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Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria: A New Perspective

The author of the celebrated painting *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria* (Fig. 1) is Gentile Bellini, a renowned Venetian artist who twenty-five years earlier had stayed in Istanbul (between 1478 and 1481),[1] where he painted the Ottoman Sultan Muḥammad the Conqueror, or Mehmet II (Fig. 2), but who had probably never travelled to Alexandria.[2] In 1504 Gentile Bellini was commissioned by the Scuola di San Marco to paint *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria,* which is usually dated to 1507 (the year of Gentile's death)[3] but was actually completed after his death by his brother Giovanni.[4] The huge basilica set at the center of the background represents the Alexandrian Basilica,[5] originally built as a shrine to St. Mark after his martyrdom and later enlarged into a church.[6] In actual fact, it closely resembles the Basilica of San Marco in Venice and even the Church of Constantinople in Istanbul (where Gentile had once stayed),[7] both of which were

[1] Deborah Howard, "Venice as an 'Eastern City,'" in *Venice and the Islamic World: 828–1797,* ed. Stefano Carboni (New York, 2007), 67. After its fall in 1453, Constantinople was renamed Istanbul.

[2] Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio,* 3rd ed. (New Haven, 1994), 206.

[3] Patricia Fortini Brown, *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice* (New York, 1997), 60.

[4] Although completed by Giovanni, radiographs have proven that Gentile had completed the entire background and the masses of figures before his death. See Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 203. For that reason, this paper will ascribe *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria* to Gentile Bellini. Perhaps that is why most scholars date it to 1504–7. However, Humfrey has considered the possibility of its completion in about 1510 (1504–ca. 1510). See Peter Humfrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven, 1996), 11.

[5] Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance: The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy* (Chicago, 2007), 164. Brown referred to it as the "great imaginary Basilica," modeled on the Basilica of San Marco in Venice. See Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 208–9.

[6] Alexander Badawy, *Coptic Art and Archaeology: The Art of the Christian Egyptians from the Late Antique to the Middle Ages* (Boston, 1978), 68. While today a huge cathedral is built in its place, no trace remains of the old monumental Church of St. Mark. See Massimo Capuani, *Christian Egypt: Coptic Art and Monuments through Two Millennia* (Collegeville, 2002), 45. However, during the last decades of the ninth/fifteenth century a huge church was still standing when in 1483 Friar Felix of Ulm went to Alexandria and Cairo on his way to the Holy Land and visited the Alexandrian Church, which he referred to as "the Cathedral of St. Mark of the Jacobites." Félix Fabri, *Voyage en Egypte 1483,* translated from Latin by Jacques Masson (Cairo, 1975), 2:690.

[7] For more details on that matter, see Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 207.

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Figure 1. Gentile Bellini, *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria*, ca. 1504–15, oil on canvas, 770 x 347 cm. Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, Italy. https://pinacotecabrera.org/en/collezione-online/opere/saint-mark-preaching-in-a-square-of-alexandria-in-egypt/

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Figure 2. Gentile Bellini, *The Sultan Mehmet II,* 1480, oil on canvas, 69.9x52.1 cm, National Gallery, London, inv. NG3099. https://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/b/bellini/gentile/mehmet2.html

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at his disposal. But what were his other sources for the whole scene? Did he copy what he had seen in Istanbul by depicting Ottoman minarets, architectural details, and costumes in an attempt to convince his viewer of an Alexandrian setting? Were the Venetians at that time able to differentiate between the Mamluk and Ottoman worlds? How much did they know about Alexandria? Examining every detail, it becomes clear that the only detail in this painting from Gentile's stay in Istanbul is the Ottoman standing right beneath St. Mark's platform and wearing a sword (Fig. 1a),[8] whose headgear resembles Gentile's painting of the Ottoman sultan Muḥammad the Conqueror.

In fact, Gentile's *St. Mark Preaching* is among a group of Venetian paintings showing Mamluk settings, costumes, and other details, which art historians have labeled "Mamluk mode."[9] The Mamluks ruled Egypt and Syria from 648 to 923/1250 to 1517[10] but were represented in Venetian painting only near the end of that period and later.[11] The main reason for the late portrayal of the Mamluk world was that this "mode" was part of a bigger Venetian phenomenon that scholars termed the "eyewitness" style, which aimed at narrating the "real"

[8] There are two other Ottomans standing in the crowd (to the right of the two men in stripes), who however could barely be distinguished by their headgear. Brown did, however, refer to the Ottoman with the sword as the only Ottoman in the painting but said nothing about what he represents or the reason for adding him here. See Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 207. Pedani, on the other hand, went a step further and identified the Ottoman as "Alaeddin, son of Osman." See Maria Pia Pedani, "Gentile Bellini and the East," text of a lecture at the Scuola Grande di San Marco in Venice, 23 June 2016. https://www.academia.edu/26941288/Venetian_Mamluk_mode_and_Gentile_Bellini_pdf, 22.

[9] The Mamluk mode in Venetian narrative paintings implies the integration of groups of Mamluks within their original setting. See Julian Raby, *Venice, Dürer and the Oriental Mode* (London, 1982), 21–53.

[10] The word *mamlūk* in Arabic literally means slave, but only refers to the slaves who were originally Turks, and not black slaves, commonly called *ʿabd.* Although the Mamluk system was established on the tradition of slave soldiery, the Mamluk status was that of a proud and honorable member of an elite fighting group. Egypt under the Mamluks could boast of numerous artistic and architectural productions that, despite the continuous influx of foreign elements coming from neighboring Muslim centers, are actually local and Egyptian in style. For more details on the Mamluk institution see Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *Al-Jaysh al-Miṣrī fī al-ʿaṣr al-Mamlūkī* (Cairo, 1998), 1–29; David Ayalon, *Islam and the Abode of War: Military Slaves and Islamic Adversaries* (New York, 1994); idem, *Studies on the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria: 1250–1517* (London, 1977). For a brief and excellent overview of the Mamluks, their arts, architecture, and society, see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and its Culture* (Cairo, 2007), 1–100.

[11] However, Mamluk artifacts had been copied in Venetian paintings much earlier. For more details on the display of Mamluk decorative art in Venetian painting, see Nevine Rateb, "The Mamlūk Impact on Venetian Renaissance Painting, 648–923 A.H./1250–1517 A.D. (Ph.D. diss., ʿAyn Shams University, 2015), 61–177.

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Figure 1a. Detail showing Saint Mark preaching. Anianus sits behind him wearing the small ʿ*imāmah* and an Ottoman stands beneath the platform wearing a sword.

world as if from the brush of an eyewitness,[12] and which occurred between 1470 and 1530.[13] What characterized Venetian narrative eyewitness paintings was their emphasis on the everyday world and not the supernatural or religious

[12] The "eyewitness" style was presented by Ernst Gombrich as meaning the representation of what an eyewitness could have witnessed at a certain moment. Venetian eyewitness artists were credited with painting whole settings that looked as truthful as possible. Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, 2001), 14.

[13] Between 1470 and 1530, Venetian artists aimed at making their narratives look as truthful as possible to bestow upon them documentary authority. Eyewitness painters belonged to a specific generation, namely Carpaccio, Mansueti, and Gentile Bellini, who all sought to paint—and

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events they had originally represented.[14] However, it was not until the middle of the last decade of the fifteenth century that Venetian eyewitness painters suddenly shifted their interest toward the world of Islam and started representing religious narratives, or *istoria,* against a Mamluk background instead of the city of Venice.[15] At that time, the lands of early Christianity (such as Alexandria and Jerusalem), where the events in religious narratives had taken place, were part of Mamluk territory. By setting their narratives in these lands, Venetian eyewitness painters managed to impose truth and credibility onto their religious stories.[16] Only a few years after the fall of the Mamluk Sultanate the age of eyewitness Orientalism ended. While the logical explanation is simply the end of an artistic taste with the death of its painters,[17] the reasons for the termination of the Mamluk phenomenon in Venetian painting could also include the political events of the day.

In *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria* Gentile wanted to depict a "real" Alexandria to place his religious narrative painting within an authentic setting.[18] In fact, Gentile's painting is one of the two most impressive eyewitness narrative paintings featuring accurate Mamluk settings and details; the other is the anonymous *Reception of the Venetian Ambassadors in Damascus.*[19] To convince the audience of its topography, Gentile employed contemporary Alexandrian landmarks that were "well known to all" Venetians.[20] He added Mamluk features, albeit not

often "invent"—a painting that would look as if it came from the "brush of an eyewitness." See Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 125, 193–94.

[14] H. Honour, *The Visual Arts: A History* (Englewood Cliffs, 2002), 464. Two famous Venetian paintings reflect such a trait: *Procession in the Piazza San Marco,* by Gentile Bellini, and *Healing of the Possessed Man,* by Carpaccio. The former focuses on the celebration of the feast day of St. Mark rather than the miracle, and the latter portrays the Rialto bustling with life instead of the miracle of the True Cross. See Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 142–50; idem, *Art and Life,* 99, 100.

[15] See Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 68–69. *Istoria* is a true and proper narrative representation (ibid., 2, 5).

[16] Ibid., 193–218. Brown relates eyewitness accounts that presented accurate and reliable visual data and the taste for creating a painting that looked as truthful as can be so as to grant the narrative documentary authority. Ibid., 125–32.

[17] The deaths of two prominent Venetian eyewitness painters, Carpaccio and Mansueti, ended the eyewitness mode, even though they must have trained a new generation of painters in the eyewitness style in their own workshops. Ibid., 237.

[18] Other Venetian painters from the eyewitness school, such as Cima and Mansuetti, fabricated an Alexandrian setting relying instead on authentic-looking Mamluk figures. Ibid., 197–200.

[19] Now in the Louvre: https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010061588

[20] Those were the words of the Venetian traveler Ludovico di Varthema in 1508, who knew so much about Alexandria's sights that he did not bother to describe them. He was keen to leave Alexandria to go to Cairo and see its unfamiliar places. See Curran, *Egyptian Renaissance,* 160. The reason probably lies in the fact that Alexandria was frequently visited by Venetian mer-

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all ones found in Alexandria itself, such as the three-storey minaret to the right of the basilica and the cylindrical one with an outer staircase to its left. The only minaret with an outer staircase found at that time in Mamluk lands was Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn's minaret (modeled after the two famous minarets at Samarra in present-day Iraq)[21] in Cairo.[22] Gentile probably relied on literary sources as well as sketches and prints for these images.

Moreover, he portrayed a number of Ancient Egyptian monuments that still exist today. Venice was not only interested in the Islamic world of the Mamluks and its culture but was equally fascinated by Egypt's ancient civilization. This Western fascination with Egypt started prior to the fifteenth century.[23] "Egyptomania" during the Renaissance was a phenomenon that was not only confined to Egypt's ancient civilization, but included an appeal to its ancient power and wisdom as well.[24] In 1499, only a few years after Gentile was commissioned to paint *St. Mark Preaching,* the *Hypnetomachia Poliphili* was released in Venice. Although originally an antiquarian romance, its importance lies in being the first book on architecture printed with illustrations, and its fundamental im-

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chants even prior to Mamluk rule, as attested by *fondacos* established by the Venetian Republic. Venice had two *fondacos* in Alexandria: a church and a bath. A commercial agreement between Venice and the Mamluks allowed the establishment of another *fondaco* in Alexandria in 1302. See Maria Pia Pedani, "Bahari-Mamluk-Venetian Commercial Agreements," in *The Turks,* ed. Hasan Celal Güzel et al. (Ankara, 2002), 2:301–2. It might be interesting to add that the term *fondaco* in the Venetian dialect is derived from the Arabic word *funduq.* Deborah Howard, "Venice and the Mamluks," in *Venice and the Islamic World,* ed. Carboni, 80. However, it could have been a Greek derivation that reached Italy in the Middle Ages. André Raymond and Gaston Wiet, *Les marchés du Caire, traduction annotée du texte de Maqrīzī* (Cairo, 1979), 2.

[21] Gentile's representation of the minaret is not accurate. For more details about Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn's minaret (as well as a detailed description of its architecture and an excellent analysis of al-Maqrīzī's stories about the mosque) see Farīd Shafʿī, *Al-ʿImārah al-ʿArabīyah fī Miṣr al-Islāmīyah: ʿAsr al-wulāh* (Cairo, 2002), 409–11; for a short description see also K. A. C. Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture* (Beirut, 1968), 314–16.

[22] In 1512 the Venetian noble Pagani described the city of Alexandria as being largely in ruins, and although he did mention some of its landmarks, including the Church of St. Mark, he did not add any descriptions. As he was already dead by the time Pagani described Alexandria in ruins, Gentile must have made use of similar reports that were typically brief and lacked topographical relations of its monuments, which could explain how a significant landmark from Cairo was integrated in an Alexandrian setting. See Pagani's description cited by Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 206.

[23] Charles Burnett, "Images of Egypt in the Latin Middle Ages," in *Wisdom of Egypt: Changing Visions through the Ages,* ed. Peter Ucko and Timothy Champion (London, 2003), 65–99.

[24] Curran, *Egyptian Renaissance,* 279.

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portance lies in the "reinvention of Ancient Egypt" during the Renaissance.[25] It may be useful to add here that Venice's visual awareness of the ancient Egyptian monuments had started at least two centuries earlier as seen in the San Marco mosaics showing the pyramidal Joseph's Granaries.[26] In *St. Mark Preaching* an ancient Egyptian obelisk covered with pseudo-hieroglyphs was placed in front of the wall to the left. In 1483 Felix Fabri described only one obelisk in Alexandria, at a time when Rome alone could boast more than 13 obelisks.[27] Gentile relied on either real Egyptian inscriptions or on faux-Egyptian hieroglyphs[28] (or pseudo-hieroglyphs).[29] Despite scholars' contradictory opinions about the source or sources for the obelisk and its hieroglyphs, Gentile probably relied on the *Hypnetomachia*.[30]

To the right of the great basilica Gentile added another famous Alexandrian landmark known as Pompey's Pillar but more accurately identified as the Column of Diocletian.[31] This great column and the huge obelisk were among the important Alexandrian landmarks well known to all Italian travelers since the middle of the fifteenth century[32] and could not have been drawn, as some scholars still claim, from Gentile's experience in Istanbul, where he stayed for some

[25]Ibid., 133–34. The import of the long recognized curative drug called mummy, or *mammia,* reflects another aspect of interest and learning in the field of medicine. Mummy was one of the 288 spices listed in Pegolotti's manual between 1310 and 1340, where it means either mummy dust or some kind of natural asphalt. Much earlier, since the days of Ibn Sīnā (980–1037), *mammia* was recognized as a useful drug for more than 17 diseases. See Robert Lopez and Irving W. Raymond, *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World* (New York, 2001), 17, 20, 108–12.

[26]Curran, *Egyptian Renaissance,* 153, 155.

[27]Rome was known as "the city of obelisks." See Labib Habachi, *The Obelisks of Egypt, Skyscrapers of the Past* (Cairo, 1987), 109.

[28]The hieroglyphs in the *Hypnerotomachia* are not necessarily real hieroglyphs, but include any type of communicative imagery inspired by the real Egyptian inscriptions. For more details on the various scholarly opinions see Curran, *Egyptian Renaissance,* 134, 146–50. While some scholars do attempt to read Gentile's hieroglyphs, they have not reached an actual reading and the artist's intended message remains to be unraveled. Ibid., 163.

[29]See Catarina Schmidt Arcangeli, "'Orientalist' Painting in Venice, 15th to 17th Centuries," in *Venice and the Islamic World,* ed. Carboni, 128.

[30]In spite of the recent agreement among scholars that Gentile's stay in Istanbul had little, if any, effect upon his subsequent works, and despite the divergence between Alexandria and Constantinople, some relate the Alexandrian setting in Gentile's painting to his experience in the Ottoman court, including the minarets and the so-called column of Pompey. See Curran, *Egyptian Renaissance,* 160, 162.

[31]Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 208.

[32]Brian Curran, "Ancient Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in Italian Renaissance Art and Culture" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1997), 126.

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time as a guest at the Ottoman court.[33] In fact, Gentile's stay in Istanbul does not seem to have influenced any of his Oriental settings in other paintings but was restricted to some Ottoman figures.[34] The tower to the extreme left probably represents another Alexandrian landmark, the famous lighthouse that once protected the ancient city,[35] though by the time Gentile embarked upon his painting it had already been replaced by Qāytbāy's citadel in 882/1477. Gentile could have used as his model the tower of the cathedral Church of San Pietro di Castello in Venice—which had been newly rebuilt in 1463–74—with its three storeys: rectangular at the bottom, octagonal in the middle, and circular at the top.[36] This tower was a clear reference to Alexandria's lighthouse, and, as a guide for travelers returning to Venice, it served the same purpose.[37] While Gentile did put all of Alexandria's landmarks together in one setting (in addition to the two Islamic monuments from Cairo), the scene was really the artist's creation and meant to fully convince the viewer of an Alexandrian scene.

Howard believes that Venice emulated Alexandria at some times and Jerusalem at others.[38] The story of the two Venetian merchants stealing some of St. Mark's relics from their resting place in Alexandria in 828, where his church and monastery once stood,[39] testifies to the existence of commercial relations between Venice and Egypt as early as the ninth century, after which Venice displaced the Byzantine patron, St. Theodore, with St. Mark. Choosing St. Mark as Venice's patron saint instead of St. Theodore is seen as a sign of the Republic's growing interest in the East and its political and spiritual independence from

[33] Curran has argued that Gentile could have sketched his minarets while in Istanbul. See Curran, *Egyptian Renaissance,* 160. This is a faulty presumption based on an ignorance of the Ottoman pencil-shaped type of minaret totally unlike any Mamluk example. Arcangeli attributed the obelisk, the hieroglyphs, and the Column of Diocletian to monuments Gentile saw in Istanbul. See Arcangeli, "'Orientalist' Painting," 128. Instead of trying to look for Gentile's source in its own homeland, scholars credited Istanbul with erroneous assumptions.

[34] Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 196.

[35] Ibid., 208.

[36] Deborah Howard, "Memories of Egypt in Medieval Venice," in *Islamic Crosspollinations: Interactions in the Medieval Middle East,* ed. Anna Akasoy, James Edward Montgomery, and Peter E. Pormann (Cambridge, 2007), 131.

[37] Ibid., 131–32.

[38] Deborah Howard, *Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture, 1100–1500* (New Haven, 2000), 209, 211; idem, "Memories of Egypt," 119–22; Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 237.

[39] See Otto F. A. Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity* (Cairo, 2001), 31. In June 1968 a small particle of the relic of St. Mark was returned by the Pope of Rome to Egypt, but instead of joining the head of the saint in Alexandria, the relic was interred in the new Cathedral of St. Mark in ʿAbbāsīyah in Cairo on June 26, 1968. See ibid., 33–35.

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Byzantium.[40] According to Curran, Gentile's painting brought together past and present, sacred and profane, Venice and Alexandria.[41] Such a collaborative quality was a Venetian tradition clearly reflected in its painted narratives, or *istoria,* and could describe Mamluk Egypt as well. When Venice linked its self-image with Alexandria,[42] Venice and Egypt had a lot in common.[43] Venice was known to the world as a "colossal *sūq,*"[44] and Alexandria was described as "an open market for the two worlds: the Orient and the Occident," where vessels from Africa, Asia, and Europe all anchored at its port.[45] Similarly, a visitor in 1482–83 reported the presence of rich merchants from all over the world in the market city of Alexandria.[46]

In addition to the architecture, the sources of other elements of the setting can be traced. The giraffe in the background, for example, could have been reproduced from a woodcut by Reeuwich,[47] the illustrator of the first illustrated travel book, Breydenbach's *Peregrinationes,* written in the last quarter of the fifteenth century.[48] Additionally, giraffes were among the exotic animals sent to Italy by Mamluk sultans as diplomatic gifts.[49] Official reports of Venetian representatives at Mamluk courts and accounts of Venetian travelers and merchants

[40] Brown, *Art and Life,* 10.

[41] Curran, *Egyptian Renaissance,* 164.

[42] See Howard, *Venice and the East,* 209, 211; idem, "Memories of Egypt," 119–22; Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 237.

[43] While comparing the two cities, Howard mentions a horde of similarities between them: their location overlooking the sea, a great river, a canal, international commerce, minting coins, manufactured glass, and so on. Howard, "Memories of Egypt," 121.

[44] Howard, *Venice and the East,* 6.

[45] Fabri was a Dominican Friar. Fabri, *Voyage,* 2:722–23.

[46] The Flemish traveler Joos van Ghistele mentioned Turks, Spaniards, Genoese, Venetians, Italians, Catalans, Tartars, Persians, Arabs, and merchants from all other nations. Joos van Ghistele, *Le Voyage en Égypte de Joos van Ghistele 1482–1483,* trans. Renée Bauwens-Préaux (Cairo, 1976), 112–13.

[47] Ulrich Haarmann, "The Mamluk System of Rule in the Eyes of Western Travelers," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 5 (2001): 3.

[48] Raby attributes it to 1483. See Raby, *Venice, Dürer,* 69. Mack and Brown date it to 1486. See Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300–1600* (Berkeley, 2002), 163; Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 194. Bernhard von Breydenbach was the bishop of Mainz in Germany, who went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and visited Egypt accompanied by the Dutchman Reeuwich, the illustrator of his travel book. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza,* 163.

[49] In 1486 the Mamluk sultan Qāytbāy sent Lorenzo de'Medici a giraffe, among other diplomatic gifts, that caused a great sensation wandering the streets of Florence. Eric Ringmar, "Audience for a Giraffe: European Expansionism and the Quest for the Exotic," *Journal of World History* 17, no. 4 (2006): 380–81.

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were important sources to eyewitness painters.[50] In 1384 Frescobaldi recorded having seen three giraffes and elephants in Cairo.[51] Between 1435 and 1439 Tafur also described the giraffe he saw in Cairo in some detail.[52] Gentile added a palm tree right above the giraffe behind the basilica, and a camel to the extreme left in front of the obelisk, both of which mirror the Mamluks' physical and zoological environment.

Having shown how Gentile set his scene in an Alexandria that was well known to many Venetians, let us now reflect on how he incorporated human figures to serve his narrative, beginning by covering Mamluk costume in some detail and considering Gentile's possible sources. He probably made use of the sketchbooks of his father, Jacopo Bellini (1396–1470), who depicted turbaned figures and was named the "Father of Venetian Orientalism,"[53] as well as the sketchbooks of other artists who had actually traveled to Mamluk lands,[54] but recognition of the Mamluk world in Venetian painting—such as showing groups of Mamluk figures along with architectural settings—had started by the end of the fifteenth century when Venetian artists executed a series of paintings that clearly reflected their fascination with the Mamluk world. In his study of Orientalism in Renaissance Venice, Raby uses the term "Oriental mode" to describe the Oriental fashion in Venice. He further differentiates between the "Mamluk mode" and the "Ottoman mode" according to costume and headgear.[55] Apart from sketchbooks, what were Gentile's other sources? The Mamluk ambassador Taghrī Birdī's visit to Venice in 1506, only one year before Gentile's death, must have been an important source for his Mamluk models.[56] Taghrī Birdī wandered around Venice with some of his retinue in formal military dress for ten

[50] See Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 125–26.

[51] Leonardo di Frescobaldi, "Pilgrimage of Lionardo di Niccolo Frescobaldi to the Holy Land," in Theophilus Bellorini, Eugene Hoade, and Bellarmino Bagatti, trans., *Visit to the Holy Places of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine and Syria in 1384,* Publications of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum 6 (Jerusalem, 1948), 49.

[52] Pero Tafur, *Pero Tafur: Travels and Adventures 1435–1439,* ed. and trans. Malcolm Letts (New York, 1926), 79.

[53] Arcangeli,"'Orientalist' Painting," 123. Jacopo's sketchbooks were known as "the Bible of Venetian Art," a phrase that refers not to a religious role in Jacopo's sketches but to their unique role in the Venetian Renaissance. Colin T. Eisler, *The Genius of Jacopo Bellini: The Complete Paintings and Drawings* (New York, 1989), 265.

[54] Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 206.

[55] See Raby, *Venice, Dürer.*

[56] Taghrī Birdī the dragoman was the Mamluk ambassador sent by the Mamluk sultan to Venice in 1506. Out of 20 commercial treaties, this was the only one to be negotiated in Venice and not (as was customary then) in Egypt.

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months.[57] On the other hand, Gentile's stay in Istanbul was definitely his source for the armed Ottoman's attire

To give his narrative credibility Gentile depicted masses of authentic-looking turbaned figures wearing Mamluk official costume and headgear. Mamluk costume consisted of three distinctive constituents: the headgear, the *qabāʾ*[58] coat, and the sword.[59] While Venetian eyewitness painters depicted headgear with great accuracy, the long, dignified Mamluk overcoat worn by Mamluk officials was usually a repetition of the same type of attire, either white or colored, sometimes belted but often not, mostly plain[60] and often made of linen or silk.[61] The *salārī* coat[62] was an overcoat that was often represented with short sleeves.[63] An open-front coat with very wide sleeves[64] known as the *mulawaṭah* was another typical Mamluk cloak commonly worn by high Mamluk amirs under Circassian rule.[65] However, by the end of the Mamluk period it was worn by tribal Arabs as well.[66] Most Mamluk figures represented in *St. Mark Preaching* wear this type of coat.

Headgear played a significant role in Venetian Oriental paintings and was important for the identification of the figures represented. Before describing the headgears represented in Gentile's painting it is important to bear in mind that

[57] For more details on that matter see John Wansbrough, "A Mamluk Ambassador to Venice in 913/1507," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 26, no. 3 (1963): 503, 514–15.

[58] *Qabāʾ* (plural *aqbiyah*) was a kind of robe worn by the "men of the sword" that had different types (for example "Mongolian" or "Islamic"), and which was sometimes worn one on top of another with the upper having shorter sleeves than the one underneath. The sword was tied to an expensive belt wound around the waist on the left. For more details see al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshá fī ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ* (Cairo, repr. 2004), 4:39–40.

[59] L. A. Mayer, *Mamlūk Costume: A Survey* (Geneva, 1952), 21.

[60] Venetian artists never represented the expensive belts worn by the Mamluk "men of the sword," usually made of silver or gold, which, when adorned with precious gems, indicated the high military status of their wearers. Nor did they represent the *ṭirāz* bands or the fur trimmings described by the contemporary historian al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 4:40.

[61] Travelers often described men's attire as being white while distinguishing between silk, linen, or calico. In 1384 Frescobaldi so described the men he saw in the streets of Cairo. Frescobaldi, "Pilgrimage," 48.

[62] *Salārī* coats were attributed to the amir Salār (under al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn) until the days of Ibn Iyās. Salār introduced other elements of costume, horse coverings, and war equipment. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr,* ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafá (Wiesbaden-Cairo; repr. Beirut, 2010). 1:1:436.

[63] Ibrāhīm Māḍī, *Ziyy umarāʾ al-Mamālīk fī Miṣr wa-al-Shām* (Cairo, 2009), 284, fig. 26.

[64] ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *Al-Jaysh al-Miṣrī,* 132.

[65] Mayer, *Mamluk Costume,* 24.

[66] Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr,* 2:172–73, 186.

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the turbans worn by Mamluk officials or the ruling class were different from those worn by the civilians. Both the common people (Muslims and Christians) and ulama wore an ʿ*imāmah,* or turban, though the ulama's was much bigger and round.[67] The type of headgear most familiar in the West is the smaller version of the ʿ*imāmah* traditionally worn by inhabitants of Mamluk lands (and other Muslim territories not subject to Mamluk rule) and very similar to the contemporary type still seen today worn with the *jallābīyah* in the streets of Egypt. In the lands of Islam, educated non-military civilians all wore a small ʿ*imāmah,* including Christians and Jews.[68] In *St. Mark Preaching* it is worn by the figure seated with an open book on his lap immediately behind St. Mark (Fig. 1a). He represents St. Mark's scribe,[69] identified as Anianas the shoemaker, who had been healed by the saint and was to succeed him as bishop.[70] He is the only figure in Gentile's painting wearing this type of a small turban. Venetian painters generally used this small ʿ*imāmah* to represent any Muslim depicted either independently or in a very small group, in contrast to Mamluk officials, who were always represented *en masse*. Among such representations showing the small ʿ*imāmah* are Giovanni Bellini's *Uffizi Pietà,* Cima da Congeliano's *Christ among the Scholars,* and Giorgione's *Three Philosophers,* all of which reflect Venice's open-minded society and religious tolerance.[71] In Giorgione's painting the turbaned figure is sometimes identified as Ibn Rushd (Averroës, an Andalusian philosopher and defender of Aristotelian philosophy), who stood for the "emblematic, all-purpose Muslim." Venice encouraged Averroan and Aristotelian debate to protect freedom

[67] The ulama wore a huge, round turban pointed out by Pedani as being worn by the man standing at the front to the right side next to a Mamluk official. See Pedani, "Gentile Bellini and the East," 18–19. In the background a few figures wear the same type of turban but smaller in size.

[68] At various intervals the rulers of Egypt forced the non-Muslim believers (Jews and Christians) to wear turbans of a different color. Under the second reign of the al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn, in 700/1300, the sultan gave orders that the Jews should wear yellow turbans and the Christians blue. See Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr,* 1:1:408; Mayer, *Mamlūk Costume,* 49.

[69] Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 207.

[70] Curran, *Egyptian Renaissance,* 158.

[71] Giovanni Bellini's drawing referred to as the *Uffizi Pietà* shows a turbaned figure among others surrounding Mary and Christ's dead body. Perhaps Bellini deliberately added this turbaned figure to relate his *Pietà* to the lands of early Christianity. Cima da Congeliano's turbaned figure in his *Christ among the Scholars* represents a Muslim among Christians and Hebrews surrounding Christ, which reflects Venice's free and open-minded society. The assimilation of the three heavenly religions was carried a step further in Giorgione's *Three Philosophers,* showing a Christian, a Muslim, and a Jew respectively. By portraying the three heavenly religions side by side, Venice's religious tolerance is again revealed.

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of thought and expression in the University of Padua (the official university of Venice) at a time when other parts of Europe greatly condemned Averroism.[72]

In Mamluk lands, the ruling class dressed differently from the rest of the population, and that class was not solely made up of the military. The most important category was the military class, known as *arbāb al-suyūf* ("men of the sword"); the second category was civilians who held administrative offices, known as *arbāb al-waẓāʾif al-dīwānīyah* or *ḥamalat al-aqlām* (literally "men of the pen"); and the third group was the religious class, known as *arbāb al-waẓāʾif al-dīnīyah,* or *al-mutaʿammimūn* (literally "men of the turban").[73] Each class had its own distinctive type of headgear. Among those who held religious offices were the qadis, or judges. They wore a much bigger turban than that worn by St. Mark's scribe, and one that was different from the typical elongated Mamluk type.[74] A group in the background behind the veiled women wears such turbans in slightly different sizes, indicating their varied status in society: the bigger the turban the greater the status. Moreover, the colored costume they wear was a familiar sight of foreign merchants outside Venice,[75] which could mean that Gentile was representing a group of merchants.

As previously mentioned, representing authentic-looking turbaned Mamluks was, according to the standards of the day, essential to render biblical credibility onto religious narratives set in the Holy Land or Egypt. Here, a wide range of Mamluk headgear is featured, such as the small turban, or *takhfīfah ṣaghīrah,*[76]

[72] "I hate the whole Arab race," said Petrarch (1304–74), the great Tuscan humanist, who lived in Venice for many years; this was because of the lasting influence of Arab medical teachings upon Venetian physicians of his day. Giorgione's painting reflects the openness of the Venetian society, its intellectual freedom, religious tolerance, and political independence, especially from the papacy. See Michael Barry, "Renaissance Venice and Her 'Moors,'" in *Venice and the Islamic World,* ed. Carboni, 154–55, 167. For more details on the presentation of Mamluk figures in Venetian paintings and their relevance to the contemporary events of the day see Rateb, "Mamlūk Impact," 178–249.

[73] Ayalon, *Studies,* 57.

[74] Ibn Iyās recalls that in 919/1513 the sultan gave orders that no one should visit him wearing the turban customarily worn by non-military officials (because of his hatred towards the jurisprudents), so Quran reciters put on a *zamṭ* wrapped with a kerchief on visiting him. One day, a qadi visited the sultan wearing the Mamluks' official turban, or *takhfīfah,* which made the sultan laugh and comment that he looked like a Circassian. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr,* 4:374.

[75] Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 233.

[76] As opposed to *al-takhfīfah al-kabīrah,* also known as *al-nāʿūrah* (waterwheel), which appeared by the end of the ninth/fifteenth century and was a heavy kind of horned turban; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr,* 4:201; Mayer, *Mamlūk Costume,* 16–17; Raby, *Venice, Dürer,* 35. Any *takhfīfah* was a small turban, which when folded around horns became a *takhfīfah kabīrah*. Carl F. Petry, "Robing Ceremonials in Late Mamluk Egypt: Hallowed Traditions, Shifting Protocols," in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture,* ed. Stewart Gordon (New York, 2001), 373. However, this

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al-tāqīyah al-jarkasīyah, which was occasionally covered with "bearskin,"[77] the *zamt* hat (Fig. 1b), and the veiled women (Fig. 1c). A turban wound around a red *tāj,* or cap, as worn by the figure with the sword, represents the Ottomans (Fig. 1a).[78] A group of Venetians, recognized by the red toga normally worn by patricians and secretaries, is set to the left. Among them a Venetian—identified as Gentile Bellini—wears a red senatorial toga and a gold chain (presumably the one given to him by Sultan Muḥammad II).[79] Other Venetians are scattered in the middle and to the right, emphasizing Alexandria as a mercantile city bustling with Venetians and Mamluks.

The *takhfīfah,* or *takhfīfah ṣaghīrah,* at first worn by the sultan and his amirs alike, became, by the end of Mamluk rule, a typical Mamluk headdress.[80] Despite its name, it was a tall turban[81] and not small at all. While the habit of winding a high turban began under the reign of al-Ashraf Khalīl ibn Qalāwūn (r. 689–93/1290–93), it only became widespread under al-Ashraf Shaʿbān (r. 764–78/1363–77),[82] and continued thus until the days of al-Qalqashandī, who died in 821/1418.[83] In Venetian paintings it is represented as either wrapped vertically or distinguished by a single crossed and oblique fold. Gentile placed those wearing the *takhfīfah ṣaghīrah* with an oblique fold in the front plane to the right (Fig. 1b), thus underscoring their privileged position among the other Mamluk figures.

The Circassian Mamluk military class adopted another type of headgear that resembled a tall cylindrical hat and was known as *al-tāqīyah al-jarkasīyah.*[84] It came in many colors—red, green, and blue—and was worn without winding a

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type of headgear does not appear in the present painting. On the other hand, the *takhfīfah ṣaghīrah*'s white color dominates most Venetian eyewitness paintings showing groups of Mamluks, and is usually represented wrapped vertically.

[77] Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-al-iʿtibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-al-āthār* (Bulaq, 1967–68), 2:104; Māḍī, *Ziyy umarāʾ al-Mamālīk,* 135; Raby, *Venice, Dürer,* 40.

[78] While Raby believed that Gentile was the right person to provide Venetians with accurate visual knowledge of the Ottomans, he said nothing about the Ottoman in this painting. See Raby, *Venice, Dürer,* 21. Brown, however, was able to point out the Ottoman in Gentile's painting, but said nothing about why he was added here or what he represents. See Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 207.

[79] Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 148, 219, 207, 233.

[80] Mayer, *Mamlūk Costume,* 16, 17.

[81] Raby, *Venice, Dürer,* 62.

[82] Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Rāziq Aḥmad, *Tārīkh wa-āthār Miṣr al-Islāmīyah fī al-ʿaṣrayn al-Ayyūbī wa-al-Mamlūkī* (Cairo, 2007), 126.

[83] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 4:39–40.

[84] Mayer, *Mamlūk Costume,* 31; Māḍī, *Ziyy umarāʾ al-Mamālīk,* 135.

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Figure 1b. Detail showing a group of Mamluks wearing different types of headgear. In the middle a figure wearing a huge *ʿimāmah* stands next to another wearing the *takhfīfah ṣaghīrah* with an oblique fold, also worn by a group of other Mamluks in the front plane. The bear-skin-like *tāqīyah* is worn by the three Mamluk dignitaries standing to the extreme right in the foreground, the two-tone *tāqīyah* is worn by a fourth figure standing behind them, and a wrapped *zamt* is worn by a figure placed further back.

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Figure 1c. Detail showing a group of Mamluk women completely covered by their large, white veils placed over tall *ṭarṭūrs*.

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turban around it.[85] Under Faraj Ibn Barqūq (r. 801–8/1399–1405)[86] *al-ṭāqīyah al-jarkasīyah* became higher, almost 34 centimeters (13.5 inches),[87] and its originally flat top became rounded like a small dome.[88] Between 1481 and 1501 the *ṭāqīyah* was reported to have been narrower at the bottom than at the top and of two colors, such as the lower portion being green and the upper portion black.[89] It was occasionally covered with "bearskin."[90] The bearskin-like *ṭāqīyah* is clearly being worn by the three Mamluk dignitaries standing to the extreme right in the foreground, as well as a few others a bit further back. The two-tone *ṭāqīyah* is worn by a fourth figure standing next to the three *ṭāqīyah*-hatted dignitaries,[91] which also speaks of their prominent position among the Mamluks (Fig. 1b).

Another typical sort of Mamluk headgear worn by the military class following 1438 was the red *zamt,* sometimes with a white kerchief wrapped around the base and over the top.[92] By the end of Mamluk rule both the red *zamt* and *takhfīfah* had become typical Circassian Mamluk headwear, even after the fall of the sultanate; Ibn Iyās recalled that after taking over Egypt the new Ottoman rulers chopped off the heads of anyone wearing a *zamt* or *takhfīfah.*[93] Although Ibn Iyās did not specify whether only the non-Mamluk officials had their *zamt* hats wrapped with a kerchief around the base, he does mention that this image of a *zamt* was, by the end of Mamluk rule, typical of *Hawwārah* tribal Arabs.[94] Egyptian villagers were also illustrated wearing the *zamt* wrapped with a kerchief.[95] The fact that it was worn by non-Mamluk officials at the time Gentile was painting could explain the figures wearing wrapped *zamt*s and placed a bit fur-

[85] It might be interesting to add in this context that women too wore this type of headgear in an attempt to look like men so as to attract their men, who preferred men to women at that time, according to Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Rāziq Aḥmad (*Al-Marʾah fī Miṣr al-Mamlūkīyah* [Cairo, 1999]), 189.

[86] Aḥmad, *Tārīkh wa-āthār,* 127.

[87] Māḍī, *Ziyy umarāʾ al-Mamālīk,* 135.

[88] Mayer, *Mamlūk Costume,* 31.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Māḍī, *Ziyy umarāʾ al-Mamālīk,* 135; Raby, *Venice, Dürer,* 40.

[91] Ibid., 60.

[92] Ibid., 41.

[93] The chronicle of Ibn Iyās is considered a very important source as being a first-hand account written by an Egyptian historian who had witnessed the Ottoman invasion. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr,* 5:150.

[94] Ibn Iyās on more than one occasion mentions the *zamt* worn by non-Mamluks: villagers, boys, slaves, and tribal Arabs from Egypt. Ibid., 2:172–73, 186. On the occasion of his death, Ṭūmānbāy was wearing a *zamt* wound with a kerchief and a *mulawaṭah* coat with big sleeves, "dressed like the tribal Arabs of *Hawwārah*." Ibid., 5:175.

[95] Pierre Belon's engraving of a *zamt*-hatted archer, illustrated a few decades after the fall of the Mamluk Sultanate, is identified as a portrait of an Arab villager. Raby, *Venice, Dürer,* 41.

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ther to the back (almost hidden by the front row of dignified Mamluks). Vecellio engraved an exact copy of Gentile's two standing figures with the wrapped *zamt* and wearing exactly the same striped costume in his *Habiti,* identifying them as Christian Indian merchants in Cairo.[96]

Women in the Mamluk period wore a kind of white veil or wrap, usually made of silk, approximately 3x2 cubits, and commonly known as *izār.*[97] The most cited depiction of typical Muslim women during the Mamluk period is, in fact, *St. Mark Preaching,* which features a group of women sitting together covered in white veils with their faces concealed (Fig. 1c). During the second half of the fifteenth century, the large white veil was often placed over a tall *ṭarṭūr,* or hat, taking the shape of a goblet,[98] as represented here. The term *ṭarṭūr* was listed among women's clothing at the end of the Mamluk period.[99] It might be relevant to add that while Muslim women were completely covered up, female slaves used to uncover their faces.[100] Muslim women during the Mamluk period wore the same white color as men; non-Muslim women were required to wear the same colors as their men: blue for Christians and yellow for Jews.[101] However, except in times of crisis, non-Muslim women did not abide by such measures.[102] On the contrary, they wore veils exactly like Muslim women and could not be differentiated from them in any way.[103]

Apparently the impact of Mamluk women's fashion was not restricted to its appearance in Venetian painting but was copied in the streets of Venice as well, revealing an affinity with Muslim society, and contributing to Venice's desired self-image.[104] A visitor's account from 1494 described Venetian women as well covered, mostly in black, and marriageable girls with their faces covered too.[105] In Gentile's *Procession in the Piazza San Marco* (902/1496) two veiled Venetian women stand among the group of women watching the celebration from behind the

[96] Such identification could simply be due to Gentile's Alexandrian setting, from which Vecellio derived his figure. Ibid., 41.

[97] It had several other names too. For more details, see Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Rāziq Aḥmad, *La femme au temps des Mamlouks en Égypte* (Cairo, 1973), 236; idem, *Al-Marʾah,* 181–82.

[98] Mayer, *Mamlūk Costume,* 71; Aḥmad, *La femme,* 241.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid., 243.

[101] Ibid., 237.

[102] Aḥmad, *Al-Marʾah,*183.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Howard, *Venice and the East,* 12.

[105] Casola wonders how they could see in the streets. See ibid., citing *Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem,* ed. Mary Margaret Newett (Manchester, 1907), 145.

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carpets displayed over the balustrades.[106] In Venice, the custom of covering unmarried brides extended for at least another century: in 1590 Cesare Vecellio engraved a bride not yet married with her head completely covered, as opposed to a married woman whose hair is falling to her shoulders.[107]

While the three distinctive constituents of Mamluk costume were the headgear, the *qabāʾ* coat,[108] and the sword,[109] none of the Venetian paintings reflecting the Mamluk world show Mamluks wearing swords.[110] Given the Alexandrian setting for the legend of St. Mark, it was necessary to add multiple contemporary figures dressed in Mamluk fashion, but why was the Ottoman standing beneath the saint's platform included? Was the Ottoman added for no reason? In fact, he is the only figure in the painting with a sword and can be identified as an Ottoman by his turban wound around a red *tāj*.[111] In spite of the fact that this painting only shows the saint preaching, the events that follow will include his arrest and martyrdom, which the Venetians to the left stand to witness.[112] Pedani has identified the Ottoman as Alaeddin, son of Osman, based on the white color of his turban,[113] but why was he carrying a sword? Did the sword dangling from his waist have no symbolic meaning or could we safely assume that Gentile's painting contained allusions to contemporary events?[114] A quick look at the political situation should answer such questions.

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[106] See Patricia Fortini Brown, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven, 2005), 162.

[107] Ibid., 141–42.

[108] See note 58 above. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 4:39–40.

[109] Mayer, *Mamlūk Costume,* 21.

[110] The two men arresting the saint in *Arrest of St. Mark* by Mansueti have daggers tied to their belts and are wearing a kind of two-toned *zamt* with a kerchief wound at the base. The rest of their costume does not resemble the typical long, dignified Mamluk overcoats; they are seen wearing short attire with open slits showing up to their knees. This type of outfit could have been what was worn by the tribal Arabs described by Ibn Iyās as a *mulawaṭah* coat with big sleeves, which, along with the *zamt* wound with a kerchief, represented the tribal Arabs of *Hawwārah*. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr,* 5:175.

[111] For more details see Raby, *Venice, Dürer,* 21–34.

[112] Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 219.

[113] Pedani, "Gentile Bellini and the East," 22.

[114] Humfrey disregards Venetian *Scuole's* interests being other than religious at such an early date. In an interesting article in which he discusses canvases depicting St. Mark at the *Scuola Grande di San Marco,* Humfrey discounts the interpretation of *The Storm at Sea* as a political allegory. He adds that at such an early date Venetian *scuole* decoration did not have any political relevance, but was only concerned with the "expression of communal piety." See Peter Humfrey, *The Bellinesque Life of St. Mark Cycle for the Scuola Grande di San Marco in Venice in its Original Arrangement* (Berlin, 1985), 225–42.

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In 1453 Constantinople was conquered by the Ottoman Turks. In 1470 Venice lost Negroponte and other territories to the Ottomans, and, despite signing a peace treaty with them in 1479, the Venetians suffered several more losses in the Aegean.[115] This was around the same time as Gentile stayed in Istanbul (1479–81) to paint Muḥammad the Conqueror, or Sultan Mehmet II.[116] Another peace treaty between the Venetian Republic and the Ottomans in 1503 came after the loss of important Venetian fortresses after 1499.[117] From 1494 to 1530 Venice outshined its rivals—Florence, Rome, and Milan, who had surrendered to their enemies[118]—but this was when the Republic lost other important colonies to the aggressive Ottomans.[119] Although Venice's overseas territory had, by the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century, reached its maximum, referred to as *stato da mar,*[120] the Republic still feared the Ottoman expansion that bordered its islands and shores.[121] Due to war with the Ottomans,[122] Venice's extensive navigation routes to the Levant were being threatened by losses of territory.[123] By the end of the fifteenth century, the Venetian Republic had begun to realize that the Ottomans, who were becoming ever more powerful, were their most threatening enemy. It was at about the same time that Gentile started *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria*. He was not the only Venetian eyewitness painter to reflect such a view.[124]

[115] Gino Benzoni, "The Art of Venice and its 'Forma Urbis,'" in *Venice: Art and Architecture,* ed. Giandomenico Romanelli (Cologne, 1997), 19.

[116] Howard, "Venice as an 'Eastern City,'" 67.

[117] See Arcangeli, "'Orientalist' Painting," 132.

[118] J. R. Hale, "Venice and Its Empire," in *Genius of Venice, 1500–1600,* ed. Jane Martineau and Charles Hope (London, 1983), 13.

[119] Brown, *Art and Life,* 13.

[120] Arbel has listed Venice's acquisitions in Table I, such as Cyprus (1473), Veglia (1481), Zakynthos (1482), the Apulian port towns (1495–97), and Cephalonia and Ithaca (1500). See Benjamin Arbel, "Venice's Maritime Empire in the Early Modern Period," in *A Companion to Venetian History* (Brill, 2013), 132–36.

[121] Jean-Claude Hocquet, "Venice and the Turks," in *Venice and the Islamic World,* ed. Carboni, 43–44.

[122] Deborah Howard, "Venice: Society and Culture, 1500–1530," in *Bellini, Giorgione, Titian and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting,* ed. David Alan Brown and Sylvia Ferino-Pagden (New Haven, 2006), 2. For more details on Venice's relations with the Ottomans see Julian Raby, "The Serenissma and the Sublime Porte: Art in the Art of Diplomacy, 1453–1600," in *Venice and the Islamic World,* ed. Carboni, 90–119.

[123] Hocquet, "Venice and the Turks," 44.

[124] In *The Baptism of the Selenites* by Carpaccio a large Ottoman turban is placed on the staircase; a placement interpreted as a symbol of conversion. See Arcangeli, "'Orientalist' Painting," 133. Given the circumstances of the moment, such an act could also be seen as the hope of victory

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By contrast, the republic's relationship with the Mamluks was one of partnership and equality, as they shared the same trading interests.[125] Since the beginning of the fifteenth century, after the Venetian Republic was granted more commercial privileges by the Mamluk Sultanate, the volume of trade between Venice and the Mamluks had risen considerably.[126] In the first half of the fifteenth century, profits were high and very important for the Venetian economy.[127] Venice's wealth was based on its commercial activity, and its geographical location enabled it to act as entrepôt to the whole world.[128] By the end of the century, trade with the Mamluks constituted almost 45% of Venice's overseas commerce.[129] Venice's growing ties with the Mamluk world were not restricted to commercial cities such as Alexandria, Cairo, Damascus, and Aleppo, but embraced the Holy Land as well. The Venetian Republic had controlled the pilgrimage sea route to Jerusalem since the beginning of the thirteenth century by legislating conditions and licensing special guides to serve the pilgrims before embarking on Venetian ships to the Holy Land.[130] The moments of commercial tension between these two great states by the end of the fifteenth century were mainly due to the external threats they both faced at that time.[131] While Taghrī

over the Ottomans, who at that time constituted a great threat and were the Republic's sole Muslim enemy. On the other hand, depicting the large Mamluk *nāʾūrah* turban worn by Mamluk sultans and held here by the kneeling Mamluk figure could be interpreted as a sign of the respect that continued to prevail between the Venetian Republic and the Mamluk Sultanate.

[125] Howard, *Venice and the East,* 218. Throughout the fifteenth century the volume of Venetian trade in Egypt and Syria was increasing. Eliyahu Ashtor, *Studies on the Levantine Trade in the Middle Ages* (London, 1978), 32.

[126] In the years 1415, 1422, and 1442 commercial profits for Venice were very high. See Eliyahu Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages* (London, 1976), 326, 329.

[127] Despite the fact that the Venetian Republic threatened more than once to suspend trade with the Mamluks between the years 1418 and 1449, not all of them were serious threats; and in spite of its great risk and danger, trade continued between the two states. Eliyahu Ashtor, "Profits from Trade with the Levant in the Fifteenth Century," *BSOAS* 38, no. 2 (1975): 274. The expulsion of the Venetians by the Mamluk sultan in 1435 and the proposal of the Venetian doge in the following year to send an ambassador to Cairo in order to continue trade with the Mamluks (believing that Venice could afford to pay the price fixed by the sultan for the purchase of pepper), is proof that Venice's annual profit from selling Oriental merchandise in the Veneto and the rest of Europe must have been overwhelmingly high. Eliyahu Ashtor, "The Volume of Levantine Trade in the Later Middle Ages, 1370–1498," *The Journal of European Economic History* 4, no. 3 (1975): 593–94.

[128] Brown, *Art and Life,* 19–22.

[129] Howard, "Venice and the Mamluks," 79.

[130] Margaret Wade, *Medieval Travelers* (New York, 1983), 72–73.

[131] The year 1497 saw the reversal of economic powers with the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope and the gradual shifting of spice trade routes from Jeddah, Damascus, Beirut, Alexan-

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Birdī's emissary was defined as "most hostile...to our nation," and described as being "equally precarious,"[132] Priuli comments, "What an honor it was for Venice to receive an ambassador from so exalted a ruler as the Mamluk Sultan."[133] As soon as the Venetians sensed that the Mamluk sultan al-Ghawrī was willing to negotiate (after having arrested a number of Venetian merchants in Alexandria in 1511) they sent him one of Venice's most distinguished senators and most experienced diplomats, Domenico Trevisani, in 1512.[134] This in itself testifies to the continued diplomatic relations between the republic and the sultanate, but most important, it reveals that whatever the crisis, there was never any political conflict between them. The Mamluks had no colonial aspirations and were never interested in capturing Venetian territory.

Following this line of argument, it would be safe to conclude that the portrayal of contemporary Mamluks and Venetians in *St. Mark Preaching* reflects the peaceful relations between them, and the inclusion of an Ottoman wearing a sword reveals Venice's true enemy.[135] Modeling Christian and Muslim figures in contemporary costumes was interpreted as the hope of the triumph of Chris-

dria, and Cairo (then under Mamluk rule) to Lisbon, thus depriving the Mamluks of their previous and long-lasting source of wealth and power. Aḥmad Darrāj, *Al-Mamālīk wa-al-Firanj* (Cairo, 1961), 128. This new situation also threatened Venice's leading role in international trade connecting the eastern Mediterranean to the rest of Europe.

[132] Taghrī Birdī's visit was in 912/1506. See Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 11. While most sources mention a retinue of 20, Priuli, in his *Diarii,* reports a retinue of 25. See Wansbrough, "Mamluk Ambassador," 503, 514–15. However, this Mamluk diplomatic visit was exceptional, and was the result of the sudden and unexpected death of Alvise Sagundini, the Venetian ambassador in Cairo. See Howard, "Venice as an 'Eastern City,'" 85.

[133] Sanuto was a diarist, while Priuli was a successful banker. See Priuli, *Diarii,* 2:422, in Wansbrough, "Mamluk Ambassador," 515. Al-Ghawrī's ambassador to Venice presented no gifts, but, apparently, sometime before Taghrī Birdī's diplomatic visit to Venice a Venetian embassy was sent to Cairo without any gifts. Priuli, *Diarii,* 2:385, in Wansbrough, "Mamluk Ambassador," 516. There were doubtless severe tensions between the two states in the last decades of Mamluk rule, and al-Ghawrī's act could have been a reaction to such an unusual practice.

[134] Wilhelm von Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au moyen âge,* translated into Arabic by Aḥmad Riḍá Muḥammad Riḍá as *Tārīkh al-tijārah fī al-sharq al-adná fī al-ʿusūr al-wustá* (Cairo, 1985–94), 4:35.

[135] True, Venice had been tributary to the Mamluks since 1473 with regard to Cyprus, but the Mamluk sultan Barsbāy had conquered the island in 1426 from the French Lusignan dynasty, and not from the Venetians, who took over Cyprus in 1473. Barsbāy's conquest was a reaction to the attacks launched from there and continuous acts of piracy in the Mediterranean. In fact, in 1252 the king of Cyprus came to Syria to help King Louis IX (who had led the Seventh Crusade against Egypt), and again in 1365 Cyprus attacked Alexandria. For more details see Darrāj, *Al-Mamālīk wa-al-Firanj,* 7, 8, 21–22; and Nicholas Coureas, "Latin Cyprus and Its Relations with the Mamluk Sultanate, 1250–1517," in *The Crusader World,* ed. Adrian Boas (London, 2015), 391.

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tianity over Islam,[136] yet it also reflects Venice's peaceful and friendly relations with the Mamluks. By pushing the core of the religious narrative to one side (in the foreground to the left), Gentile focused instead on the quiet mercantile city of Alexandria. By separating the only figure with a sword from the rest of the crowd and having him stand all by himself, the artist allowed the viewer to see him fully and clearly. Not only is he identified as an Ottoman by the red cap seen above his wrapped turban, but his very short beard (he is almost beardless) distinguishes him from the rest of the long-bearded Mamluk officials. Abū al-Fatḥ al-Sarājī's lamentation over the fall of the Mamluk Sultanate describes the Ottomans as "beardless" wearing "a *ṭarṭūr* that could be seen by the naked eye."[137] Furthermore, the brocaded coat worn by the Ottoman could be compared to Ottoman fabrics attributed to the fifteenth century.[138] Modern scholars might find it difficult to differentiate between the two distinct worlds of the Mamluks and Ottomans,[139] but Venetians at that time knew the difference. When depicting Ottomans and Mamluks, Gentile was certainly more accurate than any other eyewitness Orientalist painter of his own generation. This figure, with his sword and leftward gaze at the apostle, as if ready to kill him, symbolizes the hostile Ottomans, who had not only taken Venetian territory and constituted a threat to the republic, but had been in conflict with the Mamluks since the rule of Muḥammad the Conqueror.[140] The hostility between the two states lasted until they finally defeated the Mamluks of Egypt in 1517, brutally killed them, and

[136] Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 209. However, one must be cautious when referring to all the characters as "Muslims" as this could lead to a wrong interpretation of the pictorial composition. Carrier thought that the executioner was one of the mass of Muslims represented here, which he interpreted to mean that the Venetians could not hope for the conversion of the Muslims. David Carrier, "A Renaissance Fantasy Image of the Islamic World: Gentile and Giovanni Bellini's *Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria,*" *Source* 28, no. 1 (2008): 17. It might be relevant to add here that the Ottomans were rarely depicted in large groups, and their world was never part of the Ottoman mode in Venice. Raby mentions only two paintings in which the Ottomans appear *en masse*. See Raby, *Venice, Dürer,* 21.

[137] Al-Qāḍī Abū al-Fatḥ al-Sarājī was a Hanafi judge who died after the Ottomans hanged the last Mamluk Sultan Ṭūmanbāy at Bāb Zuwaylah. While lamenting this calamity and regretting the good old days of the Mamluks, he describes in some detail how the Ottomans pillaged Cairo and killed the Mamluk soldiers. Cited in Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr,* 5:197–202.

[138] Sandra Sardjono, "Ottoman or Italian Velvets? A Technical Investigation," in *Venice and the Islamic World,* ed. Carboni, 193, figs. 1–3.

[139] While scholars often tend to fall in such errors, Hocquet has bluntly admitted such confusion in the West. See Hocquet, "Venice and the Turks," 50.

[140] During the reign of the Mamluk sultan Qāytbāy an Ottoman-Mamluk war actually took place in 1485 and, despite ending in 1491, the conflict continued until the Ottomans finally took over the Mamluk lands. Briefly stated in Ḥusayn Muʾnis, *Aṭlas Tārīkh al-Islām* (Cairo, 1986), 358; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks,* 4.

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seized their possessions.[141] The Ottomans at the time this painting was executed were the common enemy threatening both Venetians and Mamluks.

However, while Gentile's choice of subject and composition were most likely his own, this work was at the same time part of an artistic trend that belonged to his generation of artists.[142] Gentile could have been inspired by Carpaccio's choice of Oriental landscapes in three of his canvases begun before *St. Mark Preaching.*[143] The cultural interest of the guild of silk weavers in the world of Islam was manifested in their earliest surviving cycle showing an Oriental mode.[144] Furthermore, one must not rule out the possibility that the *Scuola Grande di San Marco* had interests other than the confraternity's principal religious aim. The appeal of Gentile's setting to the *Scuola*'s members, among whom were a number of seafaring men, might have been behind his choice of composition.[145] Similar interests seem to have motivated other Venetian confraternities at that time, all of whom were fully aware of the Ottoman hostility against the Venetians.[146] In his *Stoning of St. Stephen* (Fig. 3) Carpaccio personifies the Ottomans as the true enemy by showing figures wearing the Ottoman style of turban wound around a red cap stoning the saint to death.[147] The Mamluk phenomenon in Venetian painting ended a few years after the fall of the Mamluk Sultanate. Distant places that were once recast in the image of Venice, such as Alexandria and Jerusalem, and which had been under Mamluk rule, were now replaced by images of

[141] Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr,* 5:150.

[142] Humfrey believes that Gentile's choice of subjects must have been through his own initiative to the point that led the *Scuola's* choices after the death of both Gentile and Giovanni to try and preserve the "Bellinesque" character of the scheme. Humfrey, *Bellinesque Life,* 234.

[143] Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 69, 74.

[144] See ibid., 68–69, 74.

[145] Ibid., 74, n. 127.

[146] The membership of one of Venice's religious confraternities, or *scuole,* to whom the Orientalist paintings were dedicated, was made up of immigrants who had been driven by the Ottoman Turks from their homeland in the Balkans. One of these Venetian *scoule* even financed many Venetian military galleys against the Ottoman Turks. The *Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni* was founded by almost two hundred Dalmation (Schiavoni) immigrants, and was not solely interested in peaceful travel to Mamluk lands, but financed many Venetian military galleys against the Ottoman Turks to more directly confront the Ottoman danger, which was constantly threatening Venice's possessions. For more details see Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 69, 129, and 131.

[147] In Carpaccio's late works, which were contemporary to the fall of the Mamluk Sultanate to the Ottoman Turks, Muslims started being represented as evil and dangerous characters and were personified as Ottomans. Stefano Carboni, "Moments of Vision," in *Venice and the Islamic World,* ed. Carboni, 26.

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Figure 3. Vittore Carpaccio, *The Stoning of St. Stephen,* 1520, oil on canvas, 1.49x1.70 m, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart (inv. 311, https://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/c/carpacci/4stephen/)

Rome.[148] According to Fortini Brown, the fall of the Mamluks, followed by the elimination of the Mamluk pictorial mode, made Venice lose its own identity as an Eastern city.[149]

In an attempt to understand why an Ottoman was added among dozens of male and female Mamluk figures, this study has explored the artistic, political, commercial, and social conditions in Venice that helped transmit the Mamluk world in Gentile's *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria*. Venetian eyewitness painters

[148] See Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting,* 239.

[149] Ibid., 237. The next generation of artists was no longer concerned with recording an authentic world as if witnessed by the painter; rather, it presented a *fantasia* of a supernatural world, where miracles looked "miraculous" and the real world became unreal. Ibid., 239–40.

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who represented the Mamluks and their world all belonged to one generation: that of the Bellini brothers. Accordingly, it is necessary to interpret Gentile's painting as a political allegory, to refer to other eyewitness paintings, and to consider the Venetian *scuole*'s interests. The present view of the political relevance of elements in Gentile's painting is supported by its composition, in which the artist pushed the religious narrative of St. Mark preaching to one side and set up a peaceful Alexandrian scene showing groups of Mamluks and Venetians interrupted by a single armed figure, clothed as an Ottoman and standing all by himself. It would be correct to assume that Venice's intellectual freedom and religious tolerance were behind the Mamluk phenomenon in Venetian painting, and it would be wrong to underestimate the importance of the diplomatic and commercial ties—devoid of any political or territorial aspirations—between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Venetian Republic. The Mamluk Sultanate was the only Eastern state with which Venice could draw her own image, and after its fall Venice lost her Eastern identity.

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