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Bodies of Water: The Mediterranean in Italian Baroque Theater

Jon R. Snyder

*The Mediterranean is not merely geography.
[. . .] The Mediterranean is not merely history.*
— Predrag Matvejević¹

Così convertendo il suo remo in penna, il suo mare in inchiostro, e la sua trireme in un libro manoscritto, il feci scorrer per l'Egeo de' letterati, accioché mi dicessero, s'egli era bastante per resistere agli assalti de' pirati malevoli, e fatto sicuro alfine da mordaci incursioni, alle stampe il diedi.²

Thus wrote Giovan Battista Andreini (1576-1654), arguably the leading Italian comic playwright of the seventeenth century, in the dedicatory preface to the revised edition of his early comedy entitled *Lo schiavetto* (The Little Slave).³ In personifying the process through which the original script of the play was transformed into this published literary work, Andreini employs an extended metaphor that must have made ready sense to his contemporary Baroque readership. For the character whose name also serves as the title of the work is portrayed in these lines as an unwilling participant in a central institution of early modernity—one whose very existence depended upon Mediterranean voyages. The “little slave” is, without a doubt, a galley slave, although one who in Italy will exchange his “oar” for a “pen,” salt water for “ink,” and his ship for a manuscript. The detailed vocabulary employed by Andreini—including such terms as “pirates,” “assaults,” “incursions,” “trireme[s],” “sea” and “oar[s]”—refers to the Mediterranean-wide system of human trafficking that supplied manpower for the many galleys navigating its waters, whether they belonged to Christians or Muslims, Europeans or Ottomans. The playwright thus reminds his readers that Muslims were not the only raiders to prey on mercantile shipping or to strike at coastal communities, and that not only Istanbul, Tunis, and Cairo were host to slave markets: for slavery was practiced on both the northern and southern shores of the early modern Mediterranean.⁴

At the same time, however, the fierce literary-critical controversies of the age in Italy are likened by the work's author to the “Aegean” Sea, namely a place of danger in which there lurk “malevolent pirates”/critics whose “biting” assaults are among the risks that

¹ Predrag Matvejević, *Mediterranean: a Cultural Landscape*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1999), 7, 10.

² G.B. Andreini, unnumbered page of dedication to Girolamo Priuli, *Lo schiavetto comedia di G.B. Andreini fiorentino* (Venice: G.B. Ciotti, 1620). Girolamo Priuli was the son of the Doge of Venice, Antonio Priuli, who served in this capacity from 1618 to 1623.

³ For the original edition of the play, see G.B. Andreini, *Lo schiavetto* (Milan: Pandolfo Malatesta, 1612).

⁴ See Iain Chamber's essay in this issue of *California Italian Studies*, and his reflections on the Mediterranean and slavery in *Mediterranean Crossings. The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 38-41.

ships/manuscripts must run as they cross this sea of “ink” powered by the oar/pen of the slave/writer. The identity of the galley slave is, like that of the literary text, bound up with the notion of crossing over a body of water, whether literally or metaphorically.⁵ In the character of the Schiavetto, and the metaphors used here to describe both the “little slave” and his play, is implicit a vision of the Mediterranean that also appears, as I will argue in this essay, in at least two other thematically related plays from this same period of Andreini’s career, i.e. *La turca* (The Lady Turk, 1611) and *La sultana* (The Sultana, 1622).⁶ In these three works, the Mediterranean Sea performs an essential if complex thematic and theatrical function, simultaneously separating and connecting families, communities, cultures, and states scattered around its shores, at once affirming and making it possible to overcome the distance between them. In Andreini’s perspective, this great sea cannot be thought of simply in geographical terms—i.e. as an ensemble of bodies of water, set between three continents—but rather as a unique scene of human interaction and exchange, in which unfold acts of civility and barbarity, magnanimity and cruelty, love and violence: the Mediterranean is, in short, a Baroque stage.

Andreini seems to have done little if any traveling by sea in the course of his long career as the *capocomico* and leading actor of his own company (known as ‘I Fedeli’). We know that he and the Fedeli moved chiefly between Florence, the cities of the Po Valley, Venice and Paris over the first two decades of the seventeenth century.⁷ Andreini nevertheless must have known a good deal about the Mediterranean Sea, especially concerning the dangers of piracy and slavery that menaced travelers across its waters in the Cinque-Seicento as the Ottoman Empire and the Christian West fought for control. For his father, the renowned actor Francesco Andreini (1548-1624), had in his youth been captured while serving as a soldier and enslaved for a number of years by the Ottoman Turks before escaping to Italy.⁸ Many others in the early modern period—well over a

⁵ I wish to thank here the second anonymous reader for *California Italian Studies*, who elegantly notes in regard to Andreini’s defense—as actor, playwright and *capocomico*—of the theatrical profession in the face of the moral and religious strictures of his era: “in questo senso la metafora marinara della scrittura proposta da Andreini [...] trova un ulteriore sviluppo: l’attore che diventa autore e che riceve l’attenzione di illustri protettori acquista, nei confronti dei suoi colleghi, la nobiltà del corsaro che serve un regno, innalzandolo al di sopra dei vili pirati che servono soltanto il loro interesse.” These “pirates” are to be identified with the actors of other *commedia dell’arte* troupes, whose performances defied the literary and social decorum of the Counter-Reformation and, in Andreini’s eyes, discredited their (and his) profession.

⁶ G.B. Andreini, *La turca comedia boscareccia e maritima* (Casale Monferrato: Pantaleone Goffi, 1611), and *La sultana* (Paris: Nicolas De La Vigne, 1622). Some scholars believe that the text of *La turca* was first published in Casale Monferrato in 1608, although no copy is known to exist of this printing: see G.B. Andreini, *La Maddalena lasciva e penitente*, ed. Rosella Palmieri (Bari: Palomar, 2006), 298n5. An alternate translation for *La sultana* could be *The Sultan’s Daughter*: the term ‘sultana’ may be used in English to refer to wives, sisters, or daughters of a sultan, but in this case there is no question that it designates the Sultana as the daughter of an Ottoman sultan.

⁷ The best accounts of Andreini’s itinerant existence as an actor are to be found in Siro Ferrone, *Attori mercanti corsari: la commedia dell’arte in Europa tra Cinque e Seicento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), and *Arlecchino: vita e avventure di Tristano Martinelli attore* (Bari: Laterza, 2006). For an English-language biographical sketch of Andreini, see Jon R. Snyder, “Editor’s Introduction,” in G.B. Andreini, *Love in the Mirror*, ed. and trans. Jon R. Snyder, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe, Toronto Series, 2 (Toronto: ITER/CRRS, 2009), 1-17.

⁸ Alessandro D’Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano*, 3 vols. (Turin: Loescher, 1891, 2nd rev. ed.), Vol. 2, 482, claims that Francesco Andreini was a prisoner of the Turks for eight years.

million Christian and Muslim men, women and children, according to the historian Robert C. Davis—also experienced bondage somewhere on or around the Mediterranean, principally as a result of warfare, piracy, or corsair raids.⁹ It should therefore be no surprise if this great sea—made up of many bodies of water, from the Alboran Sea to the Aegean, from the Adriatic to the Tyrrhenian and beyond—plays such a prominent role in these three comedies. Although never named as such by Andreini, in his comedies the Mediterranean is truly that which is “between the lands,” the interposing space that must be ceaselessly traversed by subjects, cultures, faiths and states. Indeed, in these plays the sea figures, like language itself, as that which lies in between human beings, with the potential both to bring them together and to keep them forever apart.¹⁰

Across these often troubled waters Andreini’s comic characters pass—if not always effortlessly—from the Christian to the Ottoman sphere or vice versa. The ablest of all are the pirates and corsairs that infest the sea(s) with their fast, elusive galleys, preying upon not only merchant ships, along with their passengers and crew, but also coastal dwellers, from fisher-folk to peasants to artisans. Powerful enough to defy or even to defeat an armada sent to stop them, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the pirates and corsairs of the Mediterranean transformed—and sometimes devastated—entire coastal economies by undermining agriculture, fishing, commerce and trade anywhere near the coastline.¹¹ The difference between ‘corsair’ and ‘pirate’ is not apparent in Andreini’s plays, although there is in fact an important distinction to be made between the former, operating more or less with a mandate from a sovereign state, and the latter, acting wholly outside of the law.¹² Perhaps this distinction mattered little to the galley slaves who were crowded into a vessel’s hold for months and years at a time. Without their forced labor at the oars, however, the *guerre di corsa* that made so much of the Mediterranean into a mobile theater of conflict throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would likely have been fewer, and would have in any case unfolded more slowly. The system of capture, trading and exploitation of prisoners had first of all to feed itself the “fuel” (i.e. the *galeotti*) that it needed to guarantee its own survival and to continue the manhunt. The speedy pirate and corsair galleys plying these waters appear in Andreini’s plays, not surprisingly, above all else as agents of sudden and drastic reversals of fortune. An urbane Italian-speaking poet in North Africa may one day unexpectedly find himself in bondage and chained to an oar far out at sea; a great Venetian nobleman on his way by ship across the Aegean may be captured and carried off to Istanbul for

⁹ Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 23-24.

¹⁰ Here I refer the reader to the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, which concerns itself with the “in between”: see, for instance, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 295-96.

¹¹ Salvatore Bono, *Corsari nel Mediterraneo: cristiani e musulmani fra guerra, schiavitù e commercio* (Milan: Mondadori, 1993), 144-146.

¹² Salvatore Bono, “Malta e Venezia fra corsari e schiavi (secc. 16 – 18),” *Mediterranea: ricerche storiche*, 3 (August 2006): 213, states that: “corsaro è colui che opera con l’autorizzazione o addirittura in nome e per conto di uno Stato, svolgendo perciò un’attività del tutto legale, sotto il profilo non solo del diritto interno ma anche di quello internazionale. Pirata è invece colui che esercita la stessa rischiosa attività del corsaro – assaltare navi e catturare uomini e merci, perfino con sbarchi a terra – senza autorizzazione, senza osservare alcuna norma né rispettare limitazioni, non esitando ad attaccare imbarcazioni e naviganti di stati nemici; il pirata è dunque letteralmente un fuorilegge.”

ransom; corsair fleets may sweep across the waters of the Mediterranean from east to west, or from north to south, arriving without warning to wreak havoc on a coastal community; a young child may be snatched from her family and taken in slavery to a foreign land whose language she does not speak, to serve in a household and perhaps, one day, in a harem.

A number of elements in Andreini's plays, including rapid shifts in the winds of fortune, or the predominance of disguises and metamorphosis, ultimately derive—like the Renaissance *commedia erudite* or learned comedies that preceded them—from Hellenistic novels and Greek New Comedy, via the Roman comic theater of Plautus and Terence. The theme of piracy, although it too was prominently featured in both ancient and Renaissance comedies, acquires a different and very specific valence in these three works. For many of the leading pirates and corsairs flying the Ottoman flag were renegades, namely former Christians who converted to Islam, “turning Turk” in order to serve the interests of the Great Sultan.¹³ The theme of religion is rarely as significant in comedy as it is in Andreini's *La turca*, for example, which ends with a triumph celebrating not only the military victory of the Christians over the Turks, but the mass (re)conversion of the latter. The same theme of conversion to Christianity dominates the final pages of *La sultana*, and does not appear in *Lo schiavetto* only because the “little slave” turns out to be a well-born Italian woman in disguise. Renegades from Christianity such as the great corsair commander Occhiali, who was a legend in his own lifetime, were sometimes showered with immense wealth for their service to the Ottoman Empire. Such privilege and favor were, in early modern Italy, beyond reach for a man of humble origins: the Ottomans offered opportunities for social mobility that were not to be had in any early modern European state.¹⁴ In Andreini's comedies, however, what matters is not social but rather religious mobility. His characters experience profound changes not only in fortune, but in personal identity. It is the possibility of further religious “turning” that these three works entertain, although only *from Islam to Christianity*. The speed with which conversion takes place in the plays—an unexpected and irreversible return to, or embrace of, Christianity—matches the rapidity with which the corsairs and other raiders were known to strike across the sea.¹⁵ Renegade Christians return to the bosom of the Church in *La turca*, just as Muslims renege on their faith in order to join the Christian community in *La sultana*. In essence, the interlocking themes of conversion and renegades reinforce Andreini's representation of the Mediterranean not only as a sea that

¹³ See, among many studies of early modern renegades, Bartolomé and Lucile Bennassar, *Les Chrétiens d'Allah: l'histoire extraordinaire des renégats, XVIème et XVIIème siècles* (Paris: Perrin, 1989), and Thomas Freller, *Spies and Renegades in Hospitaller Malta* (Pietà, Malta: Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2004).

¹⁴ See, for instance, Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters*, 22.

¹⁵ If a Christian at some point in the past turned Turk, then it was generally permissible—at least in Italy—for the renegade to revert to Christianity once s/he returned home. Muslim converts to Christianity, such as the Sultana herself, usually had to make an irrevocable choice, because Islamic doctrine in this period not only forbade apostasy, but often called for severe punishment for transgressors. See Marco Lenci, *Corsari: guerra, schiavi, rinnegati nel Mediterraneo* (Rome: Carocci, 2006), 152-153. On the issue of conversion in captivity, see Giovanna Fiume, “Premessa,” in “Schiavitù e conversioni nel Mediterraneo,” special issue of *Quaderni storici*, vol. 42.126 (December 2007): 659-678.

enables crossing-over, whether from one port to the other or from one empire to the other, but as a facilitator for exchange, whether of goods, languages, identities or faiths.¹⁶

If the early modern Mediterranean was, to use a metaphor of which Andreini himself was fond, a vast *theatrum mundi* in which these and other events could be played, its “stage” nonetheless had to be configured in a way that contemporary spectators or readers could recognize. Consonant with the economic, political, military and cultural logic of Mediterranean civilization in this era, Andreini provides in these three plays a map—however partial, fragmentary, and provisional—of key routes across and around the sea, linking east to west and north to south in an intricate web of interrelations. In what follows we will examine five nodal points on this web—Ragusa, Naples, Tabarka, Venice and Istanbul—which together constitute the basis of Andreini’s vision of the Mediterranean.

Ragusa

The Republic of Ragusa, for centuries a maritime republic and rival of Venice, was situated on the Dalmatian coast of the Adriatic (its capital, Ragusa, is now known as Dubrovnik). In 1418 the republic abolished the slave trade, but its merchants and traders continued to flourish across the Mediterranean and beyond. Later in the fifteenth century, after the end of Byzantium, the republic formally placed itself under the protection of the Ottoman sultans, to whom it paid tribute: because its port was an important conduit of goods to and from Italy, Ragusa was vital to Ottoman economic interests in the Adriatic. In the backstory of *La sultana*, the Sultana presumably followed the established overland trading route across the Balkans—Edirne/Plovdiv/Skopje/Novibazar/Sarajevo/Ragusa—in her flight in disguise (together with her two servants) from Istanbul. Given the important commercial and diplomatic ties between the republic and the Ottoman Empire, the presence of Turkish travelers, even poor ones, in the Balkan port city would hardly have been of interest to the municipal authorities. The Sultana subsequently gives birth to a son in Ragusa, and converts to Christianity there in order to keep her promise to the child’s missing father (“in quella Ragusa dico, dov’io nella tua casa ancorche povera questo peso deposi, e nel vaso ricetta di quell’Acque, che le macchie originali lavano col tenero figlio la salute ricevei; osservatrice in tutto della promessa fatta al crudele, ond’egli per turca non mi disprezzasse, dato ch’a sorte ritrovar il potessi” [*La sultana*, 19]). She later leaves Ragusa by ship, together with child and nurse, in order to make the very dangerous crossing by sea to Otranto, at the southeastern tip of the Italian peninsula. By the early seventeenth century corsairs and pirates were very active in the lower Adriatic, especially along the poorly defended coastline of Spanish-held Apulia, and such a trip was never to be taken lightly (Otranto itself had been taken by the Ottomans in 1480 and by the corsair Barbarossa in 1537, and was constantly threatened with further attacks from the sea.) From Otranto the Sultana and her party then make the long journey (nearly 500 kilometers) overland to Naples, where she plans to search for the former Christian slave Lelio, who had made love to her in her father’s seraglio and left her

¹⁶ Robert C. Davis, “The Geography of Slaving in the Early Modern Mediterranean, 1500-1800,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 37.1 (Winter 2007): 57, notes that “a major, even defining, element of the Mediterranean model has been that of exchange.”

pregnant prior to escaping from Istanbul. As the Sultana recounts to the wet-nurse accompanying her, “s’imbarcammo, per lo mare, sbarcammo ad Otrento [sic], e poi venimmo a Napoli, dov’hor noi siamo, e dove spero ritrovato il crudele trovar pietate, sapend’io per sua bocca, che napolitano non solo egli era: ma che’n Napoli dimorava” (*La sultana*, 19). There is no question of continuing the voyage by ship around the Capo di Leuca and into the Ionian Sea, where there would be few if any secure refuges against corsair or pirate attacks. We will much later learn that her Turkish father, in pursuit of his runaway daughter, also passes through Ragusa on his way to Italy (see below).

Naples

Naples, the setting of *La sultana*, was on the front line of the struggle against the Barbary corsairs and pirates in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The long coastline of the Kingdom of Naples was, as the historian Robert C. Davis points out, ravaged over and over again by raiders from the sea. Indeed, in this period the “Barbary pirates set up permanent bases for themselves on Ischia and Procida, islands that lay virtually within the mouth of the Bay of Naples and that gave them ready access to the hundreds of small ships that sailed these waters.”¹⁷ Much of the population of Ischia was enslaved at some point in the Cinquecento, as Barbarossa’s men took circa 4000 captives on the island in 1543-44 alone. The Spanish rulers of the Kingdom were largely unable to provide for the security of either coastal dwellers or vessels anywhere in Neapolitan waters. But Naples and its territories did not only offer a ready supply of slaves to the Barbary corsairs and pirates. Numerous prisoners from the Ottoman and Muslim lands were enslaved there, and Spanish Naples also had an important slave market in these same years (slavery was not abolished in mainland Spain until 1811, and Seville had one of the Mediterranean’s largest slave markets at the outset of the Seicento).¹⁸ Although it is estimated that slaves never constituted more than a rather small percentage of the overall population of Naples, which was one of the largest urban centers in Europe at this time, their presence was nonetheless more prominent than in most cities of central and northern Italy (with the notable exception of Livorno): they were perhaps 20,000 in number by the early seventeenth century.¹⁹ This offers one possible reason for Andreini’s choice of Spanish Naples—a city that he never once set eyes on, despite a lifetime spent wandering the highways and byways of the peninsula with his troupe—as the setting for his comedy.²⁰

¹⁷ Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters*, 141.

¹⁸ On slavery in early modern Spain, particularly Seville, see also Bono, *Corsari nel Mediterraneo*, 195-196. He notes that there were circa one hundred thousand slaves (many of sub-Saharan origin) in the final years of the sixteenth century in Spain alone.

¹⁹ Alberto Tenenti, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice 1580-1615*, trans. Janet and Brian Pullan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967 [1961]), 44, points out that “the two Viceroy of Naples and Sicily were not slow to find reasons, which seemed excellent to them, to expand their own pirate industry” and hence the slave population of Southern Italy.

²⁰ Davis, “The Geography of Slaving in the Early Modern Mediterranean, 1500-1800,” 65n28, cites research published by the Italian historian Salvatore Bono in his *Schiavi musulmani nell’Italia moderna* (Naples: Edizione Scientifiche Italiane, 1999), 21-35.

Indeed, a mock public slave auction held in Naples features prominently in *La sultana*.²¹ Prior to the auction, however, there is lengthy scene (II.2) in which the Sultana, who has disguised herself as a male Turkish slave in order to travel in Spanish-held territory, encounters her ex-lover Lelio on the streets of the city. As their comic dialogue unfolds, the Sultana maintains her slave disguise by speaking to him primarily in a pidgin blend of Venetian and Tuscan that had for centuries served as one of the bases for the *lingua franca* of the Eastern Mediterranean.²² S/he first provides him with a parody of a captivity narrative, explaining that while fleeing Istanbul with a great treasure s/he was captured and enslaved by a Tuscan corsair in the service of the Medici Grand Duke.²³ S/he was clearly too refined, s/he explains, to be chained to an oar, and thus subsequently s/he was sold to a great merchant from Ragusa, resident in Naples, whose maltreatment of the new slave was severe because s/he refused to perform humble tasks (“sto can strapazzarme, e farne fare cose basse, e mi c’haver anemo nobile, no poder comportar questo; lu a mi piar odio, e volerme vender” [*La sultana*, 44]). Thus this merchant, as the Sultana explains to Lelio, now wishes to sell his slave to the highest bidder at auction. In II.6 the multilingual “auction” takes place, with the wet-nurse disguised as the slave-owner from Ragusa: the hypocritical and opportunistic nature of this merchant would have been clear to the contemporary audience, which undoubtedly knew of the ban on slave-trading in the Republic of Ragusa itself. Momolo, a Venetian innkeeper and ruffian, serves as auctioneer, calling out in colorful Venetian dialect the many virtues of the Sultana’s body, while the wet-nurse and putative slave-owner instead speaks in *lingua franca* with prospective purchasers.

If the choice of *lingua franca* seems rather odd, inasmuch as Venetian was still widely spoken in the early modern period in the Eastern Adriatic, and was not radically dissimilar from the romance Dalmatian used in Ragusa, the wet-nurse’s supposed home city, her conversation with the Sultana in this same scene is even stranger. For their initial public exchange takes place not in *lingua franca*, but rather in Turkish. Unexpectedly for a master of the *commedia dell’arte*, an artform in which foreign languages and dialects often figure as pastiche or parody, Andreini furnishes his readers with a text in early seventeenth-century Turkish that is, on the whole, remarkably accurate and all the more striking for its careful choice of vowels transliterated into the Roman alphabet. Although the dialogue between the two women is quite elementary, and there are some lines clearly missing from the 1622 edition, which displays numerous printer’s errors throughout, we must keep in mind that there was no recognized system of transliteration at the time (the Turks, of course, used the Arabic alphabet until Atatürk’s reforms in the twentieth century). It may even have been illegal to speak Turkish in parts of Italy, although not in

²¹ On so-called “Turkish” slaves in Northern Italy, who often in fact belonged to other ethnic groups or nationalities, see Rafaella Sarti, “Bolognesi schiavi dei ‘turchi’ e schiavi ‘turchi’ a Bologna tra Cinque e Settecento: alterità etnico-religiosa e riduzione in schiavitù,” *Quaderni storici*, vol. 36.107 (August 2001): 437-471.

²² Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters*, 114.

²³ A classic of early modern captivity narrative concerning the Mediterranean is Michael Heberer, *Aegyptiaca Servitus*, first published in Heidelberg in 1610; for a modern facsimile edition, see *Aegyptiaca Servitus*, ed. Karl Teply (Graz: ADEVA, 1967). A valuable Italian text of this same genre is now available in English translation: *The Journal of Aurelio Scetti: a Florentine Galley Slave at Lepanto (1565-1577)*, ed. and trans. Luigi Monga (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004).

Venice; Fegatello, one of the onlookers at the auction, comments that: “se voi altri non parlate in altro linguaggio, che in questo scomunicato, non sarete intesi” (*La sultana*, 62). The years that Francesco Andreini spent in captivity may have enabled him to learn the language of his masters and, later on, to assist his son in writing this scene; or perhaps some other former slave or renegade resident in Italy may have had a hand in it. Since the play, which first appeared in print in Paris in 1622 but was based on a *canovaccio* written years earlier, was likely in the repertory of the Fedeli long before its publication, we cannot know for certain how or when the playwright came into possession of this version of the dialogue.

Nudrice: *Aahali. Ne isterse[n], Sultanum?*

[Nurse: “Greetings to everyone. What do you wish, my Sultana?”]

Nudrice: *Ben, seni satar.*

[Nurse: “I’m selling you.”]

Sultana: *Ne isterse[n] hala?*

[Sultana: “What else do you want?”]

Nudrice: *Allahatala y’le ister!*

[Nurse: “As Almighty God wills it!”]²⁴

After this first terse exchange in Turkish with the wet-nurse, however, the Sultana switches back to *lingua franca* in speaking with potential buyers at the auction. Asked by the auctioneer to perform for them, s/he breaks into song. Here too, however, as Andreini takes pains to indicate in his stage directions, the Sultana uses a mixture of Mediterranean sounds in her performance: “qui canterà a suo capriccio un’aria alla spagnola, e sapendone alcuna alla schiavona, ovvero alla turchesca pure non starebbe male” (*La sultana*, 62). To judge from the reaction of the audience onstage, a contemporary urban Italian audience would clearly not have been too surprised to hear Spanish-, Slavic- or Turkish-sounding tunes sung in a public square or theater. The cosmopolitan nature of the crowd (whose members come from Venice, Ragusa, Naples, and Istanbul) at the slave auction in Naples, as well as of the Sultana’s knowledge of music from many traditions, serve to underscore the intermixing of cultures and languages that defines not only the play, but early modern Mediterranean civilization itself.

There is, however, one caveat that should be added here. The Sultana is, like Shakespeare’s Othello, a renegade from Islam. Unlike the tragic “Moor of Venice,” however, she succeeds in overcoming her past in order to mix with and become part of Christian and Italian society, thanks to her marriage at the end of the play with the former slave (Lelio) from Naples, who fathered her illegitimate child in Istanbul.²⁵ Early in the play, she explains that her conversion came about not only from love for Lelio, but from

²⁴ I wish to thank my colleague and friend, Prof.ssa Francesca Dell’Acqua of the University of Salerno, for having kindly deciphered for me these lines appearing on p. 62 of the 1620 edition of the play. For an interesting study of the penetration of the Turkish language into Italian and its related dialects, see Matthias Kappler, “Tracce dell’ottomano in Europa: flussi e riflessi linguistici,” in *Venezia e Istanbul: incontri, confronti e scambi*, ed. Ennio Concina (Udine: Forum Editrice, 2006), 41-51.

²⁵ See Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 77-106, on the fluidity of identity in the early modern Mediterranean.

the fact that her Christian lover resolutely refused to turn Turk. Many early modern Mediterranean communities did not always look favorably on intermarriages between Muslims and Christians (it was in any case forbidden for Muslim women to marry outside of Islam, according to the Qu'ran [2.221]).²⁶ The Sultana therefore chooses to cross over not only to the other gender by crossdressing as a male slave, but also to Islam's rival faith by becoming a renegade: "terminai (non si volend'egli per assalti miei far turco) di farm'io per lo sviscerato amor cristiana" (*La sultana*, 17). Andreini's first comedy, *La turca*, was published in 1611, the same year in which the earliest known performance of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* took place in London. Both plays make reference, although in different ways, to the "hot-button" topic of Barbary Coast piracy and slavery. In the backstory of *The Tempest* are two women who never appear on stage, but whose lives offer diametrically opposed—if equally fanciful—perspectives on this issue. Claribel, the daughter of King Alfonso of Naples, has been given to the Bey of Tunis as his queen, and thus is understood to have converted to Islam for the sake of her marriage to him (II.1.70). This, however, defies normal dynastic logic, inasmuch as any offspring produced by Claribel would have to be—if all other legitimate dynasts of the house of King Alfonso (and others holding succession rights) were to perish—in line for succession to the throne of Naples, thus putting the Christian kingdom in the hands of a Muslim ruler. The mother of the illegitimate and monstrous Caliban is instead Sycorax, a "blue-eyed" witch (I.2.269)—hence possibly descended, Shakespeare would seem to suggest, from some renegade or European slave—who resided in Algiers, the capital city of the Barbary Coast corsairs, before her exile and death on the enchanted island. (Caliban's true father is a "devil," Prospero states [V.1.272-273], although it would be possible to read the play as suggesting that the father was instead a Muslim from Algiers.) This unnamed "barren" island lies somewhere in the sea between Tunis and Naples, i.e. the ambiguous zone between the realms of Islam and Christianity.²⁷ In the exchange of beings and identities ceaselessly crossing the early modern Mediterranean, origins threaten to be scandalous only when the two faiths mix together to form an unstable and sterile hybrid, in this case embodied by the in-between figure of Caliban (who will remain behind on the island when the others depart at the play's end), rather than be kept separate from one another through the mechanism of conversion that eliminates intermarriage.²⁸

²⁶ See Barbara Fuchs and Aaron J. Ilika, "Introduction," in Miguel de Cervantes, *The Bagnios of Algiers' and 'The Great Sultana': Two Plays of Captivity*, ed. and trans. Barbara Fuchs and Aaron J. Ilika (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), xx. In the Western literary tradition, of course, there are any number of exogamous unions between Christians and Muslims, but often these serve to provide an element of exoticism or of sociosexual transgression, rather than reflect the real conditions of existence in the early modern Mediterranean world.

²⁷ See Richard Wilson, "Voyage to Tunis: New History and the Old World of *The Tempest*," *English Literary History* 64.2 (1997): 336-337.

²⁸ See the numerous studies in "Schiavitù e conversioni nel Mediterraneo," *Quaderni storici*, vol. 42:126 (December 2007): 659-876.

Venice

Venice, the place of publication of many of Andreini's plays, and the city in which his company worked extensively in the second decade of the Seicento, was known for centuries as "the Queen of the Adriatic." Although the Venetian empire was already in marked decline by the mid-Cinquecento, as the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans provided new routes for the spice trade to Asia, the city retained a good deal of its fabulous wealth deriving from extensive trading networks, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond, and from privileged commercial ties with the Turks. The pressure from the westward military expansion of the Ottoman Empire, however, proved more and more difficult for the Venetians to resist between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and took an increasing toll on the city's resources, with the loss of capital, ships, colonial territories, markets and so on. Even the great naval victory of the Christian alliance over the Turkish fleet at Lepanto in 1571 did relatively little to slow this process of irreversible decline, although it did lead to a formal peace treaty between Venice and the Ottoman Empire that endured (1573-1645) throughout most of Andreini's long lifetime. Venetian shipping in the Mediterranean was nevertheless a prime target of corsairs and pirates, whether Muslim or Christian, and the Venetians sustained tremendous losses from their attacks. In the respective dedications to *La turca* and *Lo schiavetto*, both printed in Venice, Andreini integrates the questions of piracy, slavery and the struggle with the Islamic world, on the one hand, with the specific experiences of the Venetian republic in this period, on the other.

Andreini published the revised edition of his comedy *La turca comedia boschereccia et maritima* in Venice in 1620.²⁹ The city in the lagoon was the most important publishing center in Italy at the time, as well as its theatrical capital, but there were other reasons for the itinerant author-actor to have wanted this play to appear in print there. In dedicating the work to the Venetian nobleman Vincenzo Grimani, scion of an illustrious and ancient family, Andreini states with rhetorical flourish: "porta la fama su l'ali così glorioso il nome di V.S. Illustrissima che non sarà maraviglia, se dopo haver fatti schiavi mille, e mille cristiani cuori, ora tributaria soggetta a lei s'invii questa TURCA ancora. Già fiero tenore di contraria stella schiava la condusse in Costantinopoli asilo di barbari infedeli, & oggi benignissimo fato fa, che libera trascorra in Vinezia tempio di pietosi credenti. Eccolla al fine trasportata dal ceppo di ferro a quello d'oro, dal bigio all'ostro, dal pirata crudele al cavalier pietoso" (*La turca*, unnumbered pages). The date of the dedication, 7 November 1616, precedes by approximately four years the publication of this Venetian edition of *La turca*. This anomaly would suggest that the dedication was produced by the playwright after Grimani's return to La Serenissima from bondage overseas, and offered to him as a patron of Andreini's acting company, perhaps in Vicenza, a prosperous city of the Venetian *terraferma* (where Grimani held at this time the position of *podestà*, according to the title page of *La turca*, and where there were a number of permanent theaters).

In a curiously paradoxical reversal, Grimani is represented in the work's dedication as a despot in his own right, who has created thousands of slaves and can count, among those who are "subject to [him]" and must offer him tribute, Andreini's play itself (which

²⁹ G.B. Andreini, *La turca comedia boschereccia et maritima* (Venice: Paolo Guerigli, 1620).

is in part about a supposedly ‘Turkish’ slave who is actually a Christian in disguise). If the reference to Grimani’s having enslaved “thousands and thousands of Christian hearts” seems obscure at first, the captivity narrative *in nuce* that follows these words in the dedication suggests a possible explanation, albeit one that can be confirmed only by further research in the archives. Andreini does unequivocally state that this important Venetian noble was captured by the Turks and transported in chains as a slave to Istanbul (a.k.a. Constantinople, as the city was still often called); the text suggests that he was taken prisoner by pirates or corsairs, most likely somewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean. Given his exalted social status, Grimani must have been held in the Ottoman capital for ransom, as was the common practice in this peculiar economic system of exchange. Although the Grimani family in Venice would presumably have had to pay the lion’s share of the ransom money, it may possibly be that others were also involved, such as the Church, or one or more of the Italian lay or religious groups working for the redemption and liberation of Christian captives held by the Muslims. The phrase “thousands and thousands of Christian hearts” may therefore refer either to the members of these groups, or to the fervent prayers for Grimaldi’s freedom offered by the inhabitants of Venice, that “temple of pious believers.” Istanbul figures in this brief narrative as being in every way the counterpart of Venice:

<u>Venice</u>	<u>Istanbul</u>
“temple of pious believers”	“refuge of barbarous infidels”
“golden shackles”	“iron fetters”
“free[dom]”	“slavery”
“purple” [color of royalty]	“grey” [color of slave clothing]
“pious knight”	“cruel pirate”

We know that Grimani’s wife, Marina Calergi, whom he married in 1608, came from a wealthy family with deep roots in the city of Candia on the island of Crete, which was at that time still in the hands of the Venetians. In the dedication to the 1620 Venetian version of *La turca*, Andreini makes numerous allusions to Candia through Baroque word-play: “O Candida, o Candida; ad altro fine non credo che di Candida ti fosse imposto il nome, se non per segnare con pietra candida giorno così candido e felice: ma perché la sua Real fortuna con questo punto più si può ammirar con taciturnità, che scriverne in ardimento, le m’inchino, e con questo humilissimo dono me stesso le dono” (*La turca*, unnumbered page). The name of the comedy’s protagonist is “Candi(d)a,” which alludes to her virtuous nature as well as—in this context—to the Venetian city on distant Crete. This character would have been played on stage by Andreini’s wife and leading lady, Virginia Ramponi, whose stock role in his comedies was that of the *innamorata* named Florinda (which, as it turns out much later on in the play, was Candida’s original Christian name). Although Candida does not speak until late in the second act (II.8), we learn much earlier in the play that she has fled from the corsair capital of Algiers (“fuggita d’Algieri”) to the Mediterranean island of Tabarka, and for this reason is referred to as “the lady Turk” (“per sopra nome detta la Turca”) by the island’s inhabitants (*La turca*, 8). (We also discover that she was kidnapped by pirates as a five-year-old child, along with her identical twin brother, and grew up on the Barbary Coast among Muslims.) The theme of Turkish slavery is thus central to the play itself:

Candida's identical twin brother Nebi, a.k.a. Florindo, is a slave dressed as a Turk, "nobilmente alla turchesca vestito" (as the list of dramatis personae carefully notes), while the illustration on the title page of the 1620 edition displays a young woman also dressed "alla turchesca," with a crescent on top of her turban to reinforce her identity as the "Turca" of the play's title (*Fig. 1*). All of this would seem to offer circumstantial evidence that Vincenzo Grimani was captured and enslaved while traveling to or from the important Venetian outpost of Candia, before being ransomed from the Turks later on—an act of liberation from bondage which this 1620 edition of the play is meant to mark "with a white stone" ("per segnare con pietra candida giorno così candido e felice").

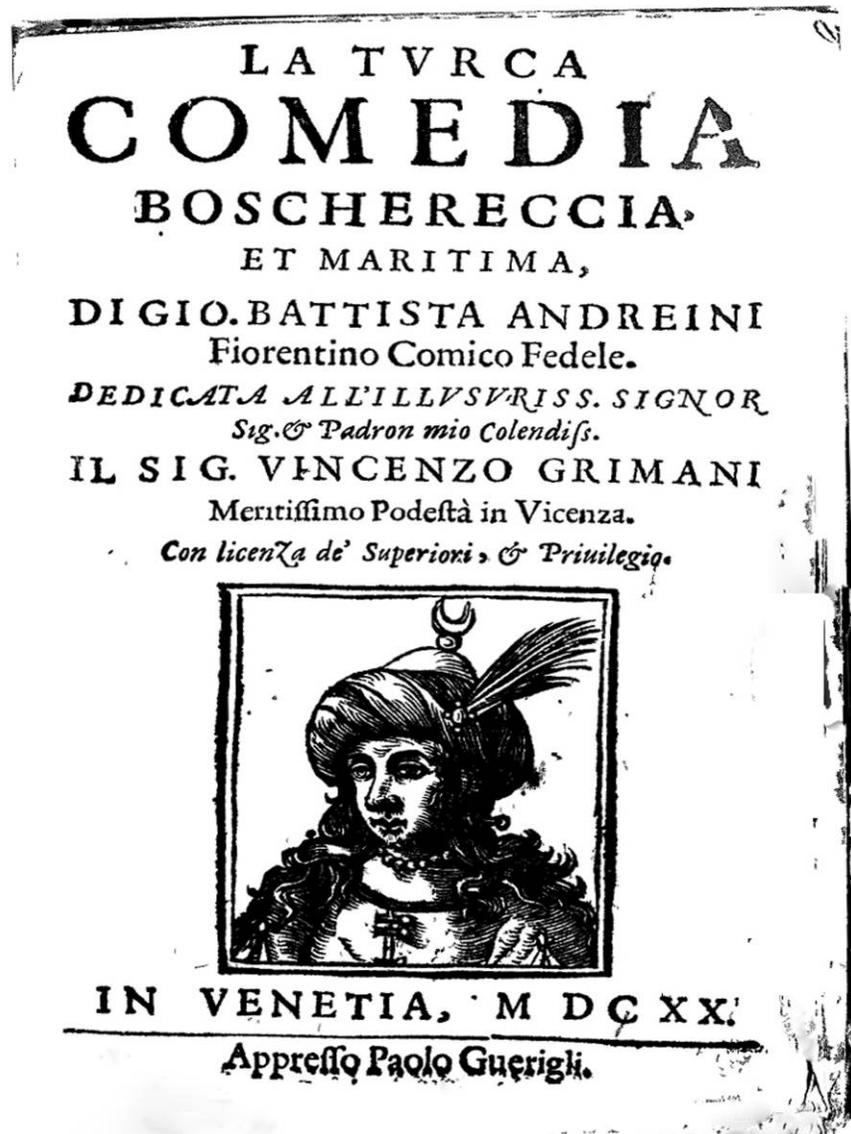


Fig. 1: title page of the 1620 edition of G.B. Andreini's *La turca*

Although it may appear counterintuitive to the modern Western reader, race is generally not a significant theme in Andreini's comedies, just as race has less to do with slavery in the early modern Mediterranean than does religion. For example, notarial documents from this period surviving in the archives in Sardinia, which was by the sixteenth century caught in the crossfire between the two civilizations, indicate that slaves on the island were a mixture of so-called 'Moors' from North and West Africa (including Arabs and Berbers), sub-Saharan Africans, Jews, Turks, and inhabitants of the Balkans.³⁰ In *La turca* the name "Candida" may refer to the color of the female protagonist's skin, but it is much more to the point that, although she lived for years among Muslims in Algiers, her heart has remained pure and her honor intact. Although the Venetian edition of *Lo schiavetto* (whose first edition, printed in Milan, dates to 1612) includes on the title page a portrait of a dark-skinned African slave with a rope around his neck to indicate his state of bondage, the character of Schiavetto is assigned no apparent racial traits in the text itself (*Fig. 2*). It is known that there were African slaves in Venice by at least the Quattrocento, so perhaps the worldly Venetian public found representations of racial exoticism not particularly compelling by the early seventeenth century. The character of Schiavetto would have been played by an actress in Andreini's company—who was once again surely Virginia Ramponi herself—appearing cross-dressed on stage as a male slave and speaking perfect, grammatically sophisticated Italian, in order only later to have her true identity revealed as a Neapolitan noblewoman named Florinda who had previously been abandoned by her lover Orazio (*Lo schiavetto*, p. 175).

³⁰ See Francesco Carboni, *L'umanità negata. Schiavi mori, turchi, neri, ebrei e padroni nella Sardegna del '500* (Cagliari: CUEC, 2008).

L O
SCHIAVETTO
COMEDIA
DI GIO: BATTISTA
Andreini Fiorentino.

DEDICATA
ALL'ILLVSTRIS S. SIG.
GIROLAMO PRIVLI
Meritissimo Figluolo di sua Sereuità.

CON LICENZA, ET PRIVILEGIO.



IN VENETIA, M. DC. XX
Nella Stamperia di Gio: Battista Ciotti

Fig. 2: title page of the 1620 edition of G.B. Andreini's *Lo schiavetto*

Apart from the themes of transvestitism and twins common to many of Andreini's comic works for the stage, what distinguishes this role is the representation of religious rather than racial difference: Schiavetto is, because of "his" African origins, understood to be Muslim and hence a slave serving Christian masters. Or, more precisely, as we saw in the discussion of the play's dedication, s/he had supposedly labored as a galley slave on board a European vessel in the Mediterranean. That there is an absolute divide in matters of religion between Christianity and all of its rivals is further underscored by a brutally anti-Semitic scene at the conclusion of act 2, in which some Jewish merchants (one of whom is named "Caino") are mocked and robbed by the thuggish "prince" Nottola and his band of followers or "scrocchi." The Jews too, although not slaves in

Italy, were excluded from the protection and privileges afforded to Christians on the peninsula; on the high seas their cargo could be confiscated by European navies or corsairs, and any Jews captured there could be enslaved.³¹ The play thus inflects the concerns and anxieties of the Venetian public over the ongoing clashes in the Mediterranean between the European powers and their surrogates, on the one hand, and the Ottoman Empire and its surrogates, on the other. In the end, however, the true identity of the “other” (i.e. Schiavetto) is revealed to resemble intimately that of the spectator, rather than to remain dangerously different in either racial or religious terms, and Andreini’s comic world is reordered in order to preserve the familiar status quo.

Finally, both respective 1620 editions of *La turca* and *Lo schiavetto*, although produced by different printers in Venice, contain the same skillfully-executed full-page portrait of Andreini himself, holding a quill in his left hand and armor in his right hand (Fig. 3). Above him, Mars and Apollo—the gods of war and of poetry, respectively—are perched on the edge of the oval frame. The gods are together holding a helmet and visor, which they are apparently lowering onto the playwright’s head, as if to prepare him for battle. Thus Andreini underscores once again the militant nature of these comic plays in regard to the conflict with Islam, and, by extension, the importance of Venice in that same conflict, positioned at the crossroads of East and West.



Fig. 3: portrait of G.B. Andreini in 1620 edition of *La turca*

³¹ In his classic study of early modern Venice and piracy, the historian Alberto Tenenti attributes Christian hatred of the Jews in this period to, among other factors, the position of the Jews as intermediaries between Christians and Muslim spheres. See his *Piracy and the Decline of Venice 1580-1615*, 24.

Tabarka

Tabarka (also spelled ‘Tabarca’), a small island less than four hundred meters off the northern coast of present-day Tunisia, would seem an unlike setting for Andreini’s comedy *La turca*. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries European states, chiefly Spain, maintained scattered territorial footholds or commercial outposts along this same North African coastline. Mers El Kébir and Oran were nearby Spanish possessions, for instance, at the time of the writing of this play; it would be misleading to think in terms of the “integrity” of national territories along the shores of the early modern Mediterranean. The island of Tabarka—not to be confused with the small, identically-named fishing port facing it from the shore—was held in concession from the Bey of Tunis (who was under Ottoman suzerainty) by the Lomellini family of Genoa, which maintained a coral fishery and military outpost there between 1540 and 1742. The Lomellini were among the richest and most powerful of the great Genoese aristocratic families, and the North African coral fishery was obviously an important source of their wealth, worthy of the considerable investment required in transportation, supplies, and security.³² The island’s precarious status as a remote Genoese colony, technically a part of the Republic of Genoa, in one of the most dangerous stretches of the early modern Mediterranean—namely the “barbareschi confini” (*La turca*, 10) of the Barbary Coast, where many corsairs were based and where many naval raids, skirmishes and battles took place—may have induced Andreini to set his play there, precisely because of the peculiar theme of this comedy. (I have been unable to find, in chronicles of the period, any reference to a particular raid or attack on the island that would have become well known in Europe.) Tabarka was also, however, one link in the complex chain of communications posts concerned with the ransoming of Christian slaves held along the Barbary Coast in this same period.³³ If *Lo schiavetto* and *La sultana* depict characters that are perceived as Muslims and slaves in Italy, *La turca* instead recounts a tale of Christians under siege in far-off, Muslim-dominated North Africa. The list of dramatis personae calls, succinctly but eloquently, for the cast to include “infiniti turchi armati” (*La turca*, unnumbered page).

Here too, as in the other comedies, the possibility of unexpected and dramatic turns of fate—from freedom to slavery, from wealth to poverty, from community to solitude, from one corner of the great sea to another, from life to death—haunts the characters. The fundamental instability of existence in the colony, despite its military garrison, seems to define Tabarka as a permeable membrane, surrounded by water, through which Muslims and Christians may pass almost at will on their way to the other side. Candida was born on Tabarka, taken in captivity to Algiers, only later to return to the island; Occhiali leaves Italy and becomes a renegade, but eventually recants and reverts to Christianity after losing the battle for Tabarka; the less-than-virtuous Capitan Corazza, leader of the island community, is Occhiali’s sworn enemy, yet in the end relents and embraces him as his long-lost brother Rosmondo; and so on. The suddenness with which these transformations or metamorphoses occur are not adequately accounted for by the

³² See Edmondo Luxoro, *Tabarca e tabarchini : cronaca e storia della colonizzazione di Carloforte* (Cagliari: Edizioni della Torre, 1977), for a basic sketch of the island’s early modern Genoese colony.

³³ Achille Riggio, *Tabarca e il riscatto degli schiavi in Tunisia: da Kara-Othman Dey a Kara-Moustafa Dey, 1593-1702* (Genoa: La R. Deputazione di storia patria per la Liguria, 1938).

playwright, but are simply a given. Departures and arrivals are enabled by the sea itself, which makes possible at any moment travel not only to but from the island, connecting it like a great highway to everywhere else in the Mediterranean basin at once, from Istanbul in the east to Genoa in the north to Algiers in the west. It is as if the sea were not only a constant presence in the play, with its winds, waves, tides and fog, but also a character in its own right, neutral in regard to the conflict between Christianity and Islam, but serving to enable and sustain the theme of crossing: between shores, peoples, faiths, families, genders and empires.³⁴

The only clearly identifiable historical figure to appear in these three comedies, and perhaps in any of Andreini's many comedies, is the notorious renegade corsair Occhiali (1519-1587). Curiously, this is also the only comedy by Andreini that is not set in the present day, or that can be located within a specific historical period. Because the date of Occhiali's death from old age is (and was) well known, however, contemporary readers and spectators alike must have understood the play's action to be set sometime before 1587 or, in other words, at least a generation before Andreini composed his comedy. In *La turca* the renegade corsair is the leader of the Turkish invasion fleet that lands at Tabarka to take slaves and sack the town (which, we are told, had already happened once some years before [*La turca*, 9-10]). Born Giovanni Dionigi Galeni in Calabria, the real Occhiali had many names—circa twenty are now known—and many lives in the course of his extraordinary career, which took him from galley slave to sailor to corsair captain to administrator to pasha to admiral of the Ottoman fleet, with which he fought from Morocco to the Crimea. Such was his fame among Europeans that Miguel de Cervantes, who spent five years in captivity in Algiers, mentions him with the name of "Uchali" in chapter 39 of the first part of the *Quixote*.³⁵ In *La turca* he is depicted as a ferocious and uncompromising enemy of Christianity, who delights in taunting his captives with remarks about their fate as slaves in the Turkish galleys. For example, when he mistakes Candida for her identical twin brother, the former Christian slave Nebì, Occhiali sneers: "al ferro, al ferro di nuovo; di nuovo agli strazij, agli stenti, alle seti, alle fami" (*La turca*, 107-108). Later, during the same raid on Tabarka, he rages at the recently captured Poet: "O col tuo pianto. Alla galea, alla galea, e con una penna di faggio va poetando, e scrivendo sonetti nel gran foglio del mare, e l' Apollo ti sia un duro e grosso nerbo di bue. Via, via, conducetelo con quell'altro alla galea, novello Parnaso di questo Poeta" (*La turca*, 140). Yet, despite his courage and military prowess on behalf of Islam, the character of Occhiali remains a renegade and thus, in Andreini's optic, susceptible to the idea of coming back over to the Christian side.³⁶ The figure of the renegade, who moves

³⁴ Davis, "The Geography of Slaving in the Early Modern Mediterranean, 1500-1800," 69, adds (regarding the Greek islands) that "each island community was left to strike what bargains it could with the corsairs of both religions [. . .] Ships from all states that entered the region routinely carried the flags of all the others, ready to masquerade as needed to dupe a potential victim or slip away from a possible foe."

³⁵ Cervantes wrote two noteworthy comedies about captivity in North Africa, based on his personal experience as a prisoner held for ransom in Algiers: see '*The Bagnios of Algiers*' and '*The Great Sultana*': *Two Plays of Captivity*.

³⁶ It is claimed that Occhiali founded the town of 'Calabria Nuova' on the Top-Hona hill near Istanbul and allowed Christians to live there while maintaining their own customs and language: see Francesco Giuseppe Romeo, *Pirati e corsari nel Mediterraneo (lo scontro tra cristiani e saraceni tra il IX e il XIX sec.)* (Cavallino: Capone Editore, 2000), 147. I am indebted throughout to the website

between two worlds (and former renegades who renounced Islam were usually welcomed back into early modern Italian society with few questions asked), and the figure of the corsair, tirelessly ranging throughout the entire Mediterranean in pursuit of plunder, are merged in this character, giving him a central role to play in the development of this comedy's overarching theme of crossing-over from one shore, culture, or identity to the other.

At the climax of the fighting on Tabarka, the Turks are defeated, and the play ends with them ultimately choosing to convert to Christianity. The Captain, rather than kill his wounded rival Occhiali, discovers that the two of them are long-lost brothers named Rosildo and Rosmondo. The latter swears not only to adopt his brother's Christian faith, but to defend the island against any future Muslim incursions ("godì ancor tu, o Isola di Tabarca, poiché per difensore avrà il tuo grande offensore" [*La turca*, 171]). Andreini reserves for this final section of the play an elaborate Baroque triumph (described in detail in an appendix included in the volume on pp. 183-184) to celebrate the Christian victory over the infidels. This procession, with the defeated corsair captains initially chained to a triumphal car, provides the framework for the climactic recognition scenes in which "è disciolto il nodo della favola" (*La turca*, 183) and the conflict is resolved. Andreini's comedy thus ends with a dream-like scene of wish fulfillment, with Turks and Christians—former bitter enemies—garlanded with flowers and carried off the stage on the same triumphal car. Although clearly lacking in verisimilitude, the conclusion of *La turca* expresses a deep-seated desire for reconciliation between Europeans and Ottomans that must have found a degree of resonance in early Seicento Italian culture (*La turca* was staged in Venice and in the cities of the Po river valley of northern Italy, areas not known to have been directly threatened with attack by corsairs or by Ottoman armies). Indeed, the conclusion of *La sultana*—which, as was said earlier, was published in 1622 but seems to have been composed and put into the Fedeli's repertory some time in the second decade of the seventeenth century—displays a marked resemblance to the conclusion of *La turca*, and is similarly oneiric in nature.

In the case of *La sultana*, the father of the Sultana—himself a Turkish sultan, i.e. both a prince and a male descendant of the ruling Great Sultan—travels to Naples from his home in Istanbul, disguised as the Persian ambassador, in search of his fugitive daughter. When he finally finds her there, the Sultan not only blesses her marriage with her Christian lover and embraces his new Christian grandson and relations, but proceeds to convert to his renegade daughter's new faith, as do all of the Turks in his retinue. Of course, it must be emphasized that in Andreini's plays this reconciliation or crossing-over comes about only on Christian terms—not that we might have expected otherwise, given the cultural and political constraints of Counter-Reformation Italy, of which the playwright was keenly aware (as his lengthy prefatory defense of the premises of *La turca* makes clear). It should also be said that Andreini presents a partisan view of the *guerra di corsa* and the pirates of the Mediterranean in general. If the corsairs are represented as Muslims or, more precisely, as Ottoman Turks (including renegades who had "turned Turk") in *La turca*, this is only one side of the story. It bears repeating here that, as was stated at the outset, many of the early modern corsairs in the Mediterranean

<http://www.corsaridelmediterraneo.it/> for year-by-year information on the activities of Occhiali in the Mediterranean.

were Christians in the service of the European states, from Holland to Tuscany to Malta—to say nothing of pirates and freebooters—, and they too took up the hunt in the various bodies of water that together make up the great inland sea, disrupting maritime commerce and shipping, laying waste to the coastlines, and enslaving the innocent. The state of bondage in which Schiavetto and the Sultana claim to have been held by Christians turns out, for different reasons, to be a fiction, but the very fact that both characters could plausibly make this claim is an implicit admission by Andreini that, in the last analysis, the system is the same everywhere in the Mediterranean—although the Italians are obviously in the right, and the Ottomans are (always) in the wrong.

Istanbul

Istanbul (“Constantinople”) was not only the capital of the Ottoman empire, but perhaps the greatest Mediterranean city of the early seventeenth century, given the declining power of Venice and the endemic economic problems of Naples. Despite the tensions between the Ottomans and the European states, the two sides maintained extensive commercial and diplomatic ties. The city of Istanbul was well known to early modern Western observers, and throughout Europe Turkish cultural artifacts and products were in vogue.³⁷ In the three plays and the paratextual apparatus accompanying them, however, Istanbul is depicted as above all a place of mortal danger, and consequently as a place from which to flee. Andreini’s references to the Ottoman capital city are surely based not only upon the commonplaces of Counter-Reformation ideology, but on the perceptions of the northern Italian theater-going public, for whom the Turkish threat remained real enough, both on land and on the seas, despite the peace treaty between Venice and the Porte, and despite the widespread fascination for this “exotic” city and its customs. In *La turca*, as we have seen, the dedicatory text describes the travails of Vincenzo Grimani after falling into the hands of Ottoman corsairs in the Aegean or the Adriatic in the second decade of the Seicento. His captivity in Istanbul is pointedly contrasted by the playwright to the “freedom” of life in the Venetian lagoon. Furthermore, in the play itself we learn that the renegade Occhiali must at all costs take Tabarka with his corsair fleet; otherwise he will be beheaded by the Great Sultan (or *Padishah*) upon his return to Istanbul (*La turca*, 89). Although Occhiali had chosen to stake his own head on this wager with the ruler of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish capital is marked in the play as a place over which hangs the threat of violence and death.

Moreover, even though a conversation with the “gran Signore” (*La turca*, 90) himself is described in some detail by Occhiali, the Great Sultan remains an inscrutable and ominous figure in this play, tolerating or even ordering surprise attacks by his surrogates on Christian communities around the Mediterranean, and profiting from the human trafficking that results from these attacks. In *La sultana*, on the other hand, the Christian slave Lelio seduces the Sultan’s daughter and escapes from the seraglio in

³⁷ See the lavishly illustrated *Venezia e Istanbul: incontri, confronti e scambi*, ed. Ennio Concina (Udine: Forum Editrice, 2006) for images of Turkish luxury objects that circulated among consumers in early modern Europe, especially Venice.

Istanbul with jewels, gold, and her honor (she is pregnant by him).³⁸ The desperate young woman then escapes from the Sultan's palace as well, in order to follow incognito her lover to Naples and exact her revenge on him. As an apostate from Islam, the Sultana would have faced a death sentence if captured by the Ottomans and returned to her father. If brought back as a prisoner to Istanbul, Lelio would have fared no better as an escaped slave, thief, and violator of the Sultan's trust (not to mention his beloved daughter). Yet this Sultan—who is not to be confused with the ruling Padishah—seems the most magnanimous of all the characters in *La sultana* when he appears in Naples in the play's final act, far from the intrigues and dangers of the Ottoman capital city, but bringing with him from there a hint of religious tolerance and cosmopolitanism that was generally unthinkable in early Seicento Italy.

He explains to the assembly of Christians and Muslims that he has doggedly followed his daughter's escape route, traveling to Ragusa and then across the Adriatic to reach Naples: “signori sotto nome d'ambasciador persiano, per queste parti io venni accioché come turco non avesse occasione mia figlia di dubitar ch'io seguitar la facessi, e però nascosta star dovesse; e ben sapeva, che in queste parti ell'era, poiché dopo esser fuggita di Costantinopoli tutta la Turchia cercar io feci, & alhor, che disperato era lo scampo di ritrovarla, seppi com'in Ragusa ell'era; & appena colà giunto ascolto, che per Napoli è imbarcata; e così seguitandola al fine (o eterna provvidenza) la ritrovai” (*La sultana*, 178). However, in order to come to Naples from Istanbul disguised as a Persian ambassador, the Sultan had first to carry out a daring subterfuge at the expense of the Padishah himself. He recounts that, in order to provide for the future of his daughter, son-in-law, and grandson, he left Istanbul with much of his personal wealth hidden on board his ships. Purportedly bound for an Ottoman fortress somewhere in the Mediterranean in the service of the Padishah, the soon-to-be former Sultan instead ordered the fleet of Turkish galleys to change course for Ragusa, and sent his valuable cargo from that Adriatic port to Venice to be held safely for him: “e perché con simil pensiero di Turchia partir mi disposi, per questo quant'oro quante gemme, e forniture di palazzi haveva meco portai, e mi fu molto facile, poiché dovendo andare in governo per voler del Gran Signore di forte luogo in mare, caricai perciò di così fatte cose molte galee, & alhor che mi trovai in poter dell'onde, e de' venti, comandai ch'a Ragusa tirassero, e tutto il mio tesoro in Vinezia [sic] conservo” (*La sultana*, 179). The former Sultan's account of his flight from Istanbul raises three relevant points here. First, the audience learns that the sea route from Istanbul to Ragusa is practicable in this period, at least for a large fleet of armed galleys flying the Ottoman flag: from the Venetian and Italian point of view, it is no longer *mare nostrum*, but *mare aliorum*.³⁹ (As we have seen, other less important Turkish travelers, like the Sultana, found greater safety in taking the inland route to Ragusa.) Second, we see that Venice is fully part of the web of exchange spreading outward from the Ottoman capital to the cities and states around the Mediterranean. The movement of capital is, in this case, from East to West, as the ex-Sultan's wealth will then be used to support his

³⁸ This was, of course, a classic topos of Western “orientalist” fantasies about Christian men seducing Muslim women, preferably in a seraglio or harem. Among other studies, see Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

³⁹ See the essay in this issue by Claudio Fogu, “From *Mare Nostrum* to *Mare Aliorum*: Mediterranean Theory and Mediterraneism in Contemporary Italian Thought.”

extended family in Naples, but there is no doubt that his fortune flows from the single most powerful economic center in the entire basin. Third, both Venice and Naples are depicted as sanctuaries for renegades from Islam, for in the plays these cities figure as places in which Istanbul's religious and cultural authority is resisted and negated, although never forgotten.

The archetype of all Mediterranean voyages is circular: Odysseus's twenty-year journey around its shores leads the hero back to Ithaca in the end. As has been argued in this present essay, in these three plays the voyages of Andreini's comic characters—across the Mediterranean's many bodies of water—are instead inscribed in a network or web without either a true center or a periphery. Italy is the place toward which all travelers tend at the end of their crossings, but we would expect no less in the work of a Baroque Italian playwright. In these comedies the Islamic lands and peoples of the Mediterranean nevertheless exercise great influence over those who traverse this far-flung network of routes and passages, just as a distant but powerful gravitational field affects the circulation of the tides in the sea. The manifold destinies of Andreini's comic characters are enacted upon this watery stage and written “nel gran foglio del mare,” never ceasing to call on us—as spectators, readers, and fellow voyagers—to imagine what lies beyond the backdrop of the horizon or the end of the page.

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