

# Constantinople as Center and Crossroad

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SWEDISH RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN ISTANBUL  
TRANSACTIONS, VOL. 23

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .....	7
OLOF HEILO & INGELA NILSSON WITH RAGNAR HEDLUND	
Constantinople as Crossroad: Some introductory remarks .....	9
RAGNAR HEDLUND	
Byzantium, Zeuxippos, and Constantinople: The emergence of an imperial city .....	20
GRIGORI SIMEONOV	
Crossing the Straits in the Search for a Cure: Travelling to Constantinople in the Miracles of its healer saints .....	34
FEDIR ANDROSHCHUK	
When and How Were Byzantine <i>Miliaresia</i> Brought to Scandinavia? Constantinople and the dissemination of silver coinage outside the empire .....	55
ANNALINDEN WELLER	
Mediating the Eastern Frontier: Classical models of warfare in the work of Nikephoros Ouranos.....	89
CLAUDIA RAPP	
A Medieval Cosmopolis: Constantinople and its foreigners .....	100
MABI ANGAR	
Disturbed Orders: Architectural representations in Saint Mary Peribleptos as seen by Ruy González de Clavijo.....	116
ISABEL KIMMELFIELD	
Argyropolis: A diachronic approach to the study of Constantinople's suburbs.....	142

MILOŠ PETROVIĆ	
Belgrade Toponyms along the Bosphorus: From the Belgrade Forest to the Belgrade Gate .....	158
FEDERICA GIGANTE	
‘New and Rare Items Coming from India and Turkey’: Changing perceptions of Islamic artefacts in Early Modern Italy.....	173
LEE BEAUDOEN	
A Mediterraneanizing Approach: Constantinople as a nexus .....	182
Maps.....	195
Bibliography .....	197
Index.....	228

# 'New and Rare Items Coming from India and Turkey'

## *Changing perceptions of Islamic artefacts in Early Modern Italy*

FEDERICA GIGANTE

Islamic<sup>1</sup> artefacts have been present in Europe since the Medieval period and initially arrived on the continent through numerous different channels. Pilgrims repatriated mementos and relics from the Holy Land, Middle Eastern courts sent luxurious presents to accompany their embassies, crusaders seized and brought back booty and trophies, while trade between Europe and the Middle East ensured exchanges of artefacts as well as mercantile commodities. Despite these intensive interactions, however, up until the sixteenth century the artefacts which reached Europe were rarely associated with Islam or Turkish and Arabic culture. These objects could be linked in a general way to the Holy Land, thus undergoing a process of conversion which turned them into objects of Christian devotion,<sup>2</sup> they could be adopted on formal grounds, their aesthetic becoming integrated into their new context to the point of losing all trace of their Middle Eastern provenance,<sup>3</sup> or they could become part of the essential opulent furnishings of a well-off family, little more than a token of wealth and conspicuous consumption.<sup>4</sup>

This obliviousness gradually changed as a result of the increasing awareness of the Islamic world engendered by the advance of the Ottomans towards Europe. By the time of the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517, the Eastern Mediterranean had effectively become an Ottoman monopoly and “the Turks” an ever more ubiquitous presence in popular imagery. This geopolitical and cultural development was accompanied by, and contributed to, the formation of a new tendency of enquiry into other cultures, religions, and races which would eventually become the science of ethnography. Discoveries of new continents and their inhabitants

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<sup>1</sup> By “Islamic” is to be understood the output of civilizations whose majority population was Muslim rather than specifically religious objects.

<sup>2</sup> A. Shalem, *Islam Christianized: Islamic Portable Objects in the Medieval Church Treasuries of the Latin West* (Frankfurt am Main 1996).

<sup>3</sup> A. Contadini, “Threads of Ornament in the Style World of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in G. Necipoğlu & A. Payne (eds.), *Histories of Ornament: From Global to Local* (Princeton 2016), 290–308.

<sup>4</sup> D. Thornton, *The Scholar in his Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven & London 1991).

were of fundamental importance to this tendency, which also fostered a deeper interest in the Turks, Arabs or Mughals and their customs.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, broadening European seafaring activities led to an expansion of the geographical area of origin of such artefacts, which now reached all the way to Mughal India. Islamic objects increasingly reached Europe with biographies, narratives, and associations, which in turn invested them with an “exotic aura.”<sup>6</sup> This phenomenon duly led, in the course of the sixteenth century, towards a singularization of Islamic objects into a collecting context and away from the utilitarian, purely aesthetic, and more anonymous uses to which they had previously been put.<sup>7</sup> These newly-imported items now acquired a completely different status from those artefacts that had been imported into Italy in previous centuries and that, as a result, had long lost their association with a foreign land and so circulated and were collected only for their aesthetic and material qualities.

By the seventeenth century, such artefacts featured in, and were actively collected for, formal collections assembled both by the nobility and by dedicated scholars. At the same time, the channels of importation of Islamic artefacts into Europe had generally been reduced to direct acquisitions, effected either through purchase, commission, or seizure, while the practices of gift-exchange between foreign courts and relic-importation that had previously brought about significant flows of objects had become discontinuous and considerably rarer.<sup>8</sup> As a result, Islamic artefacts were no longer imported into Europe haphazardly, but rather became sought-after goods which were designedly tracked down and acquired. Among the results of this change in circumstances was that Islamic objects became invested with a new poignancy, no longer appreciated only for their materiality and aesthetic qualities but also—due to their associations with the Middle East or India—for their symbolic and ethnographic significance. Items that were seized in battles thus became tokens of Christian military might against the Muslims while items purchased by collectors became representative of their civilization of origin and, as such, worthy of investigation.

This article illustrates the new meanings and relevance which artefacts coming into Italy from the Eastern Mediterranean and India embodied in the Early Modern period. By concentrating on a variety of Islamic objects featuring in Italian collections, it shows that knowledge of the objects’ biographies became of paramount importance in the perception and value of the artefacts and that this, in turn, exercised a power of agency on the collector or viewer of the item. It will demonstrate that the Eastern origins of the artefact now acted as a catalyst which endowed the object with a clear Islamic, or more broadly “exotic” identity, and that this alone was sufficient grounds for items which were insignificant in material and artistic terms to merit incorporation in a collection. As a consequence, it will

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<sup>5</sup> J. Raby, “The European Vision of the Muslim Orient in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century,” in E. Grube et al. (eds.), *Venezia e l’Oriente Vicino: Atti del primo simposio internazionale sull’arte veneziana e l’arte islamica* (Venice 1989), 46.

<sup>6</sup> A. Shalem, “The Otherness in the Focus of Interest: or, If Only the Other Could Speak,” in C. Schmidt Arcangeli & G. Wolf (eds.), *Islamic Artefacts in the Mediterranean World: Trade, Gift Exchange and Artistic Transfer* (Venice 2010), 41.

<sup>7</sup> D. Howard, “Venezia città ‘orientale’,” in S. Carboni (ed.), *Venezia e l’Islam, 828–1797* (Venice 2007), 99. For a discussion of singularization as opposed to commoditization of objects see I. Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization Process,” in A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge 1986), 78.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of Islamic artefacts imported into Italy in the Renaissance see R. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300–1600* (Berkeley 2002).

argue that this newly acquired awareness shifted the focus from the material and artistic qualities of an object to its ethnographical and anthropological potential as the main factors behind its importation into Europe in the Early Modern period.

A great concentration of collections, the contents of which comprised a broad variety of artworks, natural specimens, and more heterogeneous curiosities, appeared in Italy between the end of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. All these collections, of which the most notable are the Imperato Museum in Naples,<sup>9</sup> the Kircher Museum in Rome,<sup>10</sup> the Vecchietti Museum near Florence,<sup>11</sup> the Cospì Museum in Bologna,<sup>12</sup> the Calceolari Museum<sup>13</sup> and the Moscardo Museum in Verona,<sup>14</sup> and the Settala Museum in Milan,<sup>15</sup> featured items which came from the Islamic world, in the spheres of both *naturalia* and *artificialia*. Those collectors who were motivated by scientific considerations, such as Ferrante Imperato and Francesco Calceolari, included in their collections specimens from the Islamic world only to the extent that these furthered their scientific enquiries. Accordingly, the Islamic specimens in similar scientific collections came to comprise mainly *naturalia* such as animals as well as soil and stone samples and amounted only very rarely to artefacts. As such, they are not further considered in the present study, which focuses instead on collections comprising Islamic artefacts such as the Kircher, Vecchietti, Moscardo, Cospì, and Settala Museums, as these enable and invite broader considerations regarding the ways in which the objects were interpreted and understood by their collectors.

Raffaello Borghini, writing in the late sixteenth century about the collection of Bernardo Vecchietti assembled in Vecchietti's villa "Il Riposo" near Florence, describes a

writing-desk divided into five shelves, on which are tastefully arranged marble, bronze, terracotta, and wax statuettes; and on which are placed precious stones of various sorts, porcelain and rock-crystal vases, sea shells of various types, pyramids of highly-priced stones, jewelry, medals, masks, and fruits and animals petrified in translucent stone, as

<sup>9</sup> F. Imperato, *Dell'istoria naturale di Ferrante Imperato napolitano, libri XXVIII: nella quale ordinatamente si tratta della diuersa condition di miniere, e pietre. Con alcune historie di Piante, & Animali; sin'hora non date in luce* (Naples 1599).

<sup>10</sup> G. de Sepi, *Romani Collegii Societatis Jesu Musaeum celeberrimum: cujus magnum antiquariae rei, statuarum, imaginum, picturarumque partem ex legato Alphonsi Donini, S.P.Q.R., a secretis, munificia liberalitate relictum / P. Athanasius Kircherus Soc. Jesu* (Amsterdam 1678).

<sup>11</sup> See R. Borghini, *Il riposo di Raffaello Borghini, in cui della Pittura, e della Scultura si favella, de' piu illustri Pittori, e Scultori, e delle piu famose opere loro si fa mentione; e le cose principali appartenenti à dette arti s'insegnano* (Florence 1584).

<sup>12</sup> L. Legati, *Museo Cospiano Annesso a quello del Famoso Ulisse Aldrovandi e Donato alla sua Patria dall'Illustrissimo Signor Ferdinando Cospì, Patrizio di Bologna e Senatore, Cavaliere Commendatore di S. Stefano, Bali d'Arezzo, e March. di Petriolo, Fra' gli Accademici Gelati il Fedele, e Principe al Presente de' Medesimi. Descrizione di Lorenzo Legati Cremonese, Dottor Filosofo, Medico, e Pubblico Professore delle Lettere Greche in Bologna, Accademico Apatista, e Ansioso, al Serenissimo Ferdinando III. Principe di Toscana* (Bologna 1677).

<sup>13</sup> B. Ceruti & A. Chiocco, *Musaeum Calceolarianum veronese* (Verona 1622).

<sup>14</sup> L. Moscardo, *Note ovvero memorie del Museo del Conte Lodovico Moscardo, Nobile Veronese, uno de Padri nell'Accademia Filarmonica, Dal medesimo descritte in Trè Libri* (Verona 1672).

<sup>15</sup> P. F. Scarabelli, *Museo, ò Galeria Adunata dal sapere, e dallo studio Del Sig. Canonico Manfredo Settala Nobile Milanese. Descritta in Latino dal Sig. Dott. Fis. Colleg. Paolo Maria Terzago. Et poi in Italiano dal Sig. Pietro Francesco Scarabelli Dottor Fisco di Voghera, & dal medemo accresciuta. Et hora a ristampa con l'Aggiunta di diuerse cose poste nel fine de medemi Capi dell'Opra. Dedicata all'Illustrissimo, e Reverendissimo Monsignor Carlo Settala Vescovo di Tortona, Marchese, e Conte, &c.* (Tortona 1677).

well as many new and rare items coming from India and Turkey which stupefy whomever views them.<sup>16</sup>

Statues, vases, shells, stones, and medals are juxtaposed with “new and rare items coming from India and Turkey” as if the latter, irrespective of the genre to which they belonged and of their appearance, were a category in themselves. While in Medieval written sources it is possible to detect an object of Islamic provenance only through descriptive details revealing, for example, an inlaid-metal treatment of the object—a clue as to its Middle Eastern craftsmanship—in Early Modern sources this is often reversed and objects are simply described as Turkish, Arabic, Moorish, Persian, or Indian, for example, with no further details as to their actual appearance. This shift in focus is symptomatic of the different significance acquired by artefacts coming from the Islamic world in the Early Modern period, now imported into Europe as representatives of their civilization of origin rather than as artworks with an intrinsic and aesthetic value whose origin was unimportant and, in any event, long-forgotten.

Thus items included in collection catalogues lose many of their descriptive details and are simply labelled with their provenance or country of production, as is the case with the “two bows brought from Tunis of Barbaria”<sup>17</sup> of the Settala Museum or the “Arabic horizontal sun clock”<sup>18</sup> of the Cospi Museum which do not appear to merit any other comments beyond their association with the Islamic world. As a consequence, trivial items could merit a place in the collection as long as they reached Europe with a connection with a foreign and interesting land. This is the case, for example, with a “wooden weighing scale, used in the countries of the Turk [...] brought from Cairo”<sup>19</sup> featuring in the Cospi Museum, which would be little more than two tiny pieces of wood on a hinge were it not for the fact that the object is of Ottoman provenance, or the elusive “Turkish lock”<sup>20</sup> which is not further described.

This nascent interest in the simplest objects merely because of their association with a particular people or particular use in a specific part of the world triggered the first attempts to research their meaning and context. Secondary literature, though providing very few clues convincingly to identify the material and artistic outputs of Arabs, Turks, or Mughals, was the first and most accessible source for such research. Its use as corroboration or colour for the ethnographical background of imported Islamic items is exemplified by “four big plates, of tinned copper, used by the Turks” which were donated to the Cospi Museum by Colonel Carlo Cignani who had seized them from the Ottoman forces during the capture of Klis in 1648. Their description is thoroughly complemented by information gathered from secondary source material, in this case *De Moribus turcarum commentarius* by Giovanni Battista Montalbani:<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> “[...] uno scrittoio in cinque gradi distinto, dove sono con bell’ordine compartite statue piccole di marmo, di bronzo, di terra, e di cera; e vi sono composte pietre fini di più sorte, vasi di porcellana, e di christallo di montagna, conche marine di più maniere, piramidi di pietre di gran valuta, gioie, medaglie, maschere, frutte, & animali congelati in pietre finissime, e tante cose nuove, e rare venute d’India e di Turchia che fanno stupire chiunque le rimira,” in Borghini, *Il riposo*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> “Due archi portati da Tunisi di Barbaria,” in Scarabelli, *Museo, ò Galleria*, 189.

<sup>18</sup> “HOROLOGIO SOLARE, horizontale, Arabico,” Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 207.

<sup>19</sup> “BILANCIA di legno, usata ne’ Paesi del Turco ... portata dal Cairo,” Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 289.

<sup>20</sup> “Lucchetto Turchesco,” Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 254.

<sup>21</sup> G. B. Montalbani, *De Moribus turcarum commentarius* (Rome 1625), 27, quoted by Legati.

they differ from ours not a little, being concave, like bowls and having a cylindrical foot which serves as their base, almost half a braccio tall in order to keep them lifted from the ground, and this because the Turks are not used to eating at tall tables, as we do; on the contrary, they use the floor, on which they sit, with a carpet laid underneath, and maybe some cushions, as was the custom of the ancient Romans. They eat dishes mainly of rice, which is the most popular food over there: neither will a Pasha take offense if a stable boy eats with him.<sup>22</sup>

This anthropological analysis, and the consequent choice of appropriate authors from which to source information, however, was only made possible by the awareness that the plates had, just a few years earlier, been taken directly from the Turks. It is this awareness of the items’ origins which made the objects interesting to the collector in the first place, rather than the actual objects in themselves, evidenced by the reflection on points of cultural difference (“they differ from ours” and “the Turks are not used to eating at tall tables, as we do”) and culinary preferences.

The Moscardo Museum presents an example of another item of insignificant material or artistic importance rescued from oblivion through the use of secondary-source research (Fig. 1). This is a “metal ring”:<sup>23</sup>

it is called a ‘gymnastic brooch’ by authors and Giovanni Rodio remembers it with this name. It was used in particular by musicians, and by the ancient comedians to preserve their voice and health: one did so (as Celsus writes) by perforating the foreskin with a needle [...] they then put on this ring, which renders them impotent [...]. The religion of Calender, which is one of four in Turkey, uses this ring to the present day, putting it on in the ancient way; but they do so only in order to preserve their chastity, which is abundantly clear from Sansovino, in the Origin of the Turks.<sup>24</sup>

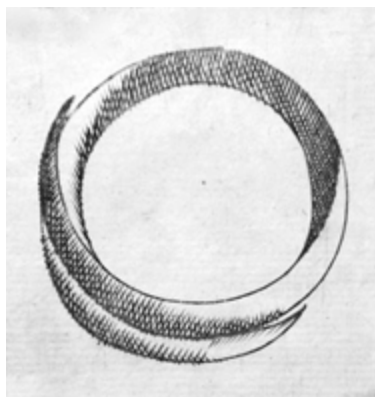


Fig. 1. Metal ring, from Moscardo, *Note overo memorie*, 104.

<sup>22</sup> “Differiscono da nostrali non poco, essendo concavi, come Catini, & havendo un pedale cilindrico, che loro serve di base, alto quasi mezo braccio, per tenerli altrettanto sollevati dal piano: e ciò, perche non costumano i Turchi le Mense alte da terra, come noi, ma invece loro si servono del pavimento, sopra il quale pur siedono, con sotto steso un tapeto, ò al più qualche cuscino, all’usanza degli antichi Romani. Mangiano Piatti per lo più di riso, che è la vivanda colà più usitata: ne si sdegherà un Bassà, che seco mangi un suo garzone di Stalla,” in Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 260.

<sup>23</sup> “Anello di metallo,” in Moscardo, *Note overo memorie*, 104.

<sup>24</sup> “[...] è dalli scrittori detta Fibula gymnastica: e con tal nome la raccorda Giovanni Rodio. Fù particolarmente da Musici, e da Comici antichi usato, per conservare la voce, e la sanità: si faceva questo (come scrive Celso) facendosi con l’ago un forame al preputio [...] infilavano l’anello, il quale rendeva inhabili al coito [...] La religione di Calender, ch’è una delle quattro della Turchia, sino il giorno presente costumano questo anello; ponendoselo nella maniera degli antichi; ma questi solo per conservare la castità: il che diffusamente appare nel Sansovino, nell’Origine de Turchi,” in Moscardo, *Note overo memorie*, 104.



Without knowledge of its provenance and origins, the item risks remaining a simple metal ring of no material or artistic value and it is only as a result of research based on written sources that it is elevated to the rank of collectible. The possibility of connecting it to antique or exotic customs, and thereby formulating a range of possible origins, thus justifies its place in the collection. The actual provenance and civilization of the object, however, cannot be definitively determined on the basis of secondary sources alone, demonstrating that the hermeneutic investigation of Islamic objects imported into Europe and Italy during the Early Modern period depended to an extraordinary extent on knowledge of the objects' provenance and biography.

This is further exemplified by another group of objects. In this case, the means to trace their origins was through conducting formal analysis in order to locate the items in place and time. Even more so than with secondary source material, however, the lack of art-historical competency, together with the relatively limited number of such artefacts from which to draw comparisons and their often highly heterogeneous nature, was such that the results of this sort of investigations often brought about rather dubious results in cases of unawareness of the objects' provenance. The "two vases of Samian ware"<sup>25</sup> featuring in the Cospì Museum are

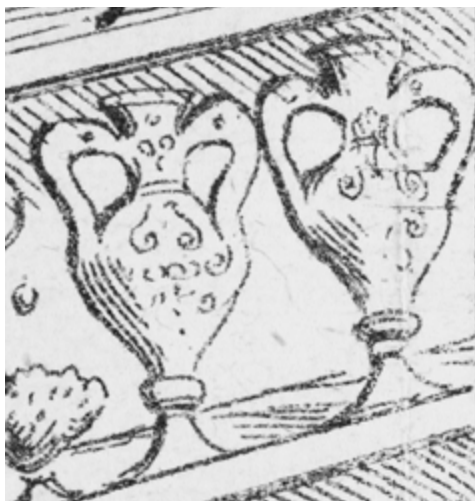


Fig. 2. Two "Samian vases", from Legati, Museo Cospiano, 266.

in fact Hispano-Moresque ware, produced in Spain by Muslim craftsmen during the second half of the fifteenth century (Fig. 2). The lack of knowledge as to their country of origin prompted a thorough analysis which led to the final, erroneous conclusion that "this type of work, being Greek, joins with the material to authenticate these as Samian Vases."<sup>26</sup> The cataloguer then goes a step further and, searching for a provenance that would validate his conclusions, declares that "this also proves that they were brought from Greece."<sup>27</sup> A direct link with a foreign land was so important in the recognition and validation of collectibles that a need was felt to reconstruct it to the extent possible, including by way of inference.

In this light, knowledge of an object's biography and provenance became paramount for a collector who wanted to include "new and rare items coming from India and Turkey"<sup>28</sup> in his museum. If an object derived its interest and peculiarity not so much from its appearance as from its connection with a distant and intriguing part of the world, then the knowledge that that object had indeed come from such a part of the world became an essential piece of information. Losing

<sup>25</sup> "Due VASI di TERRA SAMIA," in Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 266.

<sup>26</sup> "La qual sorte di lavoro, essendo Greca, cospira colla materia, ad autenticar questi per Vasi Samii," Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 267.

<sup>27</sup> "Tanto insieme prova l'essere questi stati portati dalla Grecia," in Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 267.

<sup>28</sup> "[...] cose nuove, e rare venute d'India e di Turchia," Borghini, *Il riposo*, 14.

awareness of even the most faded biography of an item meant, for the collector, losing any clue as to its civilization of origin and, with it, the trigger for any emotive or ethnographical interest which it would otherwise have stimulated. If knowledge of an object's biography was so fundamental for a collector wanting to incorporate an Islamic, or more broadly exotic, artefact in his collection in Early Modern Italy, then channels which allowed for such knowledge to be transmitted were clearly also of fundamental importance.

One such channel was the direct relation of merchants importing items into Italy from the Islamic world and selling them, along with information, to the collector.<sup>29</sup> This is the case of the pieces of turquoise featuring in the Settala Museum which

certain Armenians coming from Samarkand brought [...] in [which] gem the Turks repose such faith that they believe that whoever should carry them will not succumb to any misadventure, wherefore they abundantly adorn the saddles of their horses with such gems.<sup>30</sup>

The contextualization of the gems and the account of their power most likely derive from the direct report of the merchants who sold them to Settala and are the reason for the gems' inclusion in the museum.

Another channel by which biographies could reach Europe was through the relation of the donor who presented the collector with the object. This is the case, for example, of the "knife from Persia, or of the great Mughal [...] on one part of the blade [of which] one can read certain Arabic or Mughal characters in gold"<sup>31</sup> which belonged to the Settala Museum and to which "it was donated by the Polish Prince Stanislaus Lubomirski."<sup>32</sup> The donor was probably the channel through which the information concerning the provenance of the object travelled, especially as it is clear that the collector, or cataloguer, could not decipher or recognize the inscription on the object, meaning that he was unable to analyze the artefact by himself.

Another device which allowed for memory of the object's origins to be retained was tags and inscriptions as can be evinced from the

stirrup of very great size, memorable not as much for having been used by Murad the Emperor of the Turks as for having been the instrument of his death, having passed on to him the poison with which it was infected, as appears from the inscription in antique characters which can be seen hanging from it and which reads "Stirrup with which Murad II the Emperor of the Turks was poisoned in the year 1480."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> F. Gigante, "Trading Islamic Artworks in Seventeenth-Century Italy: the Case of the Cospì Museum," in S. Babaie & M. Gibson (eds.), *The Mercantile Effect. Art and Exchange in the Islamicate World during the 17th and 18th Centuries* (London 2017), 74–85.

<sup>30</sup> "Portarono questi alcuni Armeni, che da Samarcand venivano [...] Conservano a questa gemma i Turchi tal fede, che stimano che chiunque la porti, non soggiaccia ad alcun sinistro accidente, la onde adornano superbamente gl'adobbi di loro cavalli di queste gemme," Scarabelli, *Museo, ò Galleria*, 84.

<sup>31</sup> "Coltello Persiano, ò del gran Mogor [...] In una parte della lama si leggono alcuni caratteri Arabici, ò Mogoresi in oro," Scarabelli, *Museo, ò Galleria*, 201.

<sup>32</sup> "Fù donato dal Sig. Principe Stanislao Lubomirski Polacco," Scarabelli, *Museo, ò Galleria*, 202.

<sup>33</sup> "STAFFA di larghezza straordinaria, memorabile non tanto per haver servito ad Amuratte Imperador de' Turchi, quanto per essergli stata strumento di morte, comunicandogli il veleno, di cui era infetta, come apparisce dall'iscrizione di carattere antico, che si vede pender da essa, e dice *Staffa con la quale fù avvelenato Amurat II. Imperador de' Turchi. 1480*," Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 252–53 (italics in the original).

Here the cataloguer is patently relying upon a label that had been attached to the object in question at the time of its entry into the Cospi Museum and which therefore carried sufficient precedent authority to serve as a verified provenance.

Memory of an object's history thus transmitted also allowed it to exercise a power of agency on its viewer. This is particularly true of items that are connected with victories over the Muslim enemy. Their retained biographies turned them into tokens of military power, included in the museums to commemorate a victory or remind the viewer of the incumbent Turkish danger. The Settala Museum, for example, boasted a

steel mirror, round in shape, which belonged to that grand Turkish personage called Moratorais, acquired when he was imprisoned by the galleys of the Most Serene Duke of Tuscany. The reverse of this is of etched gold, in which the silver of the Ottoman crescents, which shine here like fixed stars, are flaunted indistinctly.<sup>34</sup>

The provenance of this mirror, and in particular the object's prestigious previous owner and his imprisonment by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, appear as the main points of interest in the description of this artefact, enjoying priority in the catalogue entry over the artefact's physical description which features only a very brief adumbration of its golden and silver decorations. Likewise, the Kircher Museum recalls that

a donation by the most illustrious hero Montecuccoli, Generalissimo of the Imperial Army, was also added in this year; being a shield and spear seized from the Turks, both covered with precious stones as well as gold and silver, by which the donor wished that the Kircher Museum be embellished as an everlasting monument of the victory won over them.<sup>35</sup>

The shield and spear, though precious objects in themselves, are here explicitly included in "commemoration of the victory obtained over [the Turks]."

Such vivid historical memory of the European struggle against the Turks emerges even more clearly from one of the descriptions featuring in the Cospi Museum catalogue. This is the "antique scimitar with a flat blade and hilt, worked with inlay, with flowers and birds along with an excellent handle [...] a Turkish weapon"<sup>36</sup> which had belonged to the collector's own grandfather who had acquired it while fighting the Turkish forces in Hungary at the end of the sixteenth century. However, if on the one hand the object did receive recognition and praise for its "excellent craftsmanship,"<sup>37</sup> it was clearly collected and exhibited as a symbol of the military encounters between Christian and Muslim powers. As the cata-

<sup>34</sup> "Specchio d'acciaio di rotonda figura, qual era di quel gran Personaggio Turco per nome Moratorais acquistato allora che egli fù dalle Galere del Serenissimo di Toscana fatto prigionie. Il rovescio di questo è tutto ad oro graffiato, in cui l'argento dell'Ottomane lune, che quiui a guisa di stelle fisse scintillano, vagamente pompeggia," Scarabelli, *Museo, ò Galleria*, 9.

<sup>35</sup> "Accessit & hoc Anno Excellentissimi Herois Montecuculi Cæsarei exercitus Generalissimi donum; videlicet Scutum & Framea Turcis erepta, pretiosis utrumque lapidibus, nec non Auro & Argento obsitum, quo Musæum Kircherianum exornatum voluit, ad perenne obtentæ contra eos victoria monumentum," in Giorgio de Sepi, *Romani Collegii Societatis Jesu Musæum celeberrimum*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> "Scimitarra antica, di lama, e d'elsa piana, ma lavorata alla Zimina, con fiorami, and ucellami, fornita d'impugnatura nobile [...] E' arma Turchesca," in Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 232–33.

<sup>37</sup> "[...] con tutta maestria formata," Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 233.

loguer explains, all the weapons thus acquired, "on account of being the spoils of war, and of holy war, against the common enemy of the Catholic Faith, are placed on their own shelf in the Museum" (Fig. 3).<sup>38</sup> This clear awareness of what the items embodied prompted in turn an emotionally-charged reaction: "oh, if only it was used against the Turks!"<sup>39</sup>

The climate of political tension caused by the constant pressure from the Ottoman armies on the eastern borders of Europe between the second half of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century was the background to a change in the perception of Islamic artefacts in Italy. While the utilitarian Islamic vases, plates, and jugs which had been a reliable presence in Italian domestic furnishings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were absorbed into museums by the turn of the seventeenth century without any apparent recollection of their civilization of origin, and went on to be appreciated for their aesthetic and material qualities alone, newly imported items were now valued because of their connection with a foreign and exotic land. Thus the type of objects that reached Italy changed and the

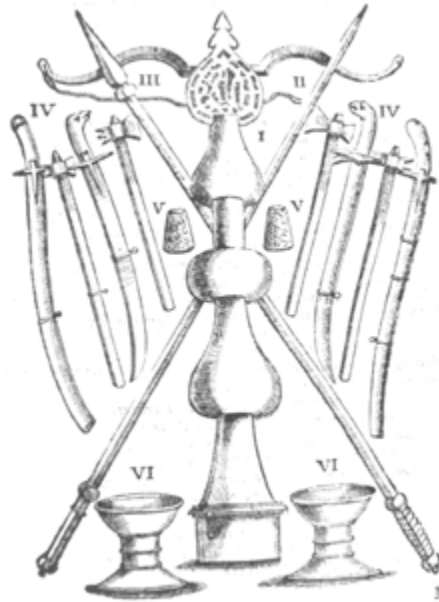


Fig. 3: Scimitars, spears, axes, bows and jugs taken as spoils of war from the Ottomans. Legati, Museo Cospiano, 233.

minor, everyday item became the most common import. At the same time, the territory from which such items were imported broadened to span from the Mediterranean to India. In this new environment, the biographies the objects carried with them on their way to Italy became the essential link to their past and civilization of origin, sometimes complemented, sometimes wholly reconstructed by the first attempts at ethnographical and anthropological investigations into Islamic material culture. Thus, Islamic artefacts imported into Italy in the Early Modern period became the carriers of a new symbolic significance, sought-after representatives of their civilization of origin, tokens of military struggles and of foreign cultures, displayed to "stupefy whomever views them"<sup>40</sup> and collected for the stories and tales they could relate.

<sup>38</sup> "[...] per essere reliquie di guerra, e di guerra sacra, come contro il commun Nemico della Catolica Religione, conservansi in una Scaffa particolare del Museo," Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 250.

<sup>39</sup> "Et oh se fusse maneggiata contro i Turchi," Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 233.

<sup>40</sup> "... fanno stupire chiunque le rimira," Borghini, *Il riposo*, 14.