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Renaissance and Old World

Introduction: The Status of the Renaissance

Stato da mar. The Venetian "empire of the sea." Sea of words. The Renaissance is a sea of words. But surely, you say, the Renaissance is nothing like that? Water is entirely the wrong figure. The Renaissance is a cornerstone, a keystone, it bears the weight of the Western canon, more than anything it provides a foundation for who we are. A few years ago, a TV series on the Medici put the received wisdom in a nutshell when it was claimed that "the whole of Western culture pivots on the extraordinary period we have come to know as the Renaissance."[1] Dissolve again into the sea of words … "Renaissance." Rebirth. Of what? "We." Who is that?

Two writers, more than any others, marked out the ground of what we might call the normative sense of "Renaissance": Giorgio Vasari writing in the sixteenth century and Jacob Burckhardt writing in the nineteenth. The arguments of both have been challenged, denied, proved false or at best partial, pulled this way and that, worn away by waves of modern scholarship. As is the way of such things, the texts themselves, let alone the paintings and sculptures, cities and libraries to which they refer, have become part of what we talk about when we talk about the Renaissance.

Both defined their Renaissances against something else. Vasari, who wrote about art, set it against "the dead tradition of the Greeks," that is, against Byzantine painting, with its "staring eyes, feet on tiptoe," and "absence of shadow."[2] Burckhardt, who didn't, or at least not in his principal book, set it against the Middle Ages, In his view, people then were conscious of themselves only as members of wider groups, whereas in the Renaissance, for the first time "man became a spiritual *individual*, and recognized himself as such."[3] Neither of these claims

Western Art and the Wider World, First Edition. Paul Wood.
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now command assent in progressive inquiry, but their power has been such that perspective and humanism (which is what Vasari and Burckhardt, respectively, were championing) continue to bear down on anyone who would engage with the Renaissance even now, half a millennium after it happened.

In a recent collection of debates about the status and meaning of the Renaissance today, James Elkins has commented on its strangely doubled identity. On the one hand it retains the kind of exemplary status gestured to above – he calls it an "anchor" for our broader sense of what "Art" is, and of what is at stake in our dealings with it.[4] But on the other hand, almost no one outside the ranks of specialists in the field engages with it anymore; and in particular, people whose interests lie with modern art, especially younger people, seem to have little or no interest in it, knowledge of it, or curiosity about it. It is regarded, at best, as having nothing to do with art now and, at worst, as symbolizing that litany of values concerning authority, taste, religion, the canon – in a word, conservatism – that modern and contemporary art are set against. The fact that tens of thousands will attend a temporary exhibition by an "Old Master," or that there is a permanent throng of tourists around the *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre, not to mention the fact that there is a mass audience for *The Medici: Godfathers of the Renaissance* and *The Da Vinci Code* only serves to reinforce the point. For most people outside of a shrinking scholarly specialism, the Renaissance seems to lie on the other side of a river of history separating a critical consciousness of modernity and globalization from the academic, Eurocentric past; and on the rare occasions that it washes up on our shore, it does so, unmistakably, as kitsch.

Yet the Renaissance is in the process of being rewritten, in ways whose implications are more far-reaching than at any time since the formation of the modern discipline of art history in the nineteenth century. The term arrived at its modern meaning, as signifying a period, in the nineteenth century. The French historian Jules Michelet used it to indicate a stage in his history of France; others, including the English writers John Ruskin and Walter Pater used it in relation to Italian art. But the definitive identification of the term with Italy was made by Burckhardt in his classic study translated into English as *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. In that book Burckhardt dealt with the state, the individual, and the wider culture rather than with art as such, although he did discuss art in other works. Nonetheless art was the principal focus for others, including Heinrich Wolfflin's *Renaissance and Baroque* and Walter Pater's *The Renaissance*, both of which appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century. This is not to say that in the field of art practice the Renaissance canon went unquestioned. Quite the reverse; it is one of those historical ironies that at the moment when the Renaissance was being inscribed in the new academic field of art history it was the object of fundamental challenge in the emerging French avant-garde. Less radically in some ways, in England a reaction had set in against the over-valorization of the "High" Renaissance art of Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo, as the self-consciously chosen name of the "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood" testifies. They were already, in 1848, looking back to the "primitives" of the fourteenth and fifteenth

centuries for a vigor they felt had begun to be lost in that work which the subsequent academic tradition of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries venerated above all else. The term "Renaissance" in its modern sense might not have been used until Burckhardt but for three centuries the same names crop up again and again wherever in Europe art was seriously debated.

This is an important point, for in that long period the tradition we think of as the "Western canon" was formed. It emerged in discussion and criticism, it was negotiated, tested, reinforced, and revised in a long process of debate. It did not emerge fully formed and stereotypical, a motionless gallery of dead white European males waiting to be knocked off their pedestals by a generation of radical art historians at the end of the twentieth century. In this sense, figures such as Burckhardt and Wölfflin are not only initiators of an art historical tradition that is now under such far-reaching criticism by contemporary scholarship, they are in the true sense of the word canonizers. They articulate something long in process. In that process, even the principal actors, whose names recur again and again, are represented as vivid exemplars. At least before the sclerosis of the academy had really set in, Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian, and others were there to be emulated, challenged, championed, *learned from*, and not merely parroted by rote.

For a long time, certainly extending into the middle of the twentieth century and the period often referred to as the crisis of modernism, despite fluctuating fashions, the Renaissance was widely accepted as the benchmark of Western art and culture. Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century modernists (including figures as diverse as Degas and Cézanne, Picasso, and Rothko), whose art took overt issue with the heritage of the academy, nonetheless repeatedly measured themselves against a range of "Old Masters" whom they particularly admired. Despite modernism's rejection of most of the norms of Renaissance art, especially the fundamental commitment to verisimilitude, the Renaissance remained the implicit standard of value against which subsequent Western art was measured. The coining of the term "modern masters" in the early twentieth century to refer to figures such as Matisse is an example of this kind of thinking. The case of the avant-garde was, however, double-edged. Although a sense of the achievement of the Renaissance masters may have continued to inform the thinking of artists whose own work looked very different, modernist painting and sculpture drew on techniques and models that could not have been further from the Renaissance example. I shall look at some of this later on, particularly problems attendant on the concept of "primitive art," and its relation to ideas of authenticity and expression that were so central to the modern movement.

All I am trying to establish at the moment is some of the complexity of the relationship of modern Western art to previous Western art, as well as to the arts of the rest of the world. To fill out a sense of the dual status of Renaissance art today that Elkins alluded to, that uncanny mix of persistent presence and almost complete eclipse, one needs some understanding of this multifaceted internal

history of Western art itself, of what has been at stake in the shifts from Renaissance to academy, from academy to the modernist avant-garde, and from modernism to postmodern and contemporary art. Part of the problem of thinking about Western art in relation to the wider world concerns the changes Western art itself underwent, often in response to that wider world, knowledge of which came about through mechanisms of power which were themselves far removed from the world of art. It is important to bring capitalism, industrialization, and imperialism into the picture while resisting the reductionist impulse to conflate art and learning with the exercise of temporal power as such. The post-Renaissance Western tradition of art has been both continuous and conflicted against itself. Part of our problem with the Renaissance today is the way it has been invoked within the overarching cultural tradition as an originary point of Western modernity. A certain view of the individual in the active life of society, and a certain kind of verisimilitude in the representation of it, have been jointly invoked as the standard against which not only subsequent Western but *all* other cultures were to be measured. It is especially this latter assumption that has now come to be questioned. In fact, that is to understate the situation. That assumption is now regarded as the unacceptable symptom of a Eurocentrism which is not only an inappropriate object of continued endorsement in the present period of increasing globalization but is now widely seen as having been historically complicit in the advance and management of Western imperialism too.

It would be stating the obvious to acknowledge that globalization is responsible for the decentering of the Western canon. People who have had that canon rammed down their throats for several hundred years, while their own cultures have been systematically disparaged if not physically destroyed, are unlikely to feel well-disposed towards claims about universal aesthetics and disinterested knowledge. Rightly so. But there is another side to this: those neophiliacs whose project is to manage contemporary globalized art by cutting it free from tradition risk a form of historical amnesia that is closer to the protocols of globalized management in general than it is to any kind of informed resistance to its depredations. For my own part, I feel it is important to treat these questions carefully, above all to avoid an all too easy reductionism whereby European art is denied any measure of relative autonomy and is merely presented as either the unwitting tool or the willing servant of power. At a point when the claims of the Western canon are coming under greater scrutiny than at any time since its formulation, it is useful to investigate the changing sense that canon made of its others, both positively and negatively. It follows that the vaunted "rebirth" of that tradition from its roots in pagan antiquity is a suggestive site of encounter with received meanings and interpretations.

This work is already in train, in the form of a wide range of new approaches to Renaissance art history. In historical representation, consciously or otherwise, the horizon of the present is always drawn around the continent of the past. A period gets the Renaissance it deserves – or needs. For Burckhardt in the nineteenth century, the impetus to researching the Renaissance was a conviction of its status

as "a civilization which is the mother of our own."[5] Contemporary historians, by contrast, are inclined to explore differences between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and our own times. Not only has our map of the societies and cultures that produced Renaissance art been substantially redrawn and expanded, our sense of what counts as "Art" itself has been subject to redescription. In a way that echoes the de-centering of painting and sculpture from the contemporary practice of the arts, our sense of Renaissance cultural practice is now moving away from an exclusive focus on painting, sculpture, and architecture. Now, painting and sculpture are being re-embedded in a matrix of ritual and building, mechanical reproduction, design and consumption, from which the modern system of the arts as it was developed in the late eighteenth century, detached them. Furthermore, the geographical boundaries of the Renaissance are being expanded, and not only from Italy to other areas of northern, central, and eastern Europe. Claire Farago has argued that "the kind of art historical practice I would like to see in Renaissance studies goes all over the world and deals with all kinds of practices, representational systems, cultural conditions."[6] Such an expanded field, which Farago had begun to explore as early as the 1990s in her book *Reframing the Renaissance*, would take as its subject "a world of cultural interactions."[7] The internal hierarchical distinctions of the canon no less than its export have come to seem out of tune with our own cultural hybridity in the epoch of globalization.

It would be hard to argue with claims for the relevance of an understanding of Renaissance art to the subsequent Western tradition. How the latter could signify without at least some apprehension of the former is difficult to conceive. What is at issue is the terms of that understanding, most particularly as it relates to that tradition's relation to a wider world than has usually been considered. As new historical inquiry has begun to shed light on the diversity of Renaissance experience, the consequences for a sense of European cultural identity are considerable.[8] John Martin has argued that

> earlier histories – grounded in the liberal and conservative myths of the gradual but heroic emancipation of the individual – have given way to histories that explore the varied constructions of the self in different time periods and different cultures. Not only is it no longer possible to view its history as one of continuous development, but individualism is itself not a uniquely Western phenomenon.[9]

Changing Histories

The principal geographical site and the main historical emphasis of normative Renaissance art history were respectively Italy, especially Florence and Rome, and the recovery of the art and learning of classical antiquity. Redirecting our gaze on the first of these has an effect on the second. One important focus for new approaches has been the city state of Venice, which has the effect of directing our

gaze further east than has been usual in thinking about the Renaissance. In Renaissance studies, the concept of the "East" was conventionally taken to refer to the territories of the Eastern Orthodox Church, that is to the Byzantine Empire centered on Constantinople (as distinct from the legacy of the Western Empire, the domain of the Catholic Church centered on Rome).[10] More recently, however, this sense of the "East" has been extended to refer to a range of Asian societies stretching from Turkey to China. This introduces a tension between the Christian legacy of Byzantium and the impact of these other societies, most of which were Islamic.[11] In the case of Venice, the greatest influence in addition to Byzantium came from the Ottoman Turks and the Mamluks, who in the fifteenth century ruled the territories of present-day Egypt and Syria.

The relationship of these societies to the more conventionally understood heartlands of the Renaissance in Italy needs careful handling. Important as it is to draw them into the circle of historical explanation, it is just as important not to overstate their significance. For a long time, indeed for most of the time that art history has been practiced, their impact on Renaissance art was far from being a main consideration, if it was acknowledged at all. One exception to this rule was Rudolf Wittkower who had published articles on the impact of non-European civilizations on the art of the West during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. His final series of lectures, at Berkeley in 1964, was on the same subject, addressing amongst other things "the problem of cultural exchange" between East and West. Wittkower died before he could work up the lectures into book form, and it is symptomatic of the wider situation that the material was not published until 1989. By then, Wittkower's wide-ranging interest in the influence of China and India, the ancient Near East, Egypt, and Turkey on European art might have commanded more widespread interest than they had at the time of their inception. But the fact that they so obviously grew out of an earlier mode of scholarship than the "new art history" of the time seems to have prevented them from having much resonance in revisionist histories. The beginnings of a postcolonialist interest in de-centering the Western canon would not have found much stimulation in claims such as Wittkower's assertion that "despite the complexity of non-European influences on European art, one point should be made quite clear. The impact of foreign civilizations never had the power to deprive Europe, after its consolidation, of its typically occidental mode of expression."[12] Like so many before him, Wittkower assigned that characteristic "mode of expression" to Greece in the fifth century BCE. For all that, however, Wittkower perceived that "seen as a whole, the history of European art has been and still is insular, or rather pen-insular (if we look upon Europe as a peninsular of the Asiatic landmass)."[13] At the time at which he was writing, few had been willing to do that. One who had was Raymond Schwab, who also noted of Europe that "she is a small promontory of Asia."[14] But his tantalizingly titled *Oriental Renaissance* of 1950 is in fact about a later period and concerns the impact of newly translated oriental texts on Romanticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[15]

Wittkower remained a diffusionist, and explicitly argued against the idea of centers of "independent, autonomous creation" and for "the diffusion of ideas, concepts, techniques and forms of art."[16] But it is important to recognize that this is not saying, as so many others had, that European art stood at the head of world culture and that all other cultures were in a secondary position with respect to Europe. If anything, the reverse was true for much of history, which, in Wittkower's view, had witnessed the continual exchange of "forms, designs and styles" as well as "concepts and motifs," that is to say, of both techniques and subjects, through "historical roads of migration, transmission and dissemination."[17]

Wittkower says little about the different social orders involved in his survey, nor about the relation of art to its society, concentrating instead on the transmission of designs or particular motifs from one civilization to another. Thus he discusses the use of Kufic script as a decorative element in haloes, or on the Virgin's robe, in various trecento and quattrocentro Italian paintings, and the impact of Egyptian obelisks or pyramids on town planning in Renaissance Rome. This continuing focus on formal analysis and iconography marks a considerable distance from the preoccupations of some of the most prominent new approaches to Renaissance art history, which tend to invoke a broader sociopolitical context as well as to adopt a more overtly critical stance with respect to preceding intellectual history.

An example of this new temper can be found in Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton's pioneering *Global Interests*, which begins with a frontal attack on Burckhardt's claims about the concept of the individual as the distinguishing feature of Renaissance civilization. For them, this is "a retrospective construction of nineteenth century ideology" intended to universalize a historically local construct.[18] In their view, this construct, namely "Renaissance Man," is set up to be "psychically whole, clean, possessed of integrity and essentially humane," all of which is supposedly counterposed to its antithesis, the "dark, dirty, exotic Eastern Other, as the negative to which humane individualism has been opposed."[19]

Taken in isolation, this can read as a peculiarly exaggerated stereotyping of its own. But to ameliorate it somewhat, to understand what motivates the rhetorical opposition, two factors have to be taken into consideration. The first is that the argument is being polemically counterposed against a long-standing, virtually silent orthodoxy in Euro-American art-historical thought. Thus, the overstatement is at least partly for effect; the text is driven by a kind of righteous anger against an academic status quo which in their view has covertly employed notions of the "individual," the "human," etc. to bolster specifically Western constructions of those ideas against others, and has done so, moreover, in an age of imperialism to which the supposedly impartial scholarship has actually been client. To that extent the stance is of a piece with the tradition of "new art history" going back to the aftermath of 1968 which concerned itself initially with a critique of the universalizing pretensions of modernism – attacking those submerged idealist presuppositions by drawing out the actual, material contradictions structuring social relations. In order of adoption, so to speak, these were, initially social class, subsequently

gender, which became the privileged site of the "new art history" *tout court*, and then, with increasing force as the Cold War ended and the process of globalization accelerated, "race" and ethnicity. By the final years of the century, these tropes had found their way into Renaissance art history where, in a slightly comical rerun of the early anti-modernist social history of art, Vasari took on the role of a Renaissance Greenberg, and figures such as Burckhardt – and even more so, Hegel – were pilloried as the intellectual sources of all that was wrong in orthodox art history.

The second consideration is rather different. It represents, so to speak, a critique of a critique, rather than of orthodoxy as such. Edward Said's *Orientalism* of 1978 was the text which more than any other opened the door for the postcolonialist, proto-global rewriting of the assumptions of the Western canon. Said's focus was on literature, but his argument was soon – although by no means immediately – adapted to the visual arts. For Said, following Michel Foucault, European culture had systematically constructed a discipline by which it was "able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively,"[20] the upshot of which was "the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures."[21] For the most part, Said ascribed this European sense of "positional superiority" to the period following the eighteenth century and its key intellectual component of the "Enlightenment"; he writes, for instance, that "taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point" orientalism can be understood as the principal Western "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient."[22] But in places he also identified it more broadly as "the period of extraordinary European ascendancy from the late Renaissance to the present."[23] For Jardine and Brotton this is to get something significantly wrong about the Renaissance. Their rereading of the relations between Renaissance societies and the Islamic societies to the east leads them "to reject the appropriateness to this period of Said's vision of Western Europe's construction of the Orient as an alien, displaced other, positioned in opposition to a confident, imperialist Eurocentrism."[24] For Jardine and Brotton, during the Renaissance period the world of Islam, in particular the Ottoman Empire, was *part of* the networks of both trade and diplomacy through which Europe in the late medieval and early modern period organized itself, and not some alien other, outside of and inferior to Europe. Rather, as they explicitly state, "in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, East and West met on much more equal terms."[25]

In what is perhaps a distant echo of the historical materialism that continued to resonate in some of the revisionist scholarship that otherwise sought to go beyond the more ossified or even Eurocentric features of the critical tradition associated with Marxism, Jardine and Brotton in their various books always tend to emphasize the broadly economic dimension over the more purely cultural. For them, despite the anti-Islamic rhetoric which marked so many Western Christian pronouncements during the Renaissance, and despite, too, the very real military challenge to Christendom posed by the Ottoman Empire, an underlying truth is told by the continuation of trade and exchange. Thus, the Venetians might have been

collectively excommunicated for it by the pope, but their resumption of trade with the Turks barely six months after the fall of Constantinople told its own story. In this expansive vision, Jardine describes the various items visible in Crivelli's *Annunciation with St Emidius* of 1486 as bespeaking "a world which assembles with delight rugs from Istanbul, tapestry hangings from Arras, delicate glass from Venice, metalwork from Islamic Spain, porcelain and silk from China, broadcloth from London", all amounting to "a vigorously developing worldwide market in luxury commodities."[26] For Brotton, this new vision of the Renaissance is one that foregrounds a surprising "level of global awareness and cultural mobility";[27] surprising, that is, to those accustomed to a parochial view of the Renaissance in which all its references are internal to European antiquity and the Christian tradition. There is a powerful sense in which this changed perspective brings the Renaissance alive. Far from being forced to erect an ideology of timeless aesthetic values to make sense of the art because the world which subtended it is so remote from our own, something different emerges. The argument is that our world of consumer-driven competitiveness, and the inbuilt tension between expansiveness and openness on the one hand and petty nationalism and religious bigotry on the other, "is a world which was made in the Renaissance."[28]

Venice

I want now to look in more detail at some of the interactions between Renaissance art and the Islamic cultures to the east by discussing the case of Venice.[29] From its earliest days until the twelfth century, Venice had stood at the western limit of the Eastern Christian empire, centered on Byzantium. The first permanent Venetian trading post was established there in 1082, though commercial links had existed long before that. As Venice grew stronger, particularly from the beginning of the thirteenth to the end of the fifteenth centuries, the city became the principal maritime power of the region. Its naval dockyard, the Arsenal, was the biggest industrial complex in late medieval Europe. As the Byzantine Empire declined and that of Venice expanded, the relation of power between the two states gradually changed. Crisis point had been reached in 1204. In that year the Venetian doge succeeded in diverting the Fourth Crusade from its destination in the Holy Land to Constantinople. After a siege, the city was ruthlessly sacked. As a consequence, huge amounts of booty made their way to Venice, ranging from jewels, metalwork and both bronze and marble sculptures to porphyry columns and sheets of marble for use in the decoration of buildings.

This was a time before Columbus' voyages to America, before the Portuguese opened a sea route to Asia, when the eastern Mediterranean remained, as it had been since antiquity, one of the most active centers of world economic and cultural development. Throughout the late medieval period Venice and Genoa competed

for domination of this European trade with the East. The Genoese watchtower, built in the mid-fourteenth century, still stands in Galata, in modern-day Istanbul. In late medieval Constantinople, it overlooked the junction of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus, leading north to the Black Sea and Trebizond, one of the western ends of the Silk Road. As already noted, when we think of the term "Renaissance," we tend to think first of a rebirth of the art, architecture, literature, science, and philosophy of antiquity. Venice, however, was different. Alone among major Italian cities, Venice had no antiquity. The creation of refugees fleeing from the barbarian invasions in the fifth century after the collapse of the Roman Empire, there are no significant classical ruins or inscriptions in the Venetian lagoon. Perhaps because of this, the impact of the Eastern trade was greatest on Venice. Venice more than anywhere else was the gateway through which the manufactured goods of Europe spread out to the East and a vast range of stuff from the East – spices and carpets, metalwork and perfumes, colors, shapes, and ideas – entered the European consciousness.

A recurring figure in recent studies of Venetian culture is that of the collage; in another variant, it is the palimpsest. In both cases, the intention is clear: the figures are meant to bring out the *layering* of Venetian culture, of Venice as a place of marked juxtapositions. Neither is this a wholly retrospective construct. At the end of the fifteenth century, the French ambassador Philippe de Commynes remarked that "most of the people are foreigners." And this perception of a society in which northerners – Flemish and Germans – Dalmatians, Greeks, Muslims, Jews, and mainland Italians mingled with indigenous Venetians, was sharpened in the sixteenth century by the Venetian writer Francesco Sansovino: "Peoples from the most distant parts of the world gather here to trade and conduct business," people who "differ among themselves in appearance, in customs and in languages."[30]

Even the fabric of Venice was different. With its power based on the *stato da mar* (the "empire of the sea"), the city was itself literally built on the water. The palaces of the wealthy merchants that stood aside the Grand Canal and other waterways were highly distinctive. Until the end of the fifteenth century, the dominant elements were a mixture of Gothic and Islamic. Thus the façade of the Ca' d'Oro, begun in 1421, presents a diverse collection of Gothic arches and tracery, topped by Islamic-inspired cresting along the roofline. The pointed "ogee" arch is itself a hybrid. Found in English Gothic, though less usual in continental Europe, it also occurs in Asian architecture. Deborah Howard has argued that "the intention behind the introduction of the ogee arch and its adoption as a trademark by the Venetian merchant class was to allude to a mental image of the Orient"[31] – a "mental image" composed out of a myriad individual memories of trade in the East, of characteristic Islamic forms in mosques and markets, in ornaments and furniture, descriptions in travelers' tales, even the double-curves found in the hulls of the galleys themselves. The colored marbles set in circular mounts on the façade of the palace of the diplomat Giovanni Dario echo designs he would have seen on diplomatic missions to the Mamluk court in Cairo.

Figure 1.1 Gentile Bellini, *Procession in the Piazza San Marco*, 1496, oil on canvas, 367 × 745 cm. Accademia, Venice. © 2013. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali.

This layered architectural heritage is to be seen most vividly in the two great buildings which stand adjacent to each other on the main ceremonial space of St Mark's Square (Figure 1.1). The Basilica of San Marco and the Palazzo Ducale marry Gothic tracery and arches with, respectively, Byzantine domes and mosaics, and colored tiles in an Islamic lozenge pattern. The Basilica of San Marco is the single most important transmitter of Byzantine influence into Venetian culture. It was first established in the ninth century to house the relics of Venice's patron saint, St Mark, which were transferred to the city from Alexandria in 829. Both in its external architectural form and its interior, San Marco is distinct from the conventions of Italian and northern churches alike, with their characteristic decorative schemes either of fresco or stained glass. San Marco began to assume its present form in the late eleventh century, based directly on the plan of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, that is, a Greek cross with five domes marking each arm and the central crossing point. Thereafter it was in a continuous process of expansion and embellishment until the fifteenth century and beyond. Mosaic decoration had started in the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries, but a surge of work followed in the wake of the capture of Constantinople. In addition to the four life-size bronze horses of classical antiquity shipped over and set above the main entrance, the domes, arches, and vaults of the interior were decorated with mosaics by artists brought from Constantinople, often working with glass tesserae actually brought back for the purpose. The effect is to suffuse the dimly lit interior with an atmospheric golden glow, as if the biblical scenes occupy a different realm elevated above the mundane world of the human spectator. Mosaics depict episodes from both the Old and New Testaments, including some related to Egypt, where, according to tradition, St Mark preached.

Traces of centuries of interaction with the East abound elsewhere throughout the city, even including a few surviving sculpted images of turbaned porters and a camel and carved fragments of decorative Islamic script. All of which forms a marked contrast to the rational composition of the façades of the classically influenced *renovatio* movement which emerged in the early sixteenth century.[32] The specific character of Venice as a physical space is thus inscribed by the sedimented experience of cultural otherness, manifest in both form and color: ogee arches, gothic pinnacles, asymmetrical façades, overhanging balconies, narrow twisting streets, colored marble, and painted plaster.[33]

Apart from the physical, built environment of the city, something else contributes to making Venice different: the organization of Venetian society. In contrast to Florence, with its strand of individualism, Renaissance Venice was a corporate society, with a related tendency to social conservatism – factors which had an influence on Venetian art in areas such as official portraits and the pictorial organization of public pictures showing scenes of Venetian life. Venetian society was hierarchical. At the top were the patricians, with a legally enshrined monopoly on political power, amounting to no more than about 4 to 5 percent of the total population. From them a doge was elected, almost always a senior figure, head of state for life but prevented from accumulating wealth and power on the model of, say, the Medici. Below the patricians was a larger, but still numerically small, layer of citizens, the *cittadini*, comprising approximately 8 to10 percent of the population. And below them were the vast majority, well over 80 percent, the *popolari*. These distinctions have now been shown to be more fluid than was once thought.[34] Nevertheless, in an age of great social upheaval and almost continuous wars, both small and large, the city state, according to its own officially sanctioned "Myth of Venice," remained stable and survived for a thousand years, from the end of the Roman Empire to Napoleon.

Underlying this stability was economic power. Controlling a trading empire that was based in the eastern Mediterranean but stretched into northern Europe and Asia, Venice enjoyed great wealth. Within the overall framework of prosperity, the key to continuing stability lay in critical points of flexibility within the hierarchy. Thus, at the top end of the *popolo* there was room for movement into citizenship with its accompanying status. Of more particular significance for the arts is the fact that, despite political power as such being reserved for the hereditary patrician class, the citizens played an extremely powerful role as a kind of permanent civil service. Among the institutions for which they were responsible were the *scuole*: lay – albeit deeply religious – confraternities, in the larger cases extremely wealthy, and responsible for a wide range of activities approximating to what we would think of as social services. There were five of the important *scuole grandi*, and some hundreds of smaller ones, *scuole piccolo*, of varying size and influence. Several of these were linked either to trades (including the painters), or to foreign groups in the city. The meeting rooms within the buildings which were home to the *scuole* provided an important source of work for artists. As well as providing many

commissions for artists, the *scuole* played an important role in maintaining that social cohesion which, allied to naval supremacy, underwrote Venetian power and prosperity.

In the wake of the Crusade of 1204, Constantinople was actually retaken by the Greeks from Venetian domination after less than sixty years, and a new dynasty secured: the Palaiologans. But Byzantine power had been fatally eroded. Under pressure from the expanding Ottoman Turks, the Byzantine Empire contracted over the next two centuries, as its eastern outposts fell one by one. During 1438–1439, John VIII Palaiologus led a Byzantine delegation to Italy to a great conference held in Ferrara and Florence that was aimed at reuniting the Eastern and Western Christian churches against the common Islamic enemy. After months of debate, even when the unification had been agreed in principle and the Byzantine delegation had returned to Constantinople, it was rejected and never implemented in practice. Without the reinforcement of a military alliance, however, the unification of the churches would have had little effect. In the event, barely a decade and a half later, the whole of Christendom was convulsed by news of the final collapse of the Byzantine Empire. Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks, under the leadership of Mehmet II, in 1453. In the second half of the fifteenth century, after 1453, the Ottomans emerged as not only the one serious imperial rival to Venice in the eastern Mediterranean but as also, for the next hundred years, a real challenge to the hegemony of Western Christendom as such. Yet, despite calls for a new crusade to repel the infidel, there was in fact no collective military response by the Christian powers of western Europe. The relative fragmentation of the West meant that no coordinated resistance could be organized, and despite much ideological breast-beating – and, of course, its concomitant, a demonization of the "enemy" – realpolitik prevailed. In a remarkably short period of time, Venetian trade was resumed with the Ottoman Empire, now based in Constantinople, or Istanbul as it came to be known.

New Light on Perspective

Having for so long been absent from our sense of what the Renaissance was, to have the Ottoman Empire brought into the web of cultural influence marks a significant advance in art historical thinking. At the same time, though, it is equally useful to be reminded of the deep differences which existed between the cultures of Catholic Italy and Islamic Istanbul. In a recent study, challengingly titled *Florence and Baghdad*, Hans Belting has sought to draw out the connections between that cornerstone of Renaissance artistic innovation, namely perspective, and Islamic science. Once again, an extant form of understanding is being challenged. The development of single-point perspective in Florence around 1430 has conventionally operated like a signpost pointing in two directions, one forwards and one back.

On the one hand it has been seen as setting the terms of the Western tradition forwards into the future by enabling a criterion of "lifelikeness" against which all other representations could and would be judged. This certainly sat with the West's increasing sense of its own superiority over the rest of the world in political, moral, and military terms. Within the West itself, even the far-reaching challenge of modernism did relatively little to dethrone lifelikeness as a kind of default setting in the culture at large for what pictorial art should be doing (something that photography reinforced). On the other hand, Renaissance perspective has been seen, not least by its fifteenth-century advocates themselves, as building on the prior achievements of Giotto and others in the fourteenth century, and beyond them, on the examples of partial perspective to be found in the surviving art of antiquity.

Ancient paintings and mosaics (not to mention sculptures) are replete with lifelike representations of individual human beings as well as images representing spatial recession in things like buildings, paths, and landscape generally. What they appear to lack is a coherent spatial armature in which the various mimetically rendered things can be disposed in relation to each other. It is this latter that the work of Brunelleschi and Alberti is widely held to have provided, going beyond the more or less lifelike representation of particular figures – animate or inanimate – found in ancient art, to the arrangement of those figures in a coherent spatial unity.[35]

Belting argues differently. For him there is no line from antiquity, via the trecento, to fully achieved Renaissance single-point perspective. Belting argues that although the artists of antiquity and the trecento did make spectator-oriented representations, they did *not* have true perspective: "the mathematical method for systematically representing three dimensions on a flat surface was not invented until two generations later [than the trecento artists]."[36] Belting's point is that the earlier artists could not have done this for the fundamental reason that antique mathematics had not developed the capacity to articulate a true theory of perspective. The revolutionary aspect of Beltings claim is that "perspective art is based on a theory of Arab origin, a mathematical theory having to do with visual rays and the geometry of light."[37]

This represents a departure not only from the conventional sense of Renaissance perspective having built on the proto-perspective of antiquity but also from the conventional sense of the scale of the contribution of Islamic science to the European Renaissance. It has long been acknowledged that some of the lost science of antiquity – lost that is, during the "Dark Ages" and the medieval period in Europe – had been preserved in Arab culture and that this found its way back into European thought via Islamic scholarship from the thirteenth century onwards. For Belting, however, the Arab contribution far exceeds the mere "translation" of the already existing knowledge of antiquity. Instead, the theory of perspective as it came to be applied in the visual arts depends on crucial mathematical *innovations* made by Arab theorists. To put the point polemically, Renaissance art could not have happened when it did without the prior contribution of Islamic science.

The crucial figure in Belting's story is Abu Ali al-Hasan Ibn al-Haytham, a mathematician who worked in Baghdad and Cairo in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries of the Christian calendar, and who was subsequently known in the West as Alhazen. His book, called in the West *Optics*, though according to Belting originally translated under the title *Perspectiva*, was composed between c.1028 and his death in 1040, and was translated into Latin in Islamic Spain around 1200. His innovation consisted in establishing that rays of light traveled from objects to the human eye and that they could be measured. Almost four hundred years is, however, a long time, and Belting accounts for the delay in the reception of Alhazen's ideas in the West in terms of the great difference between European and Islamic culture. As he says, "The Arab *theory of optics* was known at European universities by the thirteenth century, but it did not become a *theory of pictures* until the fifteenth century."[38]

The fact that the theory of optics was developed in a culture which was largely disposed against pictures caused a problem in its application within a culture that did give a prominent place to visual imagery of the world. In fact, as Julian Bell has pointed out, Belting does seem to overstate the degree of iconoclasm in Islamic culture.[39] But for all that, the use to which the theory was put within Islam militated against its easy transposition to the West, for in Islam it became a way of generating not lifelike pictures but complex geometrical patterns. These were held to signify God's creation not mimetically but abstractly. The idea of abstraction as something which can be cognitive rather than simply decorative is a concept which is still hard to grasp from within a conventional Western worldview – where the tendency to regard the non-figurative as "merely" decorative has been used to underwrite the whole modern distinction between the meaning-bearing "fine" arts and the "lesser" arts of design and craft. This was certainly an issue which preyed upon the minds of artists seeking to develop an abstract type of modernist painting in the early twentieth century. The capacity of abstraction to convey meaning would not have been an issue in Islam. Belting's contention is that the Italian mathematician Biagio Pelacani of Parma was able to bridge the gap between Islamic mathematics and the requirements of picturing by his treatment of the concept of space; that is, the space between objects. By making ostensibly "empty" space into "a quantitative dimension that provided reliable data from the external world," in the sense that objects and their distance from each other became measurable, Pelacani's work meant that matters of "size" and "proportion" "became the cornerstones of visual perception."[40]

Such elements are clearly of crucial relevance to the development of a method for generating spatial illusion on a two-dimensional surface, and as Belting points out, Pelacani's work was known in the circle around Brunelleschi. However, Belting also has to confess that his argument connecting the development of perspective in Florentine art with Arab mathematical theory "lacks a contemporaneous document specifically linking Alhazen, Pelacani and the debate on perspective

in Florence."[41] This is a pity, for Belting's argument does have the effect of "worlding" the Renaissance, of relating the technical achievement of perspectival representation to a dense web of cultural exchange rather than seeing it as the result of an autarchic lineage which effectively separates the West from other social formations. But by the same token, at the very moment when it draws two hitherto separated worlds together, Belting's argument in its very fabric also has to acknowledge these two worlds' apartness. The Arabic world and the Western world are both drawn together and held apart in Belting's thesis. There is little of the sense that a superficial cultural difference is being undercut by a shared economic reality, and that that is what really matters. Quite to the contrary, the two worlds coexist *in* difference. Western theory took the Arab theory and "reconceived it" to the point that the effect was to "revise its meaning completely."[42] Belting's construct is not one which minimizes or glosses over difference. It is built out of a recognition of real differences in which the key thing is relations and transformations between the different elements. Thus it provides an effective counterpoint to other new histories which have responded to a long tradition of Western insularity by emphasizing material exchange between hitherto separated worlds. Belting's new account of the intellectual roots of Renaissance perspective manages both to enrich the mix of cultures while yet preserving a sense of their difference.

A Portrait

Yet, across the space of cultural difference, eyes could look both ways. Western eyes – and fingers – could observe and touch and desire silks and carpets and ornamented metal ware or porcelain, for the most part without any real grasp of either the social relations that produced such things or of their meanings in themselves. Not that that is necessarily a bad thing; picking something up and running with it is an important part of the way the world works. Looking the other way, some Eastern eyes at least could be entranced and intrigued by the potential power of perspective. For perspectival representation reaches beyond the status of mere device (just as Islamic ornament reaches, for those who do grasp its cultural and spiritual matrix, beyond the merely decorative). Perspective allows the artist to set figures within the overall ground of the image, thus producing the semblance of a spatial unity within which particular things can have a credible virtual existence. What "credible" means here can go all the way to the attribution of mental and emotional states to those figures in relation to each other in their virtual worlds. Perspective is a technique, a trick if you like, but it can open up an imaginative world whose possibilities are infinite. In the conditions where Islamic power encountered European trade in the eastern Mediterranean, some eyes were capable of seeing across the cultural divide, capable of seeing the cultural power of the other as potentially fruitful in a different world.

Figure 1.2 Gentile Bellini, *Portrait of Mehmet II*, c.1480, oil on canvas, 70 × 52 cm. National Gallery, London. © World History Archive / Alamy.

One of the most intriguing portraits to have survived from the Renaissance period depicts the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II, the conqueror of Constantinople. Painted from life around 1480, its author was the Venetian painter Gentile Bellini (Figure 1.2). These are curious conjunctions. They prompt questions such as What is an Italian painter doing in a Turkish court? and Why does an Islamic monarch want to have his portrait painted by a Western, Christian artist? There is a sense in which this modest picture figures not just a man, but the relation of two cultures.

Gentile Bellini, elder brother of Giovanni Bellini and son of Jacopo Bellini, had become head of the family workshop after the death of his father in around 1470. This was the leading workshop in the city, and Gentile's organizational skills led to him becoming the most powerful artist in late fifteenth-century Venice. One historian calls him "the principal impresario": he received the most important commissions for the decoration of the Grand Council Chamber in the Palazzo Ducale in 1474 as well as others for the *Scuole grandi* and was given a knighthood from the Holy Roman Emperor.[43]

Mehmet II had ascended to the Ottoman throne for the second time in 1451 aged 19. His original tenure as an adolescent had been unsuccessful and his father had to

come out of retirement and reassume power. After his father's death, Mehmet did not fail again. He immediately began building his military power, and a policy of expansion rapidly led him to the siege of Constantinople in 1453. The city was by then almost all that remained of the former Eastern Empire. The large Ottoman army and navy, estimated at between eighty thousand and one hundred thousand men faced a defending force of only about seven thousand. Despite the imbalance of forces, the siege lasted fifty-five days, but on May 29, 1453, a date perceived as one of European history's turning points, Constantinople fell to the Turks. Mehmet the Conqueror was 21 years old, and the analogy with Alexander the Great, who was credited with having led the cavalry charge that decisively won Byzantium for the Macedonian Empire at a similarly young age, was not lost on his contemporaries.

News of the fall of Constantinople, which reached Venice a month after it happened, and Rome a week later, in July 1453, set off a panic in Christian Europe. Nonetheless, the immediate reaction, to unite in a crusade to retake Constantinople from Islam, foundered on the reefs of internecine squabbling and self-interest on the part of individual states. Before the end of the year, Venice had concluded a treaty which established a permanent embassy in Turkish Constantinople and secured the continuing domination of Venetian trade in the eastern Mediterranean (for which collective excommunication by the papacy for betraying Christendom was deemed a fair price to pay). The peace lasted a decade but was then followed by a draining fifteen-year war between Venice and the Ottomans which broke out in 1464. This history has a bearing on Bellini's portrait. By 1478 Venetian wealth and trade had become so adversely affected as a result of war that peace negotiations were initiated. The experienced diplomat Giovanni Dario travelled to Constantinople charged with acceding to as many demands as were necessary to preserve Venetian trade in the region. The terms of the treaty concluded on January 25, 1479 were harsh for Venice, including financial reparations for the costs of the war and the payment of an annual rent for trading within the Ottoman Empire.

On the positive side, the permanent ambassador, or *bailo* in Constantinople was re-secured. Mehmet meanwhile had built up the city from the impoverished and depopulated shell it had been after the conquest a quarter of a century earlier into a new capital of sixty thousand to seventy thousand inhabitants. The question of the Western construct of the barbaric oriental despot is relevant here. Recent research has shown that, rather than being a constant of East–West relations, this notion crystallized in the late sixteenth century.[44] For well over a hundred years, from the fall of Constantinople until the last quarter of the sixteenth century, fear of the Turks was mixed with admiration for their social system, which seemed to grant them in equal measure irresistible military power and enviable cultural riches. The same Mehmet who was responsible for thousands of executions and was in one report described as "feared and dreaded, ruthless and cruel … a second Nero and far worse" also reputedly spoke several languages, wrote poetry, and possessed considerable knowledge of the literature and philosophy of antiquity.[45] An eyewitness subsequently cited in a

contemporary Venetian chronicle reports that before the siege of Constantinople, Mehmet enjoyed daily readings from "ancient historians such as Laertius, Herodotus, Livy and Quintus Curtius and from chronicles of the popes and Lombard kings."[46] Kritovoulos of Imbros, a Greek scholar, recounts how he "used to read philosophical works translated into Arabic from Persian and Greek and discuss the subjects which they treated with the scholars of his court."[47] What matters here is less a question of the objective truth or otherwise of the claim than how Mehmet's identity is being constructed. At about the same time Vespasiano da Bisticci writes of Federigo, Duke of Urbino that "he was ever careful to keep intellect and virtue to the front, and to learn something new every day," going on to catalog his patronage of the arts, architecture, and music as well as his deep knowledge of both classical authors and the scriptures.[48] Half a century later, no less ambiguous a figure than Henry VIII is recorded as frequently receiving Sir Thomas More into his private apartments, "and there sometime in matters of astronomy, geometry, divinity, and other such faculties, and sometimes of his worldly affairs, to sit and confer with him."[49] The point is not, therefore, that Mehmet's learning was incompatible with brutality (nor indeed Henry VIII's) but that Mehmet's identity is being fashioned as a Renaissance prince rather than as an alien despot.

One of Mehmet's most important projects was the construction of a new palace complex – the Topkapı Palace – from which the Ottoman Empire was administered. Although many Christian churches were taken over and converted into mosques, the Orthodox Church had been reestablished, and a degree of multiculturalism with Christians and Jews existed within the overall Islamic culture of the city. Mehmet continued his personal fascination with the West – partly, it would seem, for its intrinsic interest, partly for strategic ends: building up a knowledge of contemporary Italy with a view to its eventual incorporation into the empire.[50] According to the then widespread view of world history as rooted in the Book of Daniel, the four pagan empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome were to be followed by a fifth empire uniting the world. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century it was not unusual for Renaissance scholars to worry that with Christendom prey to internecine warfare, this empire would be Islamic. In 1521 a report by the Venetian ambassador stated that the sultan "holds in his hands the keys to all of Christendom," and as late as 1576, it was still being lamented that "the fall of such an empire by the hands of men is therefore the vainest thing to think of."[51]

In discussions with the Venetian delegation during the peace negotiations of 1478–1479, Mehmet's interest in Western culture, contemporary as well as classical, seems to have been a topic that arose – including his grasp of the tradition whereby rulers reinforced their power through the circulation of images of themselves on coins and medals. As an experienced Venetian diplomat, Giovanni Dario was fully conversant with the artistic situation in Venice, and one of the requests that emerged from Constantinople in the summer of 1479 was for a "good painter" to make medals and to paint the Sultan's portrait.[52] After 1453, Venice had lost a string of important colonies in the eastern Mediterranean, with consequent damage to

its overseas trade. For both military and commercial reasons, Venice needed to secure its accommodation with the Turks, and complying with Mehmet's artistic desires – both in terms of palace decoration and the dissemination of his own image – was going to be a useful means to this greater end. One is reminded of Michael Baxandall's observation that "in the fifteenth century, painting was still too important to be left to the painters."[53] In short, the Venetian government would have done all they could to satisfy Mehmet's desire to propagate his image. Within a month of receiving the request, a painter was on his way. The leading artist in Venice at the time, in charge both of the decoration of the Grand Council chamber in the Palazzo Ducale and of producing the official portrait of the doge, was Gentile Bellini.

Portraits of the doges were displayed in a frieze above the Venetian history paintings in the council chamber of the Palazzo Ducale. In keeping with the corporate spirit of Venetian life, the point of them was less to celebrate the individual and his achievements than to represent the individual as part of a collective – the head of a family, officer of a *scuola*, the first among equals within the inner circles of Venice's aristocracy. Gentile's portrait of Doge Giovanni Mocenigo, completed just before the summons to Constantinople, shows him facing left, in profile, his elevated status conveyed by the flat gold ground, the gold collar and *cornu* embossed with geometric designs. Following an established formula, only the doge's face is lightly modeled, conveying just sufficient information for the painting to qualify as a portrait rather than a stereotype. There seems little doubt that Gentile Bellini's ability to fulfill contemporary requirements for an individuated likeness combined with a classically legitimated sense of the gravity of office led to his being chosen for the mission to Constantinople in 1479.

In some ways, the surprising thing about Gentile Bellini's year-and-a-half long sojourn in the Ottoman capital is what he did not do. Despite the emergence of a form of public painting in Venice, Gentile produced no images of contemporary Ottoman architecture or social life. He did, however, make several studies of individual Turkish people in daily costume which formed the basis for many subsequent depictions of Turks and other orientals in Western art. This sense of building up a repertoire, albeit a limited one, of exotic "types," proved to be important. In this regard, Gentile was the best knownWestern artist involved with the Ottoman court, though not the only one. A little earlier, around 1460, Mehmet had approached Sigismondo Malatesta to borrow the services of one of the artists who had been involved in the modernization of buildings in Rimini. Matteo de' Pasti, who had collaborated on this work with the well-known architect and theorist Leon Battista Alberti duly set off to Istanbul to assist in work on the new Topkapı Palace. However, he was arrested en route by the Venetians in Cyprus for having in his possession maps of Italy.

More successful was the Venetian-born Costanzo da Ferrara. Having been sent there by the King of Naples, he was in Istanbul during the late 1470s.[54] The principal work of Costanzo's to have survived is his portrait medal of Mehmet of c.1480. This image of a powerful man provides an interesting instance of the way images of "orientals" entered art, often built up from a single actual observation. Costanzo's model

was an earlier portrait medallion that had been designed by Pisanello of the Byzantine emperor John VIII Palaiologos, made at the time of the previously mentioned Council of Eastern and Western Churches held at Ferrara and Florence in 1438–1439. The portrait of Mehmet is modeled on Pisanello's image of the Byzantine emperor, not least through its use of exotic headgear to signify "otherness." The reverse of the medal, however, shows an equestrian image of the sultan also derived from Pisanello, whose work includes a sheet of drawings, apparently made from life, of the Byzantine emperor's entourage. They show the emperor standing, clad in a full-length cloak, some details of its embroidered hem, and another image of the emperor wearing the characteristic Timurid hat, mounted on horseback.[55] This observed image, adapted for the circular proportions of Pisanello's medal was then in turn used as compositional basis for the equestrian portrait on the reverse of Costanzo's medal of Mehmet forty years later. Subsequently, this image became transformed into a generic representation of an "Ottoman rider" by no less a figure than Dürer during his first visit to Venice in 1495. Rosamond Mack has remarked of this kind of borrowing that "artists tended to adapt a small repertory of authentic images to a variety of representational uses," concluding that what they reveal, despite the level of commercial contacts between East and West is "a limited vision of the Orient."[56]

Gentile Bellini also produced a portrait medal of Mehmet, either during his time in Istanbul or shortly after his return. It is slightly smaller than Costanzo's albeit very similar in format, and it gives a somewhat less robust image of the sultan. The outstanding work to survive from Gentile's mission to Constantinople, however, is his oil portrait of Mehmet, dated in its inscription at the bottom right to November 25, 1480. By this time Mehmet the Conqueror – the title he had assumed on capturing Constantinople a quarter of a century before – was 50 years old and in ill health. He had retired within the confines of the palace and was principally preoccupied with its decoration and with the cultivation of a garden. He is represented in the painting in the bust-length profile familiar from the medals and also from the contemporary portraits of the eminent in Venice. The image, however, has a pensive, scholarly air, more marked even than Gentile's medal and quite dissimilar to Costanzo's thicker-set, somewhat belligerent-looking figure. In all three, the sultan is depicted wearing the distinctive Ottoman *tāj*, the turban in which a length of white material is wound around a stiff, ribbed cap of red felt. He also wears a similar garment, a kind of shirt with a cross-over collar, under a deep-red kaftan with a broad fur collar. In the painting, the archway in which he is framed is Western in style, with decoration suggestive of classical candelabra and tracery. But draped over the lintel is an opulent oriental fabric decorated with jewels. Apart from the date, the legible part of the inscription reads "Victor Orbis" – conqueror of the world. The significance of the crowns, for all the prominence of their placement, is unclear. On the reverse of Bellini's portrait medal there are three of them, which are usually taken to refer to the three components of the Ottoman Empire – their own original territories in Asia, Greece (including Constantinople),

Figure 1.3 Attributed to Shiblizade Ahmed, *Portrait of Sultan Mehmet II* c.1480, opaque pigment on paper, 39 × 27 cm. Topkapı Sarayi Muzesi, Istanbul, H 2153, fol.10a. Photo Werner Forman Archive / The Bridgeman Art Library.

and Trebizond (as already mentioned, the gateway to the Silk Route into central Asia, captured by Mehmet from Venetian control within a decade of the end of Byzantium, in 1461). More recently, however, it has been suggested that the six crowns in Bellini's oil portrait represent the six previous Ottoman sultans, with Mehmet himself symbolized by the seventh crown, made of pearls, at the bottom center of the jeweled textile right at the front of the painting.[57]

Bellini left Constantinople in January 1481. Mehmet was dead within a year, and his iconoclastic successor sold or destroyed the Western-style figurative art he had commissioned for the Topkapı Palace. Legend has it that the sultan's portrait was bought for a knock-down price in the marketplace by an observant Venetian merchant and subsequently transported home. Interestingly, however, Bellini's portrait did leave a few traces in Ottoman art. There survives a portrait attributed to Shiblizade Ahmed from the same time (Figure 1.3) which appears to draw on the same pose – the profile portrait, the cross-over collared shirt, the fur-collared Kaftan, the *tāj* – as well as to employ Western shading to suggest volume in areas such as the handkerchief and turban, as well as the face, in contrast to the Ottoman convention for flat, unmodeled planes. Where this picture departs from Bellini's

Figure 1.4 Titian (studio), *Portrait of Suleiman the Magnificent* c.1530–1540, oil on canvas, 99 × 85 cm. Gemaldgalerie, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. © World History Archive / Alamy.

portrait is the inclusion of the oriental cross-legged sitting posture, and the enigmatic device of having the Sultan smell a rose. This is an image which recurs in later Ottoman portraits but whose precise meaning is unclear. One possibility is that it refers to the grace of paradise; another is simply that Mehmet was renowned for the pleasure he took in the cultivation of his garden.

Be that as it may, this story of the image of the Ottoman sultan is inseparable from the larger story of two societies and their interaction, economic, cultural, and military. A generation later, when the pressure of the Turks on Christendom reached its highest point, the studio of Titian produced another profile image of a Turkish sultan: Mehmet's descendant Suleiman the Magnificent (Figure 1.4). Probably based on studies by European envoys to the Ottoman court that were intended to be used to illustrate the many printed books on the threat of expansionist Islam, the painted portrait is an arresting image. Headgear had become the principal visual signifier of the oriental, and here it reaches a crescendo. The fact of its authorship by the most eminent workshop of the day, its unstable mix of authority and otherness, of majesty and caricature, says much about the ambiguous power of *El Gran Turco* in the European imagination of the time.[58]

Some History Paintings

Venetian trade, together with the colonies of merchants established throughout the eastern Mediterranean, meant a constant interplay and importation of ideas and stories as well as objects, stuffs, and raw materials into Venice itself. The result of the merging of thousands of individual responses was a distinctively inflected society bearing witness to "the profound cultural impact of centuries of trade with the Islamic world."[59] Towards the end of the fifteenth century, and in the early years of the sixteenth, an "oriental mode" appeared in Venetian pictorial art.

Much of this work involved exotic locations, but it also included representations of the heart of the city, or rather its hearts, plural: the political and religious focus around the Piazza San Marco, with the Palazzo Ducale and the Basilica, and the economic and commercial center of the Venetian empire at the Rialto. We have already touched on the nature of Venetian society, and the way in which a collective ethos held sway. Although nineteenth-century claims about the emergence of a modern sense of the individual as a key to the nature of the Florentine Renaissance are now regarded with skepticism by contemporary historians, the Venetian relationship of the individual to the collective does seem to have been distinctive.

The ethos of the ordered totality, enshrined in the myth of Venice, encompassing a multiplicity of distinctions, but encompassing and subsuming them nonetheless, is what underwrites the very particular representation embodied in Gentile Bellini's *Procession in the Piazza San Marco* of 1496 (Figure 1.1). Bellini's piazza is dominated by the façade of the Basilica of San Marco, in front of which a procession makes its way from right to left. It might be said that the top half of the picture testifies to the force of the Byzantine and the Gothic in Venice. The domes of the church and the golden mosaics of its portals speak of Byzantium. But interspersed with the East is the North – in the form of the Gothic pinnacles at either end and between the pointed arches. The Gothic theme continues in the arches of the Doge's Palace, visible to the right of the Basilica, and Islamic influence is apparent in the pink and white lozenge-shapes of its decorative tile work.

Bellini's picture was originally painted for the meeting room of the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista, whose members process across the front of the square. The organized quality of the painted representation stands unequivocally for the ordered nature of Venetian society – its diversity rendered equal in the sight of the church. The doge is one of a crowd, halfway along the right-hand side of the square. The other *scuole* have finished their procession and are drawn up in orderly fashion to the left. The middle of the picture offers nothing less than "a demographic cross-section of Venice."[60] Along with ladies, gentlemen, and citizens in recognizable costumes can be seen a group of German merchants in the middle distance to the right of the canopy, four Greek merchants in their distinctive black-brimmed hats standing in the middle of the square to the left; and in the distance, in front of the Basilica to the right are three turbaned Turks. In the row of

first-floor windows along the far left of the square, well dressed women, two of them apparently veiled in Islamic style, look out from balconies over which are draped more than thirty rich oriental carpets.

The real subject of the picture is, however, none of this urban spectacle. Or rather it is all of it, in balance with a single defining motif of divine intervention in the secular domain. The point of the commission as a whole, of all nine paintings in the scuola's great *albergo*, or meeting room, is to commemorate the miracles of the True Cross. Throughout Renaissance Europe, and nowhere more so than Venice, holy relics marked the borders of the mundane and the divine, in fact the miracles they performed *were* the proof of the presence of the divine in the material world below. The Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista possessed a fragment of the True Cross, donated in the previous century by the Grand Chancellor of Cyprus, who had in turn received it from the Patriarch of Constantinople. The depicted scene recounts an instance of the miraculous work of the relic and thus provides the underlying meaning of Bellini's picture: the divine at work in the cosmopolitan life of Venice.

Something similar holds for another picture in the same cycle in the Scuola's meeting room, painted by Vittore Carpaccio two years earlier. Here Carpaccio depicts another miracle, this time in the economic and commercial heart of Venice, the Rialto, adjacent to the busy Grand Canal (Figure 1.5). Once again the key to the picture is displaced to the margins, the sacred being embedded in the flow of secular life. At the far left, in the first floor loggia, an exorcism is taking place. A possessed man is being healed by the miracle-working fragment of the True Cross as commercial and social life rolls on with barely a blink. Another varied cast of characters is discernible. Along the bank of the canal, just before the bridge, can just be seen the columns of an open loggia where the merchants met. Outside it, two white-turbaned figures in long robes, one white, one orange, can just be made out. In the foreground, at the far left, in black-brimmed hats and sumptuous brocade robes stand figures thought to be Armenian or Greek merchants. And unmissable, right in the center foreground and acting as a kind of counter-focus to the decentered miracle, is a working man, albeit no ordinary workman: a distinctively attired African gondolier.

The black gondolier was probably a slave.[61] Venice had traded in slaves since at least the tenth century, probably earlier.[62] Most were Christians, often described as "Tartars" or "Circassians" from the area around the Black Sea. After the fall of Constantinople, there was a decline in this trade (not that the traffic died out – the slaves were simply taken over by the Ottomans), and an increase in the use of black slaves from Africa. These numbers increased further in the sixteenth century as European attitudes turned against the enslavement of fellow Christians, and increasing Ottoman power militated against the use of Moslem slaves. It has been calculated that in the late fifteenth century perhaps 1,500 African slaves were being traded annually at Venice.[63] By 1600, however, Venetian slavery had died out – not least because of competing demand from Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, British, and French colonies, as well as the Muslim states. After that time, freed slaves

Figure 1.5 Vittore Carpaccio, *Miracle at Rialto* (*The Exorcism*) 1494, oil on canvas, 365 × 389 cm. Accademia, Venice. © 2013. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali.

continued to live in Venice, mostly though not exclusively working as domestic servants. Although Africans were never as numerous as other communities such as Jews, Turks, and Germans, the imagery of black people entered into Venetian popular culture and has never really left it.

In the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, the *fondaco* of the merchants from Dalmatia, between 1502 and 1508, Carpaccio painted three scenes from the life of St George as part of an overall scheme of nine pictures. Whereas the two paintings from San Giovanni Evangelista represent the diversity of Venetian society itself, these pictures form part of an overtly "oriental mode" in Venetian art. The narrative mode as a whole functioned to represent the myth of Venice back to Venetians themselves, a visual counterpart to the historical chronicles which narrated the city's foundation and prosperity.[64] In the late fifteenth century, contemporary political developments seem to have stimulated artists to address a newly pressing theme, namely the "Other" to Venice's imperium in the shape of expansionist Islam. In these works certain Venetian artists "attempted to reproduce an Islamic setting, with figures dressed in Muslim garb, exotic animals – camels, monkeys and giraffes – and, on occasion, architecture of Islamic inspiration."[65] In contrast to

Figure 1.6 Vittore Carpaccio, *St George Baptising the Pagans (Selenites)*, c.1507–1508, oil and tempera on canvas, 141 × 285 cm. Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, Venice. © The Art Archive / Alamy.

Bellini's portrait of Mehmet II, or the individual costume studies of Costanzo da Ferrara, these pictures involve a conscious attempt to imagine an oriental culture and society. (See Figure 1.6.)

The representation of the world of Islam takes a specific form, however. One curious feature of this development is that Venetian artists seem to have shied away from representing contemporary Ottoman society as such. Whereas verbal reports on Ottoman society abounded, and although Ottoman figures can be found in Venetian art – sometimes situated in the heart of Venice itself – there are no images of the lived environment of the Ottoman world. What there are, though, are plentiful images of the early Christian world of the Holy Land. And in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the Holy Land lay not in Ottoman territory but in the empire of the Mamluks, the other eastern Mediterranean Islamic culture based in Syria and Egypt. So Venetian artists, representing the trials and victories of the early Christian church imagined them against a partly factual, partly made-up background of known architecture and non-Christians in Mamluk costume.

Thus, Carpaccio's *Triumph of St George* shows a miscellaneous crowd of Mamluk figures witnessing the triumph of the Christian knight against a background of buildings based on woodcut images of the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Traditionally, the St George story was set in the Eastern Empire, which included Palestine. The dragon motif was established in the thirteenth century *Golden Legend*, wherein the killing of the dragon results in the conversion of the people to Christianity. It does not take an enormous leap of the imagination to read the dragon that is about to succumb to George's *coup de grâce* as a figure for the pagan unbelief that the church is poised to overcome. This reading is reinforced

Figure 1.7 Gentile Bellini, *St Mark Preaching in Alexandria* 1504–1507, oil on canvas, 347 × 770 cm. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. Photo: akg-images / Erich Lessing.

in the final painting of the series, *St George Baptising the Pagans*. To the left, musicians wearing the Mamluk *zamt*, a tufted bonnet, stand on a plinth covered in an Islamic carpet, while to the right, conspicuously bare-headed figures are baptized into the Christian faith, their elaborate Mamluk headgear cast aside at the foot of the stairs they have mounted.

The meeting house of the Dalmatian confraternity of St George was in a building owned by the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, a crusader organization. The Dalmatians had been in the frontline of the Venetian struggle against the Turks in the Adriatic, and their presence in Venice marked them as, essentially, refugees from Ottoman expansion. The occasion of the commission to decorate the meeting room was their receipt of an important relic of St George in honor of their exploits under the flag of Venice. This was a gift from the commander of the Venetian forts in Dalmatia before they fell to the Turks in 1499, who in turn had received it from no less a figure than the Patriarch of Jerusalem. It can readily be seen, therefore, how the St George legend of the defeat of pagan unbelief by the action of a virtuous Christian knight becomes a resonant motif at a point where Venetian Christian culture perceives itself threatened by the apparently unstoppable expansion of the Islamic Ottoman Empire.

A similar cluster of concerns underwrites the enormous painting by Gentile Bellini of *St Mark Preaching in Alexandria* (Figure 1.7). This picture turned out to be Gentile's last, and although the design and most of the actual work is his, some of the foreground figures and the buildings to right and left of the central square were completed after his death by his brother Giovanni. The Scuola Grande di San Marco had been rebuilding their premises after a fire in 1485, and Bellini put himself forward to decorate the albergo as early as 1492. The commission, however, was not finalized until 1504, by which time Bellini had behind him the success of his *Procession in the Piazza San Marco*. The new painting was intended to evoke that earlier

triumph, and was indeed "specifically cited as the standard which he promised to surpass."[66] The added ingredient in this commission, of course, is that St Mark is the patron saint of Venice itself. Preaching to the infidel (and, indeed, dying for the cause) represents a powerful ideological message in early sixteenth-century Venice.

This was not the first work to dramatize St Mark's attempts to win over the infidels in a plausibly Egyptian setting: precedence goes to works of the late 1490s by Cima da Conegliano and Giovani Mansueti for the Silk-Weavers Guild. But in the grandeur of its conception it does represent a culmination of the orientalist mode in Venetian painting. Taken in conjunction with the *Procession in the Piazza San Marco*, it represents a kind of mapping of Venice onto its Other: St Mark's Square onto the Alexandrian plaza, the Basilica onto the imaginary pagan temple. It is as if by assimilating the exotic – and threatening – to the familiar, the all-too real threat of the Islamic Other could be negotiated and absorbed at the level of the imagination.

In his pioneering work on Venetian orientalism, Julian Raby investigated a number of possible sources for this complex imagery of Islamic society that was fashioned by Venetian artists. "Fashioned" is an appropriate term because they are not the product of direct experience. In addition to the "type and costume" studies made of Ottoman Turks by Bellini himself and Costanzo da Ferrara, another important visual resource was provided by the German woodcuts of Erhard Reeuwich. These accompanied Bernhardt von Breydenbach's *Peregrinationes*, an account of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1483, published three years later in Mainz. Yet another possible source of oriental imagery is provided by an arresting picture by an anonymous artist now in the Louvre. The city of Damascus was an important trading center situated at the end of an Asian caravan route, as well as a staging post for Western pilgrims en route to the Holy Land. In *The Reception of an Ambassador in Damascus* (Figure 1.8), both the clothing and the architecture show that the painting represents a Mamluk scene. The turbans are not Ottoman: they include the bearskin-type hats of the military, the large often white turbans lacking the Ottoman *tāj* in the middle, and the elaborate horned, so-called waterwheel turban – used, for example, by Mansueti in his St Mark series of paintings. Despite the Mamluk clothing, however, the location of the *Reception* long remained unidentified, and was in fact mistaken as being Cairo because of its compatibility with a verbal description of such a reception there. Now, though, the dome and minarets of the Umayyad Mosque have been identified, and other features such as the bathhouse in the center, with glass tiles in its dome, the walled garden and rooftop terraces all bespeak first-hand knowledge of such a scene. It has indeed been suggested that the mosque was viewed from the Venetian merchants' *fondaco* itself. Local color is provided by the authentic costumes, the Mamluk insignia on the walls and gateway, and not least by the camels and palm tree. The focus of the scene is an official reception by the Mamluk viceroy of Damascus (shown seated on a low platform with two other dignitaries behind him) of a Venetian ambassador (standing in a red gown with other black-clad Venetians to the left of the gateway).

Figure 1.8 Anonymous, *The Reception of an Ambassador in Damascus*, between 1488 and 1516, oil on canvas, 175 × 201 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: akg-images / Erich Lessing.

The Damascus *Reception* was for long believed to be an important source for the Venetian oriental mode of Carpaccio, Cima, Mansueti, Gentile and others. However, recent research indicates it may follow, rather than predate these works. The precise relationship of the pictures remains a matter for interpretation, a salutary reminder of the uncertainties still attendant on Renaissance art history, and of the often provisional nature of historical knowledge.

However the question of sources is eventually resolved, it does appear that Venetian artistic orientalism depended on a relatively limited repertoire of images, some representing quite distant "translations" of some actual, original observation. Gentile Bellini's *St Mark Preaching in Alexandria* is one such example. In it Bellini adapts three figures in his bottom right corner from the anonymous Louvre painter, as well as the palm tree in the right middle distance and many of the Mamluk turbans. His white veiled figures are derived from the Reeuwich woodcuts. The man standing directly before St Mark, apparently paying close attention to his preaching, is in Ottoman costume. At the very front of the composition in a bright red gown stands Gentile Bellini himself, wearing a gold chain given him by Mehmet II. The picture is thus a composite put together to produce the effect of an oriental scene. Many of the architectural details are topographically accurate: the pillar in the right hand background is the Column of Diocletian in Alexandria, known as "Pompey's pillar" and marking the site of a pagan temple destroyed by early Christians; the top of the famous Pharos lighthouse, one of the Seven Wonders of the World appears at the far left; the obelisk to the left of the central temple had been brought to Alexandria by the Roman emperor Augustus from Heliopolis.[67]

One of the defining features of the picture, rather than its circumstantial detailing, is of a somewhat different order: it is an imaginative recycling of Bellini's own previous masterpiece. The composition of the piazza flanked by the receding orthogonals of the side buildings; the band of figures across the foreground, parallel to the picture plane; but above all the fantastic temple dominating and defining the scene as "Other" are all adapted from the *Procession in the Piazza San Marco*. The façade with its arches and domes unmistakably evokes the Basilica of San Marco, shorn of its Gothic tracery but with the addition of enormous curving buttresses. Probably drawing on a visual memory of Hagia Sophia, which Gentile would have seen in Constantinople a quarter of a century earlier, as well as on the Venetian San Marco, this formidable synthesis serves to situate the scene in a realm at once exotic and familiar. In sum, the giant picture with its hundreds of figures and colossal architecture aspires to nothing less than a displaced affirmation of Christian Venice's sway over the realm of the infidel, imagined moreover, at precisely the moment when that actual hegemony was threatened as never before.

Later

The great trading empire on which Venetian wealth was based came under increased pressure in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries from relentless Ottoman expansion. Soon, the Ottomans had even vanquished the Mamluks, taking Cairo in 1517. It was in response to this developing threat to their *stato da mar* that Venice expanded into the north Italian mainland, the *terra firma*. This shift marked both the beginning of a decline in Venice's orientation eastwards and a corresponding increase in engagement with the classical heritage associated with a more conventional sense of the Italian Renaissance.

In art, these changed priorities are manifest in the work of the Venetian school of the sixteenth century: Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese – the "great masters" who came to be ranked with Michelangelo, Raphael, and others in the subsequent academic construction of the Western canon.

To be sure, tokens of a wider world continue to appear in that art, Venetian, Florentine, northern European alike. Rudolf Wittkower added to his discussion of the formal and thematic influences of non-European art on the art of western Europe a third category, which also bears upon the mutual interaction of European art with other cultures. This was "the European image of non-European civilisations." That is to say, the long-established practice on the part of European artists of depicting, within the armature of Renaissance perspective (which as we have already seen was itself the product of cultural interaction), "non-European objects, plants, animals and humans in order to show life in faraway countries."[68]

Some of these we have seen in the "orientalist" mode of Venetian art in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. That time, and that place, was arguably the

Figure 1.9 Giovanni Bellini and Titian, *The Feast of the Gods* (detail), 1514, oil on canvas, 170 × 188 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Widener Collection 1942.9.1.

nearest such an "orientalist" tendency came to the mainstream of Western art before the modern period, when because of the specificities of the Venetian situation, Europe's Other briefly occupied a place which forced it onto the agenda of a major European art form. Beyond that, images of black Africans are frequently to be found in European Renaissance art, often in the guise of one of the three magi come to worship Christ. Islamic figures are present in the works of Dürer, across a full gamut from negative representations of the persecutors of Christian martyrs to celebrations of Arabic learning and science. Tokens of China, in the form of blue and white porcelain bowls, can crop up in impeccably classical motifs such Giovanni Bellini and Titian's *Feast of the Gods* of 1514 (Figure 1.9). Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding* is replete with tokens of the international trade in which its protagonist engaged. Holbein's *Ambassadors* of 1533 is also stocked with signifiers of the expanding trade, and the expanding knowledge, of Europe ranging from the Turkish carpet covering the table to the astronomical instruments on it, and both a celestial and a terrestrial globe (Figure 1.10). This terrestrial globe, in fact, is a particularly potent indicator of things to come. Probably made in Nuremburg, it shows in red the line running from north to south, determined by the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. The line divided the world between Spain and Portugal: it is

Figure 1.10 Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*, 1533, oil on oak, 207 × 209.5 cm. © 2013. Copyright The National Gallery, London / Scala, Florence.

visibly labelled *Linea divisionis Castellanoru et Portugallen*. These are only a few of the many tokens of worldedness that leak into the art of the European Renaissance, though there is nothing else as consistent and deep as the presence of the Islamic east in Venetian art in the years around 1500.

For their part, the Ottomans suffered a decisive setback when their siege of Vienna failed in 1532. Although their pressure on Europe continued, and indeed the second and final failed siege of Vienna did not happen for a further 150 years, that reverse nonetheless marked the limit of their westward expansion. Gulru Necipoglu has argued that the Ottoman court's patronage of European artists began to come to an end at around the same time. The "halt of Ottoman military expansion" and the resulting "definition of geographical boundaries" began to impose more of "a barrier to the flow of ideas between East and West." The relative permeability of the earlier period was lost. She goes on, "The outcome of a heightened awareness of fixed frontiers was the accentuation of the 'otherness' of each realm."[69] This does not however mean that images of the Ottomans disappeared from the West, and it certainly does not mean that the stereotypes of a later "orientalism" became immediately fixed. In his *Orientalism*, Edward Said, as we have seen, had argued that from the eighteenth century onwards, European art

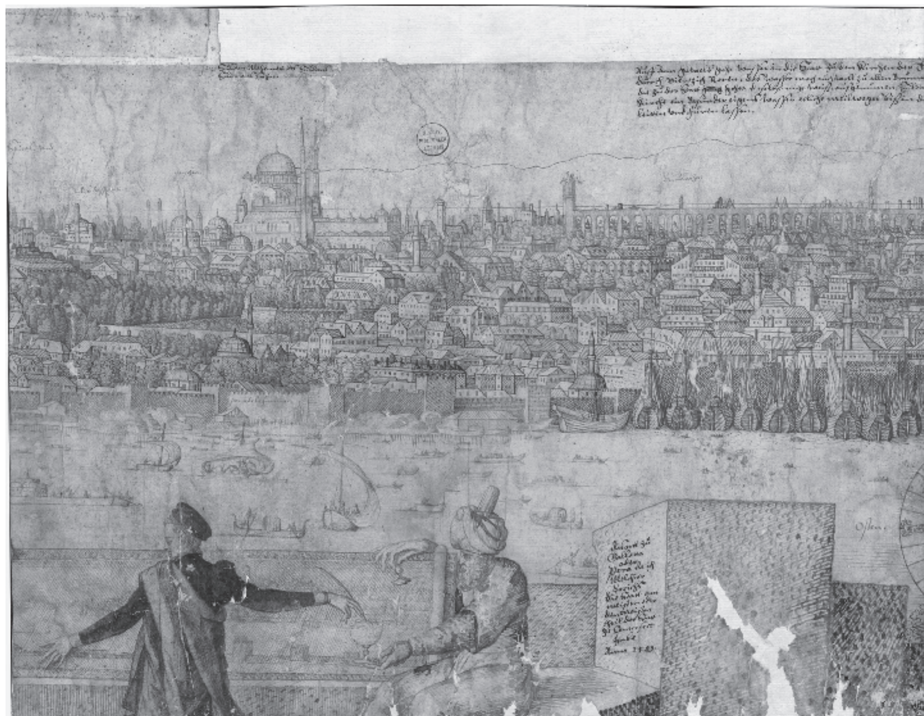

Figure 1.11 Melchior Lorck, *Prospect of Constantinople* (detail of central section), drawing, 1559. Leiden University Library, BPL 1758, sheet 11.

and scholarship constructed an image of the East as fundamentally inferior to the West. Several examples show that in the sixteenth century this was far from the case. As discussed above, in c.1530–1540, that is, around the time of the Turk's maximum perceived threat, Titian's studio produced an arresting painted image of Suleiman the Magnificent (Figure 1.4). Probably based on studies made by European envoys to the Turkish court, which were used to illustrate the many printed books on the threat of expansionist Islam, the portrait testifies to the presence of "the Grand Turk" in European consciousness. The same can be said of the engraving of a procession of Suleiman's nobles on horseback through Istanbul made by the Flemish artist Pieter Coecke van Aelst in 1533. Van Aelst's trip to Istanbul was undertaken on behalf of the Flemish van der Moyen tapestry company. Although it did not result in any tapestries being commissioned, it nevertheless produced an image which, like the Titian studio's portrait, testified to the power which all of Europe associated with the Ottoman Empire.

Later still, in 1559 the Danish-born artist Melchior Lorck produced an extraordinary panorama of Istanbul while accompanying a diplomatic mission from the Holy Roman Emperor to the Ottoman court (Figure 1.11). No less than eleven metres wide, it was subsequently displayed in the Library of the University of Leiden, one

of the most advanced centers of European learning. After his return, Lorck worked up many of his sketches into printed illustrations for a variety of books published in western Europe, not least his own illustrated volume published in Antwerp in 1574.[70] Lorck's *Prospect of Constantinople* showed a view of the city across the waters of the Golden Horn, from a position not far from the earlier Genoese watchtower on the slopes of Galata. Lorck depicted himself in the center accompanied by a high-ranking Ottoman official. Behind them the water is full of traffic, and behind that rises the city with its mosques and the fourth century Aqueduct of Valens. Whatever else it is, this is not a Western imperialistic representation of a subordinate country. Although made by a European artist, the image of their capital city is in effect being authorized by the Ottomans for Western consumption. As Marina Warner has commented, "the visiting artist from Europe is able to record the city, its layout, its dwellings, its fortifications, its trade and shipping, but by permission, and that permission is granted because the Turkish empire has nothing to fear from being revealed to foreigners, so confident are its citizens in what they have achieved and what they are."[71] Echoing the argument we encountered earlier about the inappropriateness of Said's model of "orientalism" for the earlier Renaissance period, Warner writes of Lorck's image: "It isn't possible to read into this scene a vision of the Orient as a place of 'luxe, calme et volupté'… that tendency doesn't emerge until a good two hundred years later." Quite to the contrary, Lorck's image constitutes "an awed tribute to Ottoman wealth and efficiency."[72]

So, even towards the end of the period signified by the term "Renaissance," relations between western Europe and its eastern "other" were not what they were subsequently to become. The Renaissance was a period before the age of the modern empires, when the lineaments of West and East hardened into cultural and racial stereotypes that have only begun to be questioned in our own day. Nonetheless, the sense of those interactions between continental Asian civilizations and the increasingly dynamic western Eurasian peninsular was about to undergo truly epochal transformation. Since biblical times, indeed earlier, the eastern Mediterranean, spreading westwards into Europe and eastwards into Asia, had been the crossroads of the world. In 1488, however, the Portuguese navigator Bartholomeo Diaz rounded the southern tip of Africa; in 1498, Vasco da Gama reached India; before that, in 1492, the Genoese Christopher Columbus sailed west and stumbled across America. By 1522 a fleet under Ferdinand Magellan had sailed all the way round the globe. A new horizon was, with remarkable rapidity, being drawn around a new world.

Notes

1 *The Independent*, London, December 18, 2004.
2 Vasari 1965, pp. 50 and 88.
3 Burckhardt 1990, p. 98.
4 Elkins and Williams, eds, 2008, p. 43.

5 Burckhardt 1990, p. 19.
6 Elkins and Williams 2008, p. 251.
7 Elkins and Williams 2008, p. 255; Farago 1995.
8 See Greenblatt 1980.
9 Martin 1997, p. 1315.
10 See Nelson 1966. Nelson discusses the mixture of classificatory archaism and orientalizing prejudice which separated art-historical accounts of Byzantine art from contemporary Western medieval art.
11 See Howard 2000.
12 Wittkower 1989, p. 4.
13 Wittkower 1989, p. xxviii.
14 Schwab 1984, p. 16.
15 In fact Schwab's view of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Renaissance was quite orthodox: "a family matter inside a hermetic little Mediterranean room" (p. 16). If anything he overemphasizes the inward-looking nature of the earlier Renaissance as "wholly classical" in nature (p. 23) in order to dramatize the contrast with his "second Renaissance" and its openness to the East. Schwab's *Oriental Renaissance* is discussed in Chapter 3.
16 Schwab 1984, p. 6.
17 Schwab 1984, pp. 1, 2, and 6.
18 Jardine and Brotton 2000, p. 61.
19 Jardine and Brotton 2000, p. 12 and p. 61.
20 Said 2003, p. 3.
21 Said 2003, p. 7.
22 Said 2003, p. 3.
23 Said 2003, p. 7.
24 Jardine and Brotton 2000, p. 61.
25 Jardine and Brotton 2000, p. 184.
26 Jardine 1996, pp. 9 and 19.
27 Brotton 2002, p. 219.
28 Brotton 2002, p. 436.
29 For further discussion, see Paul Wood, "Art in fifteenth-century Venice: an aesthetic of diversity", in Richardson, ed., 2007, pp. 213–247.
30 De Commynes and Sansovino, as quoted in Martin and Romano, eds, 2000, pp. 20–21.
31 Howard 2000, p. 142.
32 Tafuri 1995. Tafuri contrasts the Venice that "preserved as a valuable heritage the institutions and mentality of the late middle ages" and the city that "partakes of the new mental universes under construction" (p. ix), i.e. the Renaissance.
33 As Howard has noted, this aspect of Venice was recognized in the nineteenth century by Ruskin, who wrote that "the Venetians deserve especial note as the only European people who appear to have sympathised to the full with the great instinct of the Eastern races" (quoted in Howard 1999, pp. 37–38).
34 See Martin and Romano, 2000, p. 19.
35 See Panofsky 1991.
36 Belting 2011, p. 135.
37 Belting 2011, p. 1.
38 Belting 2011, p. 90.

39 Bell 2012.
40 Belting 2011, p. 146.
41 Belting 2011, p. 162.
42 Belting 2011, p. 4.
43 Pedrocco, 2002, p. 56.
44 See Valensi 1990.
45 Jacopo de Promontorio, a Genose merchant, quoted in Babinger, 1978, p. 431.
46 Nicolo Sagundino; see Raby 1980, p. 242.
47 Kritovoulos of Imbros, writing in 1467, quoted in Brotton 2002, p. 196. See also Raby 1982a.
48 da Bisticci 1963, p. 99.
49 Roper 1962, p. 202. The connection between representations of Henry VIII and Italian princes is made by Greenblatt 1980, p. 261, n.18.
50 In this connection, it is interesting to note that among the gifts taken to Mehmet by Gentile Bellini was Gentile's copy of a pioneering album of perspective drawings that he had inherited from his father, the artist Jacopo Bellini.
51 Venetian reports, cited in Valensi 1990, pp. 181 and 182.
52 The oft-cited Islamic prohibition on images does not appear in the Koran but in the Hadith, a subsidiary text. In the fifteenth century it was a patchily enforced custom rather than a universally applied religious edict. See Bloom and Blair 1997: "It is often said that figures were banned in Islam from the start, but this is untrue. The Koran itself has little to say on the subject … Since the Koran has little in the way of narrative, there was little reason to present stories in religious art, and in time this absence of opportunity hardened into law" (p. 30).
53 Baxandall 1972, p. 3.
54 The authorship of the figure studies of Ottoman people is disputed. The British Museum and the London National Gallery (in the 2005 catalog to the exhibition *Bellini and the East*, ed. Campbell and Chong) ascribe them to Bellini. Raby makes a case for their attribution to the little-known Costanzo (Raby 1991, p. 211), and he is followed in this by Jardine and Brotton 2000, p. 32. For good measure, even the name "Costanzo da Ferrara" is now in dispute, and in Campbell and Chong, the author of the portrait medal of Mehmet is given as "Costanzo di Moysis" (pp. 126–127).
55 See Vickers 1978.
56 Mack 2002, p. 149.
57 For the two interpretations see, respectively, Pixley 2003, p. 9 and Bagci 2004, p. 434.
58 See Necipoglu 1989, pp. 401–427.
59 Howard 2000, p. 36.
60 Fortini Brown 1988, p. 146.
61 Smith, R. 1979. Cf Kaplan 1986, p. 130: "The Venetians themselves, until well into the sixteenth century, did not especially prize black children, but adult Africans were frequently employed as gondoliers."
62 Venice was not alone. Other Italian city-states using slaves included Florence, Genoa and Rome. See also Mignolo 1995.
63 Smith, R. 1979, p. 50.
64 Fortini Brown 1988, pp. 87–97.
65 Raby 1982b, p. 17.

66 Fortini Brown 1988, p. 191, original Bellini document, p. 293.
67 See Howard 2000, pp. 67–74.
68 Wittkower 1989, p. 4.
69 Necipoglu 1989, p. 424.
70 MacLean, ed., 2005, p. 93.
71 Warner 2011, p. 173.
72 Warner 2010, pp. 15–17.

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