



palgrave▶pivot

Florence's Embassy to the Sultan of Egypt

An English Translation of Felice Brancacci's Diary

Mahnaz Yousefzadeh

palgrave
macmillan

Florence's Embassy to the Sultan of Egypt



Mahnaz Yousefzadeh

Florence's Embassy to the Sultan of Egypt

An English Translation of Felice Brancacci's Diary

palgrave
macmillan

Mahnaz Yousefzadeh
Liberal Studies
New York University
New York, NY, USA

ISBN 978-3-030-01463-6 ISBN 978-3-030-01464-3 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-01464-3>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018956586

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2018

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: © John Rawsterne/patternhead.com

This Palgrave Pivot imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my colleagues and students at NYU's Global Liberal Studies, and in particular the Freshman program in La Pietra, Florence where I undertook this translation of Felice Brancacci's *Diario*. The purpose of the translation was pedagogic: to contribute to Liberal Studies' collective work of globalizing the teaching of the Humanities. It was through the translation of Felice's descriptions of his experience in Egypt that I arrived at a new reading of Masaccio's *Tribute Money*, a fresco among the Petrine cycle he commissioned for his family Chapel in San Frediano neighborhood of Florence.

I would also like to thank Paul Taylor for his gracious invitation to present the introductory essay, "Faith and Finance" at the Warburg Institute in London in February 2013. Paul Barolsky, John Nejamy, Anthony Molho, Michael Rocke, and Neda Hadjikhani read early versions of the essay when I as a historian of nineteenth-century Italy was venturing into a new archive. I thank them for those early encouragements and helpful comments. I thank Marella Feltrin Morris for reading the translation and for her superb suggestions for improvements. I dedicate this short book to the memory of Richard Trexler, renowned historian of Renaissance Florence and my graduate advisor.

CONTENTS

1	Faith and Finance: Felice Brancacci's Visit to the Sultan and Masaccio's <i>Tribute Money</i>	1
2	On Translating the Chronicle of Felice di Michele Brancacci's Visit to Sultan Barsbay	41
3	Chronicle of Felice Brancacci Ambassador with Carlo Federighi to Cairo for the Commune of Florence 1422	53
4	Appendixes	91
	Index	103

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1.1	“List of gifts” caption: first page of “list of gifts and expenses”. Archivio di Stato di Firenze. CC. Stroziane, Serie I, 304	10
Fig. 1.2	“List of forced payments” caption: list of ‘forced payments’. Archivio di Stato di Firenze. CC. Stroziane, Serie I, 304	10
Fig. 1.3	“Giotto <i>Trial of Fire</i> ” caption: Giotto, Trial by Fire, Bardi Chapel, Church of Santa Croce, Florence. © The Picture Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo	13
Fig. 1.4	“Masaccio, <i>Tribute Money</i> ” caption: Masaccio, <i>Tribute Money</i> , Brancacci Chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence (Courtesy of the City of Florence)	20



CHAPTER 1

Faith and Finance: Felice Brancacci's Visit to the Sultan and Masaccio's *Tribute Money*

The Sea Consuls, like true Sinbads, had been saddled with a task that was beyond their limited resources.

Michael Mallet, *Florentine Galleys*.

Abstract This introductory and historiographical essay contextualizes Felice Brancacci's mission to Egypt in fifteenth-century Mediterranean commerce and finance. Felice's mission not only served to inaugurate the Florentine galley's presence in the Mediterranean, but also played a role in the transformation of mercantile culture in Renaissance Florence. The essay relates Felice's Egyptian mission to his patronage of one of the most celebrated and enigmatic frescoes of Renaissance Florence—Masaccio's *Tribute Money*—in the Brancacci Chapel of the Carmine Church in Florence.

Keywords Florin · *Masaccio's Tribute Money* · Diplomatic protocol · Commercial culture

The city of Florence has, until recently, enjoyed little attention as an object of historical study within a Mediterranean framework. Perhaps this is because the major drivers of trade in the eastern Mediterranean from

the twelfth century onward had been Venice, Pisa, and Genoa. With the purchase of Port of Pisa in 1421, however, and the building of a galley system, Florence would go on to assume a more active role in Levant trade.¹

On June 30, 1422, Felice di Michele Brancacci, a prominent Florentine silk merchant, and his companion Carlo Federighi, a noted jurist and doctor of canon law, boarded the first of the Florentine galleys sailing to Egypt from the port of Pisa. The pair carried letters of instruction from the City of Florence intended for the newly enthroned Sultan Al-Ashraf Sayf-ad-Din Barsbay (1422–1438) in Cairo. This coupling of a merchant and a jurist was particularly well suited to the Florentine mission to Mamluk Egypt.² After acquiring a license to trade with the Muslim nation from the Pope, Florence proposed treaty would allow them to finally challenge Venice's trade monopoly in the Levant. The mission served to inaugurate the Florentine galley's presence in the Mediterranean; furthermore, it would have ramifications for Sultan Barsbay's infamous protectionist economic policies in Mamluk Egypt, the transformation of mercantile culture in Renaissance Florence, and, finally, the patronage of one of the most celebrated and enigmatic frescoes of Renaissance Florence—Masaccio's *Tribute Money*—in the Brancacci Chapel of the Carmine Church in Florence.³

Timelines for the commission and completion of the Brancacci Chapel frescoes typically conceptualize Felice's time in Egypt in terms of the patron's "long absence" from Florence—a "lacuna," in other words.⁴ Felice wrote in surprising and often fascinating detail about the tribulations experienced during his "absence" from Florence and during his sea voyage to and from Egypt to meet with Sultan Barsbay and his officials. As he does so, he offers his observations on Mamluk customs and religious practices, alongside Christian holy sites, exotic animals, and other natural phenomena. What comes across most clearly in this experience is his deep feeling of estrangement and disaffection, a response that Brancacci related almost singularly to the monetary payments he made in this unfamiliar—and at times hostile—territory in the absence of established and standard diplomatic protocol.⁵ Part official communiqué, part travelogue and confessional, Brancacci's marvelously rich testimony offers insights into not only transcultural relations in the Mediterranean but also the significant historical shift in the mercantile culture of Renaissance Florence that would unexpectedly reveal itself in Masaccio's *Tribute Money*.⁶

Florence was a relative latecomer to maritime trade with Egypt among the Italian city-states. The market had been dominated by Venice

since the fourteenth century, when the galley line between Venice and Alexandria opened as a result of the city having procured a long-term trading license from the Holy See in 1345 and having abolished their embargo on the Muslim Mamluk rulers of Cairo.⁷ Trade with Cairo and Damascus had grown increasingly important, particularly as other commercial routes to India—including caravan routes in lower Russia and the maritime routes of the Persian Gulf—became less viable. While Florence began her active pursuit of maritime commercial interests in the Levant only after the conquest of Pisa in 1406, the acquisition of the Pisan port in 1420, and the construction of a communal fleet they modeled on the Venetian galley system, Florentine merchants had conducted trade in Egypt and Syria previously.⁸ At that time, they had been dependent on Pisan ships and, by and large, posed as Pisans abroad.⁹

On the inaugural journey of the Florentine fleet, Brancacci and Federighi sailed, then, as the rightful successor to the Pisans.¹⁰ They were commissioned to procure for Florence three concessions from the Sultan: equality with or advantage over Venetians regarding customs allowances and right of safe conduct¹¹; a permanent consul in Alexandria; and, most importantly, the right to replace the Venetian ducat with the florin as the currency of the Mamluk territories.¹² The city's instructions to the ambassadors stressed that this final objective was the most pivotal.

Additionally, that our gold and silver currency be used and accepted as any other, and especially that our florin be regarded as equal to the Venetian ducat.... This task of yours is of the utmost importance—giving them tangible proof of this. Show them that our florin has never been of lesser quality than the ducat, and that in many places it is regarded as having the same value as the ducat and more.... If they won't make a deal on the currency, do as much as you can. And if you cannot have everything, obtain as much as you can, leaving the fundamental parts unchanged.¹³

FLORENTINE MERCHANT BANKERS IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY MEDITERRANEAN

The question of currency *was* pivotal to this early-fifteenth-century sea-faring mission. Felice was neither a crusading mercenary nor a missionary like St. Francis, who had made a much-celebrated visit to a Sultan of Cairo in the thirteenth century.¹⁴ Rather, he visited Egypt

as a merchant, representing a city that prided itself on being the first mercantile state to issue a gold coin—the florin—in the mid-1200s. With the creation of its own galley system in the 1420s, Florence hoped to challenge not only Venetian trade dominance but also the ducat's virtual monopoly in the Mamluk territories.¹⁵ The purchase of the port of Pisa and the creation of the Florentine fleet in the early 1420s were in fact systematically coupled to an effort on the part of Florence to strengthen the value of the florin.¹⁶ At the time, Florence perceived the conditions in Egypt to be particularly propitious for the enterprise.¹⁷ Because of the interruption of the trade with Persia that had occurred in the second half of the fourteenth century, the Holy See had lifted its embargo with Egypt and began issuing trading licenses to European nations.¹⁸ At the same time, economic conditions and the imperial strategy being enacted on the part of the Mamluk Sultanate—and, specifically, by Sultan Barsbay—favored the European trade.¹⁹

Much of Florence's wealth rested on the reputation, value, and stability of the florin as the standard bearer for international currency.²⁰ However, despite the florin's spectacular success, and the fact that Florentine merchants had served as the Pope's bankers since the beginning of the fifteenth century, the ducat had still maintained a dominant presence in the Levant. Since 1399, the Venetian ducat had become the sole international currency in the region, replacing even the native Dinar as the local Mamluk coin.²¹ Prices in Cairo and Damascus were listed in ducats rather than Dinars, generating an enviable source of revenue for the Venetians.²² The Mamluk Sultans had themselves tried, unsuccessfully, to break the ducat's monopoly—banning it and issuing a local Muslim coin.²³ But time and again, the Muslim coin failed to hold its value relative to the ducat. It was during this time that the Florentines came to the Sultan a new solution to the ducat: replace the ducat not with a *Muslim* coin but with an alternative Christian one. Just before the departure of the ambassadors, Florence minted a new coin, the *largo fiorino* or *fiorino galleo*, which, while thinner and wider than the original, still resembled the ducat.²⁴ This ducat-like florin was the weapon by which the ambassadors hoped to seduce the Sultan and, at the same time, corner a significant portion of the Levantine market.

Felice's *Diario* reveals that the ambassadors endured a great deal of tribulation lobbying for the florin in Egypt.²⁵ Not only did they suffer physical assault, they also were constantly compelled to offer gifts and other forced payments, which Felice categorizes as bribes, or *mangerie*.²⁶

Even then, the success of the mission—persuading of the Sultan to adopt the florin—despite, as we shall see, the ambassador's claim to the contrary, was equivocal. The Sultan did accept the florin as a currency on par with the ducat. But only two years later, he went on to declare a new ban on Christian coins and successfully replaced both with a new Muslim currency, the Ashrafi. There is reason to believe that the Sultan's reception of the florin and its Florentine representatives was only part of his own strategy to create competition for the Venetian ducat.²⁷ The first of Felice's objectives—breaking the monopoly of the Venetian ducat—may have ironically contributed to the rise of the Ashrafi, the currency that would go on to be adopted by subsequent Mamluk Sultans.²⁸ Regardless of success or failure, however, the negotiations concerning the currency and the lessons learned in Egypt shaped Felice's views on exchange with those outside Christendom and contributed to his advocacy of a mercantile policy upon his return.

MEASURING TRIBUTE IN EGYPT

*The first person we saw in the middle of the two gates was the Custom's Officer.*²⁹

Felice's *Diario* discloses an excessive preoccupation with monies paid to Mamluks, whether as tribute, bribe, gift, tax, charity, gratuity, or duty. Page after page, Felice expresses shock and disdain at the Egyptians' unflinching requests for the payments that he considers extortion or forced bribes (*mangerie*), regardless of from whom the services were requested: message carriers, middlemen, interpreters, and even Mamluk officials. Felice's derision is noteworthy given that such payment was customary for ambassadors and merchants trading abroad—the cost of doing business.³⁰ Felice had been advised by the Genoese Consul, for example, to bribe even the highest officials in order to gain an audience with the Sultan.³¹ In fact, the Venetian Consul in Alexandria had an official budget especially allocated to cover the cost of bribing these officials.³² This was partly due to the fact that Mamluk Sultans practiced a policy that forced the purchase of public offices. Such posts were financial investments that the officers hoped to eventually make profitable.³³ But Felice's moral or affective reaction to the demands of payment, which he considered extortion, was not unique. There are other instances, such as one that concerns a Cretan Merchant who, after having obtained from the Sultan the privilege of importing wine tax free, was still asked to pay

customs; he complained that he was forced to bribe officials against his own conscience.³⁴

That Felice's outrage comes to be a dominant theme in his "chronicle" is, nonetheless, striking. One can only speculate that this was due to his character, as Ugo Tucci does, exacerbated by his lack of experience and expertise in the Eastern Mediterranean.³⁵ Yet, there are other historical factors that likely contributed to his experience. The Florentines, like the Venetians who arrived one month before, were probably not aware of the enthronement of a new Sultan, especially one who would be subsequently known by the Europeans as the "cruel and avaricious." They expected to meet a different Sultan altogether.³⁶ Secondly, the Florentines arrived at a moment of intense anti-Christian hostility in the port of Alexandria, with a Catalan ship having just opened fire on the Mamluks.³⁷ The event made Sultan Barsbay furious; he threatened to expel all Christian merchants from Alexandria at the very moment the Florentines disembarked from their ships.³⁸ Finally, and most crucially, the ambassadors had been adamantly instructed by the city to spend as little money as possible, never more than others and certainly, if possible, less than the Venetians, "lest it result in our loss."³⁹

The fact remains that Felice's first impression of Alexandria is filled with a fury that only increases over his time there. On the day of his arrival in Alexandria, he expresses open contempt for "a thousand moors and solicitors approaching us, requesting and offering this and that thing."⁴⁰ After he and his companions were taken to a residence assigned for ambassadors, one that he condemns as "hardly equipped with doors,"⁴¹ he stated:

Only after parting with a lot of money, we got rid of most of them. For example, an individual would come to say "the admiral sends you his regards" and he would then ask for a ducat. And around three in the afternoon, the admiral sent us a gift of five castrated lambs, fifty chickens, a basket of bread, and we had to pay the carriers three ducats, and still they were not satisfied.⁴²

Felice experiences these relatively mundane exchanges, and reports on them, as if they were on par with issues of great political and diplomatic weight, ones such as the dispatch of Genoese and Venetian Consuls by the Sultan or the Catalan offensive. In terms of the emotional drain and his resulting preoccupation with them, the demands of solicitors appear to eclipse even his official duties.

Indeed, Felice's complaints grow so bitter they come to occupy the central thrust of the *Diario*. In his second entry while in Alexandria, Felice objects to all "requests and solicitors," including the request of the Admiral himself, who had offered gifts to welcome the new arrivals the previous day. On this second day, he reported that:

On the 21st we also received a large number of requests and solicitors, and even the admiral wanted his own gift, which we believed we were not obliged to give until we had offered gifts to the Sultan. Even the one who had come to ask for a gift on the Admiral's behalf wanted payment. *The situation reached such a level of greed and dishonesty that we refused to give these gifts, which seemed a waste to us.* Considering the news in the country, and seeing that in attempting to carry out our ambassadorship we would be risking our lives, we were told that we should not be offered access to any provisions. We took time that day in order to ponder the situation, and quickly sent a message to the Cadi ...asked him for advice. He said he regretted the events and usefully advised us to go ahead and do it.⁴³

Felice remarks that the Florentines believed, as a matter of principle, that "they were not obliged" to present any gift to the Admiral, however customary it may have been. That they did so, he intimated, was only because they were advised that their initial refusal had created a dangerous situation. They were faced with a conflict, one between the authority bestowed upon them by the Florentine Commune and the circumstances that they encountered in Alexandria. The portrait of events on his third and fourth day suggests that Felice was utterly unprepared for these circumstances. One entry both starts and ends with further discussion of the disputes that had resulted over this same gift to the Admiral. While negotiations over the Admiral's gift continued, none of the Florentine merchants that had arrived on the galley were allowed to move freely throughout Alexandria. To settle matters, the ambassadors finally resolved to offer gifts of cloth to the Admiral. Only begrudgingly did Felice and his companions plan the visit to submit this tribute to the Admiralty. But when the gifts were reviewed, they were deemed unworthy. The Florentines were unceremoniously turned away once more.⁴⁴ In these early days in Alexandria—even before the presentation of the florin—Felice remarked that "we would have gladly left and returned to Rhodes." As a Christian outpost, it would have offered relief and salvation from this Mamluk injustice.⁴⁵

Felice expressed his experience of estrangement in terms of payments, considering abandoning his mission because he believed that remunerating the Mamluks was a “waste.” Increasingly desperate to leave by only his fourth day in Alexandria, he noted:

We were so displeased and astonished by these matters that we were tempted to take our leave in secret and sail back to Rhodes. It was only because our orders were quite strict that we endured those events and prepared to remain pawns to Cairo and to their enormous greed (*mangerie*).⁴⁶

Rather than abandoning their mission, or acquiescing to exploitative payments, the ambassadors adapted as best as they could. That same day, for example, when two of the Florentine sailors were arrested for trespassing in areas prohibited to Christians, Felice was asked to make a payment of twenty-five ducats to secure their release. Instead, Felice resolved not to offer the requested fee, besieged by what he believed were corrupt financial improprieties:

And because we had already grown familiar with their techniques, we said that they could take the sailor away instead, and if indeed he had done something wrong, they should hang him. Fortunately, in the end we got him back for less than one ducat, but not before he had been beaten badly with sticks.⁴⁷

Boasting of his shrewdness, Felice claimed that he could identify the Mamluk tactics of extortion. Suggestively, the Florentine’s response to compensation for the various Mamluk officials was different from that of the Genoese and Venetians. For example, when the Genoese Consul advised the Florentines to extend gifts equivalent to 400 ducats a piece to each of three crucial Mamluk officials, the *Dindar*, the *Chatibisser*, and the *Natarchass*, to avoid paying “much more in bribes (*mangerie*) later,” the Florentines “were quite taken aback by this advice, as we did not feel that we should make the offer, nor had we been instructed to spend so much.”⁴⁸ He even characterizes this advice as trickery.⁴⁹ It seems that the Florentine ambassador’s code of parsimony did not equip him to distinguish between benign or even benevolent and beneficial gestures and those he thought represented pure avarice. He was not yet convinced of the power of *cortesia*, a form of “voluntary” but expected payment, a credit without interest, which transformed relationships, resolved

conflicts, and crucially often proved profitable.⁵⁰ In his account, Felice categorized *mangerie* and *cortesía* as equally illegitimate and wasteful.⁵¹

The remainder of Felice's time in Alexandria and Cairo is largely colored by this attitude. Page after page, a deeper pathos emerges. When leaving Alexandria for Cairo, Felice described being "approached by a thousand solicitors whom we got rid of as cheaply as possible, shielding our faces with our hands."⁵² According to Ugo Tucci, Felice's attitude reflected the inexperience of a Florentine ignorant of customs different from his own, particularly of the value of "gift giving" in commercial and diplomatic exchange. He could only interpret this custom and economy as a corrupt one.⁵³

The pathos toward the monies spent in Egypt takes on rather rigorous quantitative features in Felice's report of expenses after his return to Florence. The list of expenses, which appeared at the end of the sixteenth-century copy of the *Diario* transcribed by Strozzi and also reproduced in Dante Catellacci's nineteenth-century publications, divided the monies spent in Egypt into two categories: (1) complimentary giving (Fig. 1.1) and (2) forced extortion (Fig. 1.2).⁵⁴ His "list of gifts delivered and expenses incurred" begins:

Here I will list all the gifts we gave to the Sultan and to the other lords in Cairo and in Alexandria, as well as to many other officials, in the form of fabrics and drapes.

Subsequently, I will list all the amounts of money we gave as bribes (*mangerie*), although it would be more fitting to call it the money that was stolen from us and that we were forced to give.⁵⁵

Given Felice's misunderstanding of the protocols of gift giving, even with the Sultan, it is perhaps not surprising that his accounting of the "forced" and "stolen" category, the *mangerie*, is *ten times longer than the other*. Clearly, this prodigious, and visually impressive, accounting reveals not merely the conspicuous economic dimensions of tribute but something else altogether (Fig. 1.2).

The ferocity of Felice's accounting also begins to reveal the ethical and legal dimensions of the monies that his party is "forced" to disburse. For example, the tax and customs fees that the group paid as foreigners entering the port of Alessandria were entered in the illicit, forced list, as if the injustice needed to be shared with the Florentine merchants



Fig. 1.1 “List of gifts” caption: first page of “list of gifts and expenses”. Archivio di Stato di Firenze. CC. Stroziane, Serie I, 304



Fig. 1.2 “List of forced payments” caption: list of ‘forced payments’. Archivio di Stato di Firenze. CC. Stroziane, Serie I, 304

and their city. Occasionally, Felice ends an entry with *vaglono*—worth the payment—or *toccati al comune*—indicating the city’s share. By doing so, he acknowledges that, even if forced, *these* monies were not a waste. They procured some service of value. Significantly, *all monies* paid on the day that he arrived in Alexandria, twenty-five entries alone, are considered “forced.” The Florentines clearly had expected to enter Alexandria’s gates without payment. This moral and legal judgment will be the central message of Masaccio’s commission for his family chapel: *Tribute Money*.

TRANSLATING TRIBUTE

In Felice's *Chronicle*, images of the troubling experience of making these forced payments in ducats are balanced by another set of images related to money, in fact, to the central purpose of the ambassadors' mission: the presentation of the new florin to the Mamluk Sultan. In Cairo, Felice and his companions eventually gained three opportunities, each portrayed as a dramatic event, to present their currency to the proper officials.

On the first day of their residency in Cairo, the party left on horseback to carry the florin to the Sultan's officials. Felice reported that he and his companions were then violently attacked by a man they identified as a religious figure, describing his shouts to the gathering crowd that "our prophet demands that we should kill these Western dogs. Look what has become of the Muslim faith: Westerners travel on horse and we on foot."⁵⁶ Felice noted that the throng grew so large that his party only managed to escape with difficulty—and in horror at having undergone this "great danger." Rather than abandon the task of the day given the stress they had endured, Felice overcame his anxiety to proceed to the Mamluk representatives and "lobby for our florin."⁵⁷

The *Diario* reveals that what Felice refers to as "the business of the florin" (*tenemmo alcuna pratica del nostro fiorino*) grew associated in his mind with the experience of being attacked as a Christian in a Muslim land. Each meeting with the Mamluk officials commences with a conversation about the prior incident, followed by the Mamluks' expression of regret. Felice then proceeds with the presentation of the florin.⁵⁸ The menacing events of the first day even mark the eve of Felice's scheduled meeting with the Sultan, leaving his party in a state of disquiet in which "none of us could feel at ease, due even more so to our doubts about the future than about what had happened."⁵⁹

At his long-anticipated meeting with Sultan Barsbay, Felice passed through what appeared to him to be a new and unnerving world, one filled with strange spectacles, sounds, and rituals. The sights seemed unreal, more "painting" than reality:

Between the novelty for the eyes and those for the ears and the fact that they made us kiss the ground at every step, I doubt that I can coherently describe the scene. Furthermore, they were two of them for each of us, and they held us by our shoulders so tightly as they led us that we were

overwhelmed. And when they wanted us to kiss the ground, they would shout at us in their language, so loudly that we grew dizzy. And so they made us kiss the ground about 6 or 8 times. And when we came within 45 feet of the Sultan we stopped.⁶⁰

What transpired between the Florentine diplomat-merchant and the Sultan, what allowed Felice to process the overwhelming as a *communicable experience*, was his recollection of St. Francis of Assisi's celebrated meeting with the Sultan of Egypt two centuries before. Felice was most likely familiar with the fresco immortalizing the episode in the Bardi Chapel of Santa Croce (Fig. 1.3). Legend held that, upon Francis's arrival to the Sultan's court, the Saint's faith was tested by a challenge. He was asked to walk through fire. St. Francis miraculously passed the test, proving to the Sultan and his Muslim audience both the strength of Francis's faith and the truth of his religion.⁶¹ Felice presented his meeting with the Sultan in a similar fashion. This time, however, it was the florin that would have to undergo the trial. Felice writes:

And immediately, [the Sultan] asked us whether we had the florins with us to which we said yes. Our Chancellor gave his men nine florins, which the Sultan then asked to see for himself. And he said from his very own mouth, that if he found any of them weighing less, he would have it cut, and we would lose it. We accepted the deal.⁶²

Within the context of the new mercantile culture that accompanied this increased and intense commercial activity in the Levant, the florin emerged as the article of faith in the showdown. When pleading that the gold florin was as acceptable as, and should be accepted as, the Venetian ducat, the Florentine *Signoria* instructed the ambassadors specifically to put the florin to the test of fire, "*mettere a fuoco e fondere*."⁶³ The florin's stability, value, and legitimacy evoked the qualities of Francis's own faith. In this deal *qua* ordeal, we encounter the central metaphor of Felice's journey. The very language of the Commune's instructions to the ambassadors discloses the equivalent replacement. But unlike his humble and self-possessed predecessor St. Francis, Felice perceives, judges, and presents his inquisitor, Sultan Barsbay, as not only greedy but irrational. He even characterizes the Sultan—who had severely and corporally punished a man who had carried in the Florentine ambassadors' gifts—and his violent comportment on the occasion of the judgment upon their favors as "crazy," saying, "These events sat very badly with us, and

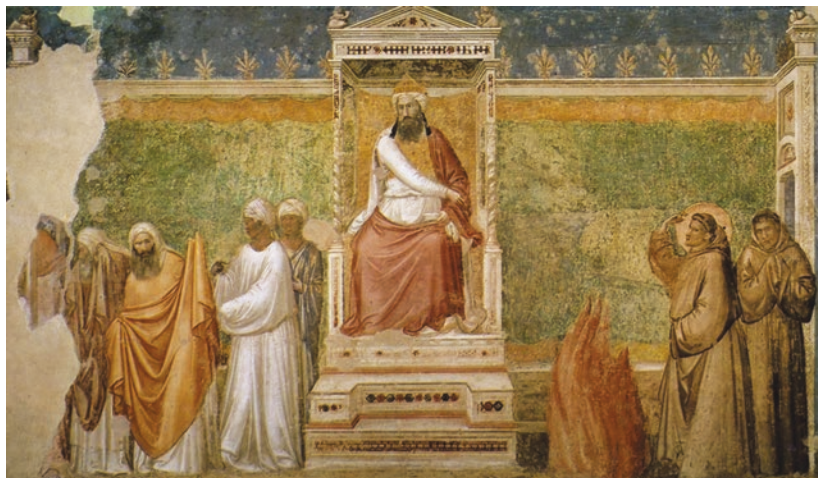


Fig. 1.3 “Giotto *Trial of Fire*” caption: Giotto, Trial by Fire, Bardi Chapel, Church of Santa Croce, Florence. © The Picture Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo

we thought of it as a great shame, as we feared that this craziness might make him send for us to do another investigation of the presents. With them you can not reason.”⁶⁴

The test of the florin lasted longer than St. Francis’s did. The dramatic ordeal continued the next day during a meeting with the Sultan’s secretary, an individual whose purpose was to settle the language of the treaty:

We then brought up the matter of the gold, and they insisted on weighing a florin and a ducat, and it seemed to them that the ducat was heavier, and as we maintained the contrary they asked for one hundred new florins and one hundred ducats. As we did not have those, we sent for them, albeit with great concern. After they came and were weighed many times it seemed to them that the florin compared well. That is why they agreed to this and that thing.⁶⁵

At this moment, the transformative power of the florin was demonstrated. Again and again in the *Diario*, the florin emerges as a miracle currency, one capable of communicating to those with whom “you can not reason.” It is likely that Felice had expected greater hospitality from the Mamluks.⁶⁶ Clearly disappointed, he likens the experience of suffering Mamluk greed to “knives to the heart.”⁶⁷ His resentment is

expressed again when he says that “with great displeasure we saw from big to small everyone tried to exploit and take advantage of us, and there was not a single one of us who would not have given away half of what he had just to go back home.” Here, a constellation of the central images of Felice’s experience emerges: unjust payment of money, violent dispute, and the transformative power of the florin.

On occasion, Felice and his companions used their position as visitors and outsiders as part of a strategy of resistance, a strategy that was not available to those foreign merchants that were stationed in Egypt, such as the Cretan Merchant who thought that the Sultan had not honored his agreement. Felice, facing the same situation—even though the florin had passed the Sultan’s test, the inquisitor’s position remained arbitrary and poised for blackmail—pretended not to understand the language demanding payment. Felice reported that the Mamluk officials expressed extreme irritation at this Florentine tactic. They resorted to verbal insults directed at the Florentines, who fell mute.⁶⁸ For the Florentines, these payments appear as an obligation that exceeds the financial register, becoming instead a sign and performance of submission.⁶⁹ The Sultan’s insistence that foreign nations should “humble themselves” is made plain, and the demand of the Sultan, from Felice’s perspective, is for this humility. During the Muslim religious celebration of Ramadan, a group of Italian pilgrims arrived in Cairo to ask the Sultan to reopen the doors of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which had been shut by the Sultan as retribution against the Catalans. With great pathos, Felice insisted that these were only poor pilgrims. They lacked the requisite funds to pay for access to the Sultan. Brimming with righteous indignation, and characterizing this demand for payment as a great “injustice,” Felice reported that he dared to take this matter up with the Sultan on behalf of the Christian pilgrims. But his cause was quickly countered, with the Sultan’s insistence that foreign nations should rightly “humble themselves.”⁷⁰

One typical mode in which an embassy is humiliated is by keeping them waiting while officials attend to other, supposedly more important, matters. After the meeting with the Sultan, and after receiving a verbal agreement, the Florentines were kept waiting in Cairo for their contracts and official dismissal for more than two weeks. Felice remarked that “we thought we were being pulled along for too long, and we didn’t know to what end, but we suspected it was to extort more money from us.”⁷¹

It is during this wait that we find the clearest externalization of Felice's inner experience of estrangement in Egypt. In what is not only the most memorable image but also the longest passage in Felice's *Diario*, Felice describes his encounter with an elephant during Ramadan.⁷² He devotes more than 900 words in his otherwise sparsely worded account to this alien creature, eclipsing even the detail in his description of his visit to the Sultan's court. While waiting for their dismissal, Felice and his companions are barred by Ramadan custom from speaking to Muslims. In this context, it seems that the elephant, in its uncanny strangeness, mirrors Felice's own feelings. It is a rare occasion for which Felice does not mention having had to pay for access.

The events of the negotiation for a *fondaco* took place toward the end of Felice's mission in Alexandria and further amplify the pathos attached to the cross-cultural exchange. A good *fondaco*, rather than the shabby ones being offered to the non-paying Florentines, would have symbolized respect: the power and legitimacy of the other.⁷³ It would promise immunity from further humiliation, the kind of immunity already enjoyed by the Venetians.⁷⁴ The deal now hung on yet another payment, this time to the *Cadi* or judge, in Alexandria, which Felice refused to extend both for lack of funds and on principle. It was a decision that would further delay the return home.

During the final stages of the mission, having been delayed in Alexandria for over a month—with many sick people in his company awaiting to return home—Felice himself grew extremely ill.⁷⁵ On November 11, while bedridden, he was carried out of Alexandria on a stretcher.⁷⁶ Heading home a few days later, “with God's help” according to Felice, they arrived to Christian land on Rhodes. Though the tribulations of the journey were not yet over, Felice expressed relief at leaving Egypt behind. Eventually, on February 11 of the next year, 1423, he reentered the port of Pisa.

The human and, arguably, the long-term commercial cost of remaining faithful to the commission was considerable. In his final remarks before departing Egypt, Felice had intimated that, despite making all the extra payments, the mission had not been properly financed by the Commune. He wished he had enjoyed more funds so as to accomplish his mission more successfully: “We knew very well that if we had had more money available to bribe the *Cadi*, he would have met our request. And we were not in a position to do so, we did not want to spend any more money.”⁷⁷

MANGERIE AND CORTESIA

Measuring the success of his mission back in Florence, Felice had to conduct complex moral, political, and monetary calculations. The official report to the Commune is brief, if not silent, on the question of mistreatment. With a positive spin, the account stated that “we obtained much more than we were commissioned to obtain” and that “we did not obligate the Commune of Florence to the Sultan in nothing.”⁷⁸ Exaggerating the success of an embassy was a common practice in fifteenth-century Florence, since the reception of embassies abroad touched the very civic identity of Florentines. It was of utter importance that embassies, as representatives of the foreign city, did not shame them.⁷⁹ Every action abroad on the part of the ambassadors was subject to close scrutiny. Insults and humiliations of various degrees were often damaging enough, and Felice Brancacci’s and Carlo Federighi’s response to conceal the disgrace publicly was the typical course of action.⁸⁰

The reality of Felice’s success in accomplishing the mission’s three objectives was more ambiguous. Barsbay’s treaty did recognize Florence as a trading nation, did grant Florence a *fondaco*, and did accept the florin on par with the ducat.⁸¹ But it did so with strict qualifications.⁸² While the Florentines had hoped to pay less than the Venetians, the city was not granted the privileged customs rate paid by the Venetians. The Florentines also failed to successfully negotiate a “dignified” *fondaco*. Finally, on the issue of currency, the florin might have passed its trial by fire vis-à-vis the ducat, but the winner seems to have been the Ashrafi—for a time at least.

By all accounts, judging from his career after his return from Egypt, Felice managed to portray his mission as a heroic success, one that established him as a key figure in the public and political life of the city.⁸³ Over the next decade, Felice was elected to important posts; he served as a major figure in the political life of Florence and as the treasurer of the city fund. In fact, the commission of *Tribute Money* for his family chapel, a decidedly rare subject for monumental art in Renaissance Italy, can be understood in this context: as an afterimage of his Egyptian ambassadorship, as a means to commemorate the treaty he procured from the Sultan, and finally, as justification for advocating public subsidy of the galleys—all of which would correct the debilitating parsimony of Felice’s commercial and diplomatic mission, signaling a transformation of commercial culture in Florence.

The commemoration of an unsuccessful mission to the Sultanate as an image of victory inside a family chapel in Florence had a celebrated precedence in Giotto's *Trial by Fire* for the Bardi Chapel in the Church of Santa Croce (Fig. 1.3). The Bardi fresco, based on one work in the cycle of twenty frescoes of the life of St. Francis of Assisi, was the first "document" to present Francis's confrontation before the Sultan in Egypt as a glorious victory between the Saint and the Muslim clerics. John Tolan observes that Giotto "transformed this failure into a singular victory, worthy of figuring among the Saint's miracles."⁸⁴ The image of the Saracens as irrational and stubborn in the presentation at the Bardi Chapel inaugurates a pattern of representation of the Saracens that would span the next two hundred years, Felice's commission included.⁸⁵ The formula allows for St. Francis's victory in the miracle trial despite his very real failure to convert either the Sultan or indeed any other Muslim.

Yet, there is another image. It is one commissioned for another prominent Florentine family chapel, one that Felice could not have avoided when he returned from Egypt in 1423 to find the city in the grip of a "magi-mania."⁸⁶ Obsessed with the story of the journey, the gifting, and prostration of the magi, "Florence responds to the galleys' return from Egypt as if the new maritime power had accessed two of the lands from which the fabled wealth of the magi had come."⁸⁷ One 1423 chronicler reported: "Among other valuables, incense and myrrh had arrived on galleys from Alexandria."⁸⁸ Palla Strozzi, the most illustrious man in Florence at the time and, significantly, Felice's future father-in-law, had commissioned the celebrated artist, Gentile de Fabriano, to paint the story for an altarpiece in his family chapel. This altarpiece, which da Fabriano had been working on exclusively since his arrival in Florence in 1420, was celebrated at an extraordinary mass in 1423. Felice returned, from Egypt, to a city captured by an image. It was an image with which he was forced to negotiate.⁸⁹

The idea of the Magi functioning as diplomats paying tax or tribute enjoys a long history that goes back to Roman times and the spread of early Christianity.⁹⁰ In Felice's time, the Magi were cast as Eastern kings journeying to bring gifts and pay homage to Christ as a Western, Christian, King.⁹¹ In Palla Strozzi's 1423 "Adoration of Magi," the confrontation between the East and West becomes further qualified in terms of a Muslim and Christian split: the three kings are identified as the three crusader Christians kings.⁹² In the audience, a youth wearing a banner with pseudo-Arabic text and Mamluk rosettes bears witness to the event.

Felice's recent voyage to Egypt, which entailed gifting and prostrating himself before the Sultan, uncannily mirrored the painting that the ambassador celebrated upon his return, presumably with his own offering of incense and myrrh. The image of paying tribute in Egypt comes into relief when situated against the backdrop of the idealized image of the Florentine elite it presented. These people are cast as magnificent and gracious in giving and in receiving.⁹³ Indeed, there is textual evidence that the story of the Magi was already on Felice's mind when he was in Cairo. While anxiously awaiting the Sultan's response, Felice made an unplanned excursion to the village of Matariya; there, he visited the site where the holy family took refuge while fleeing from Jerusalem.⁹⁴ An image on the predella of the da Fabriano altar would have immediately transported Felice to that holy site: the image of flight to Egypt.

Felice had to account for the money spent, as gift or tribute, whether freely or "forced." A group within the Sea Council known for its "undue parsimony" were likely critical of the excessive unauthorized payments on behalf of Florence. In this context, the fresco he commissioned for his family chapel, *Tribute Money*, might be seen as justifying the payments. Revising the very real story of having been "constrained" and forced into payment, into a magnanimous gesture that, post factum, transforms *mangerie* into strategic offerings which financially benefited Florence.

TRADE POLICY, TRUST, AND *TRIBUTE MONEY*

The main plot of Felice's *Diario*—payments made to enter a foreign city—along with three of its central themes—unjust tribute, the fear of violence, and the miraculous power of the florin—appear as central components of *Tribute Money*.⁹⁵ The image of the fresco depicts events recounted in the Gospel of Matthew: Peter is approached by a customs collector soliciting payment from Jesus. The choice of this story for a family chapel, a minor episode from the life of St. Peter that was rarely referred to or depicted, and Masaccio's alterations of the original portrait supply clues about the meaning of the painting.

I begin with Matthew's text, both because it is the origin of the story and because "Tribute Money" enjoyed no visual precedence. I provide here the *Diatessaron in Volgare*:

24. And when they come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, "Does your master pay tribute?" 25. He saidth,

"Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, "what do you think, Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth take tribute, or in fact, custom (*Overo Dazio*)? Of their own children or of strangers?" 26. Peter said to him, "of strangers." Jesus said to him, "then, the children are free. 27. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them (*scandalo*) go to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first comes up, and when you have opened the mouth, you will find a piece of money; take it and give it to them for me and you."

This is a highly complex story. How is Masaccio to represent this narrative? Jules Lubbock has identified thirteen subsidiary episodes or speeches in the short passage.⁹⁶ I will summarize for the sake of coherence, adding my own emphasis.

1. **Arrival:** Jesus and companions arrive and try to enter the city without paying tax.
2. **Dialogue between customs official and Peter:** The customs official asks Peter: Should Jesus pay? Peter says yes.
3. **Dialogue between Peter and Jesus:** Jesus asks Peter preemptively, offering an example by way of legal clarification of the nature of the tribute as *dazio* and adjudicates. They do not have to pay.
4. **Dialogue between Jesus and Peter:** But they will pay for extra-legal diplomatic reasons.
5. **We will pay for it with a miracle:** Go the sea and collect the coins from the fish.
6. **Make the payment.**

How did Masaccio translate this story into an image? Portraying the parts of the story that are actions—the arrival, fetching of the coins, and the payments—is not difficult; the activities are depicted in the three parts of the painting. But how is the central message of this story, legal adjudication—interpretation of law, the discussion between the tax collector and Peter, and Peter and Jesus—represented?

The scene of a dispute about the payment of customs and a judgment form the central portion of the tripartite image of Masaccio's painting Fig. 1.4. In this case, Jesus stands in as judge in the case between Peter and the customs collector. Masaccio's Peter stands on the right of Jesus, on the seaside, as the new arrival; the customs collector stands on the left side toward the town. In what is a curious revision of the original text, Jesus occupies a middle position, arbitrating the opposing claims. In Matthew's



Fig. 1.4 “Masaccio, *Tribute Money*” caption: Masaccio, Brancacci Chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence (Courtesy of the City of Florence)

text, Peter responds “Yes,” that Jesus is liable to pay customs. And it is Jesus who pronounces his objection. Peter shows no qualms about paying. In Masaccio’s picture, conversely, it is Peter who exhibits outrage concerning the payment. Jesus, in the place of judge, is the peacemaker, resolving the conflict, condoning the payment that Peter seems unwilling to make and transforming tribute to instrumental *cortesía*.

What is the source for Masaccio’s revision of the biblical narrative? To whose outrage is Masaccio giving voice? Given the conspicuous alteration of the original text, and the element noted consistently by viewers as early as Vasari—Peter’s pathos and emotional state—any explanation of the image must address these queries. In fact, the meaning of this image remains an enigma. In a volume published immediately after the restoration of the Brancacci Chapel in 1990, *Tribute Money* is read as an affirmation of the oft-quoted Christian political and ecclesiastical imperative—to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s—the Augustinian breach between the kingdom of God and the broken world.⁹⁷ But why should Peter be so passionately contemptuous if this is, in fact, the sentiment?

The iconography of the chapel frescos has also been studied in a volume edited by Nicholas Eckstein on the proceedings of a symposium on the Brancacci Chapel held at I Tatti.⁹⁸ As a collection, these studies question a long-standing interpretation of “Tribute Money,” which Tony Molho, in his influential 1970 essay, tied to the introduction of the Catasto tax system in Florence and the establishment of Papal Primacy. This edited volume instead reveals the significance of the frescoes in the immediate and local context of the Brancacci Chapel, the neighborhood life of San Frediano, and the Carmelite Order associated with it.⁹⁹ More specifically, the theme of monetary exchange is linked to: (1) the attitude toward poverty and charity¹⁰⁰; (2) the value of money as juxtaposed with the power of God¹⁰¹; and (3) Felice’s “civic fashioning” and embezzlement of 2900 florins from the communal fund.¹⁰² Yet, none of these explanations can account for Peter’s pathos, his discernment of the tribulation, or the miracle attendant to tribute payment. Even in one of the earliest descriptions of the frescoes, Giorgio Vasari observed¹⁰³:

Saint Peter’s face flushes with the effort he makes in bending down to retrieve the money from the belly of the fish; and more so when he pays the tribute to the tax collector, where his emotion can be seen as he counts out the money, as well as the greed of the man who is receiving it, who looks at the money in his hand with great pleasure.¹⁰⁴

The profundity of Peter's encounter—the specific alteration made by Masaccio that makes his experience with tribute a suitable subject for the Chapel commission—can only be revealed against the backdrop of Florentine galley's maiden voyage and the “business of florin” in Egypt.

Let us now return to Masaccio's image. The central part of the tripartite narrative depicts the arrival of Jesus from the sea. The tax collector is clearly asking if Jesus will pay the customs tax to enter the city: pointing to the city with his right hand, gesturing to Jesus with his left. Note that what is specifically being alluded to here is the customs or entry tax that is collected from foreigners upon entry to the city, by the *Cadi della Dogana*—the first person Felice and Carlo saw upon arrival in Alexandria. Florence insisted that it pay only as much as the Venetians, not more, and the entry tax Felice would consider forced and illicit in his account book was submitted to the City. The tax was as commonplace in the biblical narrative as it was in Felice's time. This is not just any tax; it is not the kind of payment the church would pay the state. Masaccio is emphasizing the kind of payment, a payment required of foreigners upon entering a city, which is the example offered by Christ.

In Masaccio's rendition, Peter is outraged, and the tax collector is agitated. The sky is stormy, it is late afternoon, and the shadows are long. In fact, it looks as if a fight might break out between the tax collector and Peter, but Jesus strides into defuse the tension. The suspense of this scene of arrival and payment bring to mind the dangerous atmosphere in Alexandria when Felice and Carlo arrived on the galleys. We recall that because the Catalans had attacked one of the Sultan's ships, the Sultan was about to expel all Christian merchants from the lands. Indeed, once on land the situation was so tense, the payments required so unexpected, that Felice had considered going back secretly with the galleys. Could Felice, as the patron, have provided the text of his *Diario* to Masaccio? Could he have shared the story of his dramatic adventure paying entry tax in Alexandria with the painter he hired?

In Masaccio's depiction, we see that Jesus steps between the two adversaries to adjudicate the matter and render his judgment: that they do not have to pay legally but will pay for diplomatic reasons. And, they will pay with their miracle coins. The discussion between Jesus and Peter as to the matter of law, whether or not they are obliged to pay, not only recalls Felice's daily reflections and the negotiations with various Mamluk officials and customs collectors. One can also presume that they were the substance of Felice's discussion and consultations with the other member

of this embassy, including his fellow traveler, Carlo Federighi, a doctor of law specifically selected for his legal expertise.

Jesus says that, as the son of God, he is not liable to pay tax, just as the Florentine party believed that they should not be liable to pay. Yet, Jesus adds an extra-legal, diplomatic qualification, insisting that they ought to pay for deeper reasons. Framed in this way, the Prince of Peace demonstrates that it is only by making such a payment that they can avoid violence and scandal and ensure the peace. And that is how, in the end, an embassy that saw itself as “pawns to Cairo’s enormous greed” justified payment, resolving “to get rid of them as best as we could.”

Coming back to the scene, whose pathos is Peter voicing? One certainly thinks of Felice in Egypt, as he expressed his outrage day after day for having to pay “these people.” Yet, back in Florence, Felice also had to justify those payments to the Commune.¹⁰⁵ The Sea Council not only had to approve the payments already made but also future ones agreed upon, including the very treaty Felice has signed with the Sultan. According to Mallet, the entire enterprise of the Florentine galleys was burdened by lack of money, “a Sinbad,” as the Commune believed, that the galleys should pay for themselves:

The real defect in the system of financing the galleys was a common one in Florentine institutions; undue parsimony in the early stages, when expenditure of considerable sums of money to get things going might have paid dividends later on. But Florentines hoped that the galleys would practically pay for themselves from the start and, by the time they realized they would not, the sporadic attempts to subsidize them were insufficient.... The Sea Consuls, like true Sinbads, had been saddled with a task that was beyond their limited resources.¹⁰⁶

We recall that during his final days in Alexandria, Felice mentioned that his mission was inadequately funded. *Tribute Money* could be interpreted as advocating a policy of state subsidy of the Florentine galleys, just as it justifies according to a new code, the moneys he spent in Egypt.

It seems that back in Florence, now in the position of having to justify the payments made in Egypt, Felice not only transcends his own outrage but also finds that his experience in Egypt has made him an advocate of mercantile policy based on his new understanding of the power and profitability of *cortesia*. In the painting he commissioned from Masaccio, Peter is depicted expressing the very outrage that Felice

felt in Egypt and that Sea Councils were expressing in Florence. But the painting tells us that Jesus justifies the payments on the grounds of diplomacy. While we can characterize this as a politically triumphant spin on a mission that was not an unequivocal success in the manner of Giotto's St. Francis's *Trial of Fire*, we can also view it as a change on Felice's part. The politician and merchant advocating for a trade policy based on that maiden journey of the galleys: that for a successful commercial enterprise, Florence should learn to risk by extending credit as an art of *cortesía*. Parsimony might not be the most economically advantageous path in seeking an active commercial presence in the Levant.

But the condition of a trade policy is that it should be profitable, not only expedient. After all, the central image of the fresco depicts the scene where Jesus directs Peter to pay the tribute he said they ought not to pay. It is a payment not only made from the elevated position of his diplomatic rational and Christian righteousness but also one further redeemed by the episode on the left side of the painting, where Peter's gold coins accompany a miracle—their emergence from the mouth of a fish.

Let us now come to the intervention that diffuses the violence: the miracle coins. We have seen that the florin emerges in Felice's account as the one successful offering he can make in Egypt. In Felice's experience, the florin is the miraculous currency that ushers in reason to the unreasonable, sanity to the insane, and redemption for the humiliated. The strength of the florin, if not its messenger, Felice, was comparable to that of Francis's faith. Again and again, in Felice's *Diario*, the appearance and presentation of the florin saved and transformed a violently tense situation. The trade policy will be advantageous, because the tribute and customs payments will be covered by the profit that Florence will make from trade in the miracle currency: the florin, the cause of which Felice had championed in Egypt.

Yet, the scene of the payment of the tribute is, in itself, interesting. Masaccio has placed the figures on either side of the post. Peter is framed by the city gate, and the customs collector is on the side toward town. The scene has brought to the minds of art historians the representational convention of a contract, or of a marriage—the two representatives agree to the exchange and shake hands. This is a payment and a handshake, even if animosity has not subsided.¹⁰⁷ What other contract could this be? Could it be any other than the one Felice had waited for in anxious

anticipation in Cairo, making a pilgrimage to the site of flight after the Magi's visit, the contract whose terms he painstakingly negotiated, the contract he brought with him to Florence in 1423, just before he commissioned this picture?

Tribute Money can be viewed as an image commemorating the commercial treaty Felice had successfully signed with the Sultan. As with all commemorations, it legitimized and justified actions taken just as it advocated for future policy. Yet, *Tribute Money* goes beyond political spin and trade policy. Felice's journey and Masaccio's *Tribute Money* stand at a crucial moment in the mercantile culture of Florentine Renaissance, one that had begun to recognize that trust and risk, rather than excessive parsimony, may be profitable. Connecting the language of faith and finance not only commemorates the Florentine galleys voyage and the treaty with the Sultan, it also inaugurates a shift in paradigm, a mercantile culture wherein credit, trust, and risk are inexorably linked to profit and speculation. *Tribute Money* stands as a moral allegory in the mercantile culture of the fifteenth century. *Cortesía* was a financial risk, a credit extended—but it not only resolved conflict, it was the very condition of future profit.

With the Port of Livorno replacing Pisa as the Tuscan port during the following century, trust and credit came to play a major role in the working of the mercantile firms that had established agents in various ports and cities. This new culture operated according to a correspondingly new understanding of risk, fate, and futurity, one exemplified in Machiavelli's *Fortuna*: chance as a force that can be controlled by human skill.¹⁰⁸

Massaccio's *Tribute Money* might be viewed as an allegory inaugurating this shift in paradigm, one related to the personal experiences Felice recorded in detail in his *Diario*. In this context, the commission of *Tribute Money* justifies, even glorifies, his payments. This is the after image that Felice renders iconic in his family chapel in Florence, the representation of a prior experience so overwhelming that he was unable to put it into coherent words. The image fixed onto the walls of the Florentine family chapel transforms the strange sights and sounds, the formless fluidity of the overseas, into a recognizable image of the self, reconstituted. Likewise, it translates the meaning of tribute, from extortion to speculation.

NOTES

1. On Medieval trade in Eastern Mediterranean, see the classic work of Elyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). For a recent study of Florentine trade networks in the Mediterranean, see Francisco Apellániz, “Florentine Networks in the Middle East in Early Renaissance,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 30, no. 2 (2015): 125–45. For a long durée and comparative study of cross-cultural trade, see Francesca Trivellato and colleagues’ edited volume *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). See, in particular, Francesca Trivellato’s “Introduction”; Leor Halevi, “Religion and Cross-Cultural Trade”; and “Trading with Muslim World,” and “Coins and Commerce,” contributions by Giuseppe Marcocci and Roxani Eleni Margarit.
2. For a discussion of the office of ambassador during this period, see Donald Queller, *The Office of Ambassador in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 187–88. The presence of a lawyer skilled in civil and canon law had become increasingly essential to the mission of certain types of embassies during the late Middle Ages. On the role of lawyers in diplomacy, see Lauro Martines, *Lawyers and Statecraft* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 311–84.
3. Michael Mallet, *Florentine Galleys in the Fifteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969). For Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay’s economic policies and their contribution to the demise of the Mamluk commercial elite, see John Meloy, “Imperial Strategy and Political Exigency: The Red Sea Spice Trade and the Mamluk Sultanate in the Fifteenth Century,” *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123, no. 1 (January–March 2003): 1–19.
4. Presenting evidence concerning the question of attribution—namely that most of the frescoes attributed to Fillipo Lippi are in fact Masaccio’s work—Frank Jewett Mather reconstructs the timelines of Brancacci’s commission and the completion of Brancacci Chapel frescos. The dates of the commissioning of the frescoes in his family chapel serve as book-ends to his Egyptian journey. Frank Jewett Mather Jr., “The Problem of the Brancacci Chapel Historically Considered,” *The Art Bulletin* (September 1944): 175–87. In contrast to this approach, Nicholas Eckstein’s recent study of Brancacci Chapel opens with a prologue on Felice’s travel to Egypt. Eckstein narrates two memorable scenes from Felice’s travels in “a foreign land” in order to introduce via an analogy his own approach to the study of Brancacci Chapel in Florentine neighborhood of San Frediano. Nicholas Eckstein, *Painted Glories: The*

Brancacci Chapel in Renaissance Florence (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 4.

5. According to Ugo Tucci, the pages of Brancacci's *Diario* reveal a man of "rather limited mentality, who was singularly focused on the practical matters of his mission, rejected any custom different from his own, and in particular, was deficient in understanding the value of 'gift institution' in the financial and mercantile Egyptian culture." See Ugo Tucci, "Brancacci, Felice," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 13, 764–67. Nicholas Eckstein's "Prologue" (see *supra* note iv) suggests, however, that Felice's operations could be viewed as typical of how Florentines saw and made sense of foreign objects and images according to a familiar lexicon. Felice emerges not only as typically Florentine but also as typically "human," using as he does concepts and language of his own culture to decipher the unknown. See Eckstein, *Painted Glories*, 6. Yet, it was precisely to *mediate* such incommensurability—to manage and negotiate cultural and linguistic differences—that diplomatic protocols and rituals such as gift institution were developed and observed. For the role of diplomatic protocol in Early Modern Mediterranean, see Maartje van Gelder and Tijana Krstić, "Introduction: Cross-Confessional Diplomacy and Diplomatic Intermediaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Journal of Early Modern History* 19, nos. 2–3 (2015): 93–105; and Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).
6. For mercantile and financial culture in Renaissance Florence, see John F. Padgett and Paul D. McLean, "Economic Credit in Renaissance Florence," *The Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 1 (March 2011): 1–47.
7. See Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 108. For a micro-study of the Venetian trade in Egypt, see Georg Christ, *Trading Conflicts* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Christ's study is based on the archives of the Venetian Consul of Alexandria during the first two decades of the fifteenth century. See Stefano Stantchev, "The Medieval Origins of Embargo as a Policy Tool," *History of Political Thought* 33, no. 3 (Autumn 2012): 373–99.
8. See Mallet, *The Florentine Galleys*; Sergio Tognetti, "Organizzazione dei trasporti e delle comunicazioni commerciali a Firenze tra XIV e XV secolo," in *Denaro e Bellezza: I banchieri Botticelli e il rogo della vanità*, ed. Tim Parks and Ludovic Sebregondi (Florence: Giunti, 2011); Richard Goldthwaite, *The Economy of Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 182–94.
9. Michael Mallet, "The Sea Consuls of Florence in the Fifteenth Century," *Papers of the British School of Rome* XXVII (November 1959): 156–69.
10. While Florentine merchants had established outposts in the eastern Mediterranean, above all in Rhodes, they paid for the use of the Pisan galleys to transport their merchandise to these destinations. See

Goldthwaite, *The Economy of Renaissance Florence*, 177. After the conquest of Pisa, however, the priority of Florence was to be recognized as the successor to the Pisans and to enjoy the same privileges in the Levant. In 1416, before the purchase of the Pisan Port, the first Florentine embassy to the East was to Constantinople. The objective of this mission was to be recognized as the successors of the Pisans—in effect, as the new Pisans. This embassy was unsuccessful, because the Byzantine Emperor remembered the Florentine refusal to help against the Turks in 1401 when they sieged Constantinople. It was not until 1439 that the rights granted to the Pisans were transferred to Florence, within the context of the Council of Basil and Florence and the unity of the Western and Eastern Church. See Giuseppe Vedovato, *Ordinamento Capitolare in Oriente nei privilege toscani nei secoli XII–XV* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1946), 149–50.

11. Examining various Florentine treaties with the Mamluk Sultan, John Wansbrough shows that the Florentines requested the same privileges as the Venetians. It seems that the Florentines used the Venetians as a model, not only for their galley system, but also to shape the form and content of the treaty with the Mamluks. John Wansbrough, “Venice and Florence in the Mameluk Commercial Privileges,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 28, no. 3 (1965): 483–523. See also Felice Brancacci, *Diary*, entry for September 10, 1422.
12. “Istruzioni a Carlo di Francesco Federighi e Felice di Michele Brancacci, ambasciatori al sultano d’Egitto,” Document XXXVII, in Michele Amari, *I Diplomi Arabi del R. Archivio Fiorentino* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1886), 332–36. See English translation of the document in Appendix 1 of this volume. This letter reads like a private letter of instruction of the *Signoria* to the ambassadors. There were, at times, two letters of “instruction” issued: one to hand over to the other side to authorize envoys, and one to provide real guidance so that the ambassadors would come up with neither an unauthorized conclusion nor no conclusion at all. Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (New York: Cosimo, 2010), 41.
13. Amari, *Diplomi Arabi*, 334.
14. For an account of this historical meeting, see John Victor Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian Muslim Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
15. Mallett, *Florentine Galleys*, 153–54. Notably, the first journeys of the Florentine galleys in the first three years from 1422 to 1425 were not to the West; rather, they were headed East to Alexandria and Constantinople. In fact, in the first two years, Alexandria was the only destination. In 1416, the request to the Emperor in Constantinople to recognize Florence as the legitimate successor of the Pisans had failed, raising the stakes for Felice’s mission to the Sultan.

16. Anthony Molho, *Florentine Public Finance in the Early Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 130.
17. By the end of the fourteenth century, Europeans were exceptionally eager to establish commercial relations with the Sultan of Cairo, as trade with Persia had become increasingly unsafe, and merchants insisted that the Holy See lift the trade embargo on Egypt and Syria. See Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 64.
18. Because of the interruption of trade with Persia, the Christian trading nations were very eager to trade with Egypt; time and again they would have to plead with and pay considerable sums to the Pope for the license to send galleys to Egypt and Syria. Beginning in 1344, the Holy See began to periodically grant licenses to ships to trade with the Mamluks, in exchange for a guarantee that the European Nations would not sell war material. See Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 17.
19. See John Meloy, "Imperial Strategy and Political Exigency."
20. See Goldthwaite, *The Economy of Renaissance Florence*, 48–49. See also Tim Parks, "The Art of Exchange," in *Medici Money: Banking, Metaphysics and Art in Fifteenth Century Florence* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).
21. For an encyclopedic study of the mint and monetary policy of medieval and Renaissance Venice, see Alan Stahl, *Zecca: The Mint of Venice in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).
22. John Day, "The Great Bullion Famine of the Fifteenth Century," *Past & Present* 79, no. 1 (1978): 3–54.
23. Jere L. Bacharach, "The Dinar versus the Ducat," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 1973): 77–96. Since 1399, the ducat had been the preferred currency in Egypt over the local Dinar for its uniform weight and purity, enabling its trade by number rather than weight. The Mamluk Sultans of Egypt had been trying to end the domination of their internal markets by the ducat to no avail. Until 1399, whatever ducats had entered the Mamluk economy were melted to bullion and minted into Dinars. Beginning in 1399, however, this practice changed with the new role of the ducat as both the currency of international transactions and local markets. Prices in Cairo, Damascus, and Alexandria—even in sacred Muslim cities such as Mecca—began to be cited in ducats. The motivation to replace the ducat was therefore both economic and religious. In 1411, the Mamluk Sultans attempted unsuccessfully to replace the ducat with a new Mamluk coin, the Nasiri. Many holders of the Nasiri ended up losing money with its devaluation, and it was taken out of the market.
24. On the minting of the new florin in 1422, see *supra* notes 8, 10, 19, Goldthwaite, *The Economy of Renaissance Florence*, 52.

25. Dante Catellacci, "Diario di Felice Brancacci Ambasciatore con Carlo Federighi al Cairo per il Comune di Firenze (1422)," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 8, Serie Quarta, no. 125 (1881): 157–88.
26. *Mangerie* is a term used in Felice's list of expenses submitted to the City of Florence after his return. Felice defines the term as forced payment or stolen money: "I will list all the amounts of money we gave as bribes (*mangerie*), although it would be more fitting to call it the money that was stolen from us and that we were forced to give." Dante Catellacci, "Diario di Felice Brancacci con Carlo Federighi al Cairo per il Comune di Firenze (1422)," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 8, no. 126 (1881): 326.
27. One can conjecture that the Sultan's sympathy for the florin and its representatives was motivated by his own desire to create competition for the ducat, although he never mentions his possible design to use the florin as competition for the ducat. He does express that *he viewed the Florentines as his allies* against other Christians, because they had arrived "at the right moment" when he had come to a confrontation with the Catalans. He hoped the Florentines might pressure the Catalans to negotiate with the Sultan. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for September 21, 1422.
28. The constant attempts by the Sultans to replace the ducat with their own coins reflect a general policy. Four times in 1426, and twice in 1429, Sultan Barsbay outlawed the ducat. Finally, in 1429, when the exchange rates for both the gold Ashrafi of Barsbay (began circulation 1422) and the ducat were listed in Arabic sources, the ducat was valued lower than the Ashrafi. This valuation represented a complete reversal of the earlier relationship between the Christian and Muslim coins. See Bacharach, "The Dinar Versus the Ducat," 77–96.
29. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for August 19, 1422.
30. See Olivia Remie Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
31. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for August 28, 1422.
32. Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 78–79.
33. Toru Miura, "Administrative Networks in Mamluk Period: Taxation, Legal Execution and Bribery," in *Islamic Urbanism in Human History: Political Power and Social Networks*, ed. Tsugitaka Sato (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1997), 39–76.
34. Cited in Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 170.
35. Felice notes that in preparation for their arrival at Alexandria, he consulted other Florentines in Rhodes, specifically seeking advice on the customs practices in Alexandria and Cairo. The one person most familiar with the Mamluk ways was a Florentine named Chiaro Archangioli. He had been posing as a Venetian for years and could not expose his

true identity by appearing in public with the Florentines. Because Archangioli refused to accompany the Florentines to Egypt, they found another, Antonio Minerbetti, who had served as Rhodes' Consul to Alexandria for four years and who agreed to accompany the embassy party without charge. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for August 11, 1422. For Tucci's characterization of Felice, see *supra* note 5.

36. Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 277.
37. Felice and the Florentines heard about the volatile situation in Alexandria's port when they arrived in Rhodes. The Catalans had opened fire on Genoese ships in the Port of Alexandria and had taken a "small precious galley of the Sultan." Felice Brancacci, *Diario*, entries for August 9 and 20, 1422.
38. Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 287; Brancacci, *Diario*, August 20, 26, and 27, 1422.
39. Amari, *Diplomi Arabi*, 333, translated in Appendix 1: "Regarding the goods that we would purchase there or bring back, we request that the price be the same as what the Venetians pay, or less if possible, or in any case no more than the other nations pay, lest it result in our loss."
40. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for August 19, 1422.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for August 20, 1422.
43. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for August 21, 1422.
44. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for August 22, 1422.
45. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for August 23, 1422.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for August 24, 1422.
48. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for August 28, 1422.
49. *Ibid.*
50. For a discussion of the meaning and practice of *cortesía*, see Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, 150–51.
51. In a "List of Gifts Delivered and Expenses Incurred," submitted to the City of Florence, Felice groups *mangerie* and *cortesie* together, characterized as forced payments, and distinguished from gifts. The list appears at the end of Felice's Chronicle (ASF, CC.Stroziane serie I, 304). It is reproduced in Dante Catellacci, "Diario di Felice Brancacci con Carlo Federighi al Cairo per il Comune di Firenze (1422)," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 8, no. 126 (1881): 326–34. See, esp., p. 327.
52. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for August 29, 1422.
53. Tucci, "Brancacci, Felice," in *Dizionario Biografico*, see note 5.
54. "List of Gifts Delivered and Expenses Incurred," see *supra* note 49, p. 236.
55. *Ibid.*

56. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for September 5, 1422.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for September 7, 1422. Kissing the ground in the presence of the Sultan was a long-standing Mamluk custom up *until* the time of Sultan Barsbay. All visitors with the exception of kings were to prostrate themselves by kissing the ground once and then kissing the hand of the Sultan. Barsbay changed this custom, requiring visitors to merely touch the ground as a symbolic gesture of kissing it. See Karl Stowasser, "Manners and Customs at the Mamluk Court," *Muqarnas* 2 (1984): 16.
61. For an account of the historical meeting, see Tolan, *St. Francis and the Sultan*. For a discussion of two Giotto frescoes depicting the episode, see Karen-Edis Barzman, "Islamic North Africa in Trecento Florence: Costume in the Assisi and Bardi Chapel Frescoes of Francis in Egypt," in *Power, Gender, and Ritual in Europe and the Americas: Essays in Memory of Richard C. Trexler*, ed. Peter Arnade and Michael Rocke (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 29–51.
62. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for September 7, 1422.
63. The Signoria's instructions are detailed on this matter. He specifically mentions putting the coins "into the fire": "You are advised to show them that it (florin) is of finer quality (than ducat) and explain the reason why, and the equal weight is clear to see. In doing so be as meticulous as possible, offering to *put the currencies to the test, by putting into fire and melting (mettere a fuoco e fondere) both the florins and the ducats*, and make sure to be dealing with people who are experts in these matters. This task of yours is of the utmost importance—giving them tangible proof of this. Show them that our florin has never been of lesser quality than the ducat, and that in many places it is regarded as having the same value as the ducat and more." Amari, *Diplomi Arabi*, 333–34. An English translation of the Italian is provided in Appendix 1.
64. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for September 9, 1422.
65. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for September 10, 1422.
66. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for September 10, 1422. Brancacci must have heard stories such as those recounted by the chronicler Villari in 1348 about the powers of the florin in other Muslim lands. Villari had reported that although the Pisans arrived in Tunis first and established commercial relations with the Tunisian Emir, once the Emir noticed a newly-minted gold florin among the Pisan silvers he questioned the Pisan who disparaged the Florentine coin. Unconvinced by the response, the Emir searched for and found a Florentine merchant who educated the Tunisian Emir on the marvels of his native city, at which point the Emir offered to establish

- not only a church but also a *fondaco* for Florentine merchants in Tunis. See Constable, *Housing the Stranger*, 130.
67. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for September 7, 1422.
 68. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for September 21, 1422.
 69. The ambassadors were given specific instructions not to pay more than other nations paid, as the dignity of Florence depended on it. Amari, *I Diplomi Arabi*, 333.
 70. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for September 21, 1422.
 71. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for September 14, 1422.
 72. The process of Felice's depiction of the elephant in Egypt, as well as his description of Sultan's court, has been depicted by Nicholas Eckstein in his prologue to *Painted Glories*, not only as a way of introducing by way of analogy his own approach to the study of Brancacci Chapel in San Frediano but also as a way of "identifying and reconstructing this process ... in more familiar setting of his neighborhood community." Eckstein, *Painted Glories*, 6.
 73. A good *fondaco* would generate more money, as surely they were aware the Genoan *fondaco* had. The revenue generated in one year by the Genoan *fondaco* in Alexandria represented half the total revenue from Pera, Genoa's own colony, and a quarter of the taxes from the port of Genoa. Constable, *Housing the Stranger*, 256.
 74. See Constable, *Housing the Stranger*, 286, for examples of Venetian merchants acting with similar impunity toward Muslims in Alexandria.
 75. See Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for October 14, 1422. After the fact, Felice writes that he was sick with various fevers until November 9. Even though the Florentine galleys had arrived in Alexandria by October 18 to transport him and his company back home, the company does not leave until November 15 when his health allowed it.
 76. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for November 11, 1422.
 77. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for October 8, 1422.
 78. The official report of the ambassadors addressed to the Signoria exaggerates the mission's success. On the entire experience of gift giving, it is said: "We took gifts to the Sultan and the three signori mentioned above, as we were commissioned and instructed to do." The ambassadors added, "we did not obligate the Signoria of Florence to the Sultan in nothing." Amari, *Diplomi Arabi*, 344–46.
 79. Trexler has shown that Florentine reports on ambassadorial missions were typically "tinged with concern for Florence's shame." It was of great importance that ambassadors, as representatives of Florence, did not shame the city. Embassies were seen "as purified image of the city's highest honor and deepest aspirations.... the city took heroic efforts to

- neutralize its social inferiority abroad." Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 291–94.
80. Richard Trexler, *Public Life*, 295–96.
 81. Amari, *Diplomi Arabi*, Serie 1, document XXXVII, 165–68. The language of the Sultan's decree portrays this concession as a magnanimous grant from a position of superiority equal to all, poor and rich, weak and powerful. Translated into English in Appendix 2 from Amari's Italian translation of the original 1422 Arabic text on a scroll.
 82. Florence had insisted on equality with Venice, the most privileged international partner regarding customs. Yet, the clause in the treaty referring to the customs paid is worded very generally, establishing that the Florentines should pay "like the other trading nations." *Diplomi Arabi*, document XL, 342. Economic historian Eliyahu Ashtor interprets this to mean that the Florentines were not given the privileged rate paid by the Venetians. See Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 286.
 83. After his ambassadorship to Cairo and until his exile in 1434, Felice served many official functions. In 1423, he was the *Priore*; in 1425, he served as the treasurer of the *camera del Comune*, and in 1426 as *commissario al campo* in Lombardia. In 1427, he served as the ambassador to Siena and in the *Dieci* in Pisa in 1429. In 1430, he was the Maestro delle porte as well as in the *Dieci della Balìa*. In 1431 and 1433, Felice served as the ambassador to the Pope, and in 1434 to Bologna. Leonida Pandimiglio, *I Brancacci di Firenze* (Torin: Olivetti, 1987), 133.
 84. In fact, in previous texts and documents, St. Francis survived because of the sagacity of the Sultan. Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan*, 146.
 85. Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan*, 179.
 86. See Rab Hathfield, "The Compagnia de' Magi," *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970); Richard Trexler, *The Journey of the Magi: Meaning in History of a Christian Story* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). The confraternity of the magi oversaw the most important pageantries including the joust in Santa Croce, which had inaugurated Felice's public life with his 1406 victory. After winning in the *gran torneo*, which took place over several weeks to celebrate the victory of Florence over Pisa in 1406, Felice was crowned with the silver helmet as the champion. Pandimiglio, *I Brancacci di Firenze*, 31.
 87. Trexler, *Journey of the Magi*, 125.
 88. Paolo Pietrobuoni, as cited in Trexler, *Journey of the Magi*, 124.
 89. The political and personal lives of Felice and Palla Strozzi are intertwined in the decade following Felice's return from Egypt. Felice returns to Florence on the eve of the celebration of da Fabriano's Adoration in the Strozzi family chapel at a moment when he is involved in the patronage of his own family chapel in the church of San Carmine. During the

months following his return, Florence has to deal with a political crisis: the duke of Milan, Visconti, has threatened Florence with his expansionist policies. Felice and Palla Strozzi are both elected to the body "Dieci da Balìa" responsible for dealing with this crisis. Palla Strozzi was far wealthier and more educated than Felice and the latter would have coveted a family association. In fact, he did not wait for more than one month after the sudden death of his first wife of fifteen years to marry the widowed daughter of Palla Strozzi in 1430. Ironically, the two patrons never saw their frescos after both were exiled in 1434.

90. Trexler, *Journey of the Magi*, 6.
91. Felice's strong association with the Carmelite order makes it likely that he was familiar with the account of John of Hildeseim, the important Carmelite friar who was the main source of information about the Magi in the second half of the fourteenth century in Florence.
92. Abolala Soudavar, *Decoding the Old Masters* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2008).
93. In fact, Keith Christensen has argued that "magnificence, the legitimating force at the base of so many Medici commissions," can find its origins in this, Palla's first commission for his family chapel. Keith Christensen, "L'Adorazione dei Magi di Gentile de Fabriano," in *Gentile da Fabriano a Uffizi*, ed. Alessandro Cecchi (Milan, 2005), 21.
94. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry September 15th, 1422, where he says "our Glorious Lady, Saint Josef and our Lord stopped while fleeing from Jerusalem to Egypt...A sycamore tree where our lady took refuge there with the infant due to the fear of Herod and his men who were following them. He even cuts a few branches from a 'balsam tree' which in the entire world this is the only place where the plant grows." Felice feels vastly restored after this pilgrimage, as if by conjuring the story of the journeying Magi and their adoration of Jesus and passing of sovereignty to Western Christianity the fear and humiliation endured by the Herod-like Sultan Barsbay is neutralized.
95. The emotional and political account of Felice's journey was measured by the currency of two victorious images: Giotto's *Trial by Fire* and da Fabriano's *Adoration of the Magi*. The dialectical vision produced is Masaccio's *Tribute Money*.
96. Jules Lubbock, "Masaccio's Brancacci Chapel Frescoes," in *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello* (New Haven: Art Institute of Chicago, 2006), 207.
97. Umberto Baldini and Ornella Casazza, *The Brancacci Chapel Frescoes* (London: Electa, 1992), 39. Specifically, *Tribute Money* speaks to the way God's salvific plan relates to historical reality. Whether tribute is paid to the Temple or to the Romans, one is obliged to "give unto

- Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God, what is God's (Luke 20:25)." See Eckstein, *Painted Glories*, p. 119.
98. Nicholas Eckstein, ed., *The Brancacci Chapel: Form, Function and Setting: Acts of an International Conference, Florence, Villa I Tatti, June 6, 2003* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Publishing, 2007).
 99. See chapters by Megan Holmes, Dale Kent, and Nicholas Eckstein, in Eckstein, *The Brancacci Chapel*.
 100. Nicholas Eckstein argues this point in "Brancacci Chapel and the Mythic History of San Frediano," in *The Brancacci Chapel: Form Function and Setting*, ed. Nicholas Eckstein, 15–37. (Florence: Olschki, 2007).
 101. Megan Holmes, "The Carmelites of Santa Maria del Carmine," in *The Brancacci Chapel: Form Function and Setting*, ed. Nicholas Eckstein, 157–77 (Florence: Olschki, 2007).
 102. Dale Kent, "The Brancacci Chapel Viewed in the Context of Florence's Culture of Artistic Patronage," in *The Brancacci Chapel: Form Function and Setting*, ed. Nicholas Eckstein, 57–73 (Florence: Olschki, 2007). Though not part of the volume, Anthony Molho's influential 1977 thesis on the subject—which appeared as "The Brancacci Chapel: Studies in Iconography and History," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 40 (1977)—is repeatedly cited by the contributors.
 103. See Baldini and Casazza, *The Brancacci Chapel Frescoes*.
 104. Vasari, *Vite* (1971), 130–33, cited in Baldini and Casazza, *The Brancacci Chapel Frescoes*.
 105. We recall that the list of "forced payments"—ten times longer than the few modest gifts that were approved before departure by the Signoria—typically divided the liability between "us" and the "Comune," distinguishing what the merchants were to pay from what they would ask the City to pay.
 106. Mallet, *Florentine Galleys*, 168.
 107. Lubbock, "Masaccio's Brancacci Chapel Frescoes," in *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello* (New Haven: Art Institute of Chicago, 2006), 211.
 108. See Nicholas Baker, "Trust and Credit: Commercial Culture of Risk in Renaissance Italy," Lecture, Casa Italiana, February 22, 2018. Studying the commercial disputes in sixteenth-century merchant's courts of Florentine Renaissance in a keynote lecture at NYU's Italian Department, Nicholas Baker argues that a new mercantile culture based on the importance of trust emerged not only in Florence but also across the Italian Peninsula during the last decades of the fifteenth century. This change was linked to the ways Italians thought about the role of providence and chance in human affairs. By the end of the century, *Fortuna*, once fickle and uncontrollable, is now portrayed as an occasion

and an opportunity for investment and a chance at profit making. A new speculative culture of investing, risk taking, assessing risk, price, and profitability was on the horizon, and trust was inseparable from risk and profit. The religious language of faith was used strategically, such as on occasions when trust had been broken, in order to minimize financial loss and maximize profit. In this sense, we can understand Cosimo Vecchio, Felice's one-time friend, when he says that faith is the greatest asset of a merchant.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Amari, Michele. *I Dipolomi Arabi del R. Archivio Fiorentino*. Florence: Le Monnier, 1886.
- Apellániz, Francisco. "Florentine Networks in the Middle East in Early Renaissance." *Mediterranean Historical Review* 30, no. 2 (2015): 125–45.
- Arbel, Benjamin. *Trading Nations: Jews and Venetians in the Early Modern Mediterranean*. Leiden: Brill, 1995.
- Ashtor, Elyahu. *Levant Trade in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Bacharach, Jere L. "The Dinar Versus the Ducat." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 1973): 77–96.
- Baker, Nicholas. "Trust and Credit: Commercial Culture of Risk in Renaissance Italy." Lecture, Casa Italiana, New York University, New York, February 22, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHN9WL2jaSk>.
- Baldini, Umberto, and Ornella Casazza. *The Brancacci Chapel Frescoes*. London: Electa, 1992.
- Barzman, Karen-Edis. "Islamic North Africa in Trecento Florence: Costume in the Assisi and Bardi Chapel Frescoes of Francis in Egypt." In *Power, Gender and Ritual in Europe and the Americas*, edited by Peter Arnade and Michael Roche, 29–55. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008.
- Cardini, Franco. "I Fiorentini e Il Mediterraneo Fra Tre e Quattrocento. Presupposti e Fondamenti di una Politca Marinara." *Nuova Rivista Storica* 93, no. 3 (December 2009): 733–84.
- Catellacci, Dante. "Diario di Felice Brancacci Ambasciatore con Carlo Federighi al Cairo per il Comune di Firenze (1422)." *Archivio Storico Italiano* 8, Serie Quarta, no. 125 (1881): 157–88.
- Catellaci, Dante. "Diario di Felice Brancacci con Carlo Federighi al Cairo per il Comune di Firenze (1422)." *Archivio Storico Italiano* 8, no. 126 (1881): 326–34.
- Christ, Georg. *Trading Conflicts: Venetian Merchants and Mamluk Officials in Late Medieval Alexandria*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

- Christensen, Keith. "L'Adorazione dei Magi di Gentile de Fabriano." In *Gentile da Fabriano a Uffizi*, edited by Alessandro Cecchi. Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2005.
- Constable, Olivia Remie. *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Day, John. "The Great Bullion Famine of the Fifteenth Century." *Past & Present* 79, no. 1 (1978): 3–54.
- Eckstein, Nicholas. "The Brancacci Chapel and the Mythic History of San Frediano." In *The Brancacci Chapel: Form Function and Setting—Acts of an International Conference, Florence, Villa I Tatti, June 6, 2003*, edited by Nicholas Eckstein, 15–37. Florence: Leo S. Olschki Publishing, 2007a.
- Eckstein, Nicholas, ed. *The Brancacci Chapel: Form, Function and Setting—Acts of an International Conference, Florence, Villa I Tatti, June 6, 2003*. Florence: Leo S. Olschki Publishing, 2007b.
- Eckstein, Nicholas. *Painted Glories: The Brancacci Chapel in Renaissance Florence*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Goldthwaite, Richard. *The Economy of Renaissance Florence*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011.
- Hathfield, Rab. "The Compagnia de' Magi." *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 107–61.
- Holmes, Megan. "The Carmelites of Santa Maria del Carmine." In *The Brancacci Chapel: Form Function and Setting—Acts of an International Conference, Florence, Villa I Tatti, June 6, 2003*, edited by Nicholas Eckstein, 157–77. Florence: Leo S. Olschki Publishing, 2007.
- Kent, Dale. "The Brancacci Chapel viewed in the Context of Florence's Culture of Artistic Patronage." In *The Brancacci Chapel: Form Function and Setting—Acts of an International Conference, Florence, Villa I Tatti, June 6, 2003*, edited by Nicholas Eckstein, 57–73. Florence: Leo S. Olschki Publishing, 2007.
- Lubbock, Jules. *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello*. New Haven: Art Institute of Chicago, 2006.
- Mallet, Michael. *Florentine Galleries in the Fifteenth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Mallet, Michael. "The Sea Consuls of Florence in the Fifteenth Century." *Papers of the British School at Rome* XXVII (November 1959): 156–69.
- Martines, Lauro. *Lawyers and Statecraft*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- Mather, Frank Jewett, Jr. "The Problem of the Brancacci Chapel Historically Considered." *The Art Bulletin* 26, no. 3 (September 1944): 175–87.
- Mattingly, Garrett. *Renaissance Diplomacy*. New York: Cosimo, 2010.
- Meloy, John. "Imperial Strategy and Political Exigency: The Red Sea Spice Trade and the Mamluk Sultanate in the Fifteenth Century." *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123, no. 1 (January–March 2003): 1–19.

- Miura, Toru. "Administrative Networks in Mamluk Period: Taxation, Legal Execution and Bribery." In *Islamic Urbanism in Human History: Political Power and Social Networks*, edited by Tsugitaka Sato, 39–76. London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1997.
- Molho, Anthony. "The Brancacci Chapel: Studies in Iconography and History." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 40 (1977): 50–322.
- Molho, Anthony. *Florentine Public Finance in the Early Renaissance*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Padgett, John F., and Paul D. McLean. "Economic Credit in Renaissance Florence." *The Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 1 (March 2011): 1–47.
- Pandimiglio, Leonida. *I Brancacci di Firenze*. Torino: Olivetti, 1987.
- Parks, Tim. *Medici Money: Banking, Metaphysics and Art in Fifteenth Century Florence*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2006.
- Parks, Tim, and Sebregondi Lucovic, eds. *Denaro e Bellezza: I banchieri Botticelli e il rogo della vanità*. Florence: Giunti, 2011.
- Queller, Donald. *The Office of Ambassador in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.
- Rothman, Natalie. *Brokering Empire*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012.
- Soudavar, Abolala. *Decoding the Old Masters*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008.
- Stahl, Alan. *Zecca: The Mint of Venice in the Middle Ages*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Stantchev, Stefano. "The Medieval Origins of Embargo as a Policy tool." *History of Political Thought* 33, no. 3 (Autumn 2012): 373–99.
- Stowasser, Karl. "Manners and Customs at the Mamluk Court." *Muqarnas* 2 (1984): 13–20.
- Tognetti, Sergio. "Organizzazione dei trasporti e delle comunicazioni commerciali a Firenze tra XIV e XV secolo." In *Denaro e Bellezza: I banchieri Botticelli e il rogo della vanità*, edited by Tim Parks and Ludovic Sebregondi. Florence: Giunti, 2011.
- Tolan, John Victor. *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian Muslim Encounter*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Trexler, Richard. *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.
- Trexler, Richard. *The Journey of the Magi: Meaning in History of a Christian Story*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Trivellato, F., Leor Halevi, and Catia Antunes, eds. *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000–1900*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Tucci, Ugo. "Brancacci, Felice." In *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 13, 764–67. Rome: Treccani, 1971.

- van Gelder, Maartje, and Tijana Krstić. "Introduction: Cross-Confessional Diplomacy and Diplomatic Intermediaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean." *Journal of Early Modern History* 19, nos. 2–3 (2015): 93–105.
- Vedovato, Giuseppe. *Ordinamento capitolare in Oriente nei privilege toscani nei secoli XII–XV*. Florence: Le Monnier, 1946.
- Wansbrough, John. "Venice and Florence in the Mamluk Commercial Privileges." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 28, no. 3 (1965): 483–523.



CHAPTER 2

On Translating the Chronicle of Felice di Michele Brancacci's Visit to Sultan Barsbay

Payment to the interpreters, everything depends on them.
Felice Brancacci

Abstract This chapter discusses the role of translators and interpreters in the diplomatic and commercial mission of Felice Brancacci in the fifteenth century, as well as the course of transmission and translation of the documents. It situates Felice's chronicle in contemporary "network" studies and travel literature as literature of encounter, reflecting upon the task of translation as historical, cultural, and ethical production.

Keywords Translation studies • Network analysis • Travel literature

The present translation makes available, in English, the reading of a marvelously rich text recounting the maiden voyage of the Florentine galleys to Egypt in 1422: *The Chronicle of Felice di Michele Brancacci Ambassador with Carlo Federighi For the Commune of Florence to Sultan of Egypt*. In part official communiqué, in part travelogue and confessional, *The Chronicle* is not only of interest to teachers and students of trans-cultural relations of Florentines in the fifteenth-century Mediterranean, it bears upon the history of Florence inside its own walls.

The work of this translation, however, extends beyond this pedagogic scope. On the one hand, at a moment when the idea of the “network” is replacing the old paradigm of the map as the means for mediating contact between world cultures, the Mediterranean itself is becoming a model for the conception of that network. On the other, “translation” has itself become the paradigm *par excellence* for historical, ethical, political, and cultural production for the Humanities in North America—making texts present in and to other locations and, in so doing, rendering the text present to itself by offering new perspectives on its meaning. Finally, the translation of this diplomatic and commercial mission, which depended on interpreters in Egypt and in Florence for its completion, will contribute to the emerging discussion on the unique role of translators as diplomatic intermediaries in cross-confessional diplomacy and trade.¹ A translation of Brancacci’s *Diario* is informed by such an agenda, opening itself up to readings beyond its Italian context and its relevance to the social and cultural history of Renaissance—its transmission available to not only the perspectives of Mamluk Egypt in North Africa but, more significantly, to the Atlantic perspective on the Mediterranean in the Anglophone world.

Fittingly, this translation-transmission continues the work that began in 1422, with Felice di Michele Brancacci’s own efforts to record, represent, portray, disseminate, and circulate the day-to-day experiences and notable events on his journey to and from Egypt. Although the diary was intended as an official report to the *Sea Consul* of Florence, there are numerous passages bearing the marks of a travelogue: when he describes his excursion to a volcanic island on one occasion, or his exceedingly long description of an elephant on another. Whether travelogue or report, what emerges from this chronicle, as the introductory essay shows, is a representation of deep alterity—an image of the alienation and disaffection felt by a Florentine abroad prior to standardization of diplomatic protocol.

Not surprisingly, the work of “translation” is already embedded in Felice’s diary. Throughout his journey, Felice is accompanied by various *Turcimanni*,² interpreters who translate and made sense of “their language,” the sound of which overwhelmed him at times. The figure of the translator/*turcimanno* looms large in his account, most memorably on an occasion of suffering and assault. As a necessary evil, Felice cleaves to the translator-interpreter. Whether suspect figure or traitor-witness, he is yet another stranger deceiving Felice in a foreign

land, without whom he would be lost. The gravest distrust, misgivings, and complaints in his chronicle are reserved for this figure of interpreter. The warning that “we should not trust the interpreters too much, because it was in their nature to swindle or overcharge people”³ becomes a central motif.

Felice’s original text had been lost until its translation-transmission continued in Carlo Strozzi’s transcription in the seventeenth century.⁴ Two centuries after Strozzi, and two decades after the reorganization of state archives of Florence, Dante Catellacci transcribed and published Strozzi’s copy of the 1422 *Diario* in the 1881 volume of *Archivio Storico Italiano*.⁵ The present English translation is based on Catellacci’s 1881 text and was compared with the Strozzi manuscript in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASF).

Orientalist Transmissions:

Catellacci situates his transcription of *Diario* within the project of Italian Orientalists working in the Tuscan archives during and in the aftermath of Italian unification, in particular, Michele Amari’s *I Diplomi Arabi delle Reale Archivio Fiorentino* (1863),⁶ and Giuseppe Müller’s *Documenti Sulle Relazioni delle Città Toscane coll’Oriente cristiano e coi Turchi* (1879).⁷ Amari’s influential volume is a compilation of the treaties and commercial privileges granted by Arab rulers published in the original Arabic, with contemporary translations of the original documents and his own. Among these are the official instructions given to Brancacci and his companion on their ambassadorial visit to Cairo in 1422, as well as the Arabic text of the concessions brought back from Sultan Barsbay to Florence.⁸ Catellacci holds that *Diario*, missed by Amari, complements the official documents that he edited.

Amari states that his project, the translation of medieval commercial treaties, is not a fortuitous historical or philological task but, rather, a patriotic and cultural work of national importance: as with other cultural nationalists of Risorgimento Italy, Amari considered the recently unified Italy heir to the glory of the Medieval Republics.⁹ The Islamic world was particularly important to the life of the Medieval Italian Republics, he asserts, since these were founded on a trade driven by navigation to, and commerce with, Muslim countries. While oriental languages such as Greek, Armenian, Turkish, Persian, and Hebrew were also used for diplomacy and trade during this time, Arabic, in his view, was the key for understanding the commercial supremacy of Italy in the Middle Ages.¹⁰

Amari's characterization of medieval Arabic translators confirms and validates Brancacci's own pervasive suspicion of the figure of the *turcimmano*. Contemporary translations of the Arabic documents, Amari concludes, often betray the original text according to a specific, almost pernicious, logic. The translators, working on behalf of different national or ethnic parties, omitted, hid, or exchanged terms and clauses that would have disadvantaged their own nation for those that would benefit them. A clause might appear in the original Arabic, for example, but be deleted from its Latin translation. Other times, the betrayal would not be intentional. Translators worked in stages and as teams. One would translate from Arabic to Italian, another from Italian to Latin—without having seen the original document.¹¹ Just as seriously, Amari notes, European translators of Arabic in the Middle Ages, while familiar with the language, lacked the scholarly “erudition” necessary for translating Arabic documents.¹²

The names and identities of the medieval translators were often omitted from medieval documents. From Amari, we know the identity of two of the contemporary translators for the reports associated with the Brancacci's 1422 mission to Cairo. One was a Jewish citizen of Pisa named Abram Judeo. Judeo had translated the 1421 Florentine treaty with Tunis from Arabic to Latin, and he was also responsible for translating Sultan Barsbay's 1422 concession.¹³ Two other documents from 1422 that concern Brancacci's visit to Sultan of Cairo were translated from Arabic to Italian by a Tommaso di Ramondo Cardus of Nicosia in Cyprus.¹⁴ According to Amari, he “read Arabic poorly, understood it even worst, mutilated Italian, and didn't have enough brains to understand the order of sentences appearing in two rows.”¹⁵ Cardus's translation was so confusing, he suggests, that if it were not for dates and proper names, one would not recognize the original Arabic document at all. Yet, while Amari was troubled with the translation of these documents, his concern was quite different from the apprehension, conflict, and frustration felt by Felice as a merchant conducting diplomacy in the Medieval Mediterranean.

The nineteenth-century translation of medieval diplomatic and commercial treaties with Arab states belongs to a double context of European Orientalist professionalization of the discipline in European universities and the reorganization of Tuscan and Italian archives in risorgimental and post-unification Italy.¹⁶ Amari, who had arrived in Florence as Chair of Oriental literature, was invited to join a small group

of *eruditi* publishing the Arabic documents conserved in Florentine archives under the supervision of Francesco Bonaini. The project was necessarily collaborative, utilizing Amari's knowledge of Arabic and Bonaini's expertise in local, Tuscan history and archives. It was financed by the Ministry of Public Education, which had also given access and funding to refurbish the sixteenth-century typographical characters of the Medici Oriental Press for the printing of Arabic script.¹⁷

The image that Amari paints of this task, of rescuing the "remains" of the Medici Arabic characters by bringing them from the vestibule of the Laurentian to the Archives of the Uffizi, is depicted as a heroic act of patriotism. Taken out of their twenty-four-year-old cases, they were brought to the archives to be repaired and used to publish the medieval Arabic document. One by one, with great care and effort, they were redistributed into new composition cases—saved by the "zeal" of Bonaini and his staff after centuries of neglect:

Because these fine typesets, engraved in Rome in the 16th Century under the directorship of Raimondi and patronage of Ferdinand de' Medici, did not survive intact from their odyssey. They were transferred from Rome to Pisa, and from there to Florence in the 17th century, from Florence to Paris in the 19th century, and then returned to bank of the Arno, it [the typesets] lost family members in that pilgrimage. They did not all rest in the sepulchral cabinets of in the pit of Laurenziana... dishonored and abandoned in such an unlikely place for printing letters. May the Medici Oriental Press be blessed with brighter and more productive days in the new era that begins in Italy!¹⁸

Amari speaks of the Arabic characters of the Medici Oriental Press in the same way that Italians would speak of the discovery of remains of Dante Alighieri a few years later on the 600th anniversary of his birth, when the language of resurgence of the remains after centuries of neglect served as a metaphor for the very body of the Italian Nation, reunited and resurgent after centuries of discord and domination.

Amari's translation of the Brancacci documents from Cairo, and their printing using the sixteenth-century Medici Oriental Press, was informed by the historiographical exigencies of nineteenth-century Italy, specifically by conceiving of the organization of the historical archives of the nation as a nation-building project. The documents were to serve as a public record, as part of the sources for the history of Italy. When translating, Amari sacrificed elegance in favor of fidelity to the text, explaining that

he was translating historical documents as a public record and not as literature. As a result, his translations neither follow the text too closely nor too distantly but, rather, take the middle road, conveying the meaning as accurately as possible, without becoming obscure.

If the nationalist and orientalist logic of building the nineteenth-century European nation-state occasioned the translation and publication of Medieval Arabic texts and their entry into the national archives, today, it is the transnational nature of our institutions that make the experience of Felice—positioned between East and West, Christian and Muslim, and Medieval times and our contemporary world—most relevant.

Felice Brancacci's experience no longer belongs to the glory of the medieval and Renaissance Florentine Republic at the height of its commercial ascendancy, nor its resurrection in the Italian nation building of nineteenth century. In his in-between worlds, we might locate the current saliency of the Mediterranean not only as a subject of study but also as a trope for other transnational studies. In this regard, it becomes the site of an articulation that merges two approaches to the study of history and culture: microhistories and "network analysis." It is in this context that the present translation sets out to insert Felice's journey into the growing network of documents, diaries, and voyages that are now surfacing, saturating the Mediterranean as a site of varied encounters. Each is unique yet operational, with a fluid context that bears significantly on cultural representations both within and without the academy.

Emblematic of recent approaches to the study of the medieval Mediterranean is Georg Christ's study of trade in Alexandria during the years immediately preceding Felice's arrival, 1418–1420. *Trading Conflicts: Venetian Merchants and Mamluk Officials in Late Medieval Alexandria* is a microanalysis of the Biagio Dolfini's ambassador to Egypt, who served as the Venetian Consul of Alexandria from 1418 to 1420. Christ's study goes beyond established categories taking identities as given and static, instead presenting a close analysis of case studies that show a series of conflicts cutting across social, religious, national, and spatial lines. Another recent work emblematic of "network analysis," Francisco Apellániz's "Venetian Networks in Medieval Mediterranean" analyzes the notarial acts of the Venetian consul of Alexandria to discover cross-cultural forms of economic organization, patterns of human interaction, and conditions of cooperation across class, national, and social lines. The network model of "putting everyone at the same level" avoids the problems of hierarchical structures and of closed identities.¹⁹

Network analysis of the Mediterranean, in its approach to maps, patterns, networks, and linkages, is heir to world-system analysis. However, viewing the Mediterranean as “the site of encounter between the self and the other,” travel literature attends to the pivotal role of language in the fabrication of social identities and categories that network analysis by and large takes as a given. In doing so, travel literature is akin to Antonio Gramsci’s distinction between the hegemonic and the subaltern, in relation to the dialectic between language and *translation*.²⁰

For Antonio Gramsci, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes occur through a complex of molecular processes—as in the relation of conversations between the more and less educated. In each instance of interaction, or encounter, what Gramsci calls a “normative grammar” is at work. This is made up of the reciprocal monitoring, reciprocal teaching, and reciprocal censorship expressed questions such as “what did you mean to say,” “what do you mean,” or “make yourself clearer.” It also occurs in mimicry and teasing. It is this complex of actions and reactions that come together to create a grammatical conformism to establish norms or judgments of correctness. We see examples of this in relations of conversation and negotiation between Brancacci and his interlocutors, always mediated through the figure of translator. In one memorable episode in the diary, Brancacci, whose primary concern is protecting himself and the commune of Florence from payments in Egypt, resists demands of a payment he considers extortion by pretending not to understand the request.²¹ “Everything” depends on them, he explains, referring to the interpreters.²² It is they who have to produce the written texts in Cairo simultaneously in Italian and Arabic before Felice and his companion can return home. This is a contentious process that is resolved only when disagreements in meaning and translation are resolved with payments of money.²³ Even after the Sultan has agreed to the Florentines’ request, the process of codification and translation is wrought with conflict. In fact, Brancacci’s almost obsessive concern with such detail, as in other literature of similar encounters in the Mediterranean, allows us to enter the scene at a molecular level, to see the emergence of identities and strategies on a molecular level. Such literature demonstrates how identities, in themselves, are not a given. They emerge only in relations—and, perhaps, even only in *translation*.

Indeed, recent travel literature might serve as a qualitative complement to network and world-system analysis by taking into account the question of language. One makes sense of the encounter between

a Florentine envoy and the Sultan of Cairo only if we know of the world-system of spice trade, with a core and periphery. Yet, the affects foundational to and motivating shifts in moral economies—views toward risk, trust, and speculative thinking that were emerging during this period, as well as the realization that the merchants were not only experiencing conflict of interest while trading but also trading one conflicting identification with another—emerge only in the moments of encounter itself.²⁴

A translation of the *Diario* of Felice, including the official documents of his ambassadorship to Cairo, lends itself to various interpretations: religious, commercial, political, and financial interpretations as well as aesthetic ones. We see here a Florentine who is, above all, on a mission to Cairo seeking an economic treaty in competition with Venetians. Reading the text from the perspective of Mamluk historiography, we can surmise Sultan Barsbay's interest is in the use of the Florentine florin to displace the monopoly of the Venetian ducat. The introductory essay that accompanies this translation discusses not only the unexpected motifs of Felice's voyage but also the traces and aftereffects of this experience, which constituted itself *a translation* of a traumatic Egyptian encounter for Felice. It shows how these aftereffects were measured, captured, returned home, and memorialized in the iconic image of *Tribute Money*, the fresco Felice commissioned from Masaccio immediately after returning home to his own world in Florence. Most significantly, it shows the ways in which his experiences of paying tribute in Egypt were translated and reinterpreted according to a new mercantile paradigm of *cortesia*—the profitability of trust—which became a distinguishing character of mercantile culture by the end of fifteenth century. It is fitting that a translation of Felice's words into English will make possible a new reentry, both for Felice and for Florence, into the greater Mediterranean.

NOTES

1. See the special issue of *Journal of Early Modern History* dedicated to the role of non-traditional intermediaries in early modern Mediterranean diplomacy. See in particular, Natalie Rothman, "Intermediaries, Mediation, and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in the Early Modern Mediterranean," and Maartje van Gelder and Tijana Krstić, "Introduction: Cross Confessional Diplomacy and Diplomatic Intermediaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean,"

- Journal of Early Modern History* 19, nos. 2–3 (2015): 93–105. During Brancacci's mission to Egypt, and throughout the fifteenth century, the difference between face-to-face interpreters and the official office of the dragoman had not been established. Natalie Rothman traces the emergence and institutionalization of the office of Public Dragoman during the sixteenth century in "Making Venetian Dragomans," a chapter within her book *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects Between Venice and Istanbul* (Cornell University Press: 2013), pp. 165–86.
2. The term *turcimanno*, derived from the Semitic root of t-r-g-m, is an adaptation of the Arabic-Persian word *tarjomaan* and the Ottoman word *tercumanı*, both signifying interpreter. It entered the medieval Italian notarial documents in the thirteenth century with various spellings, such as *turchimanus*, *torcimano*, *turcimano*, *dragumano*, and *drogumano*.
 3. Brancacci, *Diario*, entry for August 28, 1422.
 4. Carte Stroziana, Serie 1, 302, Archivio di Stato di Firenze. Carlo Strozzi (1587–1670) was a senator and console of Florentine Academy and Academia della Crusca. He edited a great number of Italian and Latin texts from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries.
 5. Dante Catellacci, "Diario di Felice Brancacci Ambasciatore con Carlo Federighi al Cairo per il Comune di Firenze (1422)", *Archivio Storico Italiano*, Serie Quarta, vol. 8, no. 125 (1881): 157–88.
 6. Michele Amari, *I Diplomi Arabi del R. Archivio Fiorentino* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1863). The publisher indicates that it was printed with the Arabic characters of Medici Press.
 7. Giuseppe Müller, *Documenti sulle relazioni delle città toscane coll'Oriente cristiano e coi turchi fino all'anno MDXXXI* (Firenze: Cellini, 1879).
 8. Translated and published in the Appendix to this work.
 9. See Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, *City and Nation in Italian Unification: National Festivals of Dante Alighieri* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), Chapters 1 and 3.
 10. The period Amari deals with is from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries, when most of the documents regarding commerce with Muslim countries existed—and coinciding with the period of Italian commercial supremacy. Indeed, Amari suggests that it was commerce and exchange with the Arabic world that itself constituted this supremacy. While these documents are founded on Arabic authority, they form a crucial component of Italian history.
 11. Amari, *Diplomi Arabi*, pp. v–vi.
 12. In a typical Orientalist manner, he maintains that erudition—that is, the knowledge of literary and scientific texts—is a modern phenomenon only realized in Europe. *Ibid.*, p. lxxv.

13. This translation was authenticated by the notary Filippo Poggibonzi, *ibid.*, p. lxxi.
14. The name of this interpreter does not appear in Felice's *Chronicle*, but he does appear on various occasions as Tommaso di Cipri in Felice's "Expense Report" to the City of Florence, published also by Dante Catellacci. The first mention of Tommaso is on September 11, 1422. Thus, he was likely hired in Alexandria. A September 28, 1422, entry describes his services to date: "We gave Tommaso di Cipri for many services he provided for us, for translating many documents and for everything, 6 ducats." See the transcript of "Expense Report" in Dante Catellacci, "Diario di Felice Brancacci con Carlo Federighi al Cairo per il Comune di Firenze (1422)," *Archivio Storico Italiano*, Serie Quarta, vol. 8, no. 126 (1881), pp. 329 and 331. In addition to Tommaso Cardus, Felice's "Expense Report" mentions the names of three other interpreters. Two of them, Caino and Fers, were assigned to the Florentines by the Sultan himself. They are referred to in the *Chronicle* generically as "Sultan's interpreters." They were dispatched from Cairo to Alexandria to meet and accompany Felice's embassy to Cairo. Fers made the return journey back to Alexandria with the Florentines after their audience with the Sultan; see *ibid.*, pp. 329–33. Another interpreter named in Felice's "Expense Report" is Luigi of Famagusta, who was hired in Rhodes "as a trusted interpreter" to accompany the Florentines to Egypt from August 17th to November 21st. He was paid 30 ducats on November 10th—for which Felice requests a reimbursement from the City of Florence; see *ibid.*, p. 334.
15. Amari, *Diplomi Arabi*, p. lxxii.
16. See Ilaria Porciani, "L'archivio storico italiano," and Ilaria Porciani and Mauro Moretti, "The Policentric Structure of Italian Historical Writing," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, 1800–1945*, ed., Stuart Macintyre, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 221–42.
17. Ferdinand I founded the Medici Oriental Press in 1584 under the protection of Pope Gregory XIII while he was a cardinal in Rome (1562–1587). The press was established primarily for the purpose of printing a polyglot bible. For scholarly literature on the press, see Guglielmo E. Saltini, "Della Stamperia Orientale Medicea e di Giovanni Battista Raimondi," *Giornale Storico degli Archivi Toscani* 4 (1860): 257–308; Robert Jones, "The Medici Oriental Press (Rome 1584–1614) and the Impact of Its Arabic Publications on Northern Europe," in *The "Arabik" Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Gül A. Russell (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1994), 88–108; Margherita Farina, "La nascita della tipografia medicea: personaggi e idee," in *Le vie delle lettere. La tipografia medicea tra Roma e l'Oriente*, ed. Sara Fani and Margherita Farina (Florence: Mandragora, 2012), 43–72; and Mario Casari,

- “Eleven Good Reasons for Learning Arabic in Late Renaissance Italy: A Memorandum by Giovan Battista Raimondi,” in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Joseph Connors*, ed., Machtelt Israëls, Louis A. Waldman, et al. (Florence: Villa I Tatti, 2013), 545–57.
18. Amari, *Diplomi Arabi*, p. lxxiv.
 19. Francisco Apellániz, “Venetian Networks in Medieval Mediterranean,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 44, no. 2 (Autumn, 2013), 157–79 (see, esp. p. 158).
 20. Patrick Crowley, Noreen Humble, and Silvia Ross, eds., *Mediterranean Travels: Writing Self and Other from the Ancient World to Contemporary Society* (London: Routledge, 2011).
 21. See Brancacci’s journal entry for September 21 and October 2.
 22. See journal entry for September 26.
 23. See journal entry for September 24 through September 28.
 24. Christ’s microanalysis highlights nuances, moments of encounter, rupture and miscommunications through a series of cases recorded in Dolphin’s papers. We witness social and sectarian conflicts and solidarities that cut across, and not along, religious and national lines. Identifications here are never given, they emerge through relations and in the midst of encounters, often arising as a result of trading one conflict—or solidarity—for another.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Amari, Michele. *I Dipolomi Arabi del R. Archivio Fiorentino*. Florence: Le Monnier, 1863.
- Apellániz, Francisco. “Venetian Networks in Medieval Mediterranean.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 44, no. 2 (Autumn 2013): 157–79.
- Casari, Mario. “Eleven Good Reasons for Learning Arabic in Late Renaissance Italy: A Memorandum by Giovan Battista Raimondi.” In *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Joseph Connors*, edited by Machtelt Israëls, Louis A. Waldman, et al., 545–57. Florence: Villa I Tatti, 2013.
- Catellacci, Dante. “Diario di Felice Brancacci Ambasciatore con Carlo Federighi al Cairo per il Comune di Firenze (1422).” *Archivio Storico Italiano* 8, Serie Quarta, no. 125 (1881a): 157–88.
- Catellaci, Dante. “Diario di Felice Brancacci con Carlo Federighi al Cairo per il Comune di Firenze (1422).” *Archivio Storico Italiano* 8, Serie Quarta, no. 126 (1881b): 326–34.
- Christ, Georg. *Trading Conflict: Venetian Merchants and Mamluk Officials in Late Medieval Alexandria*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

- Crowley, Patrick, Noreen Humble, and Silvia Ross, eds. *Mediterranean Travels: Writing Self and Other from the Ancient World to Contemporary Society*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- Farina, Margherita. "La nascita della tipografia medica: personaggi e idee." In *Le vie delle lettere. La tipografia medica tra Roma e l'Oriente*, edited by Sara Fani and Margherita Farina, 43–72. Florence: Mandragora, 2012.
- Jones, Robert. "The Medici Oriental Press (Rome 1584–1614) and the Impact of Its Arabic Publications on Northern Europe." In *The Arabik Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England*, edited by Gül A. Russell, 88–108. Leiden and New York: Brill, 1994.
- Müller, Giuseppe. *Documenti sulle relazioni delle città toscane coll'Oriente cristiano e coi turchi fino all'anno MDXXXI*. Firenze: Cellini, 1879.
- Padgett, John F., and Paul D. McLean. "Economic Credit in Renaissance Florence." *The Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 1 (March 2011): 1–47.
- Porciani, Ilaria. "L'archivio storico Italiano." In *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, 1800–1945*, edited by Stuart Macintyre et al., 221–42. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Porciani, Ilaria, and Mauro Moretti. "The Polycentric Structure of Italian Historical Writing." In *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, 1800–1945*, edited by Stuart Macintyre et al., 221–42. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Rothman, E. Natalie. *Brokering Empire: Trans-imperial Subjects Between Venice and Istanbul*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011.
- Saltini, Guglielmo E. "Della Stamperia Orientale Medicea e di Giovanni Battista Raimondi." *Giornale Storico degli Archivi Toscani* 4 (1860): 257–308.
- van Gelder, Maartje, and Tijana Krstić. "Introduction: Cross-Confessional Diplomacy and Diplomatic Intermediaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean." *Journal of Early Modern History* 19, nos. 2–3 (2015): 93–105.
- Yousefzadeh, Mahnaz. *City and Nation in Italian Unification: The National Festivals of Dante Alighieri*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.



Chronicle of Felice Brancacci Ambassador with Carlo Federighi to Cairo for the Commune of Florence 1422

Abstract This chapter is the translation from Italian to English of Felice Brancacci's chronicle of his seven-month journey (June 30th, 1422–February 12, 1423) from Florence to Cairo. This English translation is based on Dante Catellaci's 1881 Italian transcription of Carlo Strozzi's seventeenth-century copy of Felice's 1422 text. Part official report, and part travelogue, the text chronicles the daily activities of the Florentines on their trip to and from Cairo, including the sea voyage from Pisa through the strait of Messina to Rhodes, and from there to Alexandria.

Keywords Felice Brancacci · Sultan Barsbay of Egypt
Commercial culture · Florentine galleys · Alexandria

After the Republic of Florence took possession of Pisa, its historical rival, in 1406, and in 1421 it purchased Livorno from Genoa for the small sum of 100,000 florins, it devoted all its care and thought to the development and expansion of its commerce, the main source of the greatness and happiness of a people, and the real source of those riches that empowered and aggrandized the Florentine State. With the acquisition of Livorno the movement of its merchandise through the sea was finally freed up, and it became easier to access those parts of Levant which served as markets for the sale of its products and manufactured goods.

It was for this reason that with the deliberation of November 28, 1421, the office of the *Consoli di mare*, or Sea Consuls, was created,

to which the Commune of Florence intended above all to entrust the protection and management of its commerce. This new office composed of six citizens, had as its first task that of providing for the construction of galleys for the transport of goods to far-away places. With the deliberation of April 7th, 1422, the *Signoria* was given the mandate to elect two citizens as ambassadors to the Eastern lands, to obtain from the Sultan of Egypt those same privileges and trade concessions which the other Italian States, specially Venice and Genoa, enjoyed; and to obtain for the florin gold coin the same currency as the Venetian ducat.

For this ambassadorship, two esteemed citizens were elected, Carlo di Francesco Federighi, Doctor of Law, and Felice di Michele Brancacci, who had admirably undertaken other important tasks and official missions previously.

....The document published here is the daily Chronicle written by Felice Brancacci, not only about his journey, but also about the places which he visited in his role as Ambassador on his way to Cairo. This Chronicle is all the more interesting, because it is an excellent complementary source to the Official Report of February 17th, 1423, edited by Michele Amari, which the two Florentine Ambassadors, once they returned to their homeland, were asked to compile summarily and present to the *Signoria*....

THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE FLORENTINE AMBASSADOR

....Felice Brancacci, the author of this Chronicle, whose family originates from Brozzi (neighborhood of Florence) was one of the best-known men in his distinguished family. Indeed, he was involved in important and crucial affairs of the Florentine republic. In 1418, with Guidaccio Pecori, he submitted a great part of Lunigiana (a territory which lies between northwest Tuscany and part of Liguria region) to the Commune of Florence. Shortly after his return from Cairo in 1423, he was elected as one of the *Priori*, and in 1430, with Alessandro degli Alessandri and Neri Capponi, he was selected to be *Commissario al Campo* against Lucca. In December of the same year, he was elected member of the *Dicci di Balìa*, and in 1433 was invited as ambassador to Pope Eugene IV to share his displeasure about the anti-papal movements, and offer him hospitality in Florence or in other places in the Florentine territories.

From "Introduction" by Dante Catellacci

THE CHRONICLE OF FELICE BRANCACCI

This little notebook belongs to Felice di Michele Brancacci. In it he records the journey made to Cairo, the ambassadorship carried to the Sultan, and many other events that took place during that journey. In that voyage Carlo Federighi and I, Felice, his companion, served as ambassadors for the Commune of Florence. We left Florence on the June 30th, 1422.¹

1422

In the name of God. Here I will speak about the journey on which Carlo Federighi and I, Felice Brancacci, were sent as ambassadors to the Sultan of Cairo.

On June 30th, we left Florence and arrived in the evening in Empoli and stayed at Sovigliana, Carlo Federighi's home town.

On July 1st, we arrived in Pisa and spent the next day there.

On July 3rd, we received a visit from Ser Filippo da Poggibonzi, who came from Pisa to bring us a letter from the *Consoli di Mare*, or Sea Consuls. The letter informed us of a provision made on our behalf that ordered the owner of the galley to let us ashore two or three times at our request and allow us to spend two days ashore each time.

On July 4th, we wrote to the Sea Consuls in Florence and told them we had heard a rumor in Pisa that the galleys would be leaving on July 8th.

On July 5th, we waited and did not do anything.

On July 6th, we waited.

On July 7th, we wrote to the Sea Consuls.

On July 8th, we waited.

On July 9th, we received letters from the Consuls.

On July 10th, and 11th we waited.

On Sunday morning, July 12th, we left Pisa after attending Mass and receiving the Archbishop's blessing. On the same day we went to Livorno, where the Sea Consul Gherardo Canigiani examined the galleys.

On July 13th, we arrived in Piombino, where we stayed the entire day and the following one. On the evening of the 15th, we set sail and departed. His Lordship Iacopo II d'Appiano introduced himself to us and we visited him ashore.

On the evening of July 16th, we arrived by Civitavecchia and without stopping we moved ahead.

On the 17th, we entered the mouth of the Tiber River to get water, and there we stayed, because of bad weather, through the 18th.

On the 19th, we left the mouth of the Tiber River. However, we had only traveled 15 miles when the weather turned for the worst, and we decided to turn back to the mouth of the Tiber River. We struggled through the bad weather but around 4:30 p.m. the weather improved and we passed Capo Danza² and before night fell we arrived at the island of Ponza, where we did not stop, but sailed on.

On the 20th, we sailed past Naples, but did not stop at any place, not even for the night.

On the 21st, we arrived in the evening at Scalea in Calabria and we revived ourselves with water, wine and other things. And we spent the night there and stayed until the next morning after breakfast.

On the 22nd, we left Scalea and arrived in the evening at Cedrano,³ where we spent the night intending to buy more oars, but did not succeed.

On the 23rd, we left Cedrano, and arrived in the evening at Turpia⁴ where we spent the night and the next morning until noon.

On the 24th, we left Turpia, and in the evening we went through the narrows of Farro⁵ down to Paradiso and spent the night there.

On the 25th, we entered the Port of Messina, and we remained there all day.

On the 26th, we stayed in Messina... and wrote to Florence...and at 11:00 p.m. we left... and traveled all night.

On the evening of the 27th, we finally reached Cape Spartivento.

On the 28th, we left Cape Spartivento, and were swept away for nearly 30 miles, but we were fortunate and turned back a good 30 miles, and at dusk we decided to depart and take the route to Corfu, praying that God would keep us safe.

And on the 30th, at 7:00 p.m., we arrived at the island of Kefalonia after sailing through 300 miles of heavy seas, so much so that even the sailors were shaken, and we were very ill.

On the night of the 31st, we arrived at Zakynthos, and we stayed the night to rest. And there we met the Lieutenant of the Despot, Lotto Girolami, who welcomed us lavishly and offered us a large variety of victuals.

On the 2nd, of August we left Zakynthos, and in the evening we arrived at 20 miles from Methoni, leaving again at four o'clock in the morning.

On the 3rd, at 9:00 a.m., we arrived in Methoni, and we paid a visit to the *Luogotenente della Signoria*, known there as Castellano, whose name was Messer Andrea Barbaro. He came to meet us at a small fortress between the two ports, and there he gave us audience and attended to us, and throughout that day we remained in Methoni.⁶

We wrote to the Sea Consuls in Florence and at night we left Methoni.

On the 4th, after we had left Methoni, we headed towards Candia.

On the 5th, at 3:00 p.m. we arrived in Candia, and met the Vice Duke, at the docks. He ordered his people to prepare a lodging for us and welcomed us with more kind offerings. Towards sunset we visited him, and he came to greet us at the door with such courtesy and kind words that I would have a hard time repeating them. He led us to a... [missing words] in the middle of the ground, and there... we sat down and delivered... our ambassadorship, which dealt with... general matters. And their response was likewise general and courteous. They then led us to the Church of San Salvatore, where they were celebrating the feast of that saint. There we attended the vespers. After many kind conversations, gracious offerings and invitations we took leave of them. They accompanied us to the door and we returned to our galley. That same night, they invited us to dinner for the following evening, but because we intended to leave, we did not accept.

On the 6th, the Duke sent for us to join him for mass. We went to the above church, and made a very good impression. We then took leave of him, intending to return to the galley to set sail. As soon as we were on the galley, however, he sent us bread, fruits and wine. Nevertheless, even though we had been promised some craftsmen to work on our ships, which we indeed needed very badly, they would not allow any to come. All the workers called off their promise and we were told in confidence that we should find another arrangement. Furthermore, we paid taxes on wine and on other goods, apparently even beyond what is customary for armed ships, despite the fact that the owner of the ships complained with the Duke, whose name was Marco Giustiniani, and thus we wrote to report about this to Florence, to the *Signori* and to the Sea Consuls.

On the 7th, we left before daybreak and pushed towards Rhodes, and in the evening we reached Setteri.⁷

On the 8th, we left Setteri, and arrived at an almost desert island which is called.... [missing words.]

On the 9th, we reached Rhodes around midday. Before we reached the harbor, we heard that at the port there were two armed Catalan

galleys and one ship. For this reason we took our weapons to the deck, and as they recognized us, the galleys made way for us and we entered the harbor. There we found a Catalan ship that had been besieged by two Genoese ships for a few days. The Catalan galleys and the ship had opened fire on a Genoese ship in Alexandria. Furthermore, the Catalans had taken a small, precious galley of the Sultan of Turkey.

And that same day in the evening, following our orders, we visited the Gran Maestro,⁸ who received us warmly but asked to have until the morning before answering our request We asked him for protection...in his harbor [...]. He responded that on land he would give us full protection, but not at sea, because he was not the sovereign of his port, as we could now understand. Moreover, he refused to declare to the two Catalan galleys that we were his allies and children of His Majesty the King, because the said Gran Maestro was Catalan himself. He said that he would rather stay neutral and not take anybody's side. He did, however, call another Catalan knight and asked him to do so himself, and the latter said he would, but we never heard back from him and, so as not to appear cowardly, we did not pursue the matter any further.

On the 10th, we went to visit the Admiral, according to our orders, and with him, after the exchange of niceties, we returned to receive the response of the Gran Maestro, which was the following: that he was very pleased about our arrival, our presence, as well as the purpose of our journey, which would not only profit us, but trading our goods would benefit many other nations as well; and that he supported us with our undertaking, and offered us access to all his ports and territories, provisions and any other comfort both day and night for our goods, our ships and our men.

After this he spoke about his knights from Tuscany, who were supposed to remain exempt and free from all the taxes and expenses of the world, in consideration of their duty. He said that the City of Florence had been the only one to impose upon them, time after time, intolerable taxes, and for that he was surprised even more about us Florentines, as we have always been very fond of that Order. He concluded by asking that, upon our return, we intervene on their behalf with the *Signoria*.

In the meantime, Bindo Delle Brache went off to procure the many things that our galley was missing.

On the 11th, we spent some time with other Florentines in Rhodes, and we showed them the letter of the Sea Consuls. And with them,

especially with Chiaro Arcangioli, we discussed the customs we should follow in Alexandria and Cairo [...]. We talked about having him join us on our journey, but he utterly refused, explaining that he had posed as a Venetian for a long time, and that he would prefer to continue doing so, since he could not live in Florence, and had not been able to obtain formal patronage from Florence. Therefore he said did not want to renounce both homelands, even though we had been told that he could not get around the country very easily. Moreover, while we were in Rhodes, he avoided going out with us, but he showed great love and attention to us otherwise, coming to see us night and day. Finally, we managed to take with us Antonio Minerbetti, who had been Rhodes' consul in Alexandria for four years. We also took a trustworthy interpreter who cost us 30 ducats in addition to expenses. Antonio Minerbetti came freely and we paid his expenses.

On the 12th, we continued with the same routine, and gathering new information every day; and generally, from all the Florentines that were there we received help, advice, and great respect, as though we were their own brothers; and in the meantime every day we put pressure on the owners of the commissary so that we could get things for the ships as we lacked everything, but the repairs on the galleys took longer than they had estimated.

On the 13th, we met with the Admiral on behalf of Niccolò di Guccio, and from him we got the response that the mission of knighting his son in Tuscany was possible, because he was a nobleman on both his mother's and his father's side, and a legitimate son. The Admiral offered to help overcome any obstacles. However, no further accompanying benefit would be obtainable, and he regretfully discouraged Niccolò di Guccio from requesting it.

On that same day we met with the Captain of the Galleys, and once all officers from both galleys were summoned, we discussed what we should do, now that the galley was repaired. In our presence they discussed the matter, and all thirteen of them agreed that the winds had been and still were too weak, that the moon was about to... and it did not seem advisable to... before the moon, since... even though from all of our... we were being told the opposite—that the weather was favorable [missing words].

On the 14th, we went back to the Admiral on behalf of Niccolò di Guccio, and again he said that he had not spoken to the Gran Maestro because the latter was ill. However, this was not important, because in

any case, upon return, we would have what we had requested. We spoke further with the Treasurer and the Prior, and both repeated what the Admiral had said.

On the 15th, we saw in the Church of St. John in the castle of Rhodes, a brass cross made from the basin Our Lord had used to wash his disciples' feet, and the bowl from which he ate during the Last Supper, and a thorn from Christ's crown, and one of the coins for which he was sold, an arm of St. John the Baptist, one of St. Stephen, one of St. Blaise, the hair of St. Mary Magdalene, and other relics. And we kissed them all.

On the 16th, we went to bid farewell to the Gran Maestro, but because he was ill, we were not allowed to speak to him, so we sent him a message, and he gave us permission to leave. We did the same with the Admiral who in turn showed us great kindness.

On the 17th, after 3:00 p.m., we left Rhodes in the name of God, and set course for Alexandria.

On the 19th, at 2:30 p.m., we arrived in Alexandria, and a boat came from the shore to meet us. As they were not sure whether ours was a Catalan ship, they would not approach us, but turned back towards the shore. Many people came to the port, on foot and on horse; also present were the Admiral and the *Cadi della Doana*. Finally, Antonio Minerbetti and our interpreter disembarked, and the interpreter came back to inform us that it was safe for us to disembark. And thus, we were sent horses and also escorts. The first person we saw in the middle of the two gates was the *Cadi della Doana*, whom we greeted and who welcomed us in return. We then went to visit the Admiral, to perform the task of our ambassadorship, and to present the letters we were carrying. We were well received by him, as well, and as a refreshment he offered us a most delicious sweetened water. We then took leave of him, and he had us accompanied to a residence assigned to ambassadors, which was hardly equipped with doors; and there we unpacked, and we began to organize ourselves as best as we could. That evening, the Admiral sent us bread, grapes, watermelons, and other fruit, and we dined on those and drank water.

On the 20th, a thousand Moors and solicitors approached us, requesting bribes (*mangerie*) for this and that thing. Finally, with the help of a few Italians, and after parting with a lot of money, we got rid of most of them. For example, an individual would come to say "the Admiral sends you his regards," and he would then ask for a ducat. And around three in the afternoon, the admiral sent us a gift, of five castrated lambs, fifty

chickens, a basket of bread and one of bananas and we had to pay the carriers three ducats, and still they were not satisfied.

In the meantime, we heard that the Venetian and the Genoese consuls had been ordered to present themselves to the Sultan in Cairo, for the damages the Catalans had done to the Sultan. He had noted that he did not want Westerners, in any shape or form, to live within his territory, unless they extended to him protection and security at sea. And we heard this news while the Genoese and the Venetians were preparing to depart for Cairo. And that is why we decided not to permit any goods to be unloaded from our ships, and not to dismiss the ships, until we had heard from the Sultan on whether or not he would grant access to us.

On the 21st, we again received a large number of requests and solicitors, and even the Admiral wanted his own gift, which we believed we were not obliged to give until we had offered gifts to the Sultan. Even the one who had come to ask for a gift on the Admiral's behalf wanted payment. The situation reached such a level of greed and dishonesty that, when we refused to give those gifts, which seemed like a waste to us, considering the news in the country and seeing that in attempting to carry out our ambassadorship we were risking our lives, we were told that we would not be offered access to any provisions. We took time that day in order to ponder the situation, and quickly sent a message to the *Cadi*, who was a friend of Antonio Minerbetti, and indeed a friend of all merchants, and asked him for advice. He said he regretted the events and usefully advised us to go ahead and present those gifts, offering us fabrics and cloths of his own. During the same night, in order to relieve the captains of our ships, we sent a messenger to them officially requesting that for the honor and welfare of the Commune they should not leave the port of Alexandria until we had commanded them to do so, regardless of their orders. They responded that this was not sufficient, for they wanted us and the merchants to guarantee and provide for their maintenance and safety.

On the 22nd, we did as we were advised, and took nearly a quarter of turquoise cloth, a quarter of green fabric and also from our own Nanni Gucci, a piece of green satin, and divided it in half, and half of it we sent to the Admiral, together with the rest of the fabric. With these presents we reached the first gate where we were met by the *Dindar*, who said that he wanted to see what we were offering, because if it was not acceptable, he would not take it. After much demurring, we finally had to show our offerings. Seeing these he said they were not enough for

his Lieutenant, and he refused to take them; and with rude words he sent them away. Then, a few came to our house to mediate and negotiate an agreement, and they spoke with Antonio Minerbetti, and not with us. Among them was the Consul of Constantinople. They said that we should give 500 ducats, and finally, they reduced the price to a piece of fabric in addition to the previous items. Antonio Minerbetti refused this, and we immediately went to the *Cadi* to inform him about the situation. The *Cadi* was very disturbed, and said he would go to speak with the Consul of Constantinople. In the meantime, we began to suspect that these parties were all plotting together.

On the same day, we sent word to the owners of the ships that the guarantees they had requested would be granted, and they were pleased.

We were being watched constantly to make sure no Christians spoke with us, and we would have gladly left and returned to Rhodes.

On the 23rd, early in the morning, the Consul of Constantinople and other Moors came to our house to urge us to give something more to the Admiral, so that he would not disdain us; they said that this advice came again from the *Cadi*, who reasserted his willingness to mediate on our behalf. Finally, we decided that it would behoove us if he interceded, but that he should not go beyond twenty or twenty-five more ducats nor go through too much trouble to reach an agreement. At this time, a guard was put at our door, to make sure that no one, from the ships or elsewhere, would enter our house, nor that any one of us would leave. And in this way we stayed until the evening. Then a new order came, namely, that members of our group were allowed to leave the house two at a time; and so we asked the *Cadi* for advice, and he recommended that on top of the things we had already delivered we send the remaining piece of satin. And this we did. And in order to favor us, he replaced it with the same quantity of green and black; and he added six ducats out of his own pocket for the messenger. The presents were sent to the Admiral who, when he saw them, made a sour face and said that they were ugly and a poor offering. And if the messenger whom the Admiral trusted and who praised the gifts had not been present, he might have sent everything back. Finally, he accepted the gifts without the courtesy of giving even the smallest tip to the person who had carried them, and ordered that the individual who had been sent to guard our house be sent away, but he demanded one ducat to perform this task, and the messenger who delivered the order also demanded half a ducat. From that moment on, the Venetians and others were allowed to pay visits

to us. We were so displeased and astonished by these matters that several times we were tempted to take our leave in secret, and sail back to Rhodes. It was only because our orders were quite strict that we endured those events and prepared to remain pawns to Cairo and to their enormous greed (*mangerie*).

On the 24th, we stayed there, but still another accident happened, since two sailors were found upon land on a hill where Christians are not allowed to go; one was captured and one escaped to the ship. The one who was captured was taken to our house in handcuffs, amidst much brutality and anger; and they said they also wanted his companion, and that we should send someone to the ship to get him, or else severe measures would be taken. Eventually, some said that they would release the captured sailor for twenty-five ducats. And because we had already grown familiar with their techniques, we said that they could take the sailor away instead, and if indeed he had done something wrong, they should hang him. Fortunately, in the end we got him back for less than one ducat, but not before he had been beaten badly with sticks.

On the 25th, we stayed there, but without doing anything at all.

On the 26th, given that a response had not arrived from Cairo and it appeared that the agreement with the Venetians had been arranged, thinking it best not to put an excessive financial burden on our City, we decided to let the galleys go. But at night we could unload neither our own things nor those of the merchants; therefore, the departure was delayed until the morning of the following day. That same evening, the *Cadi* sent a message to us, informing us that a response had arrived from Cairo, and that the Sultan welcomed our arrival, and that in dealing with the Venetians and the Genoese he had been more favorable than usual for our sake, and he assured that he would be sending his interpreter immediately to fetch us on a boat. On the same day, we gave notice to the owners of the galleys to take their leave, following the most direct route without entering into any conflict with the Turks or anyone else.

On the 27th, due to bad weather, the galleys did not depart. And on the same day the Venetians and the Genoese returned from Cairo bearing the following agreement: that they could keep on doing business as usual, but that they could not bring Catalan goods into the Sultanate, and that the ones already in their possession should be sealed away in the *fondaci*,⁹ and that they should operate in this fashion until a peace agreement between the Sultan and the Catalans were reached and the

Sultan had recovered his losses. This agreement cost the Venetians and the Genoese much in bribes (*mangerie*). A few of them called upon us.

On the 28th, the Genoese consul, Messer Bartolomeo Lomellino, paid us a visit; and we asked him about the customs of the place. And we received much reassurance and friendly advice from him; among other things he said that, beyond the gifts that we were taking to the Sultan, we would do well to extend gifts to the *Dindar*, to the *Chatibisser* and to the *Natarchass*, as main officers and as men we would need greatly. He thought that, at least, we should offer the equivalent of about four hundred ducats per person. For this was what had been done for the others, a few ducats more or less. And he said that if we did not do this, it would be to our great disadvantage, and consequently we would have to pay much more in forced bribes (*mangerie*). We were quite taken aback by this advice, as we did not feel that we could make the offer, nor had we been instructed to spend so much.

And on the same day, Gabriello Cattani, still a friend of our community, called upon us, confirming what Messer Bartolomeo had said. For that reason we wrote again to the Sea Consuls, relating to them all these matters. And still on that same day, one of the Sultan's interpreters, who had come from Cairo with the Venetian and the Genoese consuls, paid us a visit. And he offered us great assurance, speaking on behalf of the Sultan and confirming that our arrival pleased the Sultan. He warned us that in giving *mangerie*, we should not trust the interpreters too much, because it was in their nature to swindle or overcharge people in order to please their masters. We were taken aback by this friendly gesture, as we had not brought up the subject, and indeed we were not sure that his words did not conceal shrewdness and trickery, but nonetheless we thanked him and were gracious to him.

On the 29th, two of the Admiral's men came to tell us that he wanted to send one of his interpreters with us as far as Cairo, and that for his part the *Cadi* wanted to send one at our expense. We said that it was not necessary, since not only was there already the Sultan's interpreter, but we also had two of our own already. Finally, we got rid of them by giving them ten ducats; and at about 5:30 p.m., we mounted our horses with the Consul who was to accompany us as far as the city walls. But as we got on our horses, the interpreter indicated that the Consul was to go with us to Cairo and that we could not leave without him. This surprised us greatly, because the Consul had already decided against traveling with us. Thus, given the situation, we decided to consult the *Cadi*, since

once again it was a question of bribing (*mangeria*) the interpreter so that the Consul would not come. We found the *Cadi* with the *Dindar* of the Admiral, whom we had earlier alienated because we had refused to give him the three pieces of cloth he had demanded. And we realized that he was the cause of all these mishaps. And in this fashion, dinner time arrived and, still without being told anything at all, we were left there while they went to dinner. After one-and-a half hours the Consul agreed on fifteen ducats. And the *Cadi*, to our displeasure, and in our presence, gave three pieces of cloth to the *Dindar*, indicating that, as we refused to pay, he would willingly do so himself. At that point we left Alexandria. We went to the port, about three miles away, where we found the boat that the Sultan had sent, and we had to purchase another, which cost twelve ducats, just for the interpreters who, for reasons related to a religious holiday, would not talk to us. In the time between when we mounted our horses and when we got on the boat we were approached by a thousand solicitors whom we got rid of as cheaply as possible, shielding our faces with our hands, and had someone pull us out of the pit.

On the 31st, around nine in the morning, we arrived at the river Nile, at a large piece of land called Fua, across from Gold Island.¹⁰ And here we rested and stayed until evening. At night, we departed, traveling up the Nile.

On the 2nd, of September, at around 7:00 p.m., we arrived two miles from the port of Cairo, and here we spent the night. And the interpreters disembarked to give instructions for the morning, when we would be entering the city.

On the 3rd, around three o'clock in the afternoon, the interpreters returned with a few Mamluks, in addition to a few horses for us, and we left six ducats as a parting gift to the Sultan's boat; We landed, and settled in the house of a Christian named Andrea Garzalla from Candia, who was not in the country at the time. There we waited, still paying a lot of money.

On September 4th, we spent time with our interpreters, and we also sought help from others. But no one dared come to us, let alone give us information, because they were afraid. However, because two of the interpreters were frequenting our house, we received separate information from each of them, and we kept on reorganizing the things that we wanted to ask.

On the 5th, in the morning, we mounted our horses, and went to visit the *Dindar* of the Sultan. And presenting him our letter, we

spoke to him, according to our mandate, and appealed for his support. He received us gladly, with the proper respect, with good manners and exquisite regard. Upon leaving him, we visited the *Chatibisser*, that is, the Chancellor; and going through a very crowded street, someone who is considered there a holy man came towards us with a stick in hand, and started to hit Messer Carlo, and struck him as hard as he could four times with his stick. He then turned to me, and I ducked, so he could not hit me more than once. Then he hit our Chancellor and our young men who were on horse, saying the following words, which various interpreters who were with us translated for us later: "Our prophet demands that we should kill these Western dogs. Look what has become of the Muslim faith: Westerners travel on horse, and we on foot." With these words a huge crowd chased after us, and they dragged our young men from the horses. I do not mean to be long-winded, but even our interpreters struggled to get back home together with our young men and our servants. After we returned we learned that we had just escaped great danger, as one is not permitted to touch their holy men; yet one of the Sultan's interpreters had beaten the religious man who had attacked us, and had tied him up to take him to the authorities, but he was later freed by the crowd. At that point, feeling very upset and displeased, we went to see the Chancellor and were well received by him. He was very saddened by the story, and apologized for the crazy actions of the holy man; I seemed to infer that the man would be punished so to set an example for others. Here we began to lobby for our florin. He asked to see a sample of florin. Pleased by what he saw, he further pursued the agreement. We then left and went to visit the *Natarchass*, who is in charge of the entry to Alexandria and other cities. He greeted us very kindly, because he is an honorable and dignified man, and has been in that office for nearly thirty years. After the usual niceties, we had some delicious drink with him. Then we again brought up the business of the florin; he asked to see and weigh it: and he was very happy and very interested. Our earlier encounter saddened him very much; he said that he had never witnessed such an occurrence. He added that whoever was responsible for doing this would be punished, and we should feel comforted about that. After leaving him we returned home to eat. Yet none of us could feel at ease, due more to our doubts about the future than about what had happened. And one of the interpreters presented us with a large castrated lamb and a cage of chickens. And that same day the *Natarchass* presented us with twenty geese, fifty hens, two blocks of

sugar, and four boxes of their own sweets. And still on the same day we sent to Caino,¹¹ our interpreter, two boxes of sweets—one of candied fruit and the other the *Natarchas's*—, and eleven feet of turquoise cloth, and eleven of green fabric.

On the 6th, we prepared for our visit to the Sultan the following morning; we put on the finishing touches on our written requests; and arranged to have old Pisan letters of privilege read to the Sultan in Arabic.

On the morning of the 7th, an hour before daybreak, our interpreters came for us with horses; also present were one of the gentlemen from the previous night who was the Receiver of the Ambassadors, and others on horse and on foot; and we journeyed toward the Sultan's castle, on a hill, two miles away. We arrived as the sun arose, and we waited outside the first gate for an hour; by that time the sun was fully up. And in the meantime, all the Mamluks, that is, big and small barons, entered the castle; a never-ending and incredible multitude, all dressed in their own style, with full-length white tunics, some sashes of very fine material and some heavier, with light blue embroideries on the arms. Almost everyone was dressed in this way. At about half past nine in the morning, we climbed up to the castle through a staircase that was about 150 feet wide; it was rough and the horses barely made it to the top. We arrived at a gate, passed through it to get to a courtyard with many barons. There we stopped to sit for a half hour. Then we entered through another gate, went through many arches, where we found Mamluks with spears in hand facing each other. We had to pass through them to arrive at another gate where we found a similar scenario. We went through more arches and reached a courtyard where we found similar spears. And here we were completely surrounded by weapons. Then we arrived at the Sultan's residence, which was raised about eight steps; and on these steps spears were raised in the same way as before, but these had 3 or 4 heads, like swords; as we were moving under them, they would rub the blades against each other above our heads. There were about 12 on each side. The hall into which we entered, and where the Sultan was, resembled a church, since it had three naves, with stone columns. The middle nave was much larger than those on the sides, which had one opening so that we could enter, but were otherwise separated with ropes. The floor had marble inlays, and almost half was covered with carpets. Facing the entrance was a pulpit; and it had steps on both sides. In the middle of the pulpit, sitting on the floor, was the Sultan. It is notable that the

pulpit did not possess an edge in front of it, nor did it have stairs on either side, so one could see him very well. He was dressed in a tunic similar to the others we had seen, a man thirty-eight or forty years old, with a brown beard. Behind him were many of his barons, among whom some with a sheathed sword in hand; others had shields; others still a baton as long as an arm, as thick as a *passetto*¹² and made of gold. They held it very high and straight above the shoulders; and many other people were present. And all along the two staircases and down below was an infinite number of barons. I would almost say that this assemblage looked like a religious painting. On certain steps at the foot of every column and everywhere else were men playing violas, rebecs, lutes, drums, cymbals, and there were also singers, everyone playing together making a lot of noise and a partially-harmonious sound. Between the novelty for the eyes and for the ears, and the fact that they made us kiss the ground at every step, I doubt that I can coherently describe the scene. Furthermore, there were two of them for each one of us, and they held us by our shoulders very tightly as they led us, when they could just as easily have walked alongside us. And when they wanted us to kiss the ground, they would shout at us in their language, so loudly that we grew dizzy. And so they made us kiss the ground about 6 to 8 times. And when we came within 45 feet of the Sultan we stopped. At that moment, the musical instruments stopped, as well. And we were told to speak briefly, this first time. And all along they would brandish three shining blades above our heads. And we had not yet uttered 12 words of our introductory statement through our interpreter that we were told "enough, enough." And, still held very tightly, we were forced to kiss the ground again, and then exit backwards one step at a time; we kissed the ground once again, turned our backs to the Sultan, and left. The Sultan left, as well.

We exited through two gates, and then we stopped and let the multitudes who were leaving pass. We waited half an hour and were then taken into another hall with mosaic arches, where the Sultan and a few of the main barons were sitting at a lower level. And we kissed the ground a few more times, still held tight as before, and we stopped in front of him, about 18 feet away. And here, we delivered our message little by little, almost one word at a time. And we presented three issues, in addition to the usual letters of recommendation. One was the request to conduct commerce in the Sultan's territories, as had been conducted traditionally by the Pisans. Our second request was to have a Consul with privileges and

the rest, as well as another *fondaco*, in addition to the ones we already had. Thirdly, we requested that our florin be accepted as was the ducat. And once we had kissed the ground, he answered with few words: that which we asked for, would be granted. And immediately, he asked us whether we had the florins with us, to which we said yes. Our Chancellor gave his men nine florins, which the Sultan then asked to see himself. And he said from his very own mouth, that if he found any of them weighing less, he would have them cut, and we would lose them. We accepted the deal. The whole time, the *Dindar* and the *Scrivano della Segreta* advocated for us. They told us to take our leave for the moment. They said they would follow through and attend to our business. We kissed the ground and left in the same way as we had come, which I explained above. We left the castle, and mounted our horses to visit and thank those lords who had done much for us. We waited for them at their houses, including the *Natarchass*. Because he was sick, and was not at the court, we visited him at home, conveying to him what we had done, and asked him to advise us further about what we should do, and he spoke a great deal to us.

He said, above all, the word was traveling that never before had a Western ambassador received such a welcome, and that we had been very well received by everyone.

Let it be known that on our first visit we presented the letter from our *Signori*, kissing it first and then placing it on our heads; once he had it in hand, the one who took it blew in our faces and then rubbed the letter against them.

Leaving these lords, we went home, where many people asked us for money, and we sent them away as best as we could. But even worse, our interpreter told us that those main lords went around saying that they had done great things for us, and that we had received great honor in the style of Ser Viviano, and that it would be necessary for us to present them with gifts. And these words were like knives to the heart, because we felt deceived.

Please note that the Sultan and all the major lords were very sorry about the offense that we had endured, and the person who was responsible was beaten and sent into exile.

On the 8th, early in the morning, we went to the castle to present our gifts to the Sultan, and we arrived into a large courtyard, eight steps high with lattice windows, and in the middle of it, a fountain that measured 22 feet on each side. The Sultan was standing on a platform three steps high, like one of the beautifully-decorated ones that you would find in

a chapel over a choir. Here we presented our gifts. He received them very gratefully, and we all thought he was being particularly gracious to us, given that our gift was quite modest. We then inquired about our requests. He responded that he would gladly do what we asked. He further ordered that we should be protected, and that no Moor should harm or attack us. We tarried a little while there, showing him the drapes we had brought as gifts. The gifts included a pair of trunks, rich and beautiful, a piece of red two-pile velvet with gold trimmings, and one similar but blue, one of plain red velvet, and one green and black. All measured 72 feet long more or less. In addition, we had brought one coarse piece of cloth and a blue one. However, the Sultan complained about a few matters, among which the fact that the trunks and all the other things had been brought before him covered. And this had been done due to the very many people who would have rushed to us, and to the danger of items being stolen. And we had been advised to do this.

And leaving his company, we visited the *Dindar* at his house, and then returned home. The same day, the interpreter came to us so that we would be able to bear our gifts to the other lords; and he told us, on behalf of the *Dindar* and the *Scrivano della Segreta*, who had heard that we were not bringing them anything other than a piece of wool, that they would like some velvet to serve at least as cover for their shields. Earlier on we had been forced to do the same thing. Having considered that our case rested on these people, and having listened to the opinion of Antonio Minerbetti as well as of our notary, and having thought back on our own experience in Alexandria, we decided to be more liberal and got from our merchants forty-two *picchi*¹³ of two drapes. On the same day we gave to the *Dindar* a pink cloth and fourteen *picchi* of drapes, and about the same to the *Scrivano della Segreta*. To the *Natarchass*, a pink cloth, and to his son fourteen *picchi* of drapes. Everyone received these very gratefully and with kind words, so that we were comforted. On the same day, we gave to each of the officers of these three gentlemen over twelve feet of green cloth; and to the two officers of the *Natarchass* we did not offer cloth but instead five ducats each. These officers were the following: the *Dindar* of the Great *Dindar*, the second *Dindar*, and the *Dindar* of the *Scrivano della Segreta*: over ten feet each and to the two officers of the *Natarchass* five ducats each.

Please note that, out of honesty, one of the *Natarchass*'s officers would not accept any money, so we sent him about five *picchi* of green cloth, which corresponds to 8.6 ft.

In the evening, we received our payment for three days, ninety-two *dirham* per day, and we had already received one day's pay, thus making four days' pay in total.

On the 9th, in the early morning we sent Antonio Minerbetti to the *Natarchass* to get an appointment with him to discuss our case, and to ask him for advice about what we should request in accordance with other nations; and to ask what we should do about the gift that the main Dignitary expected from us, given that we had not been instructed to give him one. He responded that at dusk we should go to him. This we did, since the *Natarchass* had been very favorable to us and all the income in Alexandria went through him.

At about three in the afternoon, the two Italian interpreters came, saying that the Sultan had sent for them and, due to the accusations of a third companion, he had said to them: "Dogs, sons of dogs, those Westerners brought me such great presents, and you did not let them through; moreover, you compelled them to present gifts here and there, and also took them for yourselves." And immediately, he had them forced down to the ground, and he ordered sixty beatings for each, so that when they showed us their bodies, they were like those of any well-beaten piece of pork. After that, since they were denying it, showing good evidence, the Sultan changed his mind, saying that they deserved the punishment because they had had the presents brought in covered. The interpreters protested saying that in covering the presents they had a good reason: so that the people would not plunder them (since from where we were to the Sultan's castle it was about three miles). In the end the third interpreter, who had reported this, was removed from his task, and these two remained. These events sat very badly with us, and we thought of it as a great shame, as we feared that this craziness might make him send for us to do another investigation of the presents. With these people you cannot reason.

On the 10th, early in the morning, we went to the *Natarchass's* house, where the *Scrivano della Segreta* and others had been ordered to examine our case. Yet we found only the *Natarchass* and his son, with whom we went over the passages we had composed and translated into Arabic. After examining our texts, they decided they did not like them, but told us to request an order stating we were to have the same privileges and deals enjoyed by the Venetians. We agreed, but first we wanted it in writing so we would have it for any event without having to ask the Venetians or others if anything happened: we insisted on this matter. Then we arrived at the matter of the *fondaco*: we asked to have the

same agreement that the Pisans enjoyed. We were told that the Sultan had asked four judges about this very matter, and all had indicated that it could not be done, that in no way he could consent to this, and that we should seek elsewhere. In the midst of this, the *Scrivano della Segreta* arrived with other people, and we began discussing this matter with them. And finally, they agreed that they would request, on our behalf, an interpreters' *fondaco*, which was very beautiful and suitable for us. And we were advised to accept it, if we were to obtain it. We then brought up the matter of the gold, and they insisted on weighing a florin and a ducat, and it seemed to them that the ducat was heavier. As we maintained the contrary, they asked for one hundred new florins and one hundred ducats. As we did not have those, they had us send for them. Finally we were able to have them delivered, albeit with great suspicion on their part. After they weighed them many times, it seemed to them that the florin compared well, that is why they agreed to this and that thing. But regarding our major contracts and agreements, they left without giving us any real answer. However, the *Natarchass* stayed behind, and told us that the *Scrivano della Segreta* wanted one hundred of our florins to send to different places in the territory, so they would have it as a sample. And our interpreters told us that we should not refuse him, because our deal depended on him; but we did refuse him, saying that we had borrowed the money from the merchants, and we had no money of our own to spend. We understood that the *Natarchass* did not like the demand that had been made of us. He dismissed us for the time being, and said that we should go to visit the *Scrivano* and thank him; and we did as such but we were not able to speak to him. It was past three in the afternoon. We spoke with a few of his officers, and left them our documents in Arabic to be copied diligently, and then said they would show them to the *Scrivano*; and if there was any to which he objected, he would make a note of it and we would meet with him again. Everyone exploited us (*faceva mangeria*); our own interpreter worst of all. We did not want to give into him, nor could we deny him what he requested, lest he got offended, since he was in a position to ruin us. Finally, we returned home to take refreshments. We were greatly displeased, since we saw that from big to small, everyone tried to take advantage of us, and there was not a single one of us who would not have given away half of what he had just to go back home.

On the 11th, early in the morning, the Sultan's interpreters came to ask that we send the great Dignitary his gift; and to avoid worsening

our situation, we decided to send him twelve *picchi* of green cloth, and twelve of blue cloth; as soon as he saw them, he began to disparage them, saying that they were neither beautiful nor of good quality, that he was as much a great master as everyone else to whom we had given more, and that in no way did he want to accept them. In the end, after much flattery, he accepted them. And on the same day, the Receiver of the Ambassadors himself came to our house for his gifts, and we gave him ten *picchi* of green cloth. After much resistance, he, too, accepted them.

And because it was a Friday and on that day they were engaged with their prayers and religious orations, we waited until sundown, since we could not do anything else. After sundown, we sent to the *Scrivano della Segreta* to get back our contracts. He responded saying that all matters were in place, except that it would be advisable to get direct permission from the Sultan if he agreed that the interpreters' *fondaco* be given to us, and then it would be done. We informed the *Natarchass* about this, asking him to plead on our behalf, since any day our galleys might arrive in Alexandria and they would not be able to unload any merchandise if our stipulations had not been finalized. He said that he considered this matter important and that he would see to it that our contracts were signed soon. And for that day we did not do anything else.

On the 12th, we did nothing except plead our case with the *Scrivano della Segreta*, who went to the castle to show some of our documents to the Sultan. But that evening we heard that, because of other matters, our issue was not mentioned.

On the 13th, we pleaded with both the *Scrivano della Segreta* and the *Natarchass* about our deal. They responded that other matters had arisen with other deals that the Sultan had secured through his barons (apparently for a large sum of money), and therefore they could not do as they had previously indicated. They delayed further the day when we would be robbed by the Sultan, which was supposed to be the 14th. They said that, before our robbing, they wanted to take care of everything else so that, once we had been robbed and formally dismissed by the Sultan, we could leave. That day, we did nothing else.

On the 14th, we waited until lunchtime without doing anything, because we were told that they could not do anything about our matter until Wednesday the 16th, and we thought that we were being pulled along for too long, and we did not know to what end, but we suspected it was to extort more money from us.

Late in the morning of the 15th, we went to the village of Matariya, about six miles from Cairo, and there we saw the fresh water spring (the only one in the area) where our Glorious Lady, Saint Joseph and our Lord stopped while fleeing from Jerusalem to Egypt. This miracle is told in the following way: that they left the infant behind to go and seek water to drink; and not finding any, on their return they discovered a spring at the feet of our Lord. And there appeared also a tabernacle next to the spring, where the Virgin Mary spoke with an angel. And at that same location, we saw a sycamore tree, large and very old, with an empty base. It is said that Our Lady took refuge there with the infant, due to fear of Herod and his men, who were following them. And we heard of many other miracles that are witnessed here.

At this same site the balsam plant originates. We saw its branches emerging from the ground, as tall as a hand and as thick as a thumb; and on them were small twigs as long as a hand. It was not yet full grown, and I almost confused it with a weeping tree. We cut some to take with us as in the entire world this is the only place where this plant grows. With the water from the spring we watered the plant, since the water is considered to possess miraculous virtues. Having seen all of this, we went to Babylon, the old land, mostly in ruins, which borders on Cairo in a way that makes it seem as if it were all one land. There we visited four churches, three of them Christian of the Girdle¹⁴ and one Greek. The first one is called Santa Maria; here we found, after descending in the darkness about ten steps, a vaulted tabernacle, the place in which Our Lady, Saint Joseph and Our Lord took refuge, when out of fear of Herod they fled to Egypt; it is said that they stayed here for two months; and it appears to be a holy site.

We then visited another church, called Santa Barbara, where we were shown her body, preserved in a sort of safe, but round and thinner. They let us touch it.

We then visited another church, called Santa Maria della Scala, where we were shown the body of another old saint, whom they called San Martino, preserved in the same way as the one of Santa Barbara.

Next, we visited a Greek church, called San Michele, where we found the Patriarch; he welcomed us warmly, and we stayed with him for a while. All the Christians of the Girdle appeared very enthusiastic to see us, and considered themselves fortunate if they could touch our robes; they asked us to recommend them to the Sultan, since there are many of them, and they are mistreated and persecuted. And a few days later their

Patriarch sent us gifts. We returned home, and sent the Sultan's interpreter and Antonio Minerbetti to plead our case with the *Scrivano della Segreta*.

For the sake of clarity I give you this information. The Saracens wear a white headgear, while the Jews wear yellow, the Christians wear blue, and a few wear blue and white stripes.

On the 16th, we stayed at home, but we continued to pursue our cause through the Sultan's interpreter and also through Antonio Minerbetti. However, out of respect for their Easter, which was the next day and the day after that—depending on when the new moon would appear—they cared about nothing else but their religious rituals, since many of them are robed by the Sultan on that day. We were told that after this week we would be able to make a deal.

On that day they brought to our home an elephant, an animal so marvelous and of such strange appearance that I am barely able to speak about it. It is about 11 feet tall, and probably more than that, and 13 feet long. It has such a large belly that it is a marvelous thing to see; it is much taller in the front than the back; its skin is like a buffalo's, the tail shorter than a buffalo's; its ears are like the wings of a bat, as big as a medium wheel, and the elephant kept on slapping its shoulders with them, because it does not have a neck. Its front legs looks like two columns four-and-a-half feet long, two feet wide, and round in shape. The joint of its paws is rather high. The animal does not have knees but bends its legs at the shoulders. The hind legs are shorter, less than two feet long. Its head is very large, and held quite higher above the shoulders. Its eyes are very small, almost like a pig's. Its nose is nine feet long, so much so that it touches the ground; near the head it is almost two feet wide, and it becomes increasing thinner at the tip, so, that you could actually hold that end in one hand; and it curls up a little, and looks like a mouth; if you look inside, you will see two round holes. And the whole nose is speckled like a sprout and worm-like, and the animal can curl it up. In the upper jaw he has two teeth that grow upwards, thicker than a man's leg, and rounded like an ankle, and they are hardly sharp; you cannot see the lower lip of the animal because of the nose that covers it. It uses its nose to take what it wants to eat and drink; with the nose, it takes it to his mouth. Sometimes, it takes water through its nose, and then squirts it over its shoulders, under its body, and on its genitalia. Its master told the elephant I don't know what, and the animal took some water through its nose and squirted it around, drenching every one of us who were

standing about, so much so that a person with a bucket could not have drawn so much water. In our presence, the man made the elephant perform various tasks: mainly he made it raise one of its front feet, which was unchained, unlike the others which were chained together with large chains. The master climbed on that foot; once he was on it, the elephant lifted his foot back little by little so that the man could touch its back with his hand. The man threw a carpet the elephant's back, then climbed on it; he made the elephant trumpet in such a way that it seemed as if the elephant were responding to what the master was saying. After that, someone who was standing nearby gave him a stick, about two feet long and as thick as an arm. The elephant took the stick with the tip of its nose and held it tightly. And the man who was standing nearby had another stick, longer than the first one, and shouted; the animal would raise its nose to the sky holding the stick and then brought it down, hitting the other stick with most powerful strikes. It struck twelve blows this way, sometimes upwards, and sometimes downwards. Then, the man took out four filled bags, as large as a hand on each side, and showed them to the elephant. The animal would lower its nose and throw them in the air, forty-five feet high, and toss them around the houses nearby. Sometimes the man would trick the elephant, and when it was about to strike he would withdraw his hand and the animal would strike in vain. And they kept doing that for a while. And then the man made the elephant lie on the ground, and the animal did it so gracefully that not even a puppy would have been able to do it as well. After his entire body was on the ground, the chains were removed, and then he made the animal rise again, and the animal did it so fast and well, that it seemed marvelous. We saw it urinating, like a stream out of a mill. And we saw its member reach the ground, proportionate to the other upper body. It was very dirty and stank all around. Overall, it seemed more like a piece of meat that wiggles and moves about than a four-legged animal, with a protruding nose, that does whatever it pleases with it. It proceeds about very slowly. Its feet have five toes and nails, just like pigs have two. And its feet are round. We were told by many that this elephant was very young; everybody estimated it was less than half the size of a full-sized adult. To get around it with a rope, you would need one eighteen feet long.

On the 17th, we stayed home, because it was the eve of their version of Easter, and they, especially those lords, don't like seeing Christians, and we were prohibited from speaking with them on that day and on Easter day.

Their religious holiday begins with the first moon of August, lasts all month, and it is called Ramadan. During the month, they do not eat anything until dark. Then most of them eat all night long. While meat is not forbidden, wine is, since their laws prohibit wine at all times. Yet those who can are even more fond of drinking than we are, and they drink a lot.

On the 15th, about thirteen Christian pilgrims came to the city. They were mostly Italians who had just got off the boat to go to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. They were all caught in Jerusalem, even the friars of the Convent of Saint Francis who were inside the Sepulcher. They were taken to Cairo, mostly those who were not very old. The Sultan had had the doors of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, of Mount Zion, and of Bethlehem walled up with stones. He would allow no more Christians to enter until they forced the Catalans to agree to trade with him. Those pilgrims, especially the Friars and the Consuls of the Venetians and the Genoese who were staying in Jerusalem, came to us to ask if we would intercede on their behalf. We felt great compassion for those people because we gathered that some of them were very poor, and the lords would not hear them if they did not bring any gifts first. The lords, with much dishonesty, request gifts on purpose, which is such an injustice.

On the 18th, it was their Easter, so we did not speak to the interpreters, or to anybody else.

On the 19th, we did the same, though we did try to plead with the *Natarchass* but we did not get to speak with him.

On the 20th, it was still their Easter, but the interpreters came to tell us that the next morning we should be prepared to go to the castle to see the Sultan, as he would robe us, and we would take leave of him. On the same day we would be able to meet with the *Scrivano della Segreta*, to conclude our negotiations. And we received the same message from Antonio Minerbetti, whom we had sent to plead with the *Natarchass*.

On the 21st, early in the morning, we went up to the castle, stood before the Sultan, and were received: we spoke with him, thanking him for all that he had done for us, with whatever kind words we knew, and we spoke well of our merchants. We then asked whether we could speak to him again, if necessary. He refused, saying: "What for? You are already dismissed." He added that he would like us to be his allies, since we had arrived at the right moment. He robed the two of

us, our Chancellor and Antonio Minerbetti in their traditional dress. We then took our leave, kissing the ground many times. In his closing statement, the Sultan said that, once we got back to our land, he would like us to intervene with the Catalans so that they would come to terms with him. And when he touched upon this subject, we asked permission to talk about the same matter, and especially about his locking the Church of Sepulcher and other holy places. He let us utter no more than twelve words, and then he cut us off, saying that he desired only that other nations would humble themselves into making the Catalans come to terms with him. We were pulled away without being able to respond. Once we had left, we went to visit his Great *Dindar*, and thanked him; We then did the same with the *Natarchass*. The latter gave us one vial of balsam each, and two little tin vases, measuring an ounce each, one of perfume, and another of a healing potion. After we left, we visited the *Scrivano della Segreta*, and we waited two hours for him; it was already three in the afternoon. We exchanged only a few words, as he wanted to leave, but left his *Dindar* to speak with us; he told us that the Sultan had ordered that we put forward one hundred new Florentine florins, since he wanted to send them as samples throughout his entire territory. We maintained a reserved attitude, and replied that Alexandria and Damascus were enough for us, that sending ten or one hundred thousand did not make a difference, and that the florins did not belong to us, but to the merchants from whom we had borrowed them. In the end, the *Dindar* let the following words slip out of his mouth: "These ambassadors are so ignorant, they do not realize what we intend to do with these hundred florins." These words sounded very harsh to us, and we could not contradict them. We tried to reduce the amount, but did not come to any conclusion. We agreed that on the same day we would send our Chancellor, Antonio Minerbetti, and our interpreter over, and this we did. But he was not able to take care of this business, and so that day was wasted. And returning home, we found nearly five hundred Moor singers, jugglers and other officers to the Sultan, as well as representatives of the other lords. With great effort, we pushed our way into our home. At around three in the afternoon, we were able to send them away, amidst great commotion, screams and threats, after they had made lewd gestures and vulgar noises at us, and insulted us. After they left, we ate, as for that day we could not do anything else. On the same day, we saw twelve camels arrive, loaded with snow, coming in after a twenty-days' journey.

Early on the 22nd, we sent to the *Dindar* of the *Scrivano* for our documents, as we had agreed earlier, and we found that the parties had gone to the castle, so we were not able to obtain them. But when they returned to eat, they stayed in all day until they came to an agreement about how the documents should appear. And he said that the next day he would write them out, so that we would have all three orders for any event as we asked: one for Florence, one for Alexandria, and one for Damascus. And that day, we did nothing else.

On the 23rd, at noon we sent for the documents, and they were not finished, but at sundown they said that they would be done. At sundown, we sent for them again. Meanwhile, we discovered many betrayals and disgraceful acts that had been carried out to extort (*mangerie*) more money from us. We were even accused of having sold the gifts that we were supposed to give to the Sultan and other lords. All of this had been done by the person who was supposed to pay us our daily stipend¹⁵; for nine days he had failed to pay us, and still refused to do so. Once again, each of us would gladly have given half of what he owned to get back home. Throughout all this, we had various sick members among us: three out of four of our youths and servants were ill.

On the 24th, in the morning, we sent again for our documents; our messengers had to wait all day, until eleven at night, and finally they brought them back; and during the same night we began to translate them.

On the 25th, we continued to translate; and we found some chapters missing, ones that we wanted to have included, and we had to spend the whole day trying to obtain them. On the same day, the Sultan sent us a vial of balsam, and a stick of perfume; and the *Natarchass* asked us for sixteen-and-a-half feet of blue cloth for himself, and because of necessity, we complied with his request.

On the 26th, we sent for the written documents, and still we could not obtain them. Everything depended on the interpreters, because they would have wanted much more money than we were willing to offer them. When evening came, having sent all of our belongings, servants and sick members to Bulak that is by the river, we decided to leave ourselves that evening, as well. And at night we departed; at our own peril we left without the documents, but we left three of our men on land, so that they would fetch them early in the morning. All matters were settled, and everything was paid for.

On the 27th, we waited all day long, until 5:00 p.m. At that time the interpreters and those of us whom we had left on land returned;

they brought our orders and our documents. Once it came to paying them, the interpreters were not happy with the amount that we had agreed upon the previous day; they said that, if we wanted them to go with us to Alexandria, they wanted more money. As we refused, we had a clash, so much so that we decided to go back and complain. We left, but once we had traveled one mile, seeing that night was approaching and that the risk was great, we decided to back to the boat. The interpreters kept following us, and with the intervention of Antonio Minerbetti and another Christian we came to an agreement: that we would give them part of the payment there, and another part in Alexandria. One of them would come with us, and we would pay him as we saw fit. But because the two letters that they would be taking to Alexandria mentioned two interpreters, they led us to believe that it was necessary to delete the name of the one interpreter who was not coming with us. And they went back with the letter, and we were left with the orders.

On the 28th, we waited for the interpreter until sundown, since he did not come until then, and this caused us great discomfort because one of our young people was very sick, and we did not expect to take him alive to Alexandria. So we waited until 9:00 p.m., and then we left.

On the 29th and 30th, we sailed the river with great difficulty, because we were without oars in second position. The wicked men would not row unless we gave them money and wine, which we were trying to save; and so they did many offensive things against us.

On October 1st, we reached Fua, where we revived ourselves, bought two horses and, at a village a couple of miles ahead named [words missing] we disembarked, and bought five camels, eighteen donkeys, and one horse. At about 4:30 p.m., we started traveling on land. With God's mercy, one of our sick party had improved enough that we was able to ride smoothly between two bales. But another, who was very sick with cramps, had a hard time advancing by himself, so he needed to be carried. In this manner, we walked all night, except for a two-hour rest in a village when it was almost morning.

On October 2nd, we left again, and around three in the afternoon, we arrived in Alexandria. But because it was Friday, which is their day of prayer, the city doors were closed from nine in the morning until sundown. We waited until they opened the doors. Then, with the Admiral's horses and with a few other people we went inside, but only after they made us unload all five of our camels at the gate. They also opened and

searched our clothes and hoods, until there was nothing left to search. All of this was done right in front of us. We then went to the Admiral and presented him with the order for Alexandria. After reading it, he wrote down some things and gave it back to us, putting himself at our disposal, etc. We had something to drink at his house; and after that, we went to the *Cadi de la Doana*, and did the same, and he also wrote down something. When we asked him about the *fondaco*, he responded that he would do all he could so that we would obtain one as we had it in our own nation. And the Admiral had told us the same thing.

Please note that, on the same night at 7:00 p.m., the *Cadi de la Doana* sent us a message saying that he wanted to know what was in for him in giving us a beautiful *fondaco*. We pretended not to understand, and he explained that he wanted to get something better out of this deal. It did not seem prudent of us to enter into such an agreement, so we did not ask him how much he expected, chiefly because his manner appeared most dishonest, since it was clear that he was not going to move a finger for a small amount. We responded that we had not been instructed to spend any money, and besides, that we possessed the order from the Sultan, which should suffice. We added that if the *fondaco* given to us proved to be a good one, we would move into it and accept it with much appreciation; but, if the case proved otherwise and we were not able to stay in it, then we would leave, despite the fact that we knew our departure would run contrary to the Sultan's intentions. We thus took our leave. Along the way, many others asked us for money: those who had accompanied us, those who led the horses, and the others.

On the 3rd, we heard from many others asking for money, and we got rid of them as best as we could.

Please note that we were traveling by land, wearing the Sultan's robes. In Alexandria, we found the Consul, his priest, as well as another young boy and two of our own youngsters whom we had left with him—Luca degl'Albizzi, Iacopo Arnoldi, who had been with me, and Domenico Bencini—all of them sick. We found out that Piero Del Papa and one of his servants were dead, and we were very shocked and saddened.

The 4th was a Sunday, and we did not do anything, but we did keep pleading to obtain our *fondaco* and the decree.

Early in the morning of the 5th, the decree was announced throughout Alexandria: our new florins must be accepted at an equal value as the ducat, under penalty of death, as we were told. On the same morning, we presented our gift to the *Cadi de la Doana*: fifty feet of green cloth,

and 25 feet of golden drapes, which we bought from Nanni Gucci for three florins for every two feet. The *Cadi* accepted these very gladly, and told us that it was his intention that we receive the *fondaco* of the Turks, but at a cost of sixty or seventy ducats. We responded that we had not been instructed to pay for this. He said that the merchants should pay, and we agreed, as it seemed a fair expense.

On the 6th, we went up to the *Cadi*'s door: he told us that he wanted to talk to us in his house, and that he would send for us when it was a convenient time. Meanwhile, the Consul and most of the merchants and of our youngsters remained sick in bed. Thus, we had no one to ask for advice or help, or with whom to discuss the above matters. On the same night we went to the *Cadi*'s house, and we talked to him at length about the *fondaco*. He responded to us very courteously, apologizing and saying that because the Venetian galleys had arrived he had not been able to attend to our request immediately, but that in two days he would take care of the matter.

On the 7th, the merchants sent for us in the morning to say that the Consul had almost died during the night and that he was very ill. We went to visit him and saw it was true; we made sure he received his Last Rites. We stayed with him all morning and had a good doctor visit him. His prognosis was not optimistic, but still he attended to him. And so for that day we did nothing else.

On the 8th, in the early morning, our merchants sent us a note saying that the Consul, that is Ugolino Rondinelli, had passed away. May God have mercy of his soul. On the same morning we buried him. We continued to ask for our *fondaco*, and we knew very well that if we had had more money available to bribe (*mangeria*) the *Cadi*, he would have met our request. As we were not in a position to do so, we did not want to spend any money, but we kept saying that once the galleys came at the merchants' expense, we would show our gratitude if they let us have the *fondaco* of the Turks, which was the very best one.

On the 9th, we waited, since was the day of prayer for the Saracens, but we sent Antonio Minerbetti to plead for the *fondaco* with the *Cadi*, who said that the next day he would take care of everything.

On the 10th, we did nothing but plead, and we kept receiving positive answers but more procrastination.

The 11th, was a Sunday, and we went to eat with the Genoese, who had invited us; no one had received us with such kindness and fraternity—more than if we ourselves had been Genoese; even their own

servants could not get enough of honoring and serving us, and they lent us all of their household materials.

That same day, I contracted a fever, and stayed in bed.

On the 12th, we received good but inconclusive news about the *fondaco*. We came to believe that they wanted more money (*mangerie*); we pleaded as best as we could, yet our entire house was crowded with sick people, and those who were particularly sick needed attention and that took up a long time and filled us with concern.

At around 1:30 p.m., I got the chills, and after that I developed a high fever that lasted throughout the night.

On the 13th, Messer Carlo accompanied by the Sultan's interpreter went to the Admiral to discuss the issue of the *fondaco*, and to complain about the delay. However, he was not able to speak to him because the latter was drunk. We turned to the *Cadi*, and the *Cadi* responded that whichever *fondaco* we wanted, he would give it to us right away, provided there were no Saracens already inhabiting it. But given the available *fondacos*, it seemed to him better that we wait a little while, and receive a good one. He was optimistic. He postponed the matter until the 15th.

On the 14th, we wrote to Florence to request a boat that would take us to Rhodes.

And until November 9th, I remained sick with two tertian fevers and an ongoing one; thank God, on that day I recovered from them all, but I was very weak and I could not stand on my feet. In the midst of these events, we elected Antonio Minerbetti Consul.

And on the 18th, of October, on a Sunday, our galleys arrived.

On November 11th, Messer Carlo, our servants and I boarded the ship. And it is true that I was carried on a stretcher.

On the 15th, on a Sunday, in the name of God, we left the port of Alexandria heading home.

On the 21st at nine in the morning, with God's help we arrived in Rhodes.

On the 27th, of November, we left Rhodes.

On the 30th, at three in the afternoon, we arrived at the Cape of Sant'Agnolo¹⁶; there we were saved by sheer luck. When we were only one half mile from the harbor, we could not enter; so we dropped our anchor outside the harbor and stayed there, facing great danger, as it was so windy and stormy that we doubted that the anchor would hold. Moreover, there was a lot of rain. Here we stayed until the 6th, of

December; and the whole galley agreed that each of us would make an offering to the Virgin di Palermo, each what he considered appropriate.

On the 6th, of December before daybreak, we left the Cape of Sant'Agnolo, in good weather, and set off towards Methoni.

On the 7th, at night, we arrived in Methoni, waited two miles off shore until the morning, approached the port at around 9 in the morning, and then entered the port to procure the many victuals we needed. Here we stayed until the 10th, of December, due to poor weather.

On the 10th, before daybreak, we left Methoni; and with God's blessing, we continued our journey; and around nine in the morning, because the wind was against us, we returned to Methoni. As we could not enter the port, we returned to Sapienza; and there we stayed all day and all night.

On the 11th, we spent all day in Sapienza; and at night we left the port, and in the name of God we continued our journey.

On the 12th, we sailed towards Zakynthos, and arrived at eight miles from there at night. And there we encountered bad weather, and stayed all of the 13th, 14th and 15th.

On the 16th, we left in the morning at nine, and took up our voyage again in the name of God; and around midday, we came upon an area where the clouds made the sea swell in four different places, but we continued nonetheless; it was one of the most astonishing sights we had ever witnessed. We were very afraid, so we dropped all the sails, and thus managed to escape, but only when the storm was just a mile away from us. Then the weather changed abruptly and it started to rain, and throughout that day we stayed in the harbor.

On the 17th, we left the port with the intention of heading towards Sicily; but all day long, we had little wind and proceeded very little; as in both galleys we had much need for bread and other food, we decided to land in Corfu; and so we sailed all night.

On the morning of the 18th, we were fortunate enough to reach Corfu; and that afternoon at around six we landed and entered the port.

On the 19th, we stayed in Corfu and filled the galleys with supplies.

On the 20th, again we stayed in Corfu since the weather was not favorable.

On the 21st, we left Corfu early in the morning, and arrived at Porto Chasopoli,¹⁷ twelve miles from Corfu, and there we wasted the whole day and the next.

On the 23rd, we left Chasopoli and made our way towards Messina.

On the 25th, we arrived at the Port of Messina, and we spent the night just outside of it.

On the 26th, we entered the port; but because of strong currents we could not enter Messina, and were unfortunately separated from the other galley. The strong currents pushed the galleys in such a fashion that they nearly crashed on land; we stayed anchored until the 29th.

On the 29th, both of our galleys arrived in Messina.

On January 1st, we left Messina and arrived at about 8 miles from the lighthouse; there we had to spend the whole day since the tide was against us.

On the 2nd and 3rd, we had to proceed rowing due to the lack of wind.

On the 3rd, in the evening strong winds finally arrived; and at around nine at night, the wind changed direction suddenly; yet nobody noticed it until it back-winded our sails so that that we might have lost our galleys completely. But with God's help we regained control, and all night we spun around very hard in order not to go back; and finally, around daybreak we found before us the island of Vulcano, thirty miles away by sea. We also discovered we had lost sight of our convoy, that is our other galley, but we thought we could see one in the distance so we went towards it.

On the 4th, at three in the afternoon, we entered the port of Vulcano; and there, we found the other galley, that had gone through great turbulence. We stayed there all day. We climbed to the top of Vulcano, which rises as high as two thirds of a mile above sea level. The mountain seemed to be made of ashes and sand; it is round, and the color tends towards red. The circumference of the peak is about two miles around. With great effort we made it to the top, since the way up was very steep and rough. At the top, we found an opening, as in a mound of corn with a void in the middle, where the grain falls into the center, while the edges of the mountains were very sharp as if they had been cut with a knife. Such was the shape of this mountain, and the mouth of the mountain was over one mile deep. We surmised that its bottom was lower than the sea level. There were places by which one could descend to the bottom, but with great effort. In other places where there were rocks the edge was cut and it was a most frightening sight for one who stood on top and looked down. And one could walk all around that edge, and down at the bottom were smoke, fire, and flames. We could not see many flames because it was daytime, and there was a lot of smoke.

And the main part of the fire seemed to be under the mountain, towards the west. Most astonishing was the sound that the volcano makes: It is comparable to the sounds made by a couple of bellows in a forge. But no one could tolerate the noise, nor could any stomach bear the smell of sulfur. We heard of miraculous and marvelous stories about this site, but because they are too marvelous and hardly credible I will not recount them here. Above the same mountain, the smoke gathers in a huge cloud.

On the 5th, we remained at the same port. In the meantime, four ships took refuge in the port at different times, all Catalans and Sicilians.

On the 6th, we still remained there, as it was not a good time to leave. Please note that this port was uninhabited; yet within four miles there is an island, with a nice village, or better said, a nice city that is called Lipari; and there we were able to procure bread and a little water, which we badly needed.

On the 7th, we still stayed where we were.

On the 8th, we stayed in the same port, surrounded by water, wind and snow. At around noon, a Catalan ship approached the port and we feared that it might be preparing to attack our ship.

On the 9th, we remained in the same port.

On the 10th, we stayed in the same port.

On the 11th, we stayed in the same port.

On the 12th, we stayed in the same port.

On the 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, we stayed in the same port.

On the 17th, we remained in the same port, plagued by snow and rain, and without wind.

On the 18th, of January, at around 2:00 p.m., we left the port with good weather, and sailed towards Palermo in the name of God. Yet, at around midnight, the wind shifted, and we were forced to go back.

On the 19th, around 9 in the morning, we returned to the port of Vulcano, and there we stayed all day.

On the 20th, we stayed at the port all day.

On the 21st, around midday, we left that port in good weather conditions, and in the name of God we sailed for Palermo.

On the 22nd, at nine in the morning, in the name of God, we arrived in Palermo, and there we remained until the 31st, of January.

On February 1st, in the name of God, we left Palermo four hours before daybreak, and headed towards Gaeta.

On the 4th, early in the morning, we reached Gaeta. To save time, we did not enter the port, but stayed outside, merely unloading the Gaetans' merchandise. At night we entered the mouth of the Gaeta port, and there we stayed until eleven at night. And at that time, while our scrivener was on land and so were two of the boats, the Captain gave orders to leave, despite the fact that we wanted to wait for the scrivener. But in less than half an hour a great wind arrived, and threw us crashing on the rocks. Despite the anchor and all of our rowing efforts, the ship kept on crashing on the rocks, so that everyone started to shout "God have mercy," because we did not think we would survive. But the Lord, who does not abandon those who confide in him, inspired those who steered the boat to cut the rope where the anchor was attached, and to set sail right away; and, by doing that, we escaped the great danger, leaving behind the boats, the scrivener and his companion on land, and the anchor and rope in the sea. And in the name of God, we took off towards Pisa.

On the 6th, we were near Rome. As we had little wind, the Captain decided we should return to Gaeta, and all night we continued sailing.

On the 7th, we stayed at Cape Circeo thirty miles from Gaeta; and at night we took off and all night we spun around until we realized that we had retreated five miles.

On the 8th, we kept sailing, and did the same on the 9th, and the 10th.

On the 11th, in the name of God, at about seven p.m., we entered the port of Pisa. And God let us know that we had been touched by His grace.

On the 12th, we went to Pisa, and on the 13th we stayed in Pisa, to take care of various things.

On the 14th, we arrived in Empoli, and on the 15th, in Florence.

NOTES

1. Note on translating time and dates: The way hours were calculated in the fifteenth-century, was by counting the hours from sunset, so for example, "alle otto," it doesn't mean "at eight." In order to calculate the time, we need to know the time the sunset on that date in that place, and then add eight to that time. When the sun set at 18:49, for example, it would be 2:49 in the morning (rounded up to 3:00 a.m.). This does not apply when Brancacci talk about "terza", "sesta" "nona", which is left as

- original throughout. See Barbieri, Nello. "Note di cronologia: Le ore a Siena dal XIV al XVIII secolo." *BSSP* 90 (1983): 148–51.
2. Today it is called Porto d'Anzio.
 3. Today it is called Cetraro, small Mediterranean port.
 4. Called Tropea in modern times.
 5. The lighthouse near Messina.
 6. Methoni is the old Methone, the maritime fortress city in Morea, which faces the island of Sapienza.
 7. According to Catellacci it is Ceuta on the Barbary Coast. But Ugo Tucci thinks this is an error, and that he identifies Setteri as Sitia, on the Island of Crete. Ugo Tucci, *Bibliographical Dictionary of Italians*, Volume 13 (1971).
 8. Friar Antonio Fluviano of the Priorate of Catalonia was, at the time, Grand Master of the Order of Jerusalem, or Knights of Rhodes—later called Knights of Malta. He held this position from July 1421 to October 29, 1437.
 9. *Fondaco*, or Fundug in the original Arabic (lit. residence), was a medieval institution in the Mediterranean housing foreign merchants and their goods. There were many *fondaci* in Venice, Genoa, housing merchants from the Levant.
 10. Jazirat adh-Dhahab, also known as Gold Island.
 11. Caino and Fers are the two interpreters assigned by the Sultan to Felice's embassy.
 12. A variable unit of measurement used in some Italian cities before the metrical system was adopted. It was equal to 2.2–3.8 ft.
 13. A unit of measurement.
 14. "Cristiani di Cintura" are mentioned by Mariano di Nanni, *Viaggio per Gerusalemme*, and Leonardo Frescobadi *Viaggio in Egitto e Terrasanta* (Rome, 1818).
 15. Brancacci uses the term "gemichia". It is of Arabo-Turkish origin, from Persian "Gamikuyyah" which signifies a customary stipend received from Sultan for visiting ambassadors.
 16. He is likely referring to Cape Malea (or Maleas), which is a peninsula in the southeast part of the Peloponnese.
 17. This appears to be the Port of Santa Maria di Leuca, at the tip of the heel of Italian Peninsula.

GLOSSARY

Cadi della Doana: Customs officer. Cadi is from Arabic qadhi, "he who judges", refers to a person who administers justice.

Cadi della Legge: Legal officer.

Chatibisser: From Katib-es-sir, which means literally Secret Scribe, which refers

to the title of Secretary of the Secret Chancellery of the Sultan. Also referred to as Chancellor.

Commissario al Campo: Field commissioner.

Consolato del Mare: Florentine organism founded in the fifteenth century with the goal of administering the affairs related to Pisa's countryside and port.

Consoli di Mare: Members of the *Consolato del Mare*.

Dindar: Secretary, literally "Prefect of the Inkwell."

Dieci di Balìa: Special organ of the Commune of Florence in charge of war efforts.

Gonfaloniere di Giustizia: A post in the government of Medieval Florence.

He was one of the nine citizens drawn by lot who formed the government.

Gran Maestro: Grand Master of the Order of Jerusalem, Friar Antonio Fluviano, of the Priory of Catalonia, who held the position in the Order of Jerusalem, or Knights of Rhodes—later called Knights of Malta—from July 1421 to October 1437.

Luogotenente della Signoria: Governor of the *Signoria*.

Mangerie: Illicit or coerced money payment.

Natarchass: from Nazir-al-Khas, or Inspector of private property.

Priori: Members of the *Signoria*, the main administrative organ in Medieval and Renaissance Florence. The *Priori* were selected from the ranks of the city Guilds.

Scrivano della Segreta: Same as *Chatibisser* (see above), or Secret Scribe, Chancellery Secretary.

Signoria: In the Medieval and Renaissance city-states, a government run by a *Signore* (lord, or despot) (see Encyclopedia Britannica).

Turcamanni: Dragoman or interpreter.



CHAPTER 4

Appendixes

Abstract This chapter provides the translation of three key documents related to Felice Brancacci's mission in Egypt: Translation into English of the Instructions of City of Florence to Brancacci and Federighi; Translation into English of Michele Amari's nineteenth century Italian translation of 1422 Arabic text of Sultan Barsbay's address to City of Florence; Sultan Barsbay to City of Florence; Translation into English of the Cardus da Nichosia's 1422 translation of the Arabic text of Sultan Barsbay's letter sent to Florence.

Keywords Sultan Barsbay · Michele Amari · Cardus da Nichosia
Commercial Treaty Florin

APPENDIX 1: INSTRUCTIONS OF COMMUNE OF FLORENCE TO F. BRANCACCI AND C. FEDERIGHI

Document XXXVII in Series II, Amari, *Diplomi Arabi*, pp. 331–335.
Republication of Pagnini, *Della Decima.*, tom.

Note and information to you, Dr. Carlo di Francesco Federighi, and Felice di Michele Brancacci, Florentine citizens, ambassadors to the Commune of Florence, about what you are to do on your visit to the great Sultan of Alexandria. This note and information was approved and drafted by the magnificent and powerful *Signori*, by the Priors of the arts

and by the *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia* of the people and the Commune of Florence, and their respectable boards, on June 13, 1422.

You shall travel to Alexandria on the ship called San Giovanni, captained by... and while on route or in the places where you will stop, you shall follow the directives given to you by the *Consoli del Mare*. If you stop in Methoni, or in Candia, or in other Venetian territories, if you have time visit the person in charge of the *Signoria* of Venice as appropriate: bring greetings and offerings on behalf of our *Signoria*, and then make offerings yourselves. Speak to them of the good relationship and friendship that our *Signori* and our community have with the *Signoria* of Venice; and mention how the *Signoria* of Venice has been so kind as to order that, in each of its territories, our citizens, ships, subjects and belongings be favored, given a good treatment, and regarded as special friends. You shall show them the letters you are bringing with you from the *Signoria* and ask them for anything you judge would be useful to you, explaining that this is what we have instructed you to do.

Do not stop in Genoese territories except out of necessity, because we do not have free passage across their land.

In Rhodes you shall visit the *Gran Maestro*, bringing letters of recommendations and honoring him with friendly offerings, as to a special religious leader and as appropriate, showing the reverence and affection we bear him and his religion as a whole. You shall tell him about the intention to engage in maritime trade, letting him know that we trust them but that in any case you want to ask them for permission, since our intention is that you would have a base there under their trust. And you shall visit the Admiral and greet him, giving him offerings etc. with the appropriate formulas. And to each of them you shall present your credentials. Both there and in Alexandria you shall gather information about the rituals and customs observed when appearing before the Sultan and before the other princes whom you will meet, in terms of reverential gestures, of speaking, and of the other actions you will need to carry out. In this way, you will not run the risk of inadvertently causing offense, or of making them unfavorable to our requests.

Then, in the name of God, you shall go to Alexandria and there you shall visit the Admiral, reciting the appropriate words of greeting through an interpreter. And you shall meet the *Cadì della legge* and the *Cadì della doana*, and to each of them you shall present your credentials. To the Admiral and the others you shall state the reason for your visit, asking them for help and advice, especially about going to Cairo, with

the advice and suggestions of the above or of others that you will deem suitable, through the safest, shortest and cheapest route. And you shall visit the Sultan, performing the reverential gestures, presenting your letters of recommendations and making the customary offerings through the interpreter and as you will be advised to do. Attend to this particular task with utmost diligence for the honor of our Commune, and in order to make him more favorable to our requests.

Then you shall relate the reason for your journey, expressing our intention to sail there with our galleys, trade our goods and buy some of their spices and other products of theirs, in the hope that they will give us good treatment, etc., always to their honor, greatness and profit. And plead with them that they grant us what they grant to the Venetians or the Genoese, or to other Christians who trade over there, that is, the same authority and jurisdiction. You shall explain that the reason why up until now we haven't engaged in any maritime activities is that we had no access to the sea. However, now that we have acquired Pisa, we are able to sail. You shall exalt our *Signoria* and our city, reminding him of the industry of our citizens and merchants, and of how their trade is flourishing in all places, and is as successful as that of other nations. For this reason we should be granted what we are asking for, especially everything that the Pisans had, which now pertains to us; and any additional jurisdiction that the Venetians or any other Christian nation or *Signoria* have. Once you are there, ask for advice on whether you should present our requests during your first audience, or whether you should make a second appointment, and whether those requests should be made verbally or in writing. And if the Sultan happened not to be in Cairo but in another city that you could reach within several days, and if you deem it feasible to go to him, you shall go and perform your task, sending your galley back as quickly as you can, and then waiting at your return for the bigger galleys and returning [to Florence] with them.

Our requests are the following:

First of all, to have free passage and full security with no time limitation, or as the Venetians have, to sail and stay there, and trade safely throughout the Sultan's territory. And if any debt were incurred, or any crime or offence were committed by Florentines, Pisans, or by subordinates of said Florentines, or by others who identified as Florentine or Pisan, or other subordinates who traded on their behalf, or by any other Christians, this would not result in the revocation of any free passage, safe conduct or exemptions that the Florentines have on land and

at sea by agreement or convention. The same would be true for any debt incurred or crime committed by the Sultan or the Saracens against the Florentines or against any who identified as Florentine. Make sure this request is met as closely as possible, or to the same extent as any nation that has the best agreement.

Regarding the goods that we would purchase there or bring back, we request that the price be the same as what the Venetians pay, or less if possible, or in any case no more than the other nations pay, lest it result in our loss. We also request to be free to travel to and from its ports and cities; and in the said kingdom and in each of its ports and cities, to enjoy the same exemptions, freedoms, immunity and favors as the nations that have the best agreement, or even better, if possible, specifying the privileges and having any unspecified privileges included under a general clause.

Additionally, to have a consul with the same role, authority, freedom and jurisdiction, honors, favors and salary as any other nation with the best agreement in Alexandria and in Beirut, specifying the privileges and having any unspecified privileges included under a general clause.

Additionally, to have a *fondaco*, church, bath, scale, porters, a scrivener and all the other items, with the same freedoms, immunity and privileges as any of the nations with the best agreement. For each of these requests, obtain reliable information regarding what the other nations have, if possible before you present the requests.

Additionally, that our gold and silver currency be used and accepted as any other, and especially that our florin be regarded as equal to the Venetian ducat, since it is just as good if not better in terms of the quality of the gold, and it weighs the same. You are advised to show them that it is of finer quality and explain the reason why, and the equal weight is clear to see. In doing so be as meticulous as possible, offering to put the currencies to the test, by putting into fire and melting both the florins and the ducats, and make sure to be dealing with people who are experts in these matters. This task of yours is of the utmost importance—giving them tangible proof of this. Show them that our florin has never been of lesser quality than the ducat, and that in many places it is regarded as having the same value as the ducat and more. Show them the silver, too, but insist particularly on the gold, and if in doing so it were necessary to incur in some expense, follow the advice of the *Consoli del mare*, not excluding a bargain over the other requests. If they won't bargain on the currency, do as much as you can. And if you cannot have

everything, obtain as much as you can, leaving the fundamental parts unchanged and gathering useful information about it.

Additionally, were any Florentines or Pisans, or other subordinates of the Florentines, or individuals who were trading on behalf of the Florentines, to die in Alexandria or in the Sultan's kingdom, we request that the Sultan commit to have all their goods delivered to the Florentine consul in Alexandria. And the consul shall do with them as he has been instructed.

Finally, you shall tell the Sultan about the present you are bringing on behalf of your *Signoria*, using the customary formulas of courtesy as required and as you will have been advised to use; and if what is given is not adequate, apologize to him on behalf of the *Signoria*, explaining that you were not informed about this.

Regarding potential requests from the Sultan, you shall proceed as follows:

If he requests a commitment on our part to have any Florentines or Pisans or other subordinates who may be stealing from their subordinates in his kingdom captured and sent before him, insist with as strong an argument as you can that it is not advisable, considering the problems that may derive from it while the *Signoria* of Florence is not to blame. And if this does not fully convince him, try and persuade him that it is sufficient to proceed in this way: if we get hold of the criminals so that they can be captured and punished, we shall take care to carry out justice. If we are not able to carry out justice, the criminal shall be presented before him, but only after following the bureaucratic procedure of notifying the *Signoria* of their crimes, and with a statute of limitation of one year between when they are captured and when they are presented before the Sultan. You shall promise this only if he grants the same to us, otherwise you shall not.

Additionally, if he requests a commitment on our part that the Florentines etc. shall not have relations with their enemies, or that they shall not give them help etc., and that they shall not become their allies, and that they shall not wage war with them for passage or for other reasons, you shall respond that it cannot be promised except in the following form: that they will be notified first, and that this *Signoria* commits not to do anything unannounced to them or their subordinates. And if he insists on being given a specific notice, make sure it is as short as possible, and obtain the same from him. And if he wants the term to be specified, make sure it is no longer than one year.

Carry out your orders as quickly as you can, because this mission is expensive, and return to Alexandria having done everything you can possibly do. And if that were not possible, find accommodation with the consul so that your stay there is not long. On your journey back, visit the Admiral, the *Cadi della Legge* and the *Cadi della Doana* again; and to each of them present what you have to present, according to the information given to you by the *Consoli del Mare*, with the appropriate formulas. Both in Cairo and in Alexandria make sure you have everything set in writing, or let them do so. And be careful and avoid being cheated. Once you have been dismissed, in the name of God you shall return via Rhodes, and you shall visit again the *Gran Maestro*, the Admiral, etc., and recommend our ships, merchants, citizens and goods to them.

If due to illness or death one of the ambassadors were not able to carry out his ambassadorship, the other shall do so; and if neither could do so, the task shall fall on the consul, who shall carry it out at his expense.

Keep in mind that on the day of your return or on the following one you are due to report verbally to our *Signori*. And between the date stated below and the end of your mission you shall chronicle your actions in your own writing, or have them written and then signed by you, and leave these chronicles to the chancellors, under serious penalty.

June 30.

Addendum: Request to the Sultan that if any nation, Christian or Saracen, were to plunder in any port of the Sultan's kingdom any ships belonging to the Florentines or to individuals acting on behalf of the Florentines, or their goods, merchandise or personal belongings, or if they were to perpetrate any offence or violence against them in the said ports, the Sultan is required to bring them to justice, unless such plunder, offence or violence were carried out against any Florentines or subordinates to the Commune of Florence who were pirates or criminals. And the same applies in the reciprocal case.

Where it says that the Sultan commits to have the goods of Florentines who happened to die in Alexandria delivered to the Florentine consul in Alexandria, try to convey that the delivery should be made to the most skillful Florentine consul in Beirut or in other parts of the Sultan's kingdom, while the part on the Florentine consul in Alexandria still stands.

APPENDIX 2: FROM SULTAN BARSBAY TO COMUNE DI FIRENZE.
SEPTEMBER 22, 1422

Scroll in Arabic. Translated into English from the nineteenth century Amari translation of the 1422 Arabic text. *Diplomi Arabi*, pp. 165–168. Document in Serie I. XXXVII.

From the most powerful sultan, prince, most venerable king, most distinguished, learned, upright lord, fighter in the holy war, positioned at the outpost, defender of the borders, assisted (by God), triumphant, helped (by God with victory), sword of the world and of faith, sultan of Islam and of Muslims, champion of justice in the world, avenger of the oppressed against the oppressors, slayer of rebels and agitators, prince by rightful succession, king among kings of the Arabs, of the Persians and Turks, destroyer of tyrants, of prevaricators and infidels, giver of kingdoms, provinces and metropolises, model of the law in all creation, Alexander the Great of this century, chief of generosity, king of all those who sit on pulpits and on thrones and who wear a crown, prince of the two seas, lord of the routes to Jerusalem and Mecca, servant of the two noble sanctuaries of Mecca and Medina, shadow of God on earth, promoter of religious practices and executor of divine precepts, sultan of the world, stronghold of the continent that surrounds (the seas), Imam of those who fear (God), lord of kings and sultans, equal in authority to the prince of believers—Abu Al-Nars Barsbay, may God make his kingdom everlasting, may He grant victory to his armies and his auxiliaries, and may He spread to (all) people and over (all) countries his kindness and generosity.

In the name of the benevolent, merciful God.

This letter is addressed to the majesty of the great, distinguished, magnificent, honored, celebrated Commune of Florence, to the distinguished, great and revered men of the council and of the *Signoria*, and to the most powerful personages—glories of the baptized people, foremost members of Christianity, friends of kings and sultans, may God keep their splendor and lead them to the right path.

This is to inform your majesties that your letter reached our venerable doors through your distinguished, great and honorable ambassadors, Dr. Carlo Federighi and Felice Brancacci. We have understood the meaning of that (letter) and embraced it with our venerable minds.

When the two (ambassadors) approached our venerable seats, we turned to them our venerable countenance, we extended our venerable

kindness on them, and lent our venerable ear to the message they brought on behalf of the Commune and of the greatest and most powerful personages (of Florence). And in order to benefit the Commune and its citizens, to do a grateful gesture to its great and most powerful personages, to favor them and support them, in (our) venerable kindness we have agreed to (your majesties') request, expressed both in the letter as well as in the message delivered verbally (by your ambassadors). Therefore, we have written to your (majesties) two venerable dispatches, from which the most excellent majesty of the Commune will gather most precisely the concessions that (the Florentines) have obtained from our venerable kindness. We have delivered (our) most venerable response to the Lieutenant of the venerable government in Damascus, protected (by God), and to our Lieutenant in the city of Alexandria, protected (by God), expressing to them the goal of the request sent by the majesty of the Commune (of Florence) and its wishes, and the agreements (made with it), as the majesty of the Commune and the most powerful personages will gather (from the copies sent to them). (The Florentines) can rely and place their faith on these provisions, since this venerable throne never ceases to extend its venerable generosity over its neighbors and peoples far away, over the rich and the poor, over the loftiest and the lowliest. (This government), with the grace of God, has never abandoned its custom to act kindly; and among the gifts that God, may He be praised, bestowed upon it ever since the beginning of its prosperity and that He sowed in its venerable counsel, one must mention virtue: that is, charity, mercy towards (all) creatures, and carrying on the path of truth and justice. This shows its reverence to God's commandment, sanctifies His (divine) Majesty, and attests highly to His immense benefits and favors. On this day...

(September 22, 1422)

APPENDIX 3: SULTAN BARSBAY TO CITY OF FLORENCE.

TRANSLATED INTO ITALIAN BY RAMONDO CARDUS DA NICHOSIA
CITIZEN OF CYPRUS, ON 29TH OF SEPTEMBER 1422

This is a contemporary translation of the Arabic diploma (Appendix 2): *Diplomi Arabi*, Document: XXXVIII, pp. 336–337.

To the magnificent, honorable and great Commune of Florence, and to the great and honorable *Signori* of the Council, victorious and great in the Christian faith, friends of the Sultan king through the Florentines.

From the great sultan, lord of the kingdom, *Yesu*¹ of the world, upright, always triumphant over his enemies, sword of the world, of faith, sultan of the innumerable multitude of Saracens, champion of justice, defender of those who are in the right against those who are in the wrong, rightful heir to his throne, king of the kings of Barbary, of Persia and of the Turks, enemy of heathens, gracious giver of lands, farms, and all kinds of goods, Alexander the Great of his time, lord of two seas, servant of the great Jerusalem and Mecca, father of the king of sultans, victorious father Barsbay, may God grant life to his kingdom and victory to his armies and peoples.

We are sending this letter to the great, most honorable and powerful Commune of Florence and to the great men and noble gentlemen of the council, great among the people of Christ and great in the Christian faith, friends of the king and of the Sultan, may God keep them in His love.

We inform you that your letters were delivered to our holy door by your great and noble ambassadors, Dr. Carlo Federighi and Felice Brancacci. We have understood their requests and we have considered them in our victorious mind.

They visited the holy chamber.

We watched over them with our holy gaze.

They were honored with the holy graces.

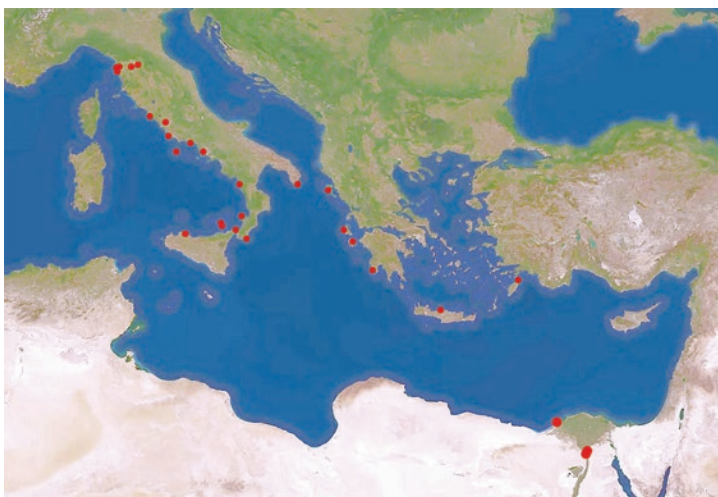
We considered in our holy minds the requests they presented on behalf of the Commune and of its great members and we graced its request, as they wrote. That they and their great personages and all who will come from Florence shall be safe and, and we shall honor them with courtesy and with everything that may please them. We have written the letters with the orders; we are sending one to be distributed throughout our territory, one to Damascus and one to Alexandria, so that the holy graces we gave shall be known. And we gave the Commune safe passage and conventions, for both the major and minor figures of the Commune, to give you peace of mind, because the holy chambers are used to honor both those who are near and those who are far away, both the wealthy and the poor, with great graces. This is a God-granted custom that we uphold in honor of the great grace of God that is given to us, and in honor of mercy toward people, and the path to truth and reason, grace of God and blessing of His grace of which we are invested. Our law

mandates thus. We have placed the holy orders for everything they asked for on behalf of their Commune in the hands of your ambassadors, the holy response to be distributed throughout our holy territory and to the admirals of our holy territory. Please know that this is the truth. And may God maintain this agreement, God willing.

Written on the 5th day of the October moon, year of Mohammed the prophet VIIIXXV (September 22, 1422).

NOTE

1. Cardus mistranslates the Arabic word “seyyed” meaning ‘lord’ into “Yesu” or Jesus. Amari’s endnotes reads: “The text has *Sid* (Lord), which in the Orient is used to refer to Jesus Christ. Cardus, therefore, was not aware of the original meaning of that word and reflected little or nothing on what he was putting down on paper.” Amari in his own translation, Appendix 2, translates it as “lord”.



Map of Felice Brancacci's journey to and from Egypt.
Thank NYU Educational Technology for workshop on visualizing
historical data

INDEX

A

Alexandria, 3, 5–10, 15, 17, 22, 23,
27–31, 33, 46, 50, 58–61, 65,
66, 70, 71, 73, 78–81, 83, 91,
92, 94–96, 98, 99
Amari, Michele, 28, 43–45, 49, 54

B

Bardi Chapel, 12, 13, 17, 32
Barsbay, al-Ashraf Sayf-ad-Din, 2, 4, 6,
11, 12, 43, 44, 48
Brancacci, Felice, 16, 28, 30, 31, 41,
46, 49, 50, 54, 55, 97, 99
Bribe, 5, 6, 8, 9, 15, 60, 64, 82

C

Cadi della Doana, 60, 88, 92, 96
Cadi della legge, 88, 92, 96
Cairo, 2–4, 8, 9, 11, 14, 18, 23, 25,
29–31, 34, 43–45, 47–50, 54, 55,
59, 61, 63–65, 74, 77, 92, 93, 96
Catellacci, Dante, 9, 29, 31, 43, 49, 50

Commissario al Campo, 33, 54, 89
Consoli del Mare, 92, 94, 96
Consoli di mare, 53, 55, 89

D

Dieci di Balìa, 54, 89
Ducat, 3–6, 8, 12, 13, 16, 29, 30, 32,
48, 54, 60, 62, 63, 69, 72, 81, 94

E

Eckstein, Nicholas, 21, 26, 27, 33, 36

F

Federighi, Carlo, 2, 3, 16, 23, 30, 31,
41, 49, 50, 55, 97, 99
Florin, 3–5, 7, 11–14, 16, 18, 22,
24, 29, 30, 32, 48, 54, 66, 69,
72, 94
Fondaco, 15, 16, 33, 69, 71–73,
81–83, 88, 94
Francis of Assisi, 12, 17

G

Galleys, [1](#), [2](#), [16](#), [17](#), [22–29](#), [33](#),
[36](#), [41](#), [54](#), [55](#), [58](#), [59](#), [63](#), [73](#),
[82–85](#), [93](#)

Gift, [5–7](#), [9](#), [18](#), [27](#), [33](#), [60](#), [61](#), [65](#),
[70–72](#), [81](#)

Gonfaloniere di Giustizia, [89](#), [92](#)

Gran Maestro, [58–60](#), [89](#), [92](#), [96](#)

L

Luogotenente della Signoria, [57](#), [89](#)

M

Magi, [17](#), [18](#), [25](#), [34](#), [35](#)

Mamluk, [2–5](#), [7](#), [8](#), [11](#), [13](#), [14](#), [17](#), [22](#),
[26](#), [28–30](#), [32](#), [42](#), [46](#), [48](#)

Masaccio, [2](#), [10](#), [18–26](#), [35](#), [36](#), [48](#)

Molho, Anthony, [29](#), [36](#)

P

Palla Strozzi, [17](#), [34](#), [35](#)

Priori, [54](#), [89](#)

S

Scrivano della Segreta, [69–73](#), [75](#), [77](#),
[78](#), [89](#)

Signori, [57](#), [69](#), [91](#), [92](#), [96](#)

Signoria, [12](#), [28](#), [32](#), [33](#), [36](#), [54](#), [58](#),
[89](#), [92](#), [93](#), [95](#), [97](#)

T

Trexler, Richard, [34](#)

Trial by Fire, [13](#), [16](#), [17](#), [35](#)

Tribute Money, [2](#), [10](#), [16](#), [18](#), [20](#), [21](#),
[23](#), [25](#), [35](#), [48](#)