth F. Davis (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); J. Drew Stephen, “Traces of Jewish Music and Culture at the Urbino Court of Federico da Montefeltro,” in *Music and Jewish Culture in Early Modern Italy: New Perspectives*, ed. Lynette Bowring, Rebecca Cypess, and Liza Malamut (Indiana University Press, 2022); and Luigi Sisto, “Jewish and Converted Musicians and Musical Instrument Makers in Southern Italy in the Fifteenth through Early Seventeenth Centuries,” in *Music and Jewish Culture*, ed. Bowring et al.

52 Jütte, “The Place of Music in Early Modern Italian Jewish Culture,” includes some information on the fifteenth century. Otherwise, see recently, Edwin Seroussi, “Ghetto Soundscapes: Venice and Beyond,” in *Shirat Dvora: Essays in Honor of Professor Dvora Bregman*, ed. Havivah Ishay (Ben Gurion University in the Negev Press, 2019); Francesco Spagnolo, “Written in Italian, Heard as Jewish: Reconsidering the notated Sources of Italian Jewish Music,” in *Music and Jewish Culture*, ed. Bowring et al.; Avery Gosfield, “A Fire, a Fight, and a Knight: Elye Bokher in Verse and Song,” in *Music and Jewish Culture*, ed. Bowring et al.; and Diana Matut, “Songs for Hanukkah and Purim from Venice,” in *The Museum of Renaissance Music: A History in 100 Exhibits*, ed. Vincenzo Borghetti and Tim Shephard (Brepols, 2023). Rebecca Cypess’ “Introduction” to *Music and Jewish Culture* offers a valuable overview of research in this area.

53 See Sam Kennerley, “Ethiopian Christians in Rome, c.1400–1700,” in *A Companion to Religious Minorities in Early Modern Rome*, ed. Matthew Coneys Wainwright and Emily Michelson (Brill, 2020).

they had adopted the small church of Santo Stefano, located directly behind the apse of St Peter's, as their headquarters in the city, where they presumably maintained an Ethiopian Orthodox rite.

In sum, it is clear that the international perspective of fifteenth-century Italians—particularly in Venice, Genoa, Florence, and Rome, but also to varying extents elsewhere—was not at all limited to Catholic Europe, but attended with particular interest to the Eastern Mediterranean region and Western Asia, for reasons of trade, travel, diplomacy and security. This situation produced a continuous circulation of people, with inevitable musical outcomes. Whilst Italian merchants, diplomats and pilgrims certainly brought their own musical practices with them when setting off to the east, they also (at least in some cases) observed and took an interest in the musical practices they encountered on their travels, acquiring instruments, and perhaps more importantly also experiences to report back home (the very process that generated most of the books analysed in the remainder of this study). At the same time, a counter-flow of people headed west to Italy, whether pilgrims and Eastern church representatives visiting Rome, or migrants from the Balkans seeking new opportunities and permanent settlement in Venice and elsewhere, or enslaved Tatars, Russians, and Circassians arriving for sale in Venice and Genoa, bringing with them their musical practices.

There is a great deal about this picture that needs to be sharpened up, because most of its individual components have yet to be adequately researched—at least so far as the fifteenth century is concerned. In particular, in further developing this research strand it will be essential to differentiate between the global engagements of the various regions of Italy, which experienced different patterns of travel, commerce and migration, and indeed could exhibit quite different cultural orientations in general, to the extent of regarding each other as “foreign.” Chronological considerations are equally important, since patterns of migration and diplomatic or military travel changed in response to events; the situation in the Venetian and Genoese colonies was especially dynamic across the fifteenth century because of the growing ambitions of the Ottomans. Further migrant groups and marginalised communities also need integrating into the picture—for example the “Zingari” or “Giptij,” who arrived in Italy from the mid-fifteenth century, largely from the Balkans

(though themselves citing an origin in “Little Egypt,” hence “Giptij”), prompted by the Ottoman conquests.⁵⁴

Nonetheless, there is enough information on the table already to draw the general conclusion that fifteenth-century Italians did not necessarily live in a Catholic European musical bubble, and that an “international” view of Italian musical culture that is limited to the migrations of musical professionals within Western Europe only tells one part of the story. This provides a valuable backdrop to the discussion of travel literature that follows, showing that the descriptions of musics heard in Asian locales that could be read in printed books in the late fifteenth century arrived into the Italian musical consciousness to find an existing frame of reference within which they could be placed and understood, at least to an extent and by some readers. The journeys that produced those observations were, or were in some sense extended versions of, journeys that music and musical experiences commonly made between Italy and the varied regions of Asia in the fifteenth century.

54 See especially Elisa Novi Chavarria, *Sulle tracce degli zingari: Il Regno di Napoli nel XVII secolo* (Alfredo Guida Editore, 2007) – which (despite the title) traces the community in southern and central Italy from the fifteenth century on; and Maria Gloria Tumminelli, “Gli zingari nel sistema imperiale spagnolo: Soldati, banditi e vagabondi tra Milano, Napoli e la Castiglia, (secc. XVI- XVII)” (PhD diss., Università di Pavia, 2019). Novi Chavarria notes that Borso d’Este paid a “Cingano” musician in 1469 (*Sulle tracce degli zingari*, 34). The payment record is transcribed in Alessandro Giuseppe Spinelli, “Gli zingari nel modenese,” *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* n.s. 3 (1909–10), 44: “et per Sua Signoria in done ad uno Cingano che sonava una citola denanzi a Sua Signoria L. 0,6.”

2. Asia in Italian Print

We have already introduced the ten works of travel literature that will provide our main case studies in the following chapters. However, several further works describing Asia, which might be called (or at least are closely related to) “travel literature,” were printed in late fifteenth-century Italy, which we will not consider as detailed case studies, but which are worth mentioning more briefly to flesh out the context. In this chapter we will concisely review those secondary texts. A convenient chronological inventory of the literature we mention can be found in the Appendix.

Somewhat similar to Mandeville, and with some musical interest, is the vernacular prose novel entitled *Guerino Meschino* already mentioned above, a chivalric romance written around 1410 by the Florentine *canterino* Andrea Mangiabotti.¹ Following the first edition of 1473, the print circulation of this work in the late fifteenth century in Italy nearly equalled that of Mandeville. The gist of the story is that Guerino, scion of European nobility and son of the ruler of Durazzo (modern Durrës in Albania, in the fifteenth century ruled by Venice), is captured as an infant by Turks and sold into slavery in Eastern Roman Constantinople. Later showing himself to possess the skill in combat and chivalrous nobility of spirit of a knight, Guerino embarks on a series of adventures to discover his true identity and recover his birthright, which take him as far east as India, as far south as Ethiopia, as far west as Spain, and as far north as Ireland. The portions of the story that take place in Asia partake liberally of Campbell’s “Matter of the East” (disposed as a series of monstrous challenges overcome by the brave knight), and are extensively concerned with military struggle between “Christians” and “Saracens.” Although

1 Andrea Mangiabotti, *Guerino Meschino* (Padua: Bartholomaeus de Valdezoccho and Martinus de Septem Arboribus, 1473 – repr. 1475, 1475-80, 1477, 1480x2, 1482x2, 1483, 1493, 1498).

music appears regularly, it is almost always in the conventional forms of European chivalry and warfare: “instrumenti” punctuate a tournament in Constantinople, a “trombeta” (meaning a herald) is several times sent to deliver a message, and “corni” (horns) play signals in multiple battles.²

Among the inspirations for the *Guerino Meschino*, and a very popular literary corpus in its own right, was the portfolio of stories concerning Alexander the Great and his military adventures in Greece and Asia, now known collectively as the Alexander Romances.³ This complex group of texts with labyrinthine interrelations is represented in Italian print in our period by three distinct works. The first into print (c.1471), and also the most often printed, was the *Historiae Alexandri Magni*, a biography by the 1st century AD historian Quintus Curtius Rufus; although mostly circulated in Latin, an Italian translation by Pier Candido Decembrio was also printed in 1478.⁴ In 1474 Curtius' text was joined in print by an Italian-language version of the so-called *Historia de preliis*, a family of Alexander romances descended from a Latin translation of Greek stories about Alexander prepared in the tenth century for the Duke of Naples by a cleric named Leo.⁵ Finally, in 1501 another core text of the Alexander Romances was printed: a letter supposedly written by Alexander himself to his tutor Aristotle concerning his experiences in India, circulated under the heading *De mirabilibus Indiae*.⁶

2 E.g. Mangiabotti, *Guerino Meschino*, fols. 19r (“instrumenti”), 29r (“trombeta”), 29v (“corno”).

3 The classic study of this corpus is George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge University Press, 1956); on Italy specifically, see Barbara Blythe, “Medieval and Renaissance Italian Receptions of the Alexander Romance Tradition,” in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander the Great*, ed. Kenneth Royce Moore (Brill, 2018). Of course, stories about Alexander also circulated throughout the regions affected by his conquests, and even beyond in Southeast Asia and the territories now encompassed by China; see especially Su Fang Ng, *Alexander the Great from Britain to Southeast Asia: Peripheral Empires in the Global Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 2019). Donatella Restani has published several important studies on music in the Alexander stories, among which the most relevant to our context is “Listening between the Lines: Alexander's Musical Legacy in Italy (13th–15th Centuries),” in *The Music Road: Coherence and Diversity in Music from the Mediterranean to India*, ed. Reinhard Strohm (British Academy, 2019).

4 Quintus Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* ([Venice]: Vindelinius de Spira, [c.1471] – repr. c.1472, 1478 (Italian), 1481, 1491, 1494, 1496).

5 *Le historia da Alexandro magno* (Treviso: [Gerardus de Lisa], 1474 – repr. 1477x2, 1483).

6 *Secretum secretorum ad Alexandrum. De regum regimine: De sanitatis conservatione: De physionomia Alexandri Aphrodisiei de intellectu. Averrois de anime beatitudine. Alexandri Achillini bononiensis de Universalibus. Alexandri Macedonis de mirabilibus Indiae ad*

The Alexander Romances were core texts of Campbell's "Matter of the East," developing themes including Gog and Magog, the Land of Darkness, and the Trees of the Sun and the Moon, which echoed through many other literary accounts of the marvels of the east, including those of "Mandeville" and Mangiabotti. However, in line with their focus on Alexander's battles and conquests, their musical repertoire is largely limited, like that of *Guerino Meschino*, to military signals.⁷ Nonetheless, Curtius in particular does offer some brief insights into music heard especially during Alexander's Persian campaign, twice mentioning the chanting of the "Magi" (Zoroastrian priests; at 3.3 and 5.1), and twice the uncouth or lascivious singing of Alexander's captives (at 6.2 and 7.10).⁸ Perhaps the most interesting of these is the first description of the singing of the captives. Following his successes against Darius, King of the Persians, Alexander spends some time relaxing:

Consumando adunque edi et lenocite insieme nedisordinati conviti nelmezo della satieta de cibi interponeva giuochi et feste non contento anchora degli artefici equali di grecia haveva facti venire. Imperoche le turbe quelle femine le quali perprigioni teneva erano dallvi comandate che sechondo illoro modo cantassino canzone senza ordine et dalunge da modi di forestieri. Tra lequali el re ne vide una piu maninchonosa che laltre la quale honestamente acholoro ripugnava equali laconducevano.⁹

Thus, consuming days and nights together in disordered feasts, amid the surfeit of food, he interposed games and celebrations; moreover he was not content with the artistes he had brought from Greece. For the crowds of women he held as prisoners were commanded to sing songs in their own manner, without order and far from the manner to which foreigners are accustomed. Among them, the king saw one more melancholy than the others, who with dignity refused to perform.

This most dignified and reserved of the women turns out to be of Persian royal blood, her musical reluctance and her sorrow at captivity both signals of and arising from her nobility of spirit. (In a slightly confusing formulation, the "foreigners" to whom the women's songs

Aristotelem (Bologna: impensis Benedetto Faelli, 1501).

7 E.g. *Le historia da Alexandro magno* (Venice: [nel Beretin Convento della Ca Grande], 1477), fol. IXv; *Secretum secretorum ad Alexandrum*, fol. 33r.

8 Quintus Curtius Rufus, *La historia dalexandro magno* (Florence: apud Sanctum Jacobum de Ripoli, 1478), sigs. a iiii r, I i v, [o iiii] v, and [y vii] v, respectively.

9 Curtius, *La historia dalexandro magno*, sig. [o iiii] r-v.

seem disordered and unfamiliar here are the Greek listeners, that is, those who are foreign to Persia.)

The case of Curtius reminds us that Italian readers in the late fifteenth century also had access to printed editions of a range of classical works describing Asia. The most important among these were Ptolemy's *Cosmographia*,¹⁰ Strabo's *Geographia*,¹¹ Pomponius Mela's *De situ orbis*,¹² Solinus' *Polyhistor*,¹³ and Pliny's *Naturalis historia*.¹⁴ Since our focus is primarily on (relatively) recent and (at least notionally) eyewitness accounts—that is, “travel literature” in a stricter sense—we do not discuss these in detail. However, they comprise an essential component of the wider context for travel literature, and, although they were many centuries old and might be presumed to present out-of-date ethnographic information, in fact to a large extent they remained trusted authorities on the topics they covered in our period.

By far the most musically productive of the classical geographies (although also, judging by the number of editions, among the least popular with late fifteenth-century Italian readers) is Strabo's *Geographia*, which circulated in a Latin translation completed by Guarino da Verona (the section on Europe) and Gregorio Tifernate (those on Asia and Africa). Several musicians and musical customs are described in Anatolia, a region which from Strabo's point of view was an extension of the Greek sphere, sharing to a significant extent a familiar Hellenistic culture. A reasonably lengthy passage discusses the Corybantes, celebrants of the rites of Cybele in the kingdom of Phrygia, who “cause stupefaction during the sacrifice with noise and crashing of cymbals and drums and weapons, likewise also with tibias and shouting.”¹⁵ In Ionia, the musicians

10 Claudius Ptolemy, *Cosmographia* (Vicenza: Hermannus Liechtenstein, 1475 – repr. 1477, 1478, 1490).

11 Strabo, *Geographia* (Rome: Conradus Sweynheym and Arnoldus Pannartz, [1469] – repr. 1472, 1473, 1480, 1494, 1495).

12 Pomponius Mela, *Cosmographia* (Milan: [Antonius Zarotus, with the material of Pamfilo Castaldi], 1471 – repr. 1477, 1478, 1482, 1498x2, 1501).

13 Gaius Julius Solinus, *Polyhistor* (Venice: Nicolaus Jenson, 1473 – repr. 1474-5, 1475, 1480, 1491, 1493-4, 1498x2, 1500x2).

14 Pliny the Elder, *Historia naturalis* (Venice: Johannes de Spira, 1469 – repr. 1470, 1472, 1473, 1476, 1476 (in Italian), 1479, 1480, 1481x2, 1483, 1487, 1489, 1491, 1496x2, 1498, 1499, 1501 (Italian)).

15 “cum strepitu ac fragore cymbalisque ac tympanis et armis item etiam tibiis vociferationibus inter sacrificandum stupefacientes.” Strabo, *Geographia* ([Venice]: Johannes Rubeus Vercellensis, 1495), fols. lxxxix-xcv, this quote at lxxxix.

"Minermus tibicen" and "Polymnatum quemdam in musica doctum" are named among the notables of the city of Colophon, while the singer Lysis and the citharode Anaxenor hail from the city of Magnesia.¹⁶ The recital of another citharode (unnamed) is described in the city of Iassus in the region of Caria, and in the same region the city of Alabanda is home to many harpists ("psalterias multas").¹⁷ Also broadly Hellenistic is Egypt, which is said by Strabo to have suffered numerous dissolute kings, but worst of all Ptolemy XII Auletes (Ptolemy the Piper), who so debased himself and his office as to perform as a *choraules*.¹⁸ Equally debased are the Alexandrians who cruise down the canal to the city of Canopus in small boats "carrying men and women who sing immodestly and dance with utter dissolution."¹⁹ The more sober musical rituals of the Egyptians are briefly hinted at when Strabo notes that "In the temple of Osiris it is not permitted for singer or piper or harpist to play, as is the custom for the other gods."²⁰ The Persians are said to have a song enumerating the 360 uses of the palm tree; while the Nabataeans (in Arabia) have two musicians at a banquet.²¹ India, meanwhile, is said to possess no "other musical instrument besides cymbals and drums and rattles, which are used by entertainers," whilst Indian "drums and bells" (*tympanis ac tintinabulis*) are several times described used in roles similar to those of civic and ceremonial musicians in fifteenth-century Italy.²²

The last pieces of the jigsaw of the description of Asia in early Italian print emerge in the 1490s, following on from Cristoforo Colombo's first voyage of 1492–93. Colombo's letter reporting the success of his first voyage and describing islands of the Caribbean was written under the misapprehension that he had reached India and was close to China. An Italian versification of the letter was printed several times in Italy in the

16 Strabo, *Geographia*, fols. cxiii r and cxix r respectively.

17 Strabo, *Geographia*, fols. cxxv-cxxir and cxxir respectively.

18 Strabo, *Geographia*, fol. cxliiir.

19 "Nam die ac nocte naviculis plena est virorum ac mulierum impudenter canentium ac saltantium cum omni dissolutione." Strabo, *Geographia*, fol. cxliiir.

20 "In Osiridis templo non licet: nec cantori nec tibicini nec psalte canere quoadmodum mos est aliis deis." Strabo, *Geographia*, fol. cxlvir.

21 "Dicunt esse carmen quoddam persicum in quo .ccc.&.lx. palmae utilitates numerentur." Strabo, *Geographia*, fol. cxxxiiv. "Convivia faciunt pro tredenos cuique convivio bini adsunt: qui musicam exercent." Strabo, *Geographia*, fol. cxlir.

22 "ut Anacarsis inquit: nec ullum aliud musicum instrumentum praeter cymbala et tympana et crotala: quibus uti praestigiones solent." Strabo, *Geographia*, fols. cxxviir and (for example) cxxixr respectively.

1490s, authored by Giuliano Dati, a Florentine clergyman based in Rome and a popular author of accessible religious works.²³ This poem, like the letter on which it is based, makes no mention of music; and, again like the letter, it is preoccupied with the opportunity to convert the newly encountered "Indians" to the Catholic faith. Dati was also the author of two further verse accounts of India printed in the 1490s, which seem to follow on from his versification of the letter: the first celebrates the splendour and Christian faith of Prester John and his court; the second, presented as a sequel, describes all the monstrous breeds of human and beast supposedly to be found there (with illustrations), as examples of the marvellous fecundity of God's creation.²⁴ Music appears only in passing in the first of these, which mentions "canti" (songs) in the context of a grand procession honouring St Daniel (in stanza 40). Nonetheless, all three of Dati's works are of musical interest in a different way, since they are written in *ottava rima* in the style of the *cantastorie*, directly addressing a listening audience and repeatedly referring to themselves as songs.²⁵

The remainder of this book is devoted to the ten case study titles set out at the very beginning, divided into two distinct categories plus a book that bridges between. In Chapter 3, we examine the pilgrim accounts and guidebooks, uncovering a distinct practice and discourse attached to Catholic listening and singing in the Holy Land. Chapter 4 considers the tricky case of Mandeville: half pilgrim account, half adventure to India and China, probably wholly fictitious and yet drawing in part on earlier genuine eyewitness accounts. In Mandeville we will find a clear articulation of the genre expectations emerging within travel literature concerning musical experiences in Asia (and especially in India and China), involving on the one hand foreign religious rituals with unexpectedly familiar elements, and on the other the magnificent musical patronage of the Great Khan and other lords. Finally, in Chapter 5, we investigate four real eyewitness accounts of travel to Türkiye, Persia, India, and China, three of them dating from the fifteenth century.

23 Giuliano Dati, *La lettera dellisole che ha trovato nuovamente el Re dispagna* (Rome: [Eucharius Silber], 15 June 1493 – repr. 1493x2, 1494, 1495, 1500).

24 Giuliano Dati, *La gran magnificentia del Prete Gianni o Primo cantare dell'India* ([Rome: s. n., c.1493–94]); *Secondo cantare dell'India* ([Rome: Andreas Freitag, or Johann Besicken and Andreas Freitag, c.1494–95]).

25 The key study of these works by Dati remains Leonardo Olschki, "I 'Cantari dell'India' di Giuliano Dati," *La Bibliofilia* 40, no. 8/9 (1938): 289–316.

3. Pilgrimage

The pilgrim travel accounts that were printed in Italy by 1500 fall into three quite distinct categories. First, from the 1470s to the 1490s several editions were printed in Venice of an anonymous Latin text entitled *Peregrinationes totius terrae sanctae*.¹ This is an octavo book running to just twenty-six folios, small and light enough to be conveniently carried on the journey. Probably copies, in whichever edition, were sold in quantity to pilgrims in Venice as they awaited embarkation.² It is not a travel account as such, but rather a kind of crib sheet to assist and guide those undertaking a pilgrimage, ensuring that they achieve their spiritual objectives.³ In the 1491 edition (the one we used in our research), the first eleven pages of text give essentially a slightly elaborated list of all the holy sites in the Levant (including Egypt), noting which components of the Gospel and Exodus stories took place where, and specifying the indulgences attached to each place. The next forty pages present what is essentially a processional liturgy for the pilgrim's tour of the holy sites, giving in full the hymns, psalms and prayers to be sung or recited at each specific location. Echoes of this liturgy (in various distinct versions) can be found in several pilgrimage accounts of the fifteenth century, including those of Capodilista and Brasca, and it is widely agreed to originate with the Franciscans of Mount Zion, who

1 Three editions survive, but probably several more were produced: see Cristina Dondi and Neil Harris, "Oil and Green Ginger: The Zornale of the Venetian Bookseller Francesco de Madiis, 1484–1488," in *Documenting the Early Modern Book World: Inventories and Catalogues in Manuscript and Print*, ed. Malcolm Walsby and Natasha Constantinidou (Brill, 2013), 398.

2 Dondi and Harris, "Oil and Green Ginger," 398.

3 On this genre of book see especially Michele Campopiano, *Writing the Holy Land: The Franciscans of Mount Zion and the construction of a cultural memory, 1300-1550* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 164–76.

represented the interests of the Catholic Church in the region.⁴

The second category comprises the books written in Italian by Gabriele Capodilista and Santo Brasca, both secular Italians of high status, both of which describe contemporary travel (in 1458 and 1480 respectively) making conventional use of Venice's highly-developed pilgrim tour system.⁵ In the spring every year, and sometimes also in the autumn, two purpose-built pilgrim galleys set out from Venice for a return voyage to Jaffa, following a similar route. Their captains served to some extent as tour guides, facilitating sightseeing at the various stops en route, and smoothing the transition from Christian to Muslim jurisdiction upon arrival in Mamluk Palestine.⁶ The journey over land from Jaffa to Jerusalem and around the sacred sites, then back to Jaffa in time for the galleys' departure some few weeks later, was also to a significant extent systematised, through the cooperation of the Franciscans, who looked after the pilgrims on this leg of their journey, with the local authorities.⁷ Capodilista and Brasca both experienced these interlocking systems in similar ways—so much so that Brasca found he could copy a great deal of his own account out of Capodilista's; their books therefore present similar and often nearly identical content in a similar order.⁸

In the third and final category we find the account of Niccolò da Poggibonsi, who travelled more than a century earlier (1346–50) and as a Franciscan, and the closely related account of Girolamo Castiglione, also a friar, who travelled in 1486.⁹ Castiglione's book, although presented as

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- 4 This liturgy and its sources are studied in Paolo Trovato, "Per lo studio dei più antichi processionali francescani di Terrasanta," *Storie e linguaggi* 1 (2015): 187–204. The following two articles in the same journal issue give a concordance of the chants and prayers appearing in all of the surviving sources, including Capodilista and Brasca's books. See also Campopiano, *Writing the Holy Land*, 37, 94–95, 172, and 191.
 - 5 The primary study of these two books remains Anna Laura Momigliano Lepschy, ed., *Viaggio in Terrasanta di Santo Brasca, 1480* (Longanesi, 1966). Title notwithstanding, the study includes editions of both Capodilista and Brasca's texts.
 - 6 R. J. Mitchell's *The Spring Voyage: The Jerusalem Pilgrimage in 1458* (John Murray, 1965) remains a vivid and intelligent account of the operation of this pilgrimage system, focussed on the voyage in which Capodilista himself participated, which is recorded in several contemporary descriptions.
 - 7 On the Franciscan custody of pilgrims in the Holy Land, established across the 1330s and 40s, see especially Campopiano, *Writing the Holy Land*, 23–29.
 - 8 On the relationship between the two accounts, see Momigliano Lepschy, ed., *Viaggio in Terrasanta di Santo Brasca*, 32–35, with a concordance of the two at 285–86.
 - 9 The key study of Niccolò's book remains Niccolò di Poggibonsi, *A Voyage Beyond the Seas (1346–1350)*, trans. T. Bellorini and E. Hoade (Franciscan Press, 1945), which

original, is really a recension of Niccolò's, giving substantially the same text (and almost entirely the same content) in substantially the same order, but somewhat slimmed down and in some passages locally re-ordered.¹⁰ Castiglione generally elides Niccolò's autobiographical anecdotes and abridges his picturesque descriptions, such that Niccolò's substantial text, printed (with illustrations) in 1500 across 68ff of folio format, is reduced to fit into 50ff of quarto in Castiglione's 1491 Roman edition.

Although Niccolò's itinerary included the Holy Land and remained focussed throughout on religious sites, the geographical scope of his adventures was much wider than that of a conventional pilgrimage, encompassing the extensions to both Damascus and the Sinai, which entailed additional stops, for example in Alexandria, Cairo and Gaza.¹¹ Also, the pacing of his journey was a great deal more leisurely than our other pilgrims', unfolding over about four years rather than a few months. As a Franciscan, Niccolò's experiences differed further from those of secular pilgrims such as Capodilista and Brasca. On the one hand, he was able to be useful to his hosts and fellow travellers, who might find difficulty in accessing a "Latin" priest in the Eastern Mediterranean, and also to take privileged advantage of a reasonably well-established Franciscan network across the region. As Niccolò himself notes, "you should know that neither in Jerusalem, nor in Syria, in Israel, in Arabia, nor in Egypt, there is no [religious] order or rule save the Friars Minor."¹² On the other hand, his rule required him to travel in poverty and without carrying money, which gave a quite different

includes a detailed Introduction. See also the Introduction to the facsimile edition of the 1500 print, Armando Petrucci and Franca Petrucci, eds., *Viazo da Venesia al Sancto Iherusalem* (Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1972); and Kathryn Blair Moore, "The Disappearance of an Author and the Emergence of a Genre: Niccolò da Poggibonsi and Pilgrimage Guidebooks between Manuscript and Print," *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013): 357–411. On Castiglione's account, see the Introduction to Girolamo Castiglione, *Fior de Terra Sancta*, ed. Salvatore Costanza (Edizioni ETS, 2020), at 1–48.

10 On the relationship between the two texts, including a concordance of chapters, see Castiglione, *Fior de Terra Sancta*, ed. Costanza, 2–17.

11 In fact, Capodilista and Brasca also describe Damascus, Cairo, the Sinai, and other stops on the extended pilgrim itinerary; but, unlike Niccolò, they did not actually visit them.

12 "e dovete sapere che ne ingierusalem ne insoria in arabia ne in egipto nonne nessuno altro ordine ne reguola se non frati minori." Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. [c i] v. (Although Bellorini and Hoade give a complete translation of Niccolò's account, it is based on a text assembled from several different manuscript sources, and does not exactly match our 1500 edition, therefore in almost all cases it has been necessary to re-translate our excerpts.)

character to his dealings with local authorities and facilitators, making him at once harder to rob and unable to pay his way.

In the most part, Niccolò's interests are comparable to those evident in other pilgrim accounts, but he shows a particularly exaggerated focus on the precise description of his route, its urban or rural setting, and the architectural features of the churches he visits, including dimensions and distances. The title of the 1500 edition claims, accurately, that the holy sites are "piu copiosamente et verissimamente descrito che nesuno deli altri" ("more thoroughly and accurately described than [in] any of the other [accounts]"). Partly for that reason, no doubt, this work was already widely circulated in manuscript at the point that it reached print (as Castiglione's imitation indicates): at least a dozen of the surviving copies listed by Bellorini and Hoade (containing all or part of the text) pre-date the first edition of 1500.¹³ In print, it became the most popular guide to the Holy Land in Italian, running to around two dozen editions by the end of the sixteenth century—all of them anonymous or misattributed—and remaining in print until 1800.¹⁴

None of these books are "travel accounts" in the same sense as the narrative of Marco Polo and others in that vein, offering autobiography, anecdote and ethnographic observation as their primary content. Rather, they are somewhere between a travel account and a guidebook, intended to inform and assist Italians in an actual or imaginary spiritual journey around the Holy Land and the Sinai.¹⁵ Niccolò explains that his care and attention to detail are necessary:

pero chel cie assai persone iguali volentieri vorrebene visitare i sancti luoghi et non possono chi per poverta chi per fatticha chi per disasio e molte volte che non si puo avere la parola o vero la licentia et questa parola et licenzia sa adomandare al papa¹⁶

because there are many people who would like to visit the holy places and cannot, some for poverty, some for weariness, some for inconvenience, and often one cannot have the word or rather the permission, and this word and permission must be asked of the pope

13 Niccolò di Poggibonsi, *A Voyage Beyond the Seas*, trans. Bellorini and Hoade, XXXII-XXXV.

14 Niccolò di Poggibonsi, *A Voyage Beyond the Seas*, trans. Bellorini and Hoade, XXXI (a table of the editions) and XXXVII-XXXVIII (a bibliography of the editions).

15 As Weber notes, "The book may either prepare for or replace the actual travel." *Travelling through Text*, 46-49, this quote at 48.

16 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. b i r.

In other words, Niccolò viewed his account as a kind of textual pilgrimage that could stand in for the real thing, for those who lacked the opportunity to visit in person, achieving similar spiritual objectives. Meanwhile, the manuscript circulation of his text, particularly in excerpts and abridgements, indicates that pilgrims actually travelling to the Holy Land also found its precision useful.¹⁷

In this respect, our secular authors, Capodilista and Brasca, hold two potentially contradictory considerations in balance. On the one hand, the pilgrim ought to approach their journey purely in a pious spirit, and not as a tourist (so to speak), as Santo Brasca admonishes his reader:

Dispona l'omo fare el viaggio solamente ad intentione de visitare: contemplare et adorare con gran effusione de lachrime quei sanctissimi misterij: adcio che iesu benigno gli perdona li suoi peccati et non ad intentione de vedere del mondo o per ambitione o per exaltatione de dire io sono stato io ho veduto etc. per esser poi sublimato da li homini: como forse fano alcuni.¹⁸

It behoves the man to make the journey only for the purpose of visiting, contemplating and adoring with great effusion of tears those sacred mysteries, in order that Jesus may kindly pardon his sins, and not with the purpose of seeing the world, or for ambition, or for the distinction of being able to say "I have been," "I have seen," etc., and to be therefore celebrated among men, as perhaps some do.

Quoting Matthew 6:2, Brasca indicates that such shallow pilgrims receive their reward in the praise of men, and not in the favour of God. On the other hand, Brasca acknowledges that pilgrims of means will nonetheless expect to travel in style, advising the reader to take along two purses, one filled with patience,

l'altra che habia ducento ducati venetiani: aut per el mancho cento cinquanta. videlicet cento che vano al viaggio per persona et non mancho niente al homo che habia cara la vita et che sia costumato vivere delicatamente a casa sua: li altri cinquanta per una malatia o altro caso che gli potesse intervenire.¹⁹

17 Niccolò of Poggibonsi, *A Voyage Beyond the Seas*, trans. Bellorini and Hoade, XXX.

18 Brasca, *Itinerario alla santissima città*, sig. [f8] v. Donald Ray Howard observes that fifteenth-century pilgrims especially rarely lived up to this ideal: *Writers and Pilgrims: Medieval Pilgrimage Narratives and their Posterity* (University of California Press, 1980), 33–34. On the balance of piety and curiosity in Christian accounts of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, see Weber, *Travelling through Text*, 42–43.

19 Brasca, *Itinerario alla santissima città*, sig. [f8] v.

the other with 200 Venetian ducats, or for those of less means 150; that is, 100 for personal expenses on the journey, in order not to lack anything necessary to the man who holds life dear and who is accustomed to living delicately at home, the other 50 for sickness or any other misfortune that may befall him.

We have already heard above of pilgrims of high status taking with them servants, including the staff and equipment required for musical diversions *en route*.

Capodilista and Brasca strike a balance between asceticism and tourism through the pacing of the journey. Whilst the party are travelling between Venetian colonial cities along the Balkan coast and in the Eastern Mediterranean, city landmarks and the hospitality of colonial administrators are heartily described. (This is not to say that the journey by sea was without spiritual merit: liturgical and devotional tasks were accomplished aboard ship, and significant churches and shrines were visited *en route*.²⁰ This activity had musical components, although it does not fall within the Asian geographical frame we have used to focus this study.) Once the pilgrims reach Jaffa, attention shifts decisively to spiritually uplifting hardships and tearful reactions to the holy sites; secular matters in general are largely avoided, following in the long tradition of pilgrim accounts, because an undue focus on leisure and entertainment might compromise the spiritual credibility of the narrator.²¹

In fact, in our pilgrimage accounts, the journey as told after the arrival at Jaffa tends to remain sealed within a kind of Christian bubble, paying little heed to the Western Asian societies through which it passes. Even Niccolò, who is particularly thorough in his descriptions of cities, deals with human geography only in relatively brief comments. The territories of the Holy Land were ruled in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by the Mamluk sultans in Cairo, but none of our authors are much concerned with modern political realities, except to the extent that they

20 On this aspect of pilgrimage see Michel Balard, "Le *peregrinagium maritimum* en Méditerranée (XIVe–XVe s.)," in *The Holy Portolano: The Sacred Geography of Navigation in the Middle Ages*, ed. Michele Bacci and Martin Rohde (De Gruyter, 2013).

21 Weber, *Travelling through Text*, 49; Aryeh Grabois, "Medieval pilgrims, the Holy Land and its image in European civilisation," in *The Holy Land in History and Thought*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Brill, 1988), 66.

place obstacles in their path. Weber has argued that medieval European pilgrims sought as far as possible to experience the Holy Land as a kind of historical narrative projection of European Catholicism, observing that “Christian and Jewish travellers visited places in order to revisit historical events.”²² This attitude could produce what Campbell has called “a special kind of blindness and vision,” in which the practicalities of contemporary life in the region are not much more than inconveniences that threaten the pilgrim’s narrative immersion.²³ Henny and Oosterhoff have recently argued strongly against the assumption that “that the mindset of pilgrims was as straight and narrow as their road, their eyes glued to Jerusalem, devout and humdrum,” and the perspective outlined by Weber and Campbell is acknowledged by them to be more a literary device than a quality of lived experience.²⁴ Nonetheless, it is a literary device that is deployed with some determination in the pilgrim guidebooks printed in Italy up to 1500, with the result that they are not rich sources of comment on local musical practices.²⁵ But nor are they silent.

Four layers of sound are held in tension and resonance in these books, in varying proportions according to the objectives and interests of the authors. First, the sounds of the pilgrims themselves as they sing or recite hymns and prayers at the appropriate locations. Second, the sounds of the Gospel and Exodus stories, powerfully evoked in the mind’s ear as the pilgrims visit the associated sites. Third, the Christian (but often not Catholic) observances celebrated in the numerous churches at the holy sites by diverse clergy based locally. And fourth, the

22 Weber, *Travelling through Text*, 30. She continues: “The fundamental difference between a medieval pilgrimage to Mecca and a pilgrimage to Jerusalem is the difference between a ‘place’ in which the pilgrim is an actor, and a ‘place where,’ whose value is enhanced by events in the past. Muslim travellers went on *hajj* in a present-oriented mode, while Christians and Jews went in commemoration of a sacred past.” See similarly Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, 17–19.

23 Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, 17.

24 Sundar Henny and Richard J. Oosterhoff, “Knowing like a Pilgrim,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 38, no. 2 (2023): 153.

25 Dinko Fabris laments thus after conducting a similar review of pilgrim travel accounts: “The sense of frustration after reading thousands of pages from travellers’ books concerning a town or a period of interest only to discover that the few references to music are generic and of little use, is only too familiar.” Fabris, “Urban Musicologies,” in *Hearing the City in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Tess Knighton and Ascención Mazuela-Anguita (Brepols, 2018), 57.

sounds of the "Saracens" or "Moors," received largely as an unwelcome imposition upon what the Catholic pilgrim experiences as a Christian (and typological Jewish) "holy geography."

The books by Capodilista and Brasca are not only descriptions, but also playscripts for the performance of pilgrimage, in that they are partly concerned with setting and action, but also and substantially with speech and song. A significant proportion of the text in these books comprises prayers, hymns, antiphons and psalms that the pilgrim must recite at specified moments, clearly based on the Franciscan practice that is more fully presented in the *Peregrinationes totius Terrae Sanctae*. These elements are absent from Niccolò's account (and therefore also from Castiglione's based upon it), because this distinct "liturgy" of pilgrimage had not yet developed at the time of his travel. By attending to the performative character of these fifteenth-century pilgrimage guidebooks, we can recognise that Holy Land pilgrimage at that time was envisaged and experienced not only as a journey, or a catalogue of sights before which to weep, but as a processional liturgy, providing a symbolic sonic and bodily articulation of the sacred geography of the Holy Land. As with the liturgy celebrated within a church, an important purpose of song and recitation within the liturgy of the pilgrimage was to manage the appropriate experience and display of emotion in response to the unfolding Gospel drama. In other words, this liturgy served (among other things) to ensure the productive alignment of the sacred geography and the emotional geography of the pilgrimage, resulting in an intensified experience of personal and collective piety.²⁶

The *Peregrinationes totius Terrae Sanctae* gives the most precise and complete account of the singing of pilgrims at the holy sites, although of course it is unlikely that all pilgrims followed it in all respects. The most common formula involves the singing of a hymn, ending with a brief exchange of antiphon, verse and response, followed by the recitation of several prayers. The hymn is cued by the pilgrim's arrival at a particular spot, and is introduced most often with the formula "cantando hymnum" ("singing the hymn"); for example:

26 On the importance of emotion in pilgrimage accounts, see Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims*, 42–44.

Incipiunt peregrinationes in ecclesia sancte Marie Bethalem: et in primis descenditur ad capellam sancti Hieronymi cantando sequentem Hymnum.

Iste confessor...²⁷

The pilgrimage begins in the church of St Mary of Bethlehem; and first they descend to the chapel of St Jerome, singing the following hymn:

“Iste confessor...”

Following the antiphon, the prayer is introduced with the instruction “Oremus” (Let us pray) and the heading “Oratio” (Prayer). Although of course we cannot be sure that “cantando” was always interpreted in the strict sense of singing, the texts given are indeed songs, in the sense that they are chants, and pilgrim accounts do frequently refer specifically to singing. The rhythm of hymn, antiphon, then prayers, which runs throughout the liturgy of the *Peregrinationes*, seems intended to imply an alternation of song and speech.

The “Iste confessor” and other well-known Latin hymns cued in the *Peregrinationes* might seem some distance from the musics that we might assume to be characteristic of contemporary Western Asian communities; clearly these are Catholic hymns, being sung by Europeans, in Western Asia. However, this simple observation is perhaps more evident from a modern perspective than it was to the pilgrims themselves. The spiritual objective of the Holy Land liturgy is to sing the hymn that best fits the place, and indeed the whole pilgrimage phenomenon required Italian pilgrims to invest in the fundamental congruity between the historical events of the gospel narrative, which indeed took place in Western Asia, and the Catholic devotional practice built upon them, which was most often enacted in Europe. This alignment between the historical Levant and contemporary Catholic Christianity is clearest, in the *Peregrinationes* as also in the books by Capodilista and Brasca, at the moments where the singing of the pilgrims is directly aligned with the sounds of the gospel story. A clear example is the case of the Benedictus canticle sung by Zechariah in Luke 1:68–79 as described in the *Peregrinationes*:

27 *Peregrinationes totius Terrae Sanctae* (Venice: Giovanni Battista Sessa, 1491), sig. b ii r.

In ecclesia sancti zacharie ascendit primo superius ubi idem zacharias canticum Benedictus dicitur composuisse cantando.

Benedictus dominus deus...²⁸

In the church of St Zachariah, [the pilgrim] first ascends to the top, where the same Zachariah is said to have composed the canticle "Benedictus," while singing:

"Benedictus dominus deus..."

Here, the Holy Land liturgy creates a deliberate and obvious resonance between the historical musical practices of the region, and the pilgrims' devotional singing, which takes on something of the character of a musical "reenactment." The other canticles from Luke—the Magnificat and the Nunc dimittis—are similarly highlighted as points of connection between Western Asian past and Catholic present. An equivalent observation can be made regarding psalms, notionally composed by an ancient king of Israel, whose singing is also sometimes mandated. Brasca, for example, records the psalm that is to be sung when first sighting Jerusalem:

circa la meza nocte ogniuno smontoe: et ala bella campagna collume de la luna se missemo afar colatione et ripossarse per tre hore. puoi avante laurora si montoe a cavallo: et circa le due hore de giorno scopresemo la sancta cita de Jerusalem et la cube del sancto .Sepulcro. et quivi ogniuno smontoe per la cagione predicta. Ingenochiati cantando le infrascripte oratione con tante effusione di lachrime chera una grandissima devotione.

Psalmus.

Lauda Jerusalem dominum...²⁹

Around midnight everyone dismounted, and in the beautiful countryside by the light of the moon we went to have breakfast and rest for three hours. Then before dawn we mounted our horses, and around the second hour of the day we sighted the holy city of Jerusalem and the dome of the

28 *Peregrinationes*, sig. f [i] v.

29 Brasca, *Itinerario alla santissima città*, sig. [b5] r. Capodilista also mentions this, but uses the phrase "dicendo psalmus," i.e. saying rather than singing the psalm (*Itinerario in Terra Santa*, fol. [23]r). Both authors switch between "cantando" and "dicendo" in a way that could be interpreted as deliberate and precise, or could equally be seen as interchangeable.

Holy Sepulchre. And there everyone dismounted for the aforementioned reason, and genuflected, singing the prayer written below with so many tears that it was a most great devotion.

Psalm [146/147]: “Lauda Jerusalem dominum...”.

Moreover, in Niccolò’s account the Mass itself emerges as a ceremony of local heritage. He notes the place where St John the Evangelist said Mass for the Virgin Mary, within the ruined Church of Mount Zion; and he visits the grotto where Mary and the Apostles hid during the Passion, recalling that St John and St Peter said Mass there.³⁰ We observed above that pilgrims tended to experience the Holy Land as a kind of historical extension of Catholic Christianity; here is one of the strategies—a potentially musical one—that allowed them to maintain this attitude. To the pilgrim, Catholic songs acquired their spiritual significance precisely from their origination in Western Asia.

Both the Western Asian past and present of Christianity are evident in the attention paid by Niccolò, Castiglione, Capodilista, and Brasca to the presence of eastern “generations” (*generatione*) of Christians throughout the region.³¹ Brasca describes the arrangement that allowed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem to be shared between four Christian groups:

Questo glorioso templo e tenuto et officiato per quatro generatione de Christiani. videlicet. Latini: greci: armeni: ethiopij aliter sabasini. El sancto sepulcro et cosi la capella de nostra dona tengono li nostri frati minori Latini: El monte Calvario tengono greci. Laltare grande tengono Armeni: et uno altare che e drieto al sancto sepulchro tengono christiani Ethiopij che li se chiamano sabasini.³²

30 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sigs. [c v] v and d i v. The first of these has a parallel passage in Castiglione, *Fior di terra sancta*, at fol. 16v.

31 On sharing and collaboration between Eastern and Latin Christians, and also with Muslims, at the holy sites of the medieval Eastern Mediterranean, see especially Benjamin Z. Kedar, “Convergences of Oriental Christian, Muslim, and Frankish Worshippers: The Case of Saydnaya,” in *De Sion exhibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem: Essays on Medieval Law, Liturgy and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder*, ed. Yitzhak Hen (Brepols, 2001); and Ora Limor, “Sharing Sacred Space: Holy Places in Jerusalem Between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam,” in *In laudem hierosolymitani: Studies in Crusades and Medieval Culture in Honour of Benjamin Z. Kedar*, ed. Iris Shagrir, Ronnie Ellenblum, and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Routledge, 2016).

32 Brasca, *Itinerario alla santissima città*, sig. [d7] v.

This glorious temple is held and officiated by four breeds of Christians, that is, Latins, Greeks, Armenians, Ethiopians or Abyssinians. The Holy Sepulchre and also the Chapel of Our Lady are held by our Latin Franciscans. Mount Calvary is held by the Greeks. The high altar is held by the Armenians, and an altar behind the Holy Sepulchre is held by Ethiopian Christians who call themselves Abyssinians.

Here Brasca is copying Capodilista, and also correcting him; the earlier author has the Franciscans and Armenians the wrong way round.³³ Capodilista, meanwhile, may have modelled his account on the much more detailed description given by Niccolò, who notes the “generation” in charge of most of the churches he visits. According to Niccolò (and identically Castiglione), the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was shared between not four, but ten denominations:

Dirovi de li altari iquali sono ne la chiesa iherosolimitana e che gli officia fovi assapere che vi sono .xx. altari in la dicta chiesa e ciaschuna generazione di Christiani ve a el suo altare e la domenicha sancta de la oliva anzi la pasqua e poi il di de la sancta pasqua vanno ogni generazione e ciaschuno a el suo sacerdote et dichono messa ognuno al populo suo, secundo la linghua di ciaschuno e lo altare magiore officia il patriarcha di grezia insu el monte calvario officiano gli ermini sotto cholgata officiano li iacopini insu laltre che dietro al sancto sepulchro officiano gli indiani e li theopiani iquali sono negri come turchi et appresso a loro officiano inobini allaltare di sancta maria magdalena officiano ischalzi cioe ifrati minori iquali sono chiamati da sancto francischo ... insu laltro altare dove il nostro signore apparette a sancta maria magdalena officiano li giorgiani e dove fu la presura del nostro signore yhesu christo offician li christiani da la cintura iquali converti sancto paolo. insu laltare che drieto altribunale officiano inestorini.³⁴

I will tell you about the altars which are in the church of Jerusalem, and who officiates them. Know that there are 20 altars in the said church; for each generation of Christians has there its own altar. On Olive Sunday and holy Easter all go there, each generation to its own priest, and each priest celebrates for his people, after his own tongue. The Greek patriarch celebrates at the high altar; and on Mount Calvary, the Armenians; beneath Golgotha, the Jacobites; on the altar at the rear of the Holy Sepulchre, the Indians and those of Ethiopia celebrate, who are

33 Capodilista, *Itinerario in Terra Santa*, fols [42]v–[43]r.

34 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. [c i] v. Parallel passage Castiglione, *Fior de terra sancta*, fol. 11r-v, with identical content and near-identical wording.

black like Turks. Beside them celebrate the Nubians. The barefoots, that is, the Friars Minor who are called for St Francis, celebrate at the altar of Saint Mary Magdalen At the other altar, where Christ appeared to Saint Mary Magdalen, the Georgians celebrate; at the prison of Christ celebrate the Christians of the Girdle, who were converted by St Paul; at the altar, which is behind the apse, celebrate the Nestorians.³⁵

Niccolò describes similar sharing arrangements at the Tomb of the Virgin on the Mount of Olives (followed in this case by Castiglione), and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.³⁶

The implication that Catholic European pilgrims in the Holy Land must have accumulated relatively extensive experience of Eastern Christian rites is richly spelled out by Niccolò and Castiglione. Towards the end of his book, Niccolò describes the rites of the different “generations,” including the Greeks, Armenians, Nestorians, Georgians, Jacobites, Indians, and Ethiopians. In fact, in the 1500 edition of Niccolò’s text this passage is considerably abridged, eliding the Armenians, Nestorians, Georgians, and Jacobites; but Castiglione preserves a version of his complete comments. First described are the Greeks, whose rite Niccolò (whose text is a little more detailed than Castiglione’s here) explains thus:

li greci sono fortemente differentiati da nui: loro non dicono messa se non sopra aduno altare el di e non piu in ogne chiesa. et non ane campane da sonare. Ma quando vogliano dire le loro hore del di o dire messa. allora va el suo prete elquale e chiamato papas. et monta sula giesia e da imano una rega da regare largha una spanna et longa bene sei bracia. eda in ogne mano uno maziolo et cum questi mazioli lui percuote insu questa regha che fa si grande el rimore che non he citta si longa ne si largha che non solda per tutto. loro dicono la messa sempre in su lora dela sexta. e non cantano per solfa. ma cignano cum le manne come el solfa de andare o insu o ingiu.³⁷

The Greeks differ greatly from us. They do not say mass except upon one altar each day and no more in every church. They use no bells: and when they wish to ring their hours or for Mass, their priest, whom they call

35 Niccolò of Poggibonsi, *A Voyage Beyond the Seas*, trans. Bellorini and Hoade, 22 (Chapter 32), revised.

36 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sigs. e [i] r and f ii v. C.f. Castiglione, *Fior de terra sancta*, fol. 20r.

37 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. o iii v.

Papas, goes up onto the church taking a wooden plank, a span wide and six braccia long, and in each hand he has a mallet, and with these mallets he strikes upon this plank, such that it makes a sound so great that the city is not so great that the sound is not heard throughout. The Mass is always said at the hour of sext, and they do not sing by solfa, but sign with their hands how the solfa should go, whether up or down.³⁸

The description is accurate: the wooden plank used in place of a bell is an instrument called the *semantron*; and the system of hand gestures indicating melodic inflection is known as *cheironomy*.³⁹

Concerning the Armenians, Castiglione writes that there is little difference between their rite and that of the Latins, although they are not subject to the Pope.⁴⁰ The Nestorians, meanwhile, “hold nearly the same faith as the Greeks, and they perform the sacrifice in the same way.”⁴¹ The Georgians “perform much of their office in choir, and especially at night ... and when the priest sacrifices, he says the words aloud so that all the people hear.”⁴² The Jacobite rite, practiced especially in Egypt, is described by Castiglione in particular detail, because “I have often attended their services” (*piu volte me sono trovato a loro officij*):

Nota che quando dicano la sua messa, pongano uno candelere sopra delo altare, con tre candele accese, lo sacerdote sta vestito pontificalmente, lo dyacono tene uno panno in testa che copre tute le spalle per fin ali calcagni, e cossi lo subdyacono. E tuti li altri sacerdoti stano in terra asetati sopra tapedi. E quando e finita la missa: tuti li sacerdoti insieme con il populo vano a basare li piedi a quello sacerdote che ha celebrato la messa.⁴³

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- 38 Niccolò of Poggibonsi, *A Voyage Beyond the Seas*, trans. Bellorini and Hoade, 124 (Chapter 252). The Italian measurement “braccio” is roughly equivalent to (although generally somewhat shorter than) the English “yard,” tied to the length of an arm.
- 39 On the *semantron* and its reception in Western European sources in this period, see Alex Rodriguez Suarez, “The *semantron* to Western ears: othering through sound,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 48, no. 2 (2024): 235–52, where Niccolò’s description is mentioned at 242.
- 40 “Pocha differentia e dal sacrificio deli Herminij a quello deli christiani latini. Ma egli non sono sottoposti ala chiesa Romana ... pur ze qualche pocho de svariatione dal suo sacrefitio al nostro.” Castiglione, *Fior di terra sancta*, fol. 45r.
- 41 “Questa natione de christiani Astorini tengono quasi la fede che teneno li Greci, e cossi fano lo sacrificio.” Castiglione, *Fior di terra sancta*, fol. 45r.
- 42 “E unaltra natione de christiani, dimandati Giorgiani, gli quali fano multo officio in choro: e maxime la nocte ... e quando lo sacerdote sacrifica, dice le parole ad alta voce.” Castiglione, *Fior di terra sancta*, fol. 45v.
- 43 Castiglione, *Fior di terra sancta*, fol. 45v.

Note that when they say their Mass, they place a candlestick upon the altar, with three lit candles. The priest is dressed in pontifical vestments; the deacon wears a cloth on his head that completely covers his shoulders [and stretches] down to his heels, and the subdeacon does the same. All the other priests sit on carpets on the ground. And when the Mass is finished, all the priests together with the people go to kiss the feet of the priest who celebrated the Mass.

In the equivalent passage in the longer version of his text (missing, as we have noted, from our 1500 edition), Niccolò also claims the authority of personal experience here.⁴⁴ However, the claim is not simply copied by Castiglione, but considerably adapted, and the following description considerably abridged; thus, it seems that Castiglione is claiming on some level that he has also, independently of his source and under different circumstances, witnessed the Jacobite ritual.

We can revert to Niccolò's fuller description for the rites of the Ethiopians, who "love us Christian Franks more than any other generation"—and by implication also those of the Indians, who "are of the same faith" as the Ethiopians.⁴⁵ He is particularly struck by their mode of singing:

costoro cantano proprio como se loro ridessene et mostrano quanti denti loro anno. e quando el suo sacerdote vole sacrificare quelli che gli stano dintorno tengono uno panno de brogato doro. et cuoprano el deeto sacerdote elaltare cum esso per modo chel non si puo vedere niente. E cosi finischono el suo sacrificio⁴⁶

they sing in such wise as to appear to laugh, showing all their teeth; and when their priest comes to the consecration, those around cover the priest and the altar with a cloth of gold brocade, so that he cannot be seen; and so they finish the sacrifice.

In respect of these Eastern Christians, Niccolò briefly states the official Catholic position that "we do not believe them to be good or perfect Christians," but he also observes that they hold the same view of the

⁴⁴ Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *A Voyage Beyond the Seas*, 125–26.

⁴⁵ "Dico che quelli dindia e quelli de thiopia anno una fede midesima ... equelli de thiopia amano piu nui christiani che nessuna altra generatione de christiani che sia oltra mare." Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. o iv r.

⁴⁶ Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. o iv r. Castiglione writes similarly: "Questi de ethiopia nel suo officio sempre canteno, e pare che rideno, e mostrano tuti li denti loro." Castiglione, *Fior di terra sancta*, fol. 46r.

Latins.⁴⁷ In practice, Niccolò adopts a cosmopolitan and collaborative approach to the different Christian communities, several times describing important feasts celebrated in common. Castiglione differs significantly in this respect: like Niccolò, he observes that the doctrines of the Eastern Christians differ from the Latins concerning the Creed, the Holy Spirit, and baptism; but, unlike Niccolò, he adds that “therefore all are destined for eternal damnation” (adoncha tuti vano ala eterna damnatione).⁴⁸

The collaboration of the “generations” at the major feasts, with predictably confusing sonic results, is described by Niccolò in particular detail—most thoroughly in the celebration of Holy Week at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, in a series of passages reporting eyewitness experience that are entirely elided by Castiglione. First, we read of a procession around the Aedicule on Good Friday:

si ragunano allora di sexta tute le generazione de li fideli christian e venghono alla chappella del sancto sepulchro patriarchi veschovi monazi et sacerdoti et tucti con la croce in mano e tuti ornati et parati ciaschuno secundo la usanza de la schiatta et ordine dato et ciaschuno va drieto al segno suo intorno alla chapella del sancto sepulchro chantando ad alta voce ciaschuno secondo la sua loquela he secondo el suo linguaggio e ciaschuno e amaestrato. et cosi e differenciato il lor chanto alchuni chantano cum la bocha alchuni cignano con le mane et chosi ognuno exercita la sua virtu spirituale e chosi vanno a la processione intorno intorno piu che non volene et ciaschuno seghuita il segno suo et channtano ad alta voce. kyrieleyson. christe leison ... e questa processione et questo chanto dura per doe hore o circa ... e poi ne va ciaschuna schiata con el suo sacerdote al suo altare et odono et dichono loro officio ciaschuno sechondo la sua loquela et usanza et amaestramento etc.⁴⁹

At the sixth hour, all the generations of faithful Christians assemble and come to the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, patriarchs, bishops, monks and priests, and all with cross in hand, all vested and arrayed, each according to the custom of their nation and order; and each goes under their own sign to the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, singing loudly, each according to their own speech and language and practice. And their singing differs

47 “tutte queste generatione sono christiani. Ma nui non credemo che siano buoni ne prefecti christiani ma lore se danno adintendere dessere migliori christiani de nui.” Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. [l iv] r. Parallel passage Castiglione, *Fior di terra sancta*, fol. 37v.

48 Castiglione, *Fior di terra sancta*, fol. 46r.

49 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sigs. [c i] v–[c ii] r.

in this manner: some sing with the mouth, some sign with the hands, and thus all exercise their spiritual virtue. And so they go in procession, around and around, more than they intend, and each following their sign and singing loudly “Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison.” ... and this procession and this song continues for two hours or thereabouts ... and then each nation goes with its own priest to its own altar, and hears and says their office each according to their own speech and custom and practice etc.

Next, Niccolò describes the “generations” gathering for a communal celebration that continues all night through to Holy Saturday:

dopo lora del vespero si ragunano ciaschuna mainera de christiani denanze ha la chorte de la chiesa del sancto sepulchro da luno lato sono igreci e li christiani da la cintura. e li nastorini da laltro lato stanno nubini e li iacopini giorgianni e latini e chosi cominciano a chantare ciaschuno secondo la sua lingua lodando e magnificando il signore idio ad alta voce e piglianse luno laltro insu le spalle e questo dura tutta la nocte ... el venerdi sancto allora de la prima messa sapre la porta dinanzi al sancto sepulchro et allora vi puo entrare ciaschuno christiano entrando dentro con la processione con due ulive. et alchuni della cita ano pichole ramicelle benedecte et ane croce .liiij. e chatano tutti insieme ciaschuno in suo linguaggio lo advenimento de la sanctissima trinitade etc.⁵⁰

after the hour of Vespers, there gather every manner of Christian before the courtyard of the church of the Holy Sepulchre; on one side are the Greeks and the Christians of the Girdle and the Nestorians; on the other side are the Nubians and the Jacobites, Georgians and Latins, and then each begins to sing, according to their own language, praising and magnifying the Lord God in a loud voice, and leaping one onto another's shoulders, and this continues all night. ... On Holy Saturday at the hour of the first Mass, the door of the Holy Sepulchre is opened, and then all the Christians may enter with the procession with two olive trees; and some people of the city carry 54 little holy branches and crosses, and they all sing together, each in their own language, of the coming of the Most Holy Trinity etc.

And finally, out of chronological sequence, Niccolò describes the procession on Palm Sunday, in the course of which we learn more about the two olive trees:

La processione de la sancta domenicha de luliva e facta in questa forma cioe la mattina pertempo la domenicha de luliva si e apparecchiato il luogo del nostro signore yhesu christo dal veschovo degli ermini et altri chiericati

50 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. [c ii] r-v.

ne li lori ornamenti ho vero paramenti in modo de .xij. appostoli e tutto el populo comunamente et vanno al sancto sepulchro con altissimo chanto e quivi e tanta gente chappena vi si puote andare ma egli vi sono certi saracini posti sopra acio che facano fare largo e poi portano dui grossi ulivi et in quelli rami sedeno huomeni che gridano adalta voce inverso il veschovo. et io domandai al mio interpido di quello che voleano et che significava quello gridare e lui me rispuose et disse io non gli intendi pero che cridano in lingua arabica. et insu l'altra uliva erano tyopiani hebrei et saracini. e bene vero che loro non gridano altro che buone parole et anche chantava il populo dintorno quel chanto che fu chantato dinanzi al nostro signore yhesu christo quando gli feciono quella richoglienza spargiendo per terra illoro panni o vero vestiti e le rame de le olive si come si legghe nel vangelio di sancto matheo nel cap .xxij. che dice. osana filio david benedictus qui venit in nomine domini. etc.⁵¹

The procession of Holy Olive Sunday is done in this way: early in the morning on Olive Sunday, the place of Our Lord Jesus Christ is prepared by the bishop of the Armenians and other clergy in their vestments or rather costumes in the role of the Twelve Apostles, and all the people together, and they come to the Holy Sepulchre with the loudest singing, and there are so many people that one can scarcely move, but there are certain Saracens posted to clear the way. Then they carry two large olive trees, and in the branches sit men who shout in a loud voice toward the bishop; and I asked my interpreter what they were shouting and what it meant, and he replied to me and said, "I don't understand them, because they shout in the Arabic language;" and in the other olive tree there were Ethiopians, Jews and Saracens; and it is certainly true that they shouted nothing other than good words. Also the people sang the same song that was sung before Our Lord Jesus Christ when they welcomed him, spreading their clothes and olive branches on the ground, as we read in the Gospel of St Matthew in chapter 22, which says, "Hosanna filio David: benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domini," etc.

Throughout these descriptions, Niccolò is particularly keen to emphasise the linguistic and musical diversity of the singing, and not because he finds it uncomfortable—he clearly relishes the experience, and participates in it with enthusiasm. A similar attitude animates his briefer descriptions of Christmas at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, and Epiphany at the River Jordan (both also elided by Castiglione).⁵² Niccolò is evidently fascinated by the differences between

51 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. [c ii] v.

52 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sigs. f ii v and i 2 v.

the “generations” and the variety among their rites, and quite prepared to view and treat them as fellow Christians, at least while travelling in the region—an attitude that is significantly revised in Castiglione’s adaptation of his text.

Niccolò mentions one further group that he categorises among the Christian “generations,” namely “slaves” (*schiavi*).⁵³ These are compromised Christians, however, who have renounced their faith, he assumes, either for money (“per quantita de pecunia”) or “because of their captivity and wretchedness” (“per la sua cativita he miseria”).⁵⁴ Niccolò reports that there are 30,000 such apostate Christians held as slaves in Cairo.⁵⁵ This is a passage that Castiglione does not abridge, but rather slightly expands and somewhat re-organises, reflecting a desire to communicate his own observations and reflections on the matter:

In questa cita del Cayro sono diverse generatione de gente. In prima ze habita christiani latini, ma pochi: Creti, Nubini, Giorgiani, Tiopiani, Jacopini, Arminij, christiani dalla cintura, e schiavi. ... In questa cita del Cayro sono infiniti christiani renegati, et quasi senza numero. Questi renegano, chi per pecunia, e chi per miseria O poveri tapini, se considerasseno la crudel e acerba passione che porta il nostro signore jesu christo per darli salvatione, non cossi facilmente lassarebeno il christianesimo, in nel Cayro, secundo che hebbe da persone digne de fede ze sono piu de quaranta migla christiani renegati, gli quali sono mamaluchi zioe soldati del soldano.⁵⁶

In this city of Cairo there are diverse generations of people. First, there are Latin Christians, though few, Cretans [i.e. Greeks], Nubians, Georgians, Ethiopians, Jacobites, Armenians, Christians of the Girdle, and slaves. ... In this city of Cairo there are countless renegade Christians, and almost without number. These renege, some for money, others from hardship. Oh poor wretches, if they considered the cruel and bitter passion our Lord Jesus Christ endured to give them salvation, they would not so easily abandon Christianity. In Cairo, according to upright and trustworthy sources, there are more than forty thousand renegade Christians, the which are Mamluks—that is, soldiers of the Sultan.

53 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. [I iv] r. Equivalent passage in Castiglione, *Fior di terra sancta*, at fol.

54 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. [I iii] v. This passage has no equivalent in Castiglione.

55 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. [I iii] v. Again, this is missing from Castiglione.

56 Castiglione, *Fior di terra sancta*, fol. 37v–38r.

Although many of these “renegates” were “Greek” (in the wider sense of the term, encompassing former subjects of the Eastern Roman Empire following the recent Ottoman conquests), Italians also found themselves in this situation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as the case of Otranto, mentioned above in Chapter 1, reminds us. Neither Niccolò nor Castiglione associates any specific sounds with these enslaved Christians and former Christians, but it is impossible to imagine that they did not bring something of their native musical culture with them to their new homes, even if they also adapted to their new situation. Although the numbers reported by Niccolò and Castiglione may be exaggerated, here is a valuable reminder of the role of the Mediterranean slave trade in bringing about the circulation of people (together, at least to some extent, with their cultural practices) at a large scale and in multiple directions.

The sounds of the Muslim majority, termed “Saracens” (Niccolò and Castiglione) or “Moors” (Capodilista and Brasca), are hardly a focus in any of our printed pilgrim guidebooks, for the reasons outlined above. Nonetheless, they are not entirely absent. Most frequently mentioned is the *adhan*, of which Capodilista and Brasca provide three brief descriptions. The first comes in a passage detailing the Temple Mount and the site of Solomon’s Temple, which is described as a broad plaza,

intorvo di grossi muri murata: da la parte de occidente sono doe porte: una se chiama spetiosa a laquale santo Pietro sano el zotto: l'altra non ha nome: da la parte de septentrione gene una da la parte de oriente gene un'altra chiamata aurea. per laquale el nostro signore intro nel giorno de le palme. et sopra molte de queste porte ge sono torre suxo lequale I sacerdoti de li mori ascendeno a farla sua oratione e li cridano secondo la lege de machometto⁵⁷

surrounded by very thick walls. On the western side are two gates, one called Spetiosa, at which St Peter healed the cripple, the other has no name; on the northern side is one, on the eastern side is another called Aurea through which our Lord entered on Palm Sunday. And above many of these gates there are towers upon which the priests of the moors ascend to make their prayers and cries according to the law of Mohammed.

57 Capodilista, *Itinerario in Terra Santa*, fol. [30]r; parallel passage Brasca, *Itinerario alla santissima città*, sig. C3.

An interesting inflection is introduced when they describe the mosques of Cairo, in the midst of a quantitative survey of the city:

Le muschee loro ne lequale fano sue: oratione ornate de nobilissimi campanille liquali non adoperano a campane: ma la nocte ascendenno suxo a cridare e fare sue false oratione quatordece milia.⁵⁸

Their mosques in which they perform their prayers, adorned with most noble campanili, which do not use bells, but in the night they climb up to cry out and make their false prayers: 14,000.

Neither Capodilista nor Brasca visited Cairo, and this passage seems to be derived (probably not at first hand, given the garbling of information) from Niccolò, who writes similarly:

et evi dele lore chiesie overo moschette quatro milia. esei cente. lequale anno le lore capelle altissime e senza campane. Ma quando viene el tempo che si deba sonare va uno saracino sul campanile. et anuncia alpopulo infidele la lore damnosa et mortiphera fede. et cosi fanne lore atutte le hore del di cum lo loro battachio si como faciamo nui sonando le nostre champane atutte le hore del giorno etc.⁵⁹

and their churches, or rather mosques, number four thousand six hundred, the which have their chapels very tall and without bells; but when the times comes that they must ring, a Saracen climbs the tower and announces to the infidels their damned and deadly faith; and they do this at every hour of the day with their “clapper,” just as we do ringing our bells at all the hours of the day, etc.

The equivalence proposed here between the Christian campanile and the Muslim minaret is intensified through the reference to the muezzin as a “battachio”—that is, as the “clapper” that sounds the adhan, which Niccolò wishes the reader to understand as the bell of the Muslims. The comparison is explored further by Capodilista and Brasca, a few pages later, in a story about the church of St Martin in Cairo:

et in dicta cita e una chiesa di sancto martino cum uno campanile. nelqual loco volendo mori cridare. et far le soe oratione subito li aparve uno homo vestito de bianco cum una croce rossa in mano: per la quale

58 Capodilista, *Itinerario in Terra Santa*, fol. [73]v; parallel passage Brasca, *Itinerario alla santissima città*, sig. [g8] r.

59 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sigs. [l iii] v–[l iv] r. Parallel passage, nearly identical in content, Castiglione, *Fior di terra sancta*, fol. 38r.

visione imori cadevano morti et per questo fu comandato per lo soldano che niuno cridassene montasse piu su dicto campanille.⁶⁰

And in the said city is a church of St Martin with a campanile, in which the moors were wont to cry out and make their prayers, until there appeared to them a man dressed in white with a red cross in his hand, by which vision the Moors fell dead, and for this reason the sultan commanded that no crier should climb the said campanile again.

In these descriptions of the adhan, the sonic device of the tower, whose elevation allows acoustic penetration across the space of the city, becomes a site of competition between Moors and Christians, between bells and “cries.”

Brasca includes a secular musical detail in his initial description of the city of Jerusalem. He is struck by the flat-roofed houses, and notes that the roofs are used for social gatherings:

le case non sono coperte de copi ne hano la decaduta como le nostre: ma sono piane et astreggate in cima de calcina tenacissima: per modo che quando quelli mori fano festa ascendano incima de le case: et ivi ballano le done con le done a soni de tamburini et altri instrumenti musici molto dissimili da li nostri: Et li homini stano avedere che per condicione alcuna li homini non ardiriano balare con le done⁶¹

The houses are not roofed with tiles nor are they pitched like ours, but they are flat and surfaced at the top with very strong lime plaster, in such a way that when those moors make a celebration they ascend to the roof of the houses, and there the women dance with the women to the sounds of frame drums and other musical instruments very different from ours. And the men remain watching, for in no circumstances do the men dare to dance with the women.

The implication is that the frame drum was familiar to Brasca—at least to the extent that the Italian term *tamburino* was adequate to describe it—whereas the other instruments were not. The rule of same-sex dancing clearly struck Brasca as noteworthy, perhaps because it contrasted with

60 Capodilista, *Itinerario in Terra Santa*, fol. [74]v; parallel passage in Brasca, *Itinerario alla santissima città*, sig. [g9] r.

61 Brasca, *Itinerario alla santissima città*, sig. [b6] v. This passage has no equivalent in Capodilista. The passage is also briefly discussed in Fabris, “Urban Musicologies,” at 59. (Note, though, that the quote and musical example given by Fabris at 58–59 as coming from Brasca are in fact from Felix Fabri, and the image of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre given as Brasca’s at 60 is actually from Bernhard von Breydenbach’s *Peregrinatio*.)

his own society, in which aristocratic dance allowed a licensed form of interaction between unmarried men and women.

Niccolò adds two brief references to the musical sounds of the “Saracens.” The first is a description of the celebratory ululation of the Muslim community in Jerusalem, a vocal technique that remains today characteristic of Western Asia and Africa:

e venghono in gierusalem huomeni et donne gioveni et vechi facendo festa et allegreza menandosi la lingua per bocha di qua et dila gridando come fano iranochi quando stano in lacqua e questo si e il chanto loro e fanno paura a chi gliode.⁶²

And there come to Jerusalem men and women, young and old, making celebration and joy, beating their tongue in their mouth this way and that, crying as do frogs when in the water, and thus their song is such that it would frighten whoever heard it.

Niccolò’s view of this practice is clearly less sympathetic than his opinions of the singing of the various Eastern Christians. His phrasing—“whoever heard it,” but evidently meaning “whichever Latin” or perhaps “whichever Christian heard it”—represents a distinct gesture of othering.⁶³ Nevertheless, it is striking that the ululation he describes comes from the crowd of Muslims watching the Christian generations’ Holy Saturday celebration in Jerusalem, and thus represents a kind of inter-faith resonance of joy; Niccolò frequently notes that the Muslims also regarded many of the sites visited by Christian pilgrims as holy.

Niccolò’s second description of musical sounds made by Eastern Mediterranean Muslims occurs during his journey from Cairo to St Catherine’s monastery. Several times during his travels across the Sinai Desert he meets Bedouin, whom he terms “wild Arabs” (“salvatichi arabi”), briefly describing their nomadic way of life. Sometimes the Bedouin are a frightening inconvenience, but at other times they are specialists in desert travel who must be engaged as cameleers. It is when extolling the virtues of the camel that Niccolò mentions their music:

62 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. [c ii] v. This is within a passage that is absent from Castiglione.

63 In his description of Cairo, Niccolò presents two categories: Christians (in which he places all of the various “generations”), and Infidels (including, in his terminology, Turks, Tatars, Jews, Samaritans, Saracens, Arabs and Berbers—that is, not only Muslims, but anyone who is not a Christian).

Dico che li decti gambilli stanno sei giorni senza bere. Estaranno tal volta uno di o dui senza manzare. Emai non se ripossano ne de di ne de nocte. Salvo che alcuna volta sinfingene pero che glie mala bestia esalvaticha. Equando tu voi che vada presto et ratto bisogna che tu canti adalta voce. O vero che tu abie qualche instromento da corde come he liuto o alpe o psalterio ecomenzo asonare. Allora andaranno presto et alegri. Emai non se riposano. et cosi li tengono gli arabi quando vanno per lo deserto.⁶⁴

I say that the aforementioned camels remain six days without drinking, and they remain sometimes one day or two without eating, and they never rest, neither day nor night, except that sometimes they pretend to, for they are wicked beasts and wild. And when you want them to go quickly and swiftly, it is necessary that you sing loudly, or that you play some stringed instrument, such as a lute or harp or psaltery; then they will go quickly and cheerfully, and never rest. And this is how the Arabs proceed when they cross the desert.

Most probably Niccolò heard the Bedouin *ḥudā'*, a song idiom used by cameleers since pre-Islamic times for exactly the purpose that he describes.⁶⁵

In sum, whilst our Holy Land guidebooks are minimally ethnographic in character, an Italian reader at the end of the fifteenth century could nonetheless learn something from them concerning music and sound in Western Asia. The available insights fall roughly into two categories, one concerned with the Western Asian character of Christianity and its songs, and the other with the sounds of Muslim societies. Regarding the latter, the information is not extensive, but includes descriptions of the adhan, women's celebratory ululation, women's festive dancing accompanied by musical instruments, and cameleers' songs. On the former, in contrast, we find a great deal. Readers approaching these books as textual pilgrimages were prompted by them to adopt what we might call the distinctive listening practice of the pilgrim, which frames, in a direct and participatory way, several of the most significant Latin songs of the Catholic liturgy as "reenactments" of moments from a

64 Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Viaggio da Venezia*, sig. [m v] v. Castiglione (*Fior di terra sancta*, fol. 41r) mentions the abstinence of camels, but elides the reference to the cameleers' song.

65 See Amnon Shiloah, *Music in the World of Islam* (Scolar Press, 1995), 5 and 158; and Habib Hasan Touma, *The Music of the Arabs*, trans. Laurie Schwartz (Amadeus Press, 1996), 3.

sacred history that unfolded precisely at specific sites in Western Asia. At the same time, the Asian or more broadly “eastern” character of those reenactments did not only have a historical dimension, but was given a contemporary aspect by the constant and pervasive presence of the various branches of Eastern Christians throughout the pilgrim’s itinerary across the region. Here some readers could find a connection with their experiences at home in Italy, where in some cities the Armenians, Greeks, and Ethiopians held churches for the celebration of their distinctive rites, as we have outlined above. In short, in the pilgrim’s perspective, both contemporary Christianity and the musical heritage of the Old and New Testaments are phenomena native to Western Asia, of which the Catholic Church in Italy was a European outpost (albeit one of great importance and antiquity, from a Catholic point of view).

4. Mandeville

Mandeville occupies a tricky position in our discussion. On the one hand, at some twelve print editions known to the USTC by 1500 (alongside extensive manuscript circulation), his was clearly the most popular and widely-read travel account circulating in Italy in the late fifteenth century. Indeed, Campbell asserts that its “popularity has been greater than any other prose work of the Middle Ages.”¹ Moreover, we know that it could be taken seriously, since serious cartographers and explorers, including Cristoforo Colombo, used it as a source of information. On the other hand, the work gives full vent to Campbell’s fabulous “Matter of the East,” featuring such characteristic medieval chimeras as the Cynocephali (men with dogs’ heads) and the Blemmyae (men with no head and a face on their chest).²

There are clear indications that at least some fifteenth-century Italian readers were capable of seeing these fictions for what they were. In his opening comments to his narration of the travels of Niccolò de’ Conti, Poggio Bracciolini comments that “Many things are reported of India by ancient writers and common rumour; but such firm knowledge as has reached us proves that some of them are closer to fables than truth.”³ Colombo himself, in his letter reporting the success of his first voyage westward to “India,” writes similarly that “although men have talked or written of those lands, it was all by conjecture, without confirmation from eyesight, importing just so much that the hearers for the most

1 Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, 122.

2 As cited above; but noting the cautions to the rather reductive reading implied in the concept of the “Matter of the East” outlined in Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India Through European Eyes, 1250-1625* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 35–40.

3 “Multa tamen a veteribus scriptoribus tum communi fama de indis feruntur quorum certa cognitio ad nos perlata arguit quaedam ex eis: fabulis quam vero esse similia.” Bracciolini [and de’ Conti], *India recognita*, sig. a iii r.

part listened and judged that there was more fable in it than anything actual."⁴ Meanwhile, in his *Secondo cantare dellindia*—a work specifically devoted to the parts of the Matter of the East that have “more fable in than anything actual”—Giuliano Dati openly acknowledges the skepticism of his audience, and attempts to defend his work by presenting himself as merely a mouthpiece for the unimpeachable Augustine:

O discretauditore chenne dirai
di queste magnie cose chio ti canto
forse si dichio piu nol crederai
ma sta pur audire anchora alquanto
tu sa ben che disopra imiscusai
chio non fonto di questo aparlar tanto
ma plinio tallegai epoi solino
el tuo magnio doctor santagustino

O judicious listener, what will you say
about these great things that I sing to you?
Perhaps if I say more, you will not believe it,
but keep listening a little longer;
you know well that above I acknowledged
that I am not the source in speaking of this,
rather I named Pliny, and then Solinus,
and your great doctor Saint Augustine.

Pero chio suono chomo fa la tromba
che suona mediante el sonatore
lavoce che tu senti in me rimbomba
vien da quel santo annotato doctore
oritorniamo alusitata tromba
chel tempo fugie presto evolan lore
or poramente aquestaltra figura
che monsruesa ha facta la natura⁵

For I sound like the trumpet
that sounds through the player;
the voice that you hear echoing in me
comes from that noted holy doctor.
Now let us return to the accustomed trumpet,
for time flees quickly and the hours fly;
now turn to this other figure
that nature has made monstrous.

Thus, it seems that a work such as Mandeville's could be read both credulously, and, perhaps more often, incredulously (though with no less enjoyment), making it difficult to evaluate how its contents might have figured into readers' imagined Asian soundscapes.

It seems clear that the character “Sir John Mandeville” is a literary device, and that his adventures (with the possible exception of those in the Holy Land) are not described from first-hand experience, but copied and collated from several earlier sources, some of them fables and forgeries, some reporting real travels, most a bit of both.⁶ Most important among

4 Christopher Columbus, *The Spanish Letter of Columbus to Luis de Sant' Angel* (London: G. Norman and Son, 1893), 17.

5 Dati, *Secondo cantare dellindia*, fol. 2v.

6 On the sources of Mandeville's account, see the summary in Higgins, *Writing East*, 9–10; and, for the details, Christiane Deluz, *Le livre de Jehan de Mandeville: Une “geographie” au XIVe siècle* (Institut d'Etudes Medievales de l'Universite Catholique

Mandeville's sources is the Franciscan missionary Odoric of Pordenone's *Relatio*, a fourteenth-century account of real travel in India, Southeast Asia, and China with a reasonably extensive manuscript circulation, but very little impact in print (an edition was published in Pesaro in 1513).⁷ Also important is the *Speculum historiale* of the thirteenth-century Dominican Vincent of Beauvais, a comprehensive world history based on textual rather than empirical research, printed once in Italy in the fifteenth century, in Venice in 1494.⁸ Mandeville's description of Prester John leans heavily on the *Letter of Prester John*, a twelfth-century forgery purporting to be addressed from Prester John to the Eastern Roman Emperor Manuel I Comnenus, also printed once in Italy in our period, in Venice in 1478.⁹ Another of Mandeville's sources, the Alexander Romance, enjoyed a larger print circulation, as we have already seen above. (Perhaps surprisingly, Marco Polo was used by the author little or not at all.) Since most readers of late fifteenth-century editions of Mandeville's book probably were not equipped to trace the origins of his anecdotes in other texts, however, we acknowledge these general relationships, but do not investigate the specific derivations of the episodes we discuss below.

Mandeville's travels confound the organisation of the rest of this volume. Roughly the first half of it is couched as a sober guide for pilgrims to the Holy Land, bearing many similarities to the pilgrim accounts discussed in the previous section. In contrast, the second half presents much more extensive, aimless and fantastical adventures throughout Asia—aimless on the part of the fictional Sir John, that is, but not on the part of the author, who seems to have been motivated by a desire to prompt religious reform.¹⁰ This material, in its most level-headed observations, shares a good deal with the accounts of secular travel throughout Asia discussed in the following chapter, and especially with Marco Polo and Niccolò de' Conti. For these reasons we place Mandeville between the pilgrims and the merchants, related to both but also quite distinct.

Mandeville's account of the Holy Land is less musical than those discussed in the previous section, but its few relevant comments fall

de Louvain, 1988), 39–93 and 428–91.

7 Odorico da Pordenone, *De rebus incognitis* (Pesaro: [Girolamo Soncino], 1513).

8 Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale* (Venice: Hermannus Liechtenstein, 1494).

9 Prester John, *De ritu et moribus Indorum* (Venice: [Nel Beretin Convento della Ca Grande], 1478).

10 For example, Rubiés, "Travel writing as a genre," 15–16.

within the same two dominant themes of the eastern origins of the Latin rite, and the distinctive rites of the Eastern Christians. Mandeville's itinerary toward the Holy Land passes through Constantinople, and in that context he describes some aspects of the Greek rite that differ from the Latin. In a short chapter entitled "On many other errors of the Greeks" (*De molti altri errore de li grezi*), he explains:

E dichono li grezi che nella quatragexima non si de cantare messa altro che sacrato e la domenicha e il sabato non digiuneno a niuno tempo de lanno si bene fosse la vigillia di pasqua o de natale e non premeteno che li latini non canteno a li loro altari altro che una messa e se pure la cantasseno li grezi da poy laveno laltare daqua benedeta e dicono che non se de cantare altro che una messa el giorno in suxo uno altare¹¹

And the Greeks say that during Lent, one should not sing Mass except on Saturdays and Sundays; and nor do they fast on Saturdays at any time of the year, unless it were the vigil of Easter or Christmas; and they insist that the Latins must not sing more than one Mass at their altars, and if they were to so sing, the Greeks afterward would wash the altar with holy water; and they say that no more than one Mass per day should be sung upon an altar.

Later, during his description of Jerusalem, he mentions an altar within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre officiated by the "Indians:"

E per quisti gradi monto il nostro signore quando porto la croce sopra se e de loco a quisti gradi e una capella ove cantano messa preti indiani ma non secundo la nostra lege ma secondo la sua che ognia volta che fano il sacramento de laltare egli el fanno de panne dicendo el paternostro con alchune altre oratione ele parole del sacramento per che egli non fano alchune de le aditione fate per li papa ma assay devotamento cantono¹²

And by these steps our Lord ascended when He carried the Cross upon Himself, and nearby these steps is a chapel where Indian priests sing Mass, but not according to our law, but according to theirs, for every time they make the sacrament at the altar, they make it with bread, saying the *Pater Noster* along with certain other prayers and the words of the sacrament, for they do not observe any of the additions made by the popes; yet they sing most devoutly.

11 Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [a 8] r. Our Mandeville is not in the original French, but an Italian translation, which (unlike in the case of Polo in the next chapter) remains close to the version of the text accepted as normative in modern scholarship.

12 Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [d 5] v.

Then, shortly after, when describing the holy sites on Mount Zion, he mentions “the tower where Our Lady heard the angels singing Mass” (*la torre ove odi la nostra dona li angeli cantare messa*).¹³ These points speak—albeit more briefly and simply—to broadly the same attitudes and concerns that we found in the other pilgrim accounts described in the previous chapter.

Much more music is encountered in the second half of Mandeville’s text, particularly in India, Southeast Asia, and China. Here, Mandeville’s observations fall into two categories, which we will find to a large extent matched in the texts discussed in the next chapter. First, he is interested to describe unfamiliar religious rituals, especially those that strike him as gruesome, and in the process mentions their musical elements. Second, he luxuriates in the courts and customs of the great lords of the East, principal among them Kublai Khan and Prester John (who features as a kind of khan of India), including customs involving music. We will consider each category in turn.

The entangled stories of St Thomas the Apostle and Prester John give Mandeville’s India a complex relationship with Latin Christianity. Mandeville comments that the Christians in the lands of Prester John sing Mass like the Greeks, describing their rite in a very similar way to the rite of the “Indians” in Jerusalem mentioned above:

nela terra de questo prete sono boni christiani de bona fede e de bona lege e spetialmente de quelli del suo paese proprio elli hano comunamente il loro capelani cantano la messa e fano li sacramenti de pane amodo de greci ma elli non dicono tante cosse como fano de qua pero che elli dicono solamente quello che linsigno san tomaso apostolo amo che cantareno li apostoli dicendo el pater noster e le parole con le quale se consacra el nostro signore ma noy habiano molte aditione che hano da po fato li papi le quale cose eli non fano¹⁴

In the land of this priest there are good Christians of good faith and good law, and especially those of his own country. They have their communal chaplains who sing the Mass and perform the sacraments with bread in the manner of the Greeks. But they do not say as many things as we do here, because they say only what the Apostle Saint Thomas taught—[that is,] what the apostles would sing, saying the Pater Noster and the words with which our Lord is consecrated. But we have many additions that the popes have made afterward, the which things they do not do.

13 Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [d 9] v.

14 Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [o 3] r.

He also finds Christians in the lands of the Great Khan, and describes them singing *Veni creator spiritus* in procession with their ruler.¹⁵

In the city of "Calamia" (presumably Mylapore), in the "country" (*paese*) or "realm" (*reama*) of "Maburon" (presumably the Coromandel Coast), Mandeville finds the tomb of St Thomas inside a "chiesa" or "monastero" that also houses the statues of many idols. One of these idols—the largest in size and most richly adorned—is the subject of a pilgrimage phenomenon, compared by Mandeville with that of Compostella, in which participants show their great devotion through acts of self-harm. When the idol is processed about the city on feast days, the devout cast themselves under the wheels of its cart, suffering mutilation or death; while "before the chariot, closest to it, go the *pifferi* of the land with diverse instruments that are without number, and they make among themselves great melodies."¹⁶ Those who intend to commit suicide in this manner are feted by their friends and family as if they were holy martyrs (Mandeville's analogy), and go to the idol in solemn pomp "with a great abundance of *pifferi*;"¹⁷ after their death, their friends present their body to the idol with songs.¹⁸

Mandeville locates many of the most fantastical creatures encountered on his adventures on the large island of "Dondino," near Sri Lanka, and its many smaller subject islands (the archipelago is now sometimes correlated with the Andaman Islands). Here also he locates a funerary practice that involves one of his several descriptions of cannibalism. When an islander is taken sick, their family seek the help of the priest, who asks their idol whether the invalid will recover or die. If death is the prognosis, the invalid is suffocated by their family, then butchered and eaten in a great feast of their friends, accompanied by "as many *pifferi* as they can have."¹⁹ Afterward, the bones are gathered, "and they bury them, singing and making great festivity and great melody."²⁰

15 Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [l 7] r.

16 "davanti al carro piu preso vano li piferi del paese con diversi instrumenti che sono senza numero e fano fra loro de grande melodie." Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [h 8] r. This is a description of a *rathayātrā*.

17 "con grande abondantia de piferi." Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [h 8] r.

18 "e allora li amici presentano el corpo alidolo e dicono cantando guardate dio che ha fato el nostro lialli amico servidore...." Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [h 8] r-v.

19 "quanti pifferi pono havere." Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. k [i] r.

20 "e si sepelischono cantando e faciando grande festa e grande melodia." Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. k [i] r.

Another funerary practice involving cannibalism is located in the “reame” of “Roboch.” This region is now usually correlated with Tibet, and the funerary practice seems to correspond closely to Tibetan Buddhist sky burial, although it also bears similarity to the funeral customs of the Parsis in what is now Gujarat:

in questa ixola e una uxanza che volendo el fiolo grandemente honorare el padre quando el more ello manda per tutti li amici soi e parenti religiosi e preti e piferi in gran quantitate e portano il corpo del padre sopra una montagna facendo grande festa e solennita poi che lano fi la portato il maggiore prelato si li talia el capo e si lo ripone supra uno grande piatelo doro e dargento o dalo al fiolo e e li altri el portano dicendo molte oratione e li uxelli del paese che hano bene impreso questa usanza per longo tempo si vengono e si se apresentationo de sopra como sono vultori e agle e altri molti uxelli che mangiano carne e li uxelli la prendano e vano alquanto da longe e la mangeno poy amodo che da qua li preti cantano per li morti subvenite santi dei cosi quelli preti cantano allora in suo lenguagio ad alta voce riguardate como era valente homo costui el quale li angeli de dio sono venvit atrovare e portare in paradixio allora prende al fiolo che ci sia molto honorato²¹

On this island is a custom that, when a son wishes to greatly honor his father after his death, he sends for all his friends and relatives, religious and priests and *pifferi* in great number, and they carry the father's body up a mountain, making great celebration and solemnity. Then, once they have carried him there, the highest-ranking priest cuts off his head and places it upon a large platter of gold and silver, giving it to the son, and the others carry it, reciting many prayers. The birds of the land, having well learned this custom over a long time, come and gather above—such as vultures and eagles and many other birds that eat flesh—and the birds take the body, fly some distance away, and eat it. Then, in the same way that here the priests sing for the dead “Subvenite sancti Dei,” so their priests sing loudly in their own tongue: “Behold how worthy a man this was, for the angels of God have come to seek him and carry him to Paradise.” Then the son considers that he [i.e. his father] is greatly honored.

The head of the deceased is then cooked and eaten by the son and his friends in a great feast, and the skull retained as a cup.

Passages such as these concerned with rituals have struck some scholars as distinctly, perhaps unexpectedly, tolerant and open-minded

21 Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sigs. [o 6] v–[o 7] r.

toward "heathen" or "infidel" religions; Campbell has emphasised the Mandeville author's "remarkable cultural relativism," and Higgins observes his "rationalizing openness to religious Otherness."²² Earlier in the description of Roboch, Mandeville likens the community's chief priest to the Pope, and in the passage quoted he treats their sung funeral rituals as comparable to those of European Catholics. Similarly, in the description of ritual suicide in Calamia, Mandeville compares the pilgrims with those of Compostella, and also with Christian martyr saints. This tendency to remark on similarities between Christian and non-Christian ritual practices, and more broadly to present the unfamiliar to European readers through the structures of the known, is one that we will encounter again in the eyewitness travel accounts discussed in the following chapter. It seems often to apply especially to music, particularly in the accounts of Niccolò de' Conti and Marco Polo, but also to an extent here, as exemplified in the insistence, throughout this Italian text of Mandeville, on referring to South and East Asian musicians as *pifferi*, one of the most familiar and even paradigmatic categories of musician in fifteenth-century Italy.²³

The second of the principal categories in which music comes up in the second half of Mandeville's book is his descriptions of great rulers and lords of South and East Asia and the customs of their courts. First among these is, of course, Kublai Khan.²⁴ In Mandeville's initial description of the "magnificentie" of the Great Khan and of his palace, a long passage relates the very splendid and highly-ordered customs observed as he dines. Among these are two musical diversions, the first of which is produced by curious bird automata:

devante alla tavola de lo imperatore sono grande feste ivi sono tavolle doro e pavoni doro smaltati molte nobelmente e sononi molte altre mainere de uxelli tuti doro smaltate molto nobilmente e sonone molto altre cosse e de altre maynere egli fano quisti uselli ballare danzare e cantare sopra le tavole percotendosse le palme e de cioe ne fano gran festa e buffonaria io non so se questo sia per artificio o per nigromantia e pure una bellissima cossa da vedere et e una gran maraveglia²⁵

22 See Rubiés, "Travel Writing as a Genre," 16-17; Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, 9; Higgins, *Writing East*, 17.

23 On the especially familiar and commonplace nature of this term, see Shephard, Doyle, O'Flaherty, Page, and Ștefănescu, *Sounding the Bookshelf 1501*, 43.

24 On the fundamental importance of the Khan to Mandeville's description of China, and his place in the author's rhetorical and ideological strategies, see especially Higgins, *Writing East*, 159-69.

25 Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [k 6] r.

Before the emperor's table are great festivities; there are tables of gold and peacocks of gold, most nobly enameled, and many other kinds of birds, all of gold most nobly enamelled, and there are many other things of diverse sorts. They make these birds cavort, dance, and sing upon the tables, beating their wings, and from this they create much merriment and jest. I know not whether this be by artifice or necromancy, and yet it is a most beautiful thing to behold, and a great marvel.

These musical birds prompt Mandeville to a brief digression on the advanced state of science and artifice among the Chinese, noting that they consider themselves the cleverest of the peoples of the world, followed by the Latin Christians. Mandeville does not contradict their opinion, and emphasises that even after careful investigation he was unable to discover the secret of the birds' performance. (In fact, comparable automata were known in Europe, even in the time of Mandeville's author—though not perhaps in the time of his source—, and certainly by the time Italian readers were encountering this book in print in the late fifteenth century.²⁶)

The other musical performance at dinner is produced by our familiar *pifferi*:

davanti alla tavola stano li gran baroni e li altri che vi servano e non ve homo de tanto ardimento che ve dicesse una parolla non parlando allui lo imperadore salvo che li piferi che dicono canzone e iovi e altre cosse per sollazo dello imperadore²⁷

Before the table stand the great barons and the others who serve there, and there is no man so bold as to speak a word unless the emperor first speaks to him—except for the *pifferi*, who recite songs and jests and other things for the emperor's amusement.

Much more information on the Khan's *pifferi* comes two chapters later, when the focus turns to the customs of the Khan's court during the four principal festivals: that celebrating the Khan's birth, that marking the

26 See Derek J. de Solla Price, "Automata and the Origins of Mechanism and Mechanistic Philosophy," *Technology and Culture* 5, no. 1 (1964): 9–23; and E. R. Truitt, *Medieval Robots: Mechanism, Magic, Nature, and Art* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). Particularly relevant is the automated cock created for the clock of the cathedral of Strasbourg in the 1350s, which both crowed and flapped its wings: de Solla Price, "Automata," 18; and Truitt, *Medieval Robots*, 174–78. See also Gabriela Currie and Lars Christensen, *Eurasian Musical Journeys: Five Tales* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), chapter 6, for a valuable cross-cultural discussion of sound-producing automata.

27 Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [k 6] v.

anniversary of his presentation at the “moysach” (i.e. mosque), and those celebrating their “idol.” First, Mandeville describes an enormous procession of the nobility of the realm, before whom “go all the *pifferi* playing on many diverse instruments.”²⁸ These process around the Khan’s hall, whilst the Khan himself sits at his table alongside “philosophi e savij” who have with them the tools and instruments of their sciences. The philosophers call for silence and issue a series of commands to the assembled nobles, requiring them to show symbolic proofs of their loyalty.

Quando li filosofi hano cossi facto ly loro comandamenti li pifferi comenzano asonare ciaschuno del suo Instrumento luno da poy laltro e fano una granda mellodia quando hono sonate una gran peza uno deli piferi de lo imperadore monta alto sopra una sedia lavorata molto nobilmente e crida e dice fate pace e ciascaduno si tace²⁹

When the philosophers have thus issued their commands, the *pifferi* begin to play, each with his own instrument, one after another, and they make a great melody. When they have played for a long while, one of the emperor’s *pifferi* climbs high upon a most nobly wrought chair, and calls out and proclaims: “Make peace!” And all fall silent.

Then the nobles present themselves to the emperor one by one, in order of rank, presenting him with gifts, after which the chief priest issues a blessing; “then the *pifferi* begin to play once more, and when they have thus played for a time, they fall silent.”³⁰ A number of other courtly entertainments follow, among which are dances performed by “the most beautiful maidens in the world.”³¹

Following straight on from the description of the feasts is a short passage summarising the staffing of the Great Khan’s court, a large part of which is devoted to the *pifferi*:

28 “davante aloro vano tuti li piferi sonando de molti diversi instrumenti.” Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [13] v. On the historical reality of processional music during the Yuan dynasty, see, among others, Zeng Meiyue 曾美月, “Zhongguo lidai lubu guchuiyue bijiao yanjiu” 中国历代卤簿鼓吹乐比较研究 [A historical and comparative study of Chinese state processional music], *Zhongguo yinyue* 中国音乐 [Chinese Music], no. 2 (2015), 75–76. Zeng notes that during the Yuan there was indeed a great diversity of instruments included in the ceremonial band.

29 Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [14] r-v.

30 “poy comenzano li pifferi a sonare una altra volta e quando eli hanno cossi uno pezo sonato egli taceno.” Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [14] v.

31 “poy fano venire danze con le piu belle damixelle del mondo si como pareno.” Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [14] v.

questo imperadore ha molte gente per servirlo como io ne ho altre fiade dito perche de pifferi el numero de .13. convans uno de quisti convans fa .13. ma egli non stano pero tuti con luy pero che tuti li pifferi veneno davanti aluy de qualoncha nazione del si sihao ello li fa tenere nel suo ostello e quantunque egli vadeno in altre terre egli non dimeno se chiamato piferi de lo imperatore e pero ne cosi gran numero³²

This emperor has many people to serve him, as I have mentioned before, for of *pifferi* alone their number is 13 *convans* (one of these *convans* is 13 [people]), though not all remain constantly with him; all the *pifferi* who come before him, of whatever nation they may be, are counted among his household, and even when they travel in other lands, they are nonetheless called "*pifferi* of the emperor," and this is why there are such a great number

Although certainly Mandeville's description of the Khan's court includes elements that are intended to strike the Catholic European reader as strange, the focus on carefully stratified and stage-managed obeisance and entertainment centred on the (dining) table of the Khan equally clearly invites analogy to European court traditions. Throughout the description, the term *pifferi* serves to anchor the more unfamiliar elements within the conventions of Italian court culture and ceremony, in which the employment of *pifferi* in relatively large numbers (if not perhaps the 13 x 13 ascribed to the Khan), and their performance during elaborate processions and feasting, were commonplace. They are elements of the "magnificence" of the Khan that accord with European expectations of the magnificent ruler. At the same time, music is still inflected by the tendency toward exaggeration, which comprises the main rhetorical strategy to emphasise the extra-ordinary nature of the East, stretching beyond the reader's prior experience: the *pifferi* are of a number, and their instruments of a number and diversity, to prompt wonder and marvel.

Mandeville's account of Prester John's court—second only to that of the Khan in power and magnificence—lacks music, most likely because his main source on Prester John, the *Letter of Prester John*, itself makes no mention of it, although perhaps also because the author has reasons

32 Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [1 5] r. Zeng, "Zhongguo lidai lubu guchuiyue bijiao yanjiu," 75–76, indicates that the Yuan ceremonial band did indeed include very numerous musicians.

to present a more ascetic view of the Christian ruler.³³ Nonetheless, courtly musical diversions are to be found in his description of a great patrician named (in our Italian version) Oatalonabos, who lives in the island of "Mischorach" in Prester John's territory. Here the text locates an anecdote that is connected in other sources with Hasan-i Sabbah and the castle of Alamut in Persia, headquarters of the Nizari Ismai'li sect widely known as the Assassins.³⁴ The episode concerns the lord's method of recruiting new young soldiers to his sect—he lures them with false promises of paradise, made credible by maintaining at his castle a wonderful garden filled with sensory delights:

dentro da quisti muri era li piu belli giardini che se potessero trovare e havere ivi haveva fato piantare ognia bona cossa odorifera e tuti li arbori e le herbe che portano nobil fiori e che se possano trovare e havere egli ha de presente molto belle fontane allato ale quale haveva fato fare molto belle sale e bele camere tute pincte doro e de azurlo e haviva facto fare molto diverse truffe de istorie ivi havea uxelli che se movevono e cantaveno cum inzegni como sosseno vivi in questo havea posto ognia maignera de gente e de bestie che havea potuto havere li quali potesseno piacere e delectare alomo per delectare e per guardare ivi havea posto le piu belle damixelle de etade de quindexe anni che havea possuto trovare e li piu belli gioveniti de simile etade et erano vestiti de drapi doro e dicena che erano angeli costuy havea fato fare tre belle fontane e nobile tute intorniate de pietre pretiose e de perle con conducti sotteranei si che quando voleva facia per luna corerre vino e per l'altra melle questo locho lui lo chiamava paradixio e quando alcuni giovane valente prode e arditi venenano avedere custui li menava avedere el suo paradixio e mostraveli le diverse cosse li piacere e li diversi canti de li uxelli e le belle damixele e le bele fontane de lacte vino e melle e fatia sonare diversi instrumenti musici e canti in una altra torre senza vedere quelli che sonano e diceva che quelli erano angeli de dio e che quella era el paradixio che dio havea permesso ali amici soy dicendo dabo vobis terram fluentem lac et mel³⁵

Within these walls were the most beautiful gardens one could find, where he had planted every good and fragrant thing, and all the trees and the herbs that bear noble flowers that could be found, and he had

33 Higgins, *Writing East*, 158.

34 The conventional text of Marco Polo also includes a description of the garden of paradise in the castle of the Assassins, but our 1496 edition abridges it so dramatically that the garden and its musicians are not even mentioned: Polo, *Delle maravigliose cose*, sigs. c ii v – c iii r.

35 Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sigs. [n 2] v – n 3 r.

close at hand many beautiful fountains, beside which he had built very beautiful halls and beautiful chambers all painted with gold and azure, and he had made many diverse decorated mechanisms, among them birds that moved by themselves and sang by artifice as if alive, and in this place he had put every manner of human and animal figure that one could have, which could please and delight men. To delight and to guard, there he had placed the most beautiful maidens of fifteen years of age that could be found, and the most beautiful youths of like age, and they were dressed in cloth of gold, and he said they were angels. He had built three fountains, beautiful and noble, all encrusted with precious stones and pearls, with underground channels such that, when he wished, one was made to run with wine and the other honey. This place he called "Paradise," and when certain youths, valiant, bold and daring, came to see, he would lead them to see his paradise, and show them the diverse things, the pleasing and diverse singing of the birds, and the beautiful maidens, and the beautiful fountains of milk, wine and honey, and make diverse musical instruments and songs play in a high tower without seeing those who played, and he said that these were angels of god and that this was the paradise that god had granted to his friends, saying "dabo vobis terram fluentem lac et mel" [Exodus 8:8].

This earthly paradise reads very like a Garden of Love after the model of the *Roman de la Rose*, but twisted with elements of *inganno*, including the bird automaton and the unseen musicians, as well as the bogus scriptural citation, to reflect the lord's cunning deception.³⁶ Unlike the Great Khan, whose territories could be placed on a map easily even if imperfectly by an educated Italian reader, by locating this episode on an apocryphal "island" of "Mischorach" it is effectively abstracted from the known geography of Asia, giving it a more uncertain role in the reader's effort to grasp the region. Some readers may have been able to resolve the conundrum and place the episode in Persia if they were familiar with the tale of the "old man of the mountain" from other sources, but certainly not all.

Another lord—unnamed and this time living in the land of the Great Khan—is also described enjoying musical diversions with an erotic charge, but this time in the more conventional context of fine dining and without an ulterior motive beyond pleasure and refinement:

36 Another musical deception, a kind of inverse of this earthly paradise, is described by Mandeville in his account of the "vale perilous" (*la valle perichulossa*), where unseen devils play frame drums, nakers and trumpets ("de tamborrini de nachare e de trombe"), and from which few travellers return—Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sigs. n 3 v – n 4 r.

costui mena molto nobile vita secondo la costuma dela ivi ha ciquanta damixelle le quale lo servano a mangiare e acontiare e fare vivanda e de quella libocano impero che lui non fa alcuna cossa se no tenere la mano sopra la tavola e masticare ... queste damixelle cantano canzone doramte che costui mangia e quando ello ha mangiato ed quella vivanda egli ne portano una altra cantando amodo che de prima e in cotal maniera fano fin che ha mangiato e ogni giorno fano in questo modo³⁷

He lives a most noble life according to the local custom. He has fifty maidens who serve him when he eats and prepare and present his food, and put it in his mouth, for he does nothing but rest his hands upon the table and chew ... these maidens sing songs while he eats, and when he has finished one dish, they bring another, singing in the same manner as before, and in like manner they continue until he has eaten; and every day they do in like manner.

These descriptions, and above all that of Kublai Khan, together begin to comprise a distinct discourse of the “great lord of the East” which we will find spun out much more fully and clearly in the travel accounts discussed in the following section, especially in those of Conti and Polo. Its central component is the presentation of musical entertainments during dinner, something that—as we have already observed—was also integral to European conceptions of courtly living, albeit that our Oriental performances have been qualified with elements that add strangeness to their familiarity (hundreds of *pifferi*, a great variety of instruments, fifty singing maidens, baffling automata). With the great lord of the East who also meets the requirements of European princely magnificence, and the foreign religious customs that are somehow analogous or comparable to those of the Catholics, we find introduced in Mandeville the two principal musical themes that will be enriched and elaborated, with differing nuances, by the texts considered in the next chapter.

37 Mandeville, *Itinerarius*, sig. [o 7] r-v.

5. Enslavement, Diplomacy, and Trade

Alongside pilgrimage, in Chapter 1 we outlined several further pragmatic motives that prompted travel and migration between Italy, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Western Asia in the fifteenth century, including enslavement, diplomacy, trade, warfare, and colonial governance. In this chapter we discuss four eyewitness accounts printed in Italy in the 1480s and 90s which result from these kinds of journeys: one concerning a Catholic European's experience of enslavement in Türkiye (Georgius), another describing recent diplomatic travel in Persia (Contarini), another reporting mercantile adventures in India earlier in the century (Conti), and finally Marco Polo's celebrated and centuries-old account of his career in China, which began in trade but encompassed also roles in the court and government of Kublai Khan.

Although here we discuss these books as somehow similar and comparable, they also exhibit important differences, which it will be useful to spell out. The accounts of Georgius, Contarini, and Conti are all quite recent and quite short, whereas that of Polo is quite old and quite long. Those of Contarini, Conti, and Polo describe elective travels, whereas Georgius had no choice about his visit to Türkiye. Both Georgius and Contarini wrote their own stories; and in contrast both Conti and Polo spoke through different authors who in different ways transformed their accounts, one (Poggio) through his humanist interests and erudition, the other (Rustichello) through the literary conventions of chivalric romance. The accounts of Polo and Contarini are printed in Italian (with distinct Venetianisms), whereas those of Conti and Georgius are written in Latin (the former humanist and classicising, the latter clerical). The initial print publications of Conti, Contarini and Georgius seem to reflect personal enterprise with a limited circulation

in view (although Georgius' book survives in by far the most known copies among the four), whereas Polo developed an extensive print distribution and was clearly printed for the most part on a commercial basis. Polo had already enjoyed a large manuscript circulation, and Conti (both as part of Poggio's *De varietate fortunae* and separately) a respectable one, therefore both were already known to readers when they appeared in print, unlike Georgius and Contarini. The first editions of Georgius, Contarini and Conti are all quarto volumes with generous margins and space left for at least one decorative initial (in the case of Conti one is printed in); whereas the 1496 Polo is an octavo with very narrow margins and exceptionally clear type—a pocket edition from one of Venice's leading printing houses (Sessa).

Thanks to these considerations, in some respects the four texts do not form a single coherent discourse with a shared readership, whereas in others they do. Certainly there is more to separate them than was the case for the pilgrim accounts, which represent different essays in the same distinct and reasonably coherent genre, arising from similar experiences in the same locations. Therefore, unlike in Chapter 3, here we consider each book separately in turn, although in the process noting the overlaps and resonances among the them. We proceed through the four accounts in the order Georgius, Contarini, Conti, Polo, reflecting both the order of their first publication (c.1481–83, 1486/87, c.1492, 1496), and the order of the eastward extent of the observations they report.

5.1 Georgius de Hungaria

Known to modern scholarship only as “George from Hungary,” the author of the *De moribus conditionibus et nequicia Turcorum* (also known as the *De ritu et moribus Turcorum*) tells us in the prologue that he came from “Septem castra,” a Latinised form of Siebenbürgen, the German name for Transylvania, which in the fifteenth century formed part of the Kingdom of Hungary.¹ In 1438, aged about fifteen or sixteen, he

1 This account is very little discussed. The most detailed and up-to-date treatment can be found in Constantin Erbiceanu's introduction to the recent Romanian translation: Georgius de Hungaria, *Tratat despre obiceiurile, ceremoniile și infamia turcilor*, trans. Ioana Costa (Humanitas, 2017); whilst Andrei Pippidi, *Visions of the Ottoman World in Renaissance Europe* (Columbia University Press, 2013), includes brief comments on it in a broad and valuable survey of European accounts of

was studying in Sebeş in Transylvania when a huge Ottoman force sacked the town. Captured, he was sold to some merchants and taken to Adrianopolis (Edirne), where he began twenty years of enslavement. Released in 1458, Georgius became a Dominican and served among the curia in Rome until his death in 1502. His account of his experiences in Türkiye was printed in Rome in the early 1480s, and must have been written only shortly beforehand.

Georgius' is probably the most ethnographic and balanced Christian description of the Turks to circulate in fifteenth-century Italy—balanced in a rather loose sense, of course, and only when viewed alongside the usual excoriating attacks motivated by holy fury, such as that printed in Rome a few years earlier under the title *Tractatus quidam de Turcis*.² Georgius is certainly sore about his enslavement, and clear in his damnation of what he inevitably sees as the Turks' false religion; but the curious structure of his treatise seems deliberately to make room also for a more positive assessment. After charting the rise of the Turks, their settlement of Anatolia, their religious doctrine, and their diligent pursuit of Christian captives for enslavement, Georgius then pivots to the topic of apostasy among Christians enslaved in the Ottoman lands. This leads him into seven chapters setting out the reasons why Christian captives might in fact be attracted to convert to Islam, amounting to a description of the most praiseworthy customs of the Turks—from the piety of their religious observance, to the modesty of Turkish wives, to the elegance of their verse, and much else besides. After evaluating the validity of these reasons, Georgius then sets out the factors that deter Christian captives from apostasy, and finally closes his account with a recommendation of the Catholic Christian religion.

It is in the seven chapters on the laudable customs of the Turks that we find mention of music. It comes up first in the course of describing the disposition of the Turkish army:

the Ottomans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (at 11–63). Because some decades later Martin Luther wrote a preface to a German edition of the work, Luther scholars have also somewhat discussed it: see, for example, Sarah Henrich and James L. Boyce, "Martin Luther—Translations of Two Prefaces on Islam: Preface to the *Libellus de ritu et moribus Turcorum* (1530), and Preface to Bibliander's Edition of the *Qur'ān* (1543)," *Word and World* 16 (1996): 250–66.

2 Anon., *Tractatus quidam de Turcis* ([Rome: Johann Schurener, c.1474–75]).

Et unusquisque eorum utitur uno timpano magno cum fistula ad convocandum suos et ad concitandum et provocandum quando necesse est ad pugnam Et illi vocantur *czumbasthi* et unicuique eorum subiciuntur centuriones plus vel minus secundum quae requirit exercitus et sunt ad minus quatuor ad maius autem decem et isti vocantur *tscheribaschi* quorum unusquisque praeest centum equestribus qui vocantur *czingheri*. iste etiam ordo in pedestribus observatur³

And each of them [i.e. the cavalry commanders] uses a large drum with a pipe to summon his men and to incite and rouse them when it is necessary to fight. And they are called *czumbasthi* (*subaşı*), and to each of them are subordinate a number of centurions, more or less, according to what the army requires, and there are at least four, at most ten, and these are called *tscheribaschi* (*çeribaşı*), each of whom commands a hundred cavalrymen which are called *czingheri* (perhaps *çengeri* or *çingene*?). This same order is also observed among the infantry.

"Tympano magno cum fistula" probably describes the *kös* (kettledrum) or *davul* (bass drum), and the *zurna*, all instruments that were by the end of the fifteenth century typical of the *mehterân* or Ottoman ceremonial band.⁴

The other, more substantive musical description occurs in a long passage recounting the dance-like whirling ritual of the Sufi mystics known as Mevlevi (or, colloquially, "whirling Dervishes"). Georgius terms the mystics "religiosi," inviting an equivalence with members of the Christian religious orders, and calls the occasions for their rituals "festivitates," suggesting a parallel with Christian feasts, strategies of analogy that are similar to those we have observed in Mandeville. The passage begins with a rather detailed description of the ritual itself:

3 Georgius de Hungaria, *De moribus conditionibus et nequicia Turcorum* ([Rome: Georgius Teutonicus and Sixtus Riessinger, c.1481]), fol. 12v (following the pencilled folio numbers in the copy we used, which is Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 4 Inc.s.a. 1848, urn:nbn:de:bsb:12-bsb00064348-3).

4 Sanlıkol notes that the term *mehter* was only just in the process of becoming attached to ceremonial musicians in the late fifteenth century: Mehmet Ali Sanlıkol, *Çalıcı Mehterler* (YKY, 2011), 21. Sanlıkol also observes (at 24–25) that in the mid-late fifteenth century the *zurna* was only in the process of incorporation into the conventional Ottoman ceremonial instrumentarium, whereas the trumpet (*boru*) was the established wind component; in the case of our source, the Latin term *fistula* strongly suggests a reed instrument specifically is intended rather than a trumpet. On the broader context of European reactions to Western Asian military music, see Edmund A. Bowles, "Eastern influences on the use of trumpets and drums during the Middle Ages," *Anuario Musical* 26 (1971): 3–28.

Agunt et ipsi religiosi eorum quasdam festivitates vel propter vota populi eis oblata vel propter praedecessorum suorum memorias vel etiam propter communem populi necessitatem scilicet pro pluvia impetranda vel serenitate et huiusmodi et tunc conveniunt et congregantur omnes qui sunt in locis propinquioribus et fit primo omnium communis refectio occidunt enim animalia si habent si autem non habent faciunt de leguminibus vel riso secundum facultatem suam cibaria qualia possunt et completa refectione ille qui primus est inter eos accepto tympano facit modulationem et surgentes ceteri per ordinem incipiunt ludere vocatur autem festivitas eorum machia et ludus czamach qui fit quadam totius corporis regulata et bene modificata agitatione cum honestis et dignis et valde decentibus omnium membrorum motibus secundum modulationem mensurae instrumenti musici ad hoc convenienter aptate. et in fine per modum vertiginis quodam motu velocissimo circulariter rotatione. vel revolutione in quo tota vis ipsius ludi consistit Nam ferventiores eorum in tanta velocitate revolvuntur, ut non possit utrum sit homo vel statua discerni ab intuitibus et ostendunt se in hoc quasi supernaturalem agilitatem corporum habere. Et licet aliquis possit eos imitari in ceteris ipsius ludi gestibus. in isto tamen revolutionis actu nemo eos quantumcunque aptus et agilis fuerit potest aliquatenus mutari [*sic* for imitari] Postquam igitur singuli luserunt. surgunt omnes simul et confuso ordine ludunt emittentes quasdam imprecationis voces pro salute eorum qui eis vota sua vel elemosinas elargiti sunt⁵

Their religious celebrate certain festivals, either because of vows made to them by the people, or in memory of their predecessors, or even for the common needs of the populace, such as to obtain rain, or fair weather, and the like. At these times, all who live nearby gather together, and first they hold a communal meal. They slaughter animals if they have them; if not, they prepare what they can from legumes or rice according to their means. And when the meal is finished, the one who is the first among them takes up a drum and makes melody, the others rise in order, and the dance begins. Their festival is called Machia (?), and the dance Czamach (*samā*; *sema*), which is done with a certain regulated and well-measured movement of the whole body, with honest and dignified and very fitting motions of all the limbs, according to the measured melody of the musical instrument, well adapted for this purpose, and in sum in a dizzying manner, with a certain very rapid circular motion, or revolution, which comprises the whole thrust of the dance. For the most fervent among them spin with such speed that it is not possible for the onlookers to distinguish whether they see a man or a statue, and they

5 Georgius de Hungaria, *De moribus conditionibus et nequicia Turcorum*, fols. 17v–18r.

show in this that they have supernatural bodily agility. And although one might imitate them in the other gestures of the dance, yet in this act of whirling, no one, no matter how capable and agile, can imitate them to any extent. After each has danced individually, they all rise together and dance in a mingled formation, uttering certain invocatory statements for the wellbeing of those who have made vows or given alms to them.

The phrases “*accepto tympano facit modulationem*” and “*modulationem mensurae instrumenti musici*” imply both a drum, most likely a frame drum, and a melodic instrument, most likely the *ney*, a reed flute conventionally used in the *sema*.⁶ Georgius initially describes the movements of the ritual in terms similar to those used by Italians of Italian dances in this period, praising its decorum and its apt choreography; but as the passage continues he passes into a more striking account of the distinctive whirling.

Next Georgius describes a practice of mystical recitation, praising the beauty and rhythm of the verses, their memorability, and also their spiritual sentiments:

Utuntur etiam quibusdam sermonibus a praedecessoribus suis sibi traditis. qui eos dum in raptu vel extasi erant in spiritu locuti sunt qui suavis sunt facundiae et rigmatice prolati et faciliter mente retinentur et secundum materiam de qua tractant vel longiores vel breviores existunt Aliqui enim sex versus. alii octo vel decem. alii plus alii minus continent Et trahunt omnes cerimonias legis turcorum et ritus ad sensum spirituales quorum ego magnam habui copiam tam in scriptis quam in mente et delectabar in eis eo qui magis christianam religionem confirmant quam turcorum Unde sacerdotes eorum non accipiunt eos ad auctoritatem dicentes illos qui eis dixerunt non intellexisse quid dicerent quia in raptu vel extasi positi et extra sensum constituti erant dum eos dicerent.⁷

They also use certain spoken phrases, handed down from their predecessors, who spoke them in the spirit while in rapture or ecstasy, which are sweet in eloquence and rhythmically recited, and easily retained in the mind, and according to the subject matter that they treat are either longer or shorter. For some contain six verses, others eight or ten; some contain more, some less. And they interpret all the ceremonies and rites of Turkish law with a spiritual meaning; and of them I acquired

6 Walter Feldman, *From Rumi to the Whirling Dervishes: Music, Poetry and Mysticism in the Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 23.

7 Georgius de Hungaria, *De moribus conditionibus et nequicia Turcorum*, fol. 18r.

many, both in writing and in memory, and took delight in them, particularly because they affirm Christian doctrine more than that of the Turks. Wherefore their priests do not accept them as authoritative, saying that those who spoke them did not understand what they were saying, since they were in rapture or ecstasy, and outside of their senses, when they said them.

This passage seems very close to a description of the *zikr*, a practice of devotional recitation common to the Sufi orders (including the Mevlevi).⁸

Georgius concludes the episode by emphasising the devotional and affective power of the *sema*, adding a personal anecdote:

quando igitur ipsi religiosi sunt inter homines unusquisque sue perfectionis vel professionis signum ostendere conatur et inter ceteros actus sue ostensionis nullus est tam provocativus devotionis seu fervoris sicut ipse ludus eorum supradictus. nec caret misterio Nam et sancti prophete antiquitus huiusmodi ludis utebantur in suis festivis officiis. sicut habetur de David qui ludebat ante archam domini. et de multis aliis veteris testamenti. dum enim quidam eorum in domo nostra hospitaretur post coenam surrexit et precinxit se et incepit ludere. et dum se revolveret audiebantur quedam voces ex ipso sonantes ita ut omnes qui in domo erant attoniti ex admiratione vix poterant se a lachrimis continere.⁹

When these religious are among men, each strives to display the mark of his spiritual attainment, and among all their demonstrative acts, there is none that stirs devotion or fervour more than their sacred dance mentioned above. Nor is this without mystery, for the holy Prophets of old also used such dances in their festive rites. As we read of David, who danced before the Ark of the Lord, and of many others in the Old Testament. For when one of them was staying in our house, after supper he rose up and girded himself and began to dance; and as he whirled, certain voices were heard sounding from him, so that all who were in the house were thunderstruck with amazement, and could scarcely restrain themselves from tears.

Once again, Georgius observes a parallel with the Christian tradition, albeit through the Old Testament prophets; and it is noteworthy that he makes no attempt to distance himself from the emotional response of

8 The *zikr* also had a musical component: see Feldman, *From Rumi to the Whirling Dervishes*, 22.

9 Georgius de Hungaria, *De moribus conditionibus et nequicia Turcorum*, fol. 18r.

the household. Overall it is clear that Georgius was deeply impressed by *sema* and *zikr*, in both their artistic and devotional aspects, an attitude that he is able to present unguardedly in his text because it suits his overarching purpose of emphasising the piety of the Turks, as a means of critiquing the excessive secularity of the Latin Christians.

Georgius has nothing else to say directly on music, but it is worth noting one more passage, in which he directly compares the soundscape of the mosque with that of the church, driving towards the same rhetorical objective:

De ordine autem honestate et silentio quam habent in ecclesia et devotione longum foret narrare per singula hoc tamen breviter dico quae quando turcorum in ecclesia eorum silentium et christianorum in sua ecclesia tempore orationis tumultum considero. magna michi admiratio generatur de tanta ordinis permutatione. unde scilicet in illis tanta devotio et in istis tanta indevotio esse potest cum tamen contrarium esse debere causa et ratio ipsa requirit.¹⁰

Moreover, concerning the order, decorum and silence which they all observe in church, and the devotion, it would take too long to recount every detail. But I say this briefly: when I consider the silence of the Turks in their church, and the commotion of Christians in their church during prayer, I am struck with great wonder at such a reversal of order—how among the former there can be such devotion, and among the latter such irreverence, when reason itself demands the opposite should be true.

This is easily read as a comment on music in negative, since the *tumultum* that attended prayer in fifteenth-century Catholic churches often comprised not only bustle and hubbub, but song and musical instruments. Georgius finds something admirable in the more restrained soundscape of the mosque—something that he implies Christians ought to emulate.¹¹

10 Georgius de Hungaria, *De moribus conditionibus et nequicia Turcorum*, fol. 15v.

11 An interesting exercise to apprehend, from a modern scholarly perspective, the contrast to which Georgius is reacting, is to read Nina Ergin's article "The Soundscape of Sixteenth-Century Istanbul Mosques: Architecture and Qur'an Recital" (*Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 67, no. 2 (2008): 204–21) alongside Giovanni Zanovello's study "'In the Church and In the Chapel': Music and Devotional Spaces in the Church of Santissima Annunziata" (*Journal of the American Musicological Society* 67, no. 2 (2014): 379–428).

5.2 Ambrogio Contarini

Born in Venice in 1429 to a noble family, Ambrogio Contarini enjoyed a long and distinguished career in business and in government.¹² Active as a merchant in Constantinople during the 1450s and early 60s (i.e. after its incorporation into the Ottoman Empire), he was arrested at the outbreak of the First Ottoman-Venetian War in 1463, but escaped and returned to Venice the following year, where he resumed his career in trade. At the beginning of the 1470s, he captained a war galley in Venetian operations against the Ottomans among the Greek islands. Towards the end of 1473, the Republic appointed him instead as ambassador to Persia, with the task of facilitating military cooperation between Venice and the Turkoman ruler Uzun Hasan of the Aq Qoyunlu confederation. Hasan's territories had expanded over the two decades prior to encompass much of modern Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iran and Iraq, and he had therefore become an important rival to the Ottoman sultan, courted as a potential ally by several European Christian powers. Contarini was neither the first nor the last Venetian representative to visit Hasan's court, and Hasan had also sent envoys to Venice.

Unable to use the usual sea route because of the ongoing conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean, Contarini and his small staff travelled to Persia over land through Germany and Poland, then via Kiev to Caffa, a Genoese colony where a Venetian consul resided. From Caffa, he crossed the Black Sea to Fasso (near the modern city of Poti), and travelled through Georgia and Armenia, reaching Tabriz in August 1474. After a delay of several weeks, Contarini was then able to proceed to Isfahan, where he was received cordially by Hasan; soon after, the whole court moved to Qom for the winter, where Contarini spent several months in company with the ruler. In March 1475, the court moved to Tabriz, and from there in June Contarini began his return journey. Upon reaching Fasso, Contarini's party learned that Caffa was now in the hands of the Ottomans, so they

12 Most useful in understanding Contarini's career and his journey are Marica Milanese, "CONTARINI, Ambrogio," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 28 (1983), https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ambrogio-contarini_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/; and Janusz Smółucha, "Ambrogio Contarini i jego podróż na Wschód: okoliczności nawiązania kontaktów dyplomatycznych przez Wenecję i Polskę z Persją w drugiej połowie XV wieku," *Folia historica Cracoviensia* 23, no. 2 (2017): 353–66.

took a detour via the Caspian coast and Moscow, eventually finding their way back to Poland, Germany, and finally Venice in 1477.

Contarini's account of his travels was prepared in 1477, shortly after his return and his official report to the Republic. Plans for a printed edition were first laid in the early 1480s, but the book was not issued until January 1487 (*more Veneto*). His description of his travels is perceptive and observant, but also somewhat weighed down by complaints about the arduous nature of the journey, the privations he sustained, and the dangers he encountered. Music was certainly not his foremost concern—indeed it appears hardly at all over the brief 24 folios—but we are given some small indications during his rich description of the customs of Hasan's court at Qom (which he calls Como):¹³

Adi .xiii. decembrio intrassemo in dicta terra di como cum sua Segnoria dove cum fatica ni fudata data una caseta per nostro lozamento ma convegessemo star zorni .2. soto i pavelioni avanti la potessemo haver cum gran fredri Stessemo in dito logo di como cum sua Seg. fin adi .xxi. marzo .M.cccclxxv. & secundo usanza molte volte ni feva chiamare Quando manzavemo cum sua Segnoria ni faceva intrar in la sua Camera de paveioni. Et anche ale volte stavamo di fuora. Et senza dirni altro se partivamo. Ma quando disnavamo cum sua Signoria havea piacer de dimandar de li nostri loghi: & faceane de stranie dimande. La sua porta certo e honorrvole: & al continuo ni sono molti homini da conto. Et ogni giorno ne manza da .cccc. & ale volte molto piu: liquali senteno in terra. Vienli porta in alchuni Tapsi de rame hora cum risi hora cum menestra di formento cum un poco de carne dentro: che e un piacer a vederli tirar a terra. Al signor cum quei manza cum sua Signoria li vien porta honore volentieri & abundante & ben apparecchiato al continuo beve vin apasto: mostrava bel manzador: & de quanto manzava havea grande piacer di presentar di quello el manzava. Al continuo li era de molti sonadori: & cantori davanti & comandava a quelli li piaceva cantasse o sonasse. Era signor che mostrava molto alegro grande di persona scarmo viso uno pocho Tartarescho al continuo duo colori ala faza. Tremavali la man quando el bevea. Secundo mi mostrava de etade de anni .lxx. molte volte fava tamfaruzo & molto ala domestega. Quando el passava il segno era pur pericoloso: ma computato el tuto era assai piasevel signor.¹⁴

13 Musical aspects of Contarini's account have already been studied in Alvise De Piero, "Eventi musicale e fenomeni sonori in Persia: Quattro testimonianze," in *Per una storia dei popoli senza note: atti dell'atelier del Dottorato di ricerca in musicologia e beni musicali* (F.A. Gallo), ed. Paola Dessì (CLUEB, 2010). Note, though, that one of the excerpts discussed by De Piero takes place in Poland, rather than Persia, so it is not mentioned here, where the focus is Asia.

14 Ambrogio Contarini, *Viaggio ad Uzun Hasan re di Persia* (Venice: Hannibal Foxius,

On 14 December we entered the said land of Como with his Lordship, where with difficulty we were given a small house for our lodging, but we had to remain for two days under tents before we could have it, enduring great cold. We stayed in the said place of Como with his Lordship until 21 March 1475, and according to custom, many times he had us summoned. When we dined with his Lordship he would have us enter his chamber in the pavilions, and at other times we stayed outside and departed without further discourse with him. But when we dined with his Lordship, he took pleasure in asking about our lands, and posed us strange questions. His court is certainly honorable, and there are always many important men present. And every day four hundred and sometimes many more dine there, the which sit on the ground. Their food is brought to them in certain copper bowls, now with rice, now with soup of corn with a little meat inside, which it is a pleasure to see them throw to the ground. The lord and those who dine with his Lordship are served honorably, willingly, and abundantly, with well-prepared dishes. He always drank wine with his meal, showing himself to be a fine eater, and he took great pleasure in offering what he ate to others. There were always many instrumentalists and singers before him, and he commanded those he liked to sing or play. He was a lord who appeared very cheerful, tall in stature, thin, face somewhat Tatar-like, always with two colors in his countenance. His hand trembled when he drank. To me, he seemed seventy years of age. Often he jested and behaved very familiarly. When he went too far, he could be dangerous; but all things considered, he was a rather pleasant lord.¹⁵

This is a rather restrained example of the topos of the “Great Lord of the East,” which in the hands of John Mandeville we have seen applied, in a less sober and objective fashion, to Kublai Khan. The topos aims to craft an image of the ruler that is structurally analogous to Catholic European traditions of kingship and courtly behaviour; and music during feasting was indeed entirely conventional among fifteenth-century European court cultures.¹⁶ But at the same time the topos highlights the exotic, the unusual and the exaggerated; and in this respect it is interesting that, in the eyewitness accounts discussed in this chapter, music is not normally presented as exotic or unusual, but is rather treated as something similar

1487), sig. c 2 v.

15 Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini, *Travels to Tana and Persia*, trans. William Thomas and S. A. Roy (London: Hakluyt Society, 1873), 132–33 – although the translation we give is very substantially revised.

16 See, among others, Anthony M. Cummings, “Music and Feasts in the Fifteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth Century Music*, ed. Anna Maria Busse Berger and Jesse Rodin (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

enough to need little or no elaboration. In this passage, for example, Contarini is sufficiently struck by the unfamiliarity of the tableware to specify "certain copper bowls," but the musical instruments do not snag his eye at all.¹⁷

Contarini's only other possible mention of music in Asia concerns the Mass. Whilst passing through Armenia on both legs of his journey, he is delighted to visit a group of villages that observe a Catholic rite, spending time with their bishop. On the return journey he mentions hearing Mass, although he does not specify whether it was said or sung:

Et cum el nome di dio de li partissemo. Che credo fusse in strania hora per gli affanni hebbi cum periculi grandissimi caminando per el paese de Usoncassan per venir al fasso arivassemo ai .viii. casali darmini Catholici come ho dicto per ananzi et alozassemo in casa del vescho: dove fussemo ben visti: Et oldissemo messa catholicha:¹⁸

And with the name of God, we departed. I believe it must have been an evil hour, considering the great hardships and extreme dangers I endured while traveling through the country of Uzun Hasan to reach Fasso. We arrived at the nine villages of Armenian Catholics, as I mentioned before, and we lodged in the house of the bishop, where we were well received, and where we heard a Catholic Mass.¹⁹

We have already read above among the pilgrim accounts that the Armenian rite differs little from that of the Latins; this case is a little different, though, since Contarini reports that these Armenians not only share the Catholic rite, but also acknowledge the authority of the Pope. Contarini would have encountered Catholic communities in Caffa and Fasso, but in those cases comprising his fellow Italians. This brief episode

17 On the nature of music in the Persianate court culture of Iran in the fifteenth century, see among others Amir Hosein Pourjavady, *Music Making in Iran from the 15th to the Early 20th Century* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 6–17.

18 Contarini, *Viaggio ad Usun Hasan*, sig. [c 4] v. The earlier mention of the Armenian Catholic villages (where the number is eleven rather than nine) gives less detail. Our copy of the 1487 book (Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, N. VII. 29), or at least its digitisation by the library, is missing the relevant page, so we read the earlier mention of the Armenian Catholics in Contarini, *Itinerario del magnifico et clarissimo messer Ambrosio Contarini dignissimo orator de Venetia mandado nel anno 1472 ad Usuncassan re di Persia chiamato modernamente Sophi* (Venice: per Francesco Bindoni & Maffeo Pasini, 1524), fol. 11v.

19 Barbaro and Contarini, *Travels to Tana and Persia*, trans. Thomas and Roy, 138 – but again very substantially revised.

recalls the pilgrim's perspective on the Eastern Christian "generations" and the Western Asian origins of the Latin rite, encountered in Chapter 3 above, and emphasises the entangled nature of Christian confessions across Western Asia.

5.3 Niccolò de' Conti and Poggio Bracciolini

Niccolò de' Conti, another Venetian merchant of patrician family, also visited Persia on his travels; but in his account it is only a territory he must pass through to reach another, India, which is his main focus.²⁰ Born in the 1390s, as a young man Conti established his career in trade in Damascus; and around 1414, having learnt Arabic, he set off on an eastward journey together with a group of Muslim merchants and sailors, travelling himself as a Muslim. During his travels Conti married an Indian woman, with whom he had four children; his wife and two of the children died of plague in Cairo on the return trip. In 1439, he arrived back in Italy, and at the Council of Florence, where he sought the Pope's absolution for his apostasy, he described his adventures to the papal secretary Poggio Bracciolini. Poggio, in turn, recounted Niccolò's story in the fourth and last book of his rather eclectic treatise *De varietate fortunae*, completed in 1448. The account immediately embarked upon a wide manuscript circulation, both alone and with the complete treatise; and it was eventually printed, in Milan about 1492, under the title *India recognita*, as a guidebook for a Savoyard diplomat, whose own eastward journey apparently never took place. The 1492 edition was later translated into Castilian, Venetian, Portuguese, Spanish, and English, entering the canon of travel literature circulating in the sixteenth century.

Part humanist inquiry and part travel guide, the *India recognita* is a representative of an intermediate stage in European travel writing about

20 Conti's account is much more widely discussed than Contarini's or Georgius'. Key literature includes Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, esp. 85–124; Ingrid Baumgärtner, "Conti, Niccolò dei (c. 1395-1469)," in *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jennifer Speake (Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003); Kennon Breazeale, "Editorial introduction to Nicolò de' Conti's account," *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 2, no. 2 (2004): 100–09; Supriya Chaudhuri, "India Recognita: The Travels of Nicolò de' Conti," in *Oriente e Occidente nel Rinascimento*, ed. Luisa Secchi Tarugi (Franco Cesati, 2009); and Meera Juncu, *India in the Italian Renaissance: Visions of a Contemporary Pagan World 1300-1600* (Routledge, 2015), 93–140.

India, going beyond imaginative medieval descriptions of India as “a place of marvels,” and not yet reflecting the imperialist attitudes of the colonial era.²¹ Scholars have frequently observed a kind of “ethnographic” fascination, and—save for matters of religion—a relatively neutral, analytical voice in the work.²² There are ample indications that Poggio exercised editorial control over the information he received from Conti, who is cited as an unbiased source but rarely appears as an individual. Given that Poggio was himself a humanist scholar, it seems likely that the perception, memory, and language of the merchant-traveller were significantly reshaped through the questioning and re-telling of the educated secretary.²³ On the other hand, Poggio takes great care to establish in a critical way the veracity of Conti’s information, stressing its authenticity as eye-witness testimony, and contrasting it with the myths and legends that clouded medieval views of India.²⁴

Poggio’s own inclination towards classical Roman and Greek literature does colour the narrative somewhat, perhaps encouraging him to include treatments of Indian customs that were also described by ancient geographers, such as polygamy and ritual suicide (although these also formed part of the wider European repertoire on India, as we have seen in Mandeville). However, at the same time, Poggio does not hesitate to give Niccolò’s empirical testimony greater weight than literary tradition. Poggio’s influence may also be responsible for a clear sense of order in the division of the land, a clearly defined geographical space, and the emergence of the city as a symbol of urban civilisation.

Confronted with Niccolò’s description of about twenty-five years of travels, Poggio brings a degree of order by dividing the narrative into two main blocks, the first arranged in the form of a journey, and the second in the form of a topic, giving answers to specific questions about “Indian life and customs.” In the first block, where the overall structure is clear and coherent, Conti begins by travelling from Damascus to Baghdad and Basra, and along the Persian Gulf to visit Hormuz and Qalhat. He enters India by way of Cambey, and sailing down the west

21 Chaudhuri, “India Recognita,” 244; Baumgärtner, “Conti,” 277.

22 For example, Chaudhuri, “India Recognita,” 247.

23 Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, esp. 88; Chaudhuri, “India Recognita,” 247; Juncu, *India in the Italian Renaissance*, 97–98.

24 Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, esp. 91–92; Juncu, *India in the Italian Renaissance*, 94–95.

coast he reaches the Vijayanagara Empire, visiting its capital city and towns. Then he makes his way down to Chennai and Sri Lanka, before heading eastwards to the Andaman Islands and Sumatra, and then along the islands to Tenasserim, before sailing up the Ganges where he visited several cities. Next he lands in Burma, visiting Arakan and sailing up the Iriwaddy to Ava. Here the narrative implies that he visited nearby China, although most modern scholars consider that unlikely. It is possible that his impressions of China come from meeting sailors in the fleet of the celebrated Chinese mariner Zheng He, which explored similar regions in a similar timeframe.²⁵ Either way, Niccolò then found himself sailing down the Sittang River to Pegu, before visiting several islands in Indonesia, including Java and Borneo, and eventually reached Ciampa in modern-day Vietnam. His return route is described as starting on the Malabar Coast in southern India, proceeding to Cambey, and then crossing the Arabian Sea to Socotra and Aden, before heading up the Red Sea to Cairo and the Mediterranean.

Poggio's record of the customs of the Indians, the second of the two main blocks in the *India recognita*, divides "India" into three parts, from west to east: the first India extends from Persia to the Indus; central India extends from the Indus to the Ganges, i.e. roughly what we now call India; and finally the third India comprises everything beyond the Ganges, principally southern China and South East Asia. (In this and other respects Conti is clearly a key source for the Fra Mauro Map, as we noted above in Chapter 1.) This tripartition in space is accompanied by another in virtue: Poggio places the three Indias into a hierarchy of development, humanity and richness, constructed in comparison with his own Italy, in which China stands at the pinnacle, exceeding Italy, and central India (i.e. what we now call India) in the middle, a little below Italy but nonetheless possessing the trappings of culture and civilisation.

Almost all of the descriptions of music in Conti and Poggio's account have some sort of a religious dimension, thus matching one of the two main categories of musical episode that we found in Mandeville. This is not particularly surprising, but it is important to note because it gives a particular colour to the episodes that are of interest to us. Whilst Poggio does not hesitate to say when Niccolò has described what he sees as a

25 Baumgärtner, "Conti," 277.

civilised custom, or one similar to those of the Catholic Europeans, in matters of religion he must inevitably use the terminology of “idols” and “idolatry.” Niccolò himself may have been more conflicted and nuanced in his feelings about his experiences in this respect, given on the one hand that he spent some of his travels as a Muslim with an Indian wife, and on the other that he recalled his experiences to Poggio while attending the Council of Florence to seek the Pope’s forgiveness for his apostasy.

Like Mandeville, Conti and Poggio seem particularly interested in religious customs involving unusual forms of death. Poggio twice mentions the Hindu funeral ritual known as sati, in which a widow casts herself upon her husband’s funeral pyre to the accompaniment of joyful music. Upon first mention this custom is located in Cambey, whereas the second time it is located in “central India,” which could mean modern India as a whole or the Vijayanagara Empire specifically. It is at the second mention that we get the musical component:

In media vero India mortui conburuntur: cumque his ut plurimum vivae uxores eodem rogo cum viris absumuntur una plures ve prout fuit matrimonii conventio: ... Defunctus collocatur in thalamo melioribus ornatus vestimentis: ingens supra eum in pyramidis formam struitur ex odoriferis lignis Pyra: summisso igne uxor ornatiori cultu inter tubas tibicinesque et cantus et ipsa psallentis more alacris: rogom magno comitatu circumdat. Adstat interea & sacerdos (hi bachali appellantur) eminens in suggesto qui vitae contemptum: ac mortem suadet: plurimasque voluptates cum viro plures opes plura ornamenta post mortem affutura pollicetur:²⁶

In central India the dead are burnt, and the living wives, for the most part, are consumed in the same funeral pyre with their husband, one or more, according to the agreement at the time the marriage was contracted. ... A vast funeral pyre is erected over him in the form of a pyramid, constructed of scented woods. When the pile is lighted the wife, richly dressed, walks gaily around it, singing, accompanied by a great concourse of people, amid the sounds of trumpets, pipes and songs. In the meantime, one of the priests (these are called Bachali), standing on some elevated spot, exhorts her to a contempt of life and praises death, promising her all kinds of enjoyment with her husband, much wealth and abundance of ornaments.²⁷

26 Poggio Bracciolini [and Niccolò de’ Conti], *India recognita* (Milan: Ulderico Scinzenzeler, c.1492), sig. b [i] v.

27 Poggio Bracciolini and Ludovico de Varthema, *Travellers in Disguise: Narratives of*

Niccolò witnessed another form of ritual suicide with a musical element in the principal city of the Vijayanagara Empire, which seems very similar to that described by Mandeville as taking place in Mylapore:

Idolum quoque in Bigenegalia statuto anni tempore in medio duorum curruum in quis ornatae adolescentulae hymnum deo canunt: per urbem fertur magna populi celebritate: Multi fervore fidei ducti corpora ad terram prostrata rotis subiciunt conterenda: ad oppetendam mortem: quam deo acceptissimam ferunt. ... Id optimum sacrificium putant et acceptissimum deo.²⁸

In Vijayanagar, at a certain time of the year, their idol is carried through the city, placed between two chariots, in which are young women richly adorned, who sing hymns to the god: the idol is accompanied by a great crowd of people. Many, carried away by the fervor of their faith, cast themselves on the ground before the wheels, in order that they may be crushed to death, a mode of death which they say is very acceptable to their god. ... This kind of sacrifice they consider the best and most acceptable of all.²⁹

There is a striking gap in these accounts between the details lavished upon the religious and ritual aspects, which are evidently curious to Poggio despite his dispassionate tone, and the treatment of music as an element that is almost bland in its familiarity. The conventional Latin terms *tubam*, *tibicinem*, *cantus* and *hymnum* are as adequate to describe Indian instruments and songs as they are those of Italy. It is possible that Poggio's Latin erudition is here acting as a filter to the information given him by Conti, flattening out elements that may have been more vividly described by the man who actually experienced them. But equally, perhaps not: a tendency to assume a likeness of instruments and songs is also present in the vernacular travel accounts, as we have seen in Mandeville and Contarini and will again in Marco Polo in the next section.

Poggio divides the Hindu priests into two categories. The "Bachali" mentioned in the first excerpt—a term that is presumably used with reference to Dionysus' close relationship with India reported in

Eastern Travel, trans. John Winter Jones, rev. Lincoln Davis Hammond (Harvard University Press, 1963), 27–28.

28 Bracciolini [and de' Conti], *India recognita*, sig. b iii r.

29 Bracciolini and de Varthema, *Travellers in Disguise*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 32–33.

Greek and Roman sources—deal with polygamy and ritual suicide, i.e. the aspects of religious ritual that Latins might be expected to find shocking; they are portrayed as deliberately leading the people to their destruction.³⁰ In contrast, the “Brahmins” are linked with the praiseworthy Indian philosophical tradition also described in some ancient Greek and Roman sources, for example in Book 3 of the *Vita Apollonii* by Philostratus of Athens.³¹ They study astronomy and predict the future, rather like Orpheus and other ancient Greek theologians, and, again like Orpheus, they make use of magical incantations:

vulgata est apud multos eius quam geomantiam vocant peritia: ita ut futura tanquam praesentia praedicant. Incantationibus quoque deduntur: adeo ut tempestates saepiusciere & sedare valeant.³²

An art which they call geomancy is practised by many of them, by means of which they frequently predict future events with as much accuracy as though they were present. They also make use of incantations, by means of which they are frequently able to excite tempests and also to allay them.³³

Poggio illustrates this practice with a story involving some Indian and Arab mariners who sailed under Conti's command. Becalmed in the middle of the sea, the sailors perform a ritual to stir the wind, involving dancing and calling out to a god whose name has become “Muthia” in Latin.³⁴ The god possesses an Arab sailor, who “began to sing in a strange manner and to run all about the ship like an insane person.”³⁵

Poggio also records musical practices associated with more joyful occasions. He briefly describes a New Year's festival celebrated in the Vijayanagara Empire, perhaps corresponding to the Hindu festival of Makara Sankranti:

30 Poggio probably also has in mind the term “bacci” used for the Chinese priests in *Il milione*.

31 On Italian views of the Brahmins see Juncu, *India in the Italian Renaissance*, 80–92.

32 Bracciolini [and de' Conti], *India recognita*, sig. b ii r.

33 Bracciolini and de Varthema, *Travellers in Disguise*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 29–30.

34 Most likely this is a Latinisation of Muttaiyan, a Tamil epithet for the Hindu god Skanda (also known as Kartikeya). Our thanks to Jonathan Katz, and Gérard and Usha Colas, for suggesting this identification.

35 “Interea Arabum quendam a demone correptum mirum in modum psallere et per omnem navem discurrere insanientis more cepisse.” Bracciolini [and de' Conti], *India recognita*, sig. b ii v.

festos dies ter praecipue solemnes agunt. Semel omnis aetatis viri: foeminaeque novis vestibus induti: & aut fluminibus aut mari abluti corpus tris universos dies cantibus choreis & conviviis vacant.³⁶

Three times in the year they keep festivals of special solemnity. On one of these occasions the males and females of all ages, having bathed in the rivers or the sea, dress themselves in new garments and spend three entire days singing, dancing and feasting.³⁷

And finally he details a wedding celebration, giving his most extended comment on musical instruments:

Nuptias suas celebrant cantu: conviviis: tuba: tibicine: organis enim exceptis: caetera similia nostris ad canendum psallendumque iusu habent instrumenta: faciunt tum interdiu tum noctu convivia sumptuosa in quibus canitur sonatur psalliturque cantant ducendo choreas in girum nostro more. Psallunt vero singuli ordine in longum alius post alium: bacillos parvulos: pictosque: quos binos gestat quilibet: cum obviis permutantes quod aspectu pulcherrimum dicit:³⁸

Their weddings are celebrated with singing, feasting and the sound of trumpets and pipes, for, with the exception of organs, all the other instruments in use among them for singing and playing are similar to our own. They make sumptuous feasts day and night, at which there is both singing and dancing. Some sing, dancing in a circle, after our manner; others sing, forming a line in single file, one after the other, exchanging little painted rods (of which each person carries two) with those whom they meet on turning. the effect of this Niccolò describes as being extremely pretty.³⁹

The observations that almost all the instruments of the Indians are “similar to our own,” and that sometimes they dance “after our manner,” are strikingly explicit confirmation of the doctrine of the likeness of musical practices amid the strangeness of other elements, which we have observed more implicitly in other sources. The remark concerning instruments in particular seems likely to be in direct dialogue with Strabo’s report (mentioned above in Chapter 2) that the Indians only used percussion; perhaps Poggio, aware of Strabo’s remark, questioned

36 Bracciolini [and de’ Conti], *India recognita*, sig. b iii r.

37 Bracciolini and de Varthema, *Travellers in Disguise*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 33.

38 Bracciolini [and de’ Conti], *India recognita*, sig. b iii r-v.

39 Bracciolini and de Varthema, *Travellers in Disguise*, trans. Jones and Hammond, 34.

Conti on this point to confirm or refute it.⁴⁰

Thus, in these musical excerpts from Poggio/Conti, we find ourselves caught between a rhetorically emphasised difference (mandated partly by a fundamental incompatibility of religious worldviews), and a rhetorically emphasised similarity arising from what Conti perceives as a fundamental musical congruity—the Indians (among whom, we must remember, Conti could count his own wife and children) also “sing hymns to god,” and their instruments are almost all the same as those of Italy. Perhaps a musical expert viewing the same musical practices would have received them rather differently; but (as we observed in the Introduction) most travellers, like most readers, were not musical experts.

5.4 Marco Polo and Rustichello da Pisa

A distinctive instance of the doctrine of musical likeness can be found in the 1496 edition of Marco Polo and Rustichello da Pisa's account of China, the first Italian printing of this celebrated work. Rustichello's original text, written in Franco-Italian, quickly spawned many versions and translations, into courtly French, Tuscan, Venetian, and Latin, among which there are many divergent readings.⁴¹ Of these, the 1496 edition is closely related to the Venetian version, which seems a near-inevitable situation for a work describing the travels of a Venetian, printed in Venice. The 1496 text represents a very concise translation, though,

40 Conti's visit coincided at least roughly with the composition of Catura Kallinātha's *Kalānidhi*, a commentary on the much older *Śaṅgītaratnākara* by Śaṅgadeva, which provides a substantial body of information on music and dance in the Vijayanagara Empire, some key points of which are summarised in Kinnari Vidwan Hulugur Krishnacharya, “Music under the Vijayanagara Empire,” in *Vijayanagara: History and Legacy* (Aryan Books, 2000). On the real historical situation, see also Surendra Govindu, “Dance and Music in the Vijayanagara Period: A Study of Some Historical Sources,” in *Kalyana Mitra: A Treasure House of History, Culture and Archaeological Studies (Festschrift to Prof. P. Chenna Reddy)*, Volume II. *Early and Medieval Indian History*, ed. Katta Narasimha Reddy, E. Siva Nagi Reddy, and K. Krishna Naik (Bluerose, 2023), with brief comments on Conti's account at 316.

41 The most fundamental critical work on the various versions, manuscripts and printed editions can be found in the very substantial introduction to Luigi Foscolo Benedetto, ed., *Il milione: Prima edizione integrale* (Olschki, 1928). Also useful is the summary given in Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, trans. A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot (Routledge, 1938), at 40–52.

in some passages so truncated as to have the character of an epitome, distilling out a good deal of the literary flair with which Rustichello—a noted author of chivalric romances—composed the original. Indeed, in some cases musical descriptions present in other versions of Polo's account are deleted entirely in our 1496 print (an example is noted in Chapter 4 above). The result, whether or not it is intentional, is to bring the text closer to the relatively dispassionate and apparently factual style that characterises the travel accounts of Contarini and Poggio/Conti. Most importantly for our purposes, the flourishes which adorn the musical descriptions in other versions of Polo's text, qualifying them as extraordinary, exaggerated and unusual, are largely flattened out, leaving the musical practices of the Chinese (like those of Persia and India above) to appear similar to those of Italy.

Marco Polo's own story is well known and can therefore be summarised briefly.⁴² His father Niccolò left Venice in 1252 and arrived in Constantinople, before travelling east through Central Asia, eventually establishing direct contact with the Yuan Emperor Kublai Khan, a journey that lasted some fifteen to sixteen years. Around 1275, Marco himself travelled into the East to reach the Yuan winter capital Dadu (modern Beijing). At the Yuan court, Marco became one of Kublai's advisors and travelled extensively in China and its surroundings (Persia, India and Burma, among other places), holding numerous responsible posts in the Yuan administration. He returned to Venice in 1295, and was captured and imprisoned three years later during the Genoese War. During his captivity he dictated his travels and observations, which were recorded by the romance writer Rustichello da Pisa in a book now usually known in Italian as *Il milione*, though in our period entitled *Delle meravigliose cose del mondo* (On the marvellous things of the world).

A large part of Polo's account focuses on the Great Khan and his court, amounting to a magnificent instance of the topos of the Great Lord of the East that we found in Mandeville and (more mutedly) Contarini. As in the other examples of this theme that we have encountered, there is a

42 See in particular Polo, *The Description of the World*, trans. Moule and Pelliot, 15–39. Of course, the literature on Marco Polo is enormous; among more recent contributions, particularly useful are Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, 87–112; and Simon Gaunt, *Marco Polo's Le divisement du monde: Narrative Voice, Language and Diversity* (D. S. Brewer, 2013).

particular focus on the court rituals surrounding eating and drinking, and it is here that we find a brief description of secular musical entertainments at the Yuan winter capital "Canbalu" (Khanbaliq, or Dadu):

Quando losignor vole bereve tutti linstrumenti sona dela chorte. Equando ello ha la copa in man tutti quelli chelo serve seingenochia con gran reverentia: etutti libaroni ecavalieri che manza ala chorte conduce lesoe moiere con si: equando lachorte sie asentada molti et infiniti zugolari viene afar infiniti solazi. Levate letavole tutti vano afar lifati suoi.⁴³

When the lord wants to drink, all the instruments play in the court. And when he has the cup in his hand, all those who serve him genuflect to him with great reverence, and all the barons and knights who eat at court bring their wives with them, and when the court are leaving many and countless pipers come to create endless pleasures. When the tables are removed, everyone goes about their business.⁴⁴

Here immediately we begin to encounter divergences between our 1496 text and modern editions. The translation of Moule and Pelliot, which compiles all of the versions of the text, adds that the instruments mentioned at the beginning of this passage are of "vast quantity" and of "all kinds," emphasising the extraordinary nature of the Khan's musical entertainment, stretching beyond the reader's own experience, rather like in Mandeville. Instead, in our 1496 text we find a grand court dinner accompanied by *pifferi*, exactly as in the courts of fifteenth-century Italy.⁴⁵

The musical components of the court of the Great Khan, according to our 1496 Polo, are three: secular entertainments during and after dinner, religious rituals sponsored by the Khan, and military musicians accompanying him into battle. These are precisely the categories of

43 Marco Polo, *Delle maravigliose cose del mondo* (Venice: Johannes Baptista de Sessa, 1496), sig. f iii v (within Chapter 66).

44 Because there are many medieval versions and translations of *Il milione*, our 1496 text does not exactly match any of the published modern English translations; therefore we provide new translations. The parallel passage in the most comprehensive modern translation, Polo, *The Description of the World*, trans. Moule and Pelliot, is at 220. The historical information in this anecdote is evaluated in Li, "'Make Boluo Xingji,'" 87 – note, though, that Li worked from a very different version of Polo's text to that in our 1496 edition.

45 See, for example, the Neapolitan courtier Giovanni Pontano's discussion of the practice of presenting musical entertainments at banquets in his contemporary treatise *De conviventia*: Shephard, Doyle, O'Flaherty, Page, and Ștefănescu, *Sounding the Bookshelf 1501*, 71.

musical patronage conventionally maintained by Catholic European rulers of the late Middle Ages, and thus music forms part of what we called above a deliberate structural analogy between Latin and Asian traditions of kingship and courtly behaviour.

Kublai Khan's sponsorship of Buddhist rituals with musical components comes up in Polo's description of life at the summer capital of "Ciandu" (Shangdu):

quando sefa lafesta deli idoli per queste incantation elli domanda al gran chan per far soi sacrifici montoni che habia elcapo negro eincenso alegno aloe acio chel so sacrificio sia piu ulioso: & ello ge fa dar tutte quelle cose predite acio chelo idolo debia conservar tutti liso i beni diti desopra. Quando lihana queste cose elli fano cuoser carne ananzi ala idola esila incensa elo brodo spande in aere e dice chela idola ha laparte soa: equesto fali con grandi incanti: e aciaschadun idolo fano lasoa festa como noi facemo ali nostri sancti. Ciaschuno idolo ha lonome suo: elli hano molti monasterii deidoli: et in questa contrada euno monasterio grande como una cita: et ha monaci piu de .ccccc. eveste honestamente eporta locapo ela barba rasa: et in lafesta soa fano grandi canti egrande luminarie:⁴⁶

when they make the feast of the idols with these incantations, they ask the Great Khan to provide for their sacrifices sheep that have black heads and incense and aloe wood so that their sacrifice may be more fragrant, and he grants them all these aforementioned things so that the idol may preserve all his goods mentioned above. When they have these things they cook meat before the idol and they incense it and scatter the broth into the air and declare that the idol has its share; and this they do with great incantations. And to each idol they make its feast as we do for our saints. Each idol has its own name, and they have many monasteries of the idols, and in this district is a monastery as large as a city, and it has more than 500 monks, and they dress simply and wear a cap and shave their beards, and in their feasts they make great songs and great illuminations.⁴⁷

Once again, in Moule and Pelliot's translation the "great songs and great illuminations" are in fact "greater singing and greater lights than were ever seen," a rhetorical device intended to suggest an experience stretching beyond the reader's understanding. In contrast, in our 1496 text the singing of the *monaci* in their *monasterio* contributes to the thread

⁴⁶ Polo, *Delle maravigliose cose*, sig. [e v] r-v (within Chapter 61).

⁴⁷ Parallel passage in Polo, *The Description of the World*, trans. Moule and Pelliot, at 189–90.

of the discourse that establishes the likeness of their ritual life ("as we do for our saints"), rather than that emphasising its difference.

Military musicians are described in a chapter on the rebellion of prince "Nania" (Nayan), who is of particular interest to Polo because he is a Nestorian Christian.⁴⁸ Kublai Khan manages to surprise Nayan in his camp, before the prince's allies are all assembled:

Lo gran chan era suso uno gran edificio fato sopra elefanti: et ivi suso era lo suo confalon grande: ela gente era tuti apparechiadi con archi espade et altre arme aschiera aschiera a .xxv. per schiera: ecirconda molto presto locampo de Nania. Alhora dormeva Nania eli suoi lo sveglio esubito fe dare ale tronbete esaglieno acavallo efuo una parte per mezo laltra.⁴⁹

The Great Khan was beneath a great edifice made upon an elephant, and accompanying him was his great standard-bearer, and the people were all equipped with bows and swords and other arms rank by rank with 25 to the rank, and very soon surrounded the camp of Nania. At that moment Nania was asleep, and his men got up and quickly gave orders to the trumpeter and mounted their horses and rode from one side to the other.⁵⁰

Of course, strictly speaking this seems to be Nayan's trumpeter, rather than the Khan's; but there is no reason for an Italian reader in 1496 to hypothesise significant differences in the kinsmen's military practices in this respect. Here, again, there is considerable abridgement of the text, resulting in a reining in of a more elaborate and remarkable musical component. What in our 1496 edition is merely a trumpeter—the inevitable musical punctuation of any European battle—is in Moule and Pelliot's translation "infinite horns and many other instruments of many sorts, and many pipes, and the singers all singing with a loud voice, in so great numbers that the air seemed to tremble," heard and seen from both of the armies arrayed for battle. So, in sum, the Great Khan has *pifferi* entertain his court at dinner, sponsors the singing of "monks" in

48 On the presence of Nestorian Christians in Yuan China, see (among many others) Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 16–30.

49 Polo, *Delle maravigliose cose*, sig. [e vii] v (within Chapter 62).

50 Parallel passage in Polo, *The Description of the World*, trans. Moule and Pelliot, at 197–98. C.f. Li, "'Make Boluo Xingji,'" 86–87. On the Yuan military band—which included the *jiao* (角), a brass horn—see Zeng, "Zhongguo lidai lubu guchuiyue bijiao yanjiu," 76.

“monasteries” to mark the feasts of the “saints,” and brings trumpeters to the battlefield. This is a musical image of the prince that any well-informed Italian would easily recognise.

Whilst Polo is certainly primarily interested in the Khan and the settings and customs of his court, he also describes in detail and at length the distinctive customs of the provinces he visits. Secular music-making is not entirely absent from these vignettes: in the province of Camul (modern Xinjiang) he notes that the locals “are men of great conviviality; they attend to nothing except playing instruments and dancing and singing.”⁵¹ However, as in Mandeville and Conti, it is in the context of religious and ritual practices, discussed using the terminology of “idols” and “idolatry,” that music is most often mentioned.

In the province of Tangut (corresponding to the territory of the Western Xia dynasty, which had been conquered by the Mongols in 1227), Polo observed Buddhist cremation ceremonies:

Sapia che tutti liidolatri del mondo fanno arder li corpi deli homini ede ledonne quando sono morti. Eli parenti deli morti fano meter per lavia donde die esser portadi quelli morti campane depertege coperte dedrapi doro ede seda: edove son queste campane elli fano metter licorpi in terra: ela elli seapparechia damanzar digando che cosi fato honor quelli corpi recevera alaltro mondo. ... Equando liporta licorpi abrusar tutti li instrumenti dela terra va sonando inanzi.⁵²

You know that all the idolaters in the world burn the bodies of men and women when they are dead. And the relatives of the dead have placed along the road whence the dead will be carried bells of rods covered with cloth of gold and silk; and where these bells are they have placed the bodies on the ground, and there they set the table to eat, so that those bodies will be received into the other world with like honour. ... And when they carry the body to burn all the instruments of the land sound before them.⁵³

There are philological complications in this passage, for the features here rendered as “campane depertege [i.e. de perteghe]” are in the

51 “sono homini degrandi solazi: elli non attendono senon asonar instrumenti et abalar e a cantar.” Polo, *Delle maravigliose cose*, sigs. d ii v – d iii r (within Chapter 45); parallel passage Polo, *The Description of the World*, trans. Moule and Pelliot, at 154. C.f. Li, “‘Make Boluo Xingji’,” 86.

52 Polo, *Delle maravigliose cose*, sig. d ii r (within Chapter 44).

53 Parallel passage Polo, *The Description of the World*, trans. Moule and Pelliot, at 151–52. C.f. Li, “‘Make Boluo Xingji’,” 85.

French called a “*maison de fust*,” i.e. a wooden hut covered with cloth of gold and silk, suggesting a wayside shrine.⁵⁴ The error arises from a substitution of *capanne* (huts) for *campane* (bells) at some point along the tortured paths of the text's transmission and translations, as Benedetto has already noted.⁵⁵ Certainly it makes more sense to adorn a hut than a bell with drapes, since they would prevent a bell from sounding efficiently; and it is hard to understand how one might make a functional bell out of *perteghe* (rods) in any case, unless perhaps one imagines wooden chimes. These matters would have been as puzzling for a reader in 1496 as they are now. With the musical instruments accompanying the body to the pyre, however, we are on surer ground.

The word *incantationi*, incantations, is used several times by both Conti/Poggio and Polo/Rustichello in describing rituals. The term implies a magical aspect, and it could indicate either speech or song, an ambiguity that is sometimes resolved by the context (for example, through the use of the word *canti* elsewhere in the passage). In three southern provinces, Iazi (Kunming), Carian (Yunnan) and Caridi (Yingjiang), Polo encountered physician-*incantadori*, incantors or enchanters, whose shamanic healing rituals were certainly musical in character:

In questa provincia e in le altre doe predite non e alchuno medico: quando elli sono infermi elli sifano andar acasa soa li incantadori che tien li idoli edice la infermitade soa: eli incantadori sona suoi instrumenti ebalà ecanta alhonor deli soi idoli: equesto fano tanto chel intra uno demonio in locorpo auno dequelli idoli ode quelli incantadori: equesto iace in terra como se ello fosse morto. In quella fiada lialtri maistri incantadori domanda aquello indemoniado per qual cason quello infermo sie infermo. Et ello risponde perche el fece incuria al cotal idolo. Eli incantadori. Noi te pregemo che tu pregi lui chelli pardoni: & ello gefa sacrificio delso sangue. Ese lodemonio crede chello debia morir el dice: questo infermo ha tanto offeso alo idolo chello non ge vole pardonar inanci vole chel mora. Ese lodemonio crede ben chel debia guarire dice: el convien chelo daga tanti montoni col collo negroe che facia tante bevande de specie edaga sacrificio alo idolo. Econvien havere cotanti incantadori ecotante done de quelle che serve ali idoli. Tutto questo sie opera deli incantadori. Fatto questo sie ordinado ali parenti delo infermo fa tutto quello che dicono li incantadori. Et alhora si invidadi limaistri deli idoli ele done: e inanci chelli vada amanzare elli

54 Benedetto ed., *Il milione*, 44.

55 Benedetto ed., *Il milione*, CX.

incensa lacasa esponde del brodo per la casa e bala ecanta al honor delo idolo: esi domanda selo ha anchora perdonado alo infermo. Lo demonio responde tal fiada anchora gemanca la tal cosa e incontiente elli lafa. Equando ello ha perdonado elli sistentano amanzar e abevere de quelle specie: poi retorna acasa con grande leticia: lo infermo guarisse puoi sel puo: se non se mori o ello stenta. Se ello guarisse elli crede chelo idolo lhabia guarido: ecosi li ingana lo demonio dalo inferno.⁵⁶

In this province [Caridi] and in the other two aforementioned [Iazi and Carian] there are no physicians. When someone is unwell they have the enchanters who keep the idols come to their house and tell them of their illness, and the enchanters play their instruments and dance and sing in honour of their idols, and this they do until a demon enters into the body of one of those idols or of one of the enchanters, and this individual falls to the ground as if he were dead. Then the other master enchanters ask of the possessed one for what reason the sick person is unwell. And he answers, "Because he neglected such-and-such an idol." And the enchanters: "We pray to you to pray to him to pardon him," and they make sacrifice to him [i.e. the demon] of his [i.e. the invalid's] blood. And if the demon believes that the invalid must die he says: "This invalid has so offended the idol that he does not want to pardon him, instead he wants him to die." And if the demon well believes that he may recover he says: "It is necessary that he give so many sheep with black necks, that he make so many drinks of spices, and give sacrifice to the idol. And it is necessary to have so many enchanters and so many women from those who serve the idols." All this is the work of the enchanters. This done, it is arranged that the relatives of the invalid do all that the enchanters say. And now the masters of the idols and the women are invited, and before they go to eat, they incense the house and scatter broth through the house and dance and sing in honour of the idol, and ask it whether it has yet pardoned the invalid. Sometimes the demon replies, "Still something is lacking," and that thing is immediately provided. And when he has been pardoned they sit to eat and drink those spiced drinks, then return home with great rejoicing; the sick man recovers if he can, if not he dies or languishes. If he recovers they believe that the idol has healed him; and thus does the demon from hell deceive them.⁵⁷

This is by far the longest passage we have found describing music-making in the 1496 edition of Marco Polo; indeed, it is one of the most detailed descriptions of Chinese rituals in general in the book (in other versions of

⁵⁶ Polo, *Delle maravigliose cose*, sigs. [g viii] v – h [i] r (within Chapter 89).

⁵⁷ Parallel passage Polo, *The Description of the World*, trans. Moule and Pelliot, at 283–84. C.f. Li, "Make Boluo Xingji," 86.

the text it is yet longer and more detailed). For both Conti (or Poggio) and Polo, unfamiliar religious practices are among the most curious features of South and East Asian societies, occupying an ambiguous rhetorical position, in that the length and detail of their descriptions give them special prominence, while at the same time they deploy conventional formulae ("idolaters," "idols," "demons") that place these fascinating practices in a subordinate position within a Catholic Christian framework. This is another respect in which our 1496 text has been adapted compared to the French original, which adopts a more neutral tone, calling the demons "spirits" (*spiriti*) and lacking the final clause referring to hell.

In sum, in the texts considered in this chapter we find the two principal categories established via Mandeville in Chapter 4 considerably elaborated. First, music helps to construct the Great Lord of the East in a configuration that meets Catholic European expectations of princely magnificence and courtly behaviour. Just like the dukes of Milan and Ferrara, the elaborate rituals associated with eating and drinking at the court of Kublai Khan are accompanied by musical entertainments, he supports clergy who sing the songs appropriate to his religion, and he fights great battles to the sound of the trumpet. In some sources, and indeed in some versions of Marco Polo's tale, to this familiar overall structure are applied highlights emphasising the unusual, extraordinary and exotic character of the lord's music; but equally, in others, such as Contarini's description of Uzun Hasan or the 1496 Polo's of Kublai Khan, the concision of the account renders the musical differences almost invisible. As Poggio puts it for Conti, "with the exception of organs, all the other instruments in use among them for singing and playing are similar to our own."

Second, music appears as an integral component of the religious practices of societies in Asia, in the form of singing, playing and dancing (as was probably the case in most of the world's societies in this period). In dealing with these matters, the sources use terminology that clearly positions the rituals within an antagonistic Catholic worldview, as did the pilgrims when writing about Islam. At the same time, though, authors deliberately suggest parallels with Catholic ritual and devotion, choosing terms such as "hymn," "feast," "martyr" and "saint" which form bridges between Christian and "idolater," in a way that encourages the Italian reader to recognise that singing, playing, and dancing were also features of their own religious observance in the fifteenth century.

6. Conclusions

Donald R. Howard has described the pilgrim accounts of the late fifteenth century as representing “the end of an era”—the voyages of Cristoforo Columbo and Vasco da Gama would shortly bring a paradigm change in travel and its written accounting.¹ As many have observed, late medieval Europeans (and certainly Italians) doing business in Western Asia were often the junior partner, dealing with rulers and authorities whose power and wealth exceeded their own. Consequently, although certainly their travel accounts exhibit a share of enmity and othering, they do not often present the imperialist attitudes that come to characterise travel literature in the age of colonialism. Even our pilgrimage accounts of the Holy Land, although lamenting Muslim hegemony in the region, urge Christian reconquest more as a genre gesture than a practical ambition, while the ideology of crusade was simultaneously redeployed to add fervour to military initiatives primarily intended to reinforce the borders of Catholic Europe itself.² Modern scholarship has understandably seen the European aspiration to rule the Holy Land as a prefiguration of the imperialist era; and clearly the Italian colonies in the Eastern Mediterranean provided important models for later colonisation projects elsewhere. Yet it is symptomatic of the differential in international relations that whilst Christian states claimed ground in the Americas, Africa, India, and Southeast Asia across the sixteenth century, simultaneously they lost ground in the Eastern Mediterranean and Eastern Europe to the Ottomans.

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- 1 Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims*, 45. This shift is already visible in early sixteenth-century travel accounts printed in Italy, such as that of Ludovico da Varthema whose experience of India was inflected by the growing Portuguese presence in the region; on the musical aspects of his account, see Paola Dessì, “L’Itinerario sonoro di Lodovico di Varthema,” in *Per una storia dei popoli senza note*, ed. Dessì.
 - 2 Petti Balbi, “Mare e pellegrini verso la Terra Santa,” 101.

In this short monograph, we set out to discover what Italian readers of the late fifteenth century could learn and understand about musics understood to be practised in regions of Asia by reading printed travel literature. We take no view on the accuracy of the descriptions they found therein. Our focus instead is on the notions about musical practices in Asia that might assemble within the awareness of contemporary Italian readers whose interest in the subject was at most passing and casual—Catholic European literary and rhetorical constructions which nonetheless claimed a degree of authenticity through their foundation in eyewitness experience.

We have found two quite distinct discourses concerning musics of Asia in our sources. The first is associated with the devotional experience of pilgrims touring the sites of the Holy Land. Focussed in this part of their journey quite rigorously on pious emotion and reflection, projecting the stories of the Old and New Testaments onto the associated locations, pilgrims enacted a processional liturgy through speech and song which they experienced as a ritual reenactment of the devotions of the Gospel protagonists. This practice performatively asserted the origins of Latin Christian song in the Eastern Mediterranean locales of the gospel story: for the Italian pilgrim, “Benedictus,” “Lauda Jerusalem,” and other psalms and canticles familiar from the Latin rite were holy precisely because of their origination in Western Asia, where the story of Christ and his disciples played out. At the same time, Catholic pilgrims’ devotions in the Holy Land were enacted alongside those of members of the Eastern Christian “generations,” comprising “Greeks” (including those of Anatolia), Christians of the Girdle, Nestorians, Indians, Ethiopians, and Jacobites. Readers could discover in some pilgrim accounts quite detailed descriptions of the different Christian rites celebrated in different regions of Asia, including their songs and vocalisations, and pilgrims themselves might even collaborate in hybrid or simultaneous liturgies celebrated in shared feasts.

The second of the two discourses we have found is associated with reported (though not necessarily genuine) ethnographic observation, shaped into narratives for differing purposes. A small sample of information on specific secular song practices located in different regions of Asia is present in our sources, including Arab women’s dancing, Bedouin cameleers’ work songs, and the bucolic musical leisure of the

convivial inhabitants of Xinjiang. More extensive is the information falling within the two themes that we have highlighted in Chapters 4 and 5: religious rituals, and the trope of the Great Lord of the East. We have encountered several descriptions of non-Christian religious customs involving music and dance, particularly in India and China, but also in Türkiye. These passages, while retaining the oppositional stance and language that seemed necessary to an Italian Catholic of the fifteenth century, nonetheless register similarities to Christian ritual practice, and tend to prompt the reader toward a perception of musical likeness—whether directly and explicitly, as in Conti/Poggio; as part of a broader strategy of highlighting religious likeness, as in Mandeville; or through omission of exotic flourishes, as in the truncated text of the 1496 *Il milione*. A similar intimation of musical analogy structures mentions of the musical patronage of great lords, a discourse most fully developed in Polo's Kublai Khan, who has *pifferi* to attend him at dinner, trumpeters to accompany him into battle, and clerics to sing rites on his behalf, matching exactly the musical magnificence expected of a Catholic European ruler.

Italian readers of the late fifteenth century encountered these fragments of musical information as adventurous extensions of a mundane, long-standing, and deep engagement with the Eastern Mediterranean and broader Western Asia. This is the specific context, or in some cases at least the starting point, for all of the ten travel accounts we have discussed—even that of Mandeville, whose journey begins as a conventional Holy Land pilgrimage. Italian merchants, colonial administrators and friars lived and built careers in Western Asia as a matter of course, bringing with them their liturgies, trumpeters, and lutes; in some cases they engaged with the local musical cultures. Italians (albeit in smaller numbers than Greeks and other Eastern Europeans) were also enslaved by Western Asian societies, converting to Islam and acquiring local customs, occasionally later escaping or being granted their freedom to return home. Meanwhile, Western Asians arrived in Italy as diplomats, pilgrims, soldiers, workers and enslaved people, bringing with them their own liturgies and “lutes;” and so did large “bridging” communities of Greeks, Albanians and Slavs.

Overall, the point that we want to make is that Italian musical culture and experience in the fifteenth century was inflected by internationalisms

stretching well beyond the kind of medieval “Schengen Area” formed by the commonality of Latin and the Catholic Church in Western Europe. Migrations and journeys traced a tangled web, from and to Italy, around the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and even further along the Silk Routes or across the Indian Ocean, carrying with them musical memories, experiences, practices and equipment. This network of global connections, characterised by varied and shifting power relations, confounds the historiographical impression of fifteenth-century Italian musical culture as inward- (or Northward)-looking, inherently European, and uniformly Catholic. It suggests instead an extremely porous musicking society, oriented toward the Mediterranean region as a whole, and the Balkans and Western Asia especially. So far the outlines of that alternative history of fifteenth-century Italian musical culture are only just visible; more research is urgently needed to add detail and nuance to the preliminary account we have given in this study. That work has the potential to weave a new and distinctive strand into the emerging tapestry of the global history of pre-modern music.

Appendix

Chronological List of Books Describing Regions of Asia Printed in Italy up to 1501

In chronological order of first known edition. All bibliographic information derived from the Universal Short Title Catalogue (www.ustc.ac.uk).

Pliny the Elder, *Historia naturalis* (Venice: Johannes de Spira, 1469 – repr. 1470, 1472, 1473, 1476, 1476 (in Italian), 1479, 1480, 1481x2, 1483, 1487, 1489, 1491, 1496x2, 1498, 1499, 1501 (Italian))

Strabo, *Geographia* (Rome: Conradus Sweynheym and Arnoldus Pannartz, [1469] – repr. 1472, 1473, 1480, 1494, 1495)

Pomponius Mela, *Cosmographia* (Milan: [Antonius Zarotus, with the material of Pamfilo Castaldi], 1471 – repr. 1477, 1478, 1482, 1498x2, 1501)

Quintus Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* ([Venice]: Vindelinius de Spira, [c.1471] – repr. c.1472, 1478 (Italian), 1481, 1491, 1494, 1496)

Andrea Mangiabotti, *Guerino Meschino* (Padua: Bartholomaeus de Valdezoccho and Martinus de Septem Arboribus, 1473 – repr. 1475, 1475-80, 1477, 1480x2, 1482x2, 1483, 1493, 1498)

Gaius Julius Solinus, *Polyhistor* (Venice: Nicolaus Jenson, 1473 – repr. 1474-5, 1475, 1480, 1491, 1493-4, 1498x2, 1500x2)

Le historia da Alexandro magno (Treviso: [Gerardus de Lisa], 1474 – repr. 1477x2, 1483)

Claudius Ptolemy, *Cosmographia* (Vicenza: Hermannus Liechtenstein, 1475 – repr. 1477, 1478, 1490)

Gabriele Capodilista, *Itinerario in Terra Santa* (Perugia: Petrus Petri de Colonia, c.1475), <https://archive.org/details/ita-bnc-in2-00001629-001>

Prester John, *De ritu et moribus Indorum* (Venice: [Nel Beretin Convento della Ca Grande], 1478)

Peregrinationes totius Terrae Sanctae (Venice: [Leonardus Wild, c.1479] – repr. 1480, 1491)

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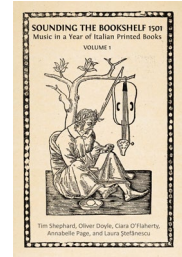
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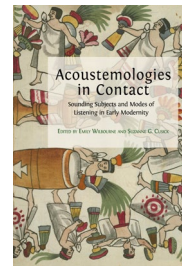


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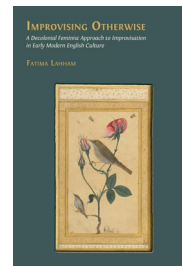


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The Khan's *Pifferi*

Reading about the Musics of Asia in Late Fifteenth-Century Italy

Tim Shephard and Chenxi Xiao

This excellent study is a welcome and timely contribution to the burgeoning field of global music history. It offers valuable new readings of Italian texts on Asia that were published before 1501, critiquing the ways in which their authors represented and engaged with a diverse range of musical and sonic practices. By focusing on a clearly defined set of travelogues and subjecting them to innovative forms of analysis, Shephard and Xiao show how these works collectively contributed to Italian Renaissance discourse on musical difference. The Khan's 'Pifferi' helps us understand the impact of travel and pilgrimage on musical ideas of Asia in fifteenth-century Europe, prior to the age of sustained trans-oceanic colonialism.

David R. M. Irving, Institució Milà i Fontanals–CSIC (Barcelona)

This volume explores what Italian readers of the 1480s and 1490s could learn about Asian music through the expanding medium of print. Drawing on ten travel books printed in Italy before 1501, reporting the experiences of pilgrims, merchants, diplomats, adventurers, and an enslaved individual, the authors examine how musical practices in the Levant, Turkey, Persia, India, and China were described for late fifteenth-century audiences.

Through close textual analysis, *The Khan's Pifferi* reveals how references to singing, instruments, religious ritual, and courtly patronage shaped Italian imaginings of Asian sound worlds. It situates these accounts within networks of pilgrimage, trade, diplomacy, and migration across the Eastern Mediterranean, showing how Italian musical culture was shaped by connections beyond Catholic Europe.

Interdisciplinary in scope, the book will interest musicologists, Renaissance scholars, historians of travel and intercultural encounter, and researchers in global and pre-modern studies.

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