Mobile Things: On the Origins and the Meanings of Levantine Objects in Early Modern Venice

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An elaborate brass wine-cup in the collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (*plate 1*) exemplifies the analytic complexities this essay will explore: incised and inlaid with silver in the Levantine manner known as damascening and marked with the coat of arms of the Priuli family of Venice, the cup is a cultural composite that challenges modern art-historical and museological classifications, specifically those based on a geography of origins.[1] The V&A's own cataloguing points to the problem at hand. Although the cup resides in the European galleries, the museum's on-line description lists place of origin as 'Syria (possibly, made); Damascus, Syria (probably, decorated); Egypt (possibly, made)', while also speculating that the cup was likely fabricated in the Middle East, the foot in Venice, and the whole sent to Syria for decoration in a single workshop.[2] Such geographic contortions are not unique to the Priuli wine-cup. Many objects associated with the affluent mercantile culture of early modern Venice are fusions – whether literal or conceptual – that inhibit a clear identification of origins, and this is particularly true of damascened brassware. For as the Venetian market for Levantine pieces flourished in the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, local craftsmen laboured hard to duplicate prized imports and take their share of the profits.[3] The resulting objects 'demonstrate a deliberate attempt to emulate Levantine originals in design and technique'.[4] Like the composite wine-cup, these imitative wares have complicated subsequent scholarship, and many so-called 'Veneto-Saracenic' objects continue to defy association with a particular site of production.[5]

This circumstance frustrates curators and other scholars for whom an object's site of production is a critical, even the most vital piece of historical data. It also stymies discussion that, guided by the powerful geographical model underlying much museological and art-historical work, is not easily turned away from the tired, often fruitless question of origins.[6] Since their emergence in the late eighteenth century, in step and in partnership with the formation of modern nation states, art museums have favoured classification by point of production, a paradigm that went hand in hand with much historical scholarship.[7] But unless new technical information about many 'Veneto-Saracenic' objects comes to light, the question of origins will never be resolved.[8] More important, the fact that many of the objects under consideration here regularly refuse to position themselves within fixed geographical frames suggests the limits of this dominant interpretative paradigm.[9] Thus this study – eschewing the place-specific model of museum-based connoisseurship that depends on situating an object in a given, geographically designated gallery or pin-pointing origins on a map;

Detail of lidded bowl, 1500–50 (*plate 4*).

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and recognizing the degree to which Venetians were embedded in a culture of material circulation – explores alternative means of understanding the value of Levantine and Levantine-inspired objects in early modern Venice. Through an investigation of contemporary texts related to trade, travel, and collecting, it proposes mobility itself as a category of value, resituating circulation not as a hindrance to full interpretation but as a key aspect of an object's meaning.[10]

Reception studies and social histories of art suggest how, rather than asking where an object came from, we might productively investigate the significance that the (perceived) origins of objects had for sixteenth-century Venetian consumers.[11] Beyond the question of whether they knew or recognized origins better than we do (an important topic but not in and of itself a resolution to the problems at hand) is the matter of what those origins meant. Likely Patricia Fortini Brown is correct, if overly brief, in her claim that, in Venice '[th]e exotic and the unfamiliar might count for as much as the cost'.[12] But the case of composite objects and imitative European wares, the ones that have been confounded with their Levantine sources of inspiration, should lead scholars to think harder about the relatively unexamined assumptions underlying such assertions. If, for example, a significant part of the allure of imported goods was their origin, one might ask whether it mattered that some of the works that were of a Levantine type were not actually produced abroad, and about the sorts of distinctions, if any, that were made between 'exotic' objects and 'exoticizing' ones.[13] Ultimately, the question at stake concerns the extent to which the actual place of production, or what is termed here provenience (which I borrow liberally from the field of archaeology), mattered to Venetian consumers and the forms that significance took in different contexts. If origins were sometimes murky and if 'exoticism' was sometimes more of an impression than the clearly defined coordinates on a map, what sorts of values and meanings did objects like the Priuli wine-cup or the many other damascened objects of the period (see *plate* 4) carry in early modern Venice?[14]

Adoption of the term 'provenience' merits a few words of explanation that also point to the larger scholarly discourses informing and provoking these pages. Archaeologists use 'provenience' to mean the find site, the place where an object came out of the ground, and differentiate it from 'provenance', or an object's documented history (art historians, who do not typically deal with find sites, envelop the full history of an object under 'provenance'). Analogously, this essay deliberately distinguishes place of production from other sites where an object may have been purchased, used, reworked, or imagined and gives it its own term: 'provenience', evoking a specific location rather than a path or journey.[15] By differentiating insistently between fixity and displacement, it parses out and calls attention to mobility, querying it not as a precursor to cultural meaning (evidenced, say, in the borrowing of forms, migration of motifs, or adaptation of types) but as a vector of meaning in its own right.[16]

This approach bumps up against a number of concerns in the burgeoning fields of object biography, global art history, and cross-cultural studies, in which the spatial and trans-spatial dimensions of the past play a significant interpretive role. By explicitly resisting calls to origins, it is possible to destabilize the stubbornly static map of history and shake loose some problematic formulations, including the notions of 'hybridity' (questioned for its underlying assumption of pure forms and degenerate intermingling) and 'globalization', which tends to press objects into a two-dimensional narrative of stylistic influence and adaptation.[17] This tactic also complicates consumption models wherein the 'exotic' import is often explained as a token of wealth or a sign of knowledge and power.[18] The deterritorialized and

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1 Priuli wine-cup, 1400–1500. Brass, engraved and damascened, 25.5 (height) × 39.5 (width) × 31 (diameter) cm. London: Victoria and Albert Museum. Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

nomadic objects explored in these pages accrued meaning not only because they were 'from there' and 'used here', but by virtue of the many and varied systems of valuation that spanned those distances both literally and in the historical imagination.[19]

An excellent investigative model for addressing Venetian attitudes toward these sorts of objects is offered by Craig Clunas in his work on later Ming-dynasty China.[20] In a chapter titled 'Words about things', Clunas examines the ways in which objects are discussed, the sorts of terms that are used, and the relative emphasis given to materials, ornament, and presentation. His aim is to superimpose contemporary Chinese frames of reference upon those of modern scholars. In emulation of Clunas, this essay probes language, and specifically the lexicons of trade, travel, the inventory, and the chronicle – all rich with references to things – in search of revealing patterns and terms, allowing these to replace the geographic paradigm of the museum as the dominant interpretative frame. Language is understood both as an interpretative filter and as a tool for engagement with the physical world that can reveal elusive Venetian states of mind and outlooks. Unlike the modern museum, laid out in synchrony with the boundaries of colonial-era nation states, language offers an investigative framework that reveals rather than suppresses the fluidity of early modern mercantile culture, in which the relationship of thing to place was more complicated than that permitted by the outlines of a map or the layout of a gallery.[21]

Words and Values

The provenience of goods remains surprisingly murky in surviving Venetian records.[22] Cargo ship inventories, for example, are both highly general when describing merchandise and inconsistent in the sorts of information they include

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and the way they present it, making it difficult to trace the trajectory of any particular item and so to connect an item, or even a category of items, to its origin.[23] In addition, specific attention to sources and places of production is scant to non-existent. Customs logs and other records for commodities such as wool, olive oil, and even valuable spices concentrate more on the point of purchase or export than the point of origin.[24] Carpets termed 'rodioti' offer but one example: unlikely to have been produced in Rhodes, the carpets were more probably named for their point of export.[25] Yet savvy merchants surely knew what they were buying and were able to identify a source based on other factors, such as quality as reflected in the goods themselves or in their pricing. Similarly, the origin of goods was a regular concern on the home front, where differentiated tax rates were imposed for imported wares and guilds regularly petitioned the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia (board of trade) for protection from foreign competition.[26] However, a general, protectionist need to distinguish local production from imports is different from a concerted, connoisseurial interest in pinpointing provenience; it is a defensive definition of origins that is distinct from the geographical categorization of modern art history and museum practice. Indirectly and through their very opacity, mercantile records suggest that the understanding of origins, as it influenced the definition and interpretation of imported goods in Venice, could be broad and relatively undefined. More than a point on a map or a firm geographical anchor on a distant horizon, 'origin' could be as generally meaningful as a source of elevated revenue or a threat to livelihood – a concept rather than a fixed set of cartographic coordinates.

Other forms of written documentation can help nuance the understanding of early modern Venetian attitudes toward provenience and the meaning of imported goods. These include collection descriptions, inventories, and the chronicle, a relatively colourful and highly developed form of historical accounting in Venice.[27] Notably, as with mercantile records, none of these genres gives the attention to provenience and origins that one might expect for a culture so deeply rooted in trade. The collection notes penned by the Venetian nobleman Marcantonio Michiel in the 1520s and 1530s are typical in their lack of attention to such matters. In his description of the collection of Andrea Odoni of 1532, for example, Michiel attends to materials (marble, porphyry, crystal, etc.), makers (named artists or general attributions to the antique), subjects, and the location of the object within Odoni's home – indeed its layout, beginning with the courtyard, is what guides Michiel, in a fashion consistent with inventories.[28] He also shows some interest in the condition of the antiquities and occasionally makes a general comment on scale. But other than periodic references to a previous owner (his uncle, Francesco Zio) and one to the workshop of the sculptor Tullio Lombardo, Michiel is here silent on matters of both provenance and provenience.[29] The same holds true of Gabriele Vendramin's will of 1548, which describes his collection of paintings and drawings, sculptures and vessels (including many in damascened metal), and natural curiosities in the abbreviated language typical of such documents. Even within this format, however, certain interests emerge as more important than others, namely medium and materials. Vendramin distinguishes engravings from woodcuts, paintings on canvas from those on panel, marble statuary from that in terracotta, and medals of gold, silver, 'copper, bronze, brass and Corinthian bronze'. And although he gives generalized attention to monetary value ('of great price'), workmanship ('by the hands of most excellent men'), and age ('ancient' and 'antique'), he appears completely uninterested in origins. He frets over where his collection will end up, but does not reveal its sources, either geographic or as a history of ownership.[30]

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An analogous set of concerns and silences infuses several important descriptions of Venice written in the sixteenth century. Francesco Sansovino's *Venetia città nobilissima, et singolare*, first published in 1581 and reissued in several later editions, was heavily influenced by the chronicle of Marino Sanudo, which spans the years 1496 and 1533. The level of detail in Sansovino's text is extraordinary and so it is notable that, when painting a verbal picture of a building or a monument, he only rarely mentions the source of its materials or furnishings. Other descriptive categories receive far greater attention. Any number of passages reveal this bias, but a particularly tight summary of Sansovino's priorities can be found in the description of a fire at San Pietro in Castello, lamenting the loss of precious silver, textiles, and illuminated manuscripts. This fire was notable because the lost objects were highly prized 'for their antiquity, craftsmanship, materials, and rarity'.[31] These four categories reappear with frequency in both Sanudo's and Sansovino's work.[32] They are the primary sets of terms through which objects are discussed and parallel the interests of both Marcantonio Michiel and Gabriele Vendramin – specifically antiquity, workmanship, and materials. Rarity may enter their texts more indirectly, as value, while the origin of objects is not overtly a topic of interest.[33]

Similar descriptive categories pervade the accounts of travellers, including letters sent and read aloud to the Senate, some of which are reproduced in Sanudo's comprehensive chronicle. A report of 1512 from Domenico Trevisan describing his accommodations in a Cairo palace, for example, foregrounds materials and workmanship: 'extremely costly, all paved from corner to corner with marbles, porphyry, and serpentine, like the Church of San Marco, and much better carved than ours, with gilded ceiling *a la damaschina*'.[34] The texts of Giosafat Barbaro (1470s), Barbon Morosini (*c.* 1514), and Benedetto Ramberti (1530s), among others, are similarly lush in their architectural reportage.[35] Barbaro's description of a royal pavilion in the gardens of Tarsis (Tabriz) is typical in its emphases: 'there was a handsome pavilion of *boccascin*, which was completely worked inside with embroidery; the door to the room was of sandalwood inlaid with threads of gold, and … pearls, worked and incised.'[36] Stefano Carboni finds analogous concerns surrounding several glass objects in the treasury of San Marco, and although his work is centred in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it is helpful for both its methods and its conclusions.[37] Granting that most of these objects likely came to Venice from Constantinople, Carboni notes that their provenience is unknown and that value was ascribed to them for two other reasons: their materials (those of coloured glass being mistaken for carved gemstones) and, in the case of painted and enamelled Mamluk glass vessels, their workmanship. Carboni's approach is compelling because of his respect for the tendentious nature of categories, as well as his attention to the cultural work that defines the significance of material goods. The objects he considers were not inherently treasure but were made such because of how they fit into and exemplified certain prioritized categories of value, namely *materia* and *lavoro*.

It is surely mistaken to conclude from the absence of written attention to provenience that Venetians, so fully enmeshed in the practice and outcomes of trade, were indifferent to the sources of their imports, from commodities to collectibles.[38] Other interpretations are more apt and other approaches potentially productive. Among these is attention to the complexities of nomenclature and its myriad associations, which break down the simple equation between word and place that a search for provenience seems to demand. This disjuncture is most evident in the names used to identify crafted objects.[39] Terms such as *tapedi turcheschi* and *porcellana damaschina*, despite their apparent call to Turkey and Damascus, are not

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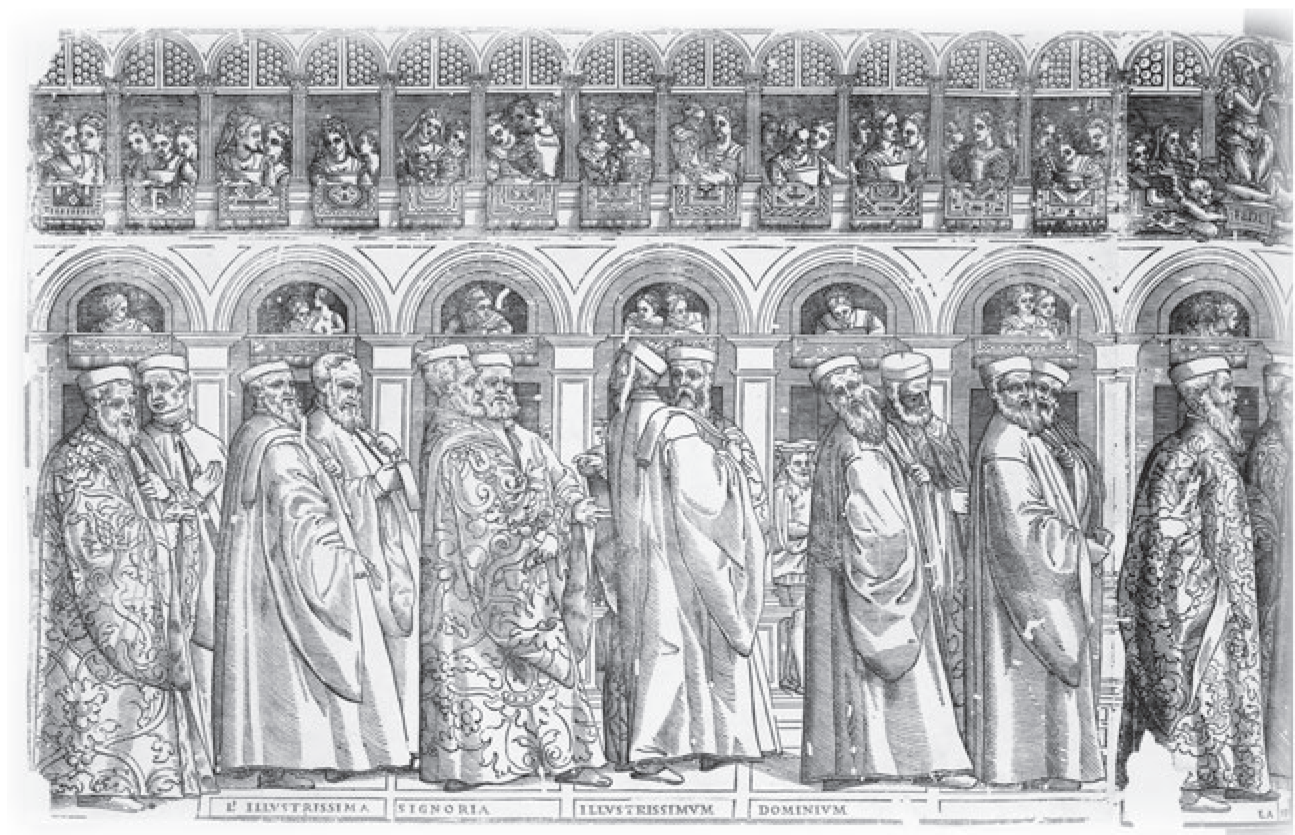
necessarily referring to the provenience of the objects at hand – just as much of what is referred to today as 'china' is not produced there but in Europe. Indeed, it would be a dangerous mistake to confuse this descriptive language with origins, even in the highly documentary language of cargo inventories; but a broader set of interpretations is possible.

Such geographical terms might, for example, call up the origins of a technique or a style rather than the production point of an individual item.[40] 'Turkish' carpets (*turcheschi*) was a generic term for imported rugs, for example; and according to Elizabeth Currie, 'by the sixteenth century, names such as *perpignano*, *damasco*, *ormisino*, and *tabi*, were used to refer to types of cloth rather than fabrics actually produced in Perpignan, Damascus, Ormus and the Attabi quarter of Baghdad'.[41] By extension, '*porcellana damaschina*' could describe pottery made in Damascus, but it might also refer, more generally, to pottery in a Levantine style, perhaps with a meandering pattern echoing damascened metalwork.[42] Interestingly, this metalwork technique, which was in fact first developed and mastered in Damascus, was referred to in the Venetian dialect as *lavoro all'azzimina* from the Arabic *al-ajem*, acknowledging origins in a foreign land.[43] This labyrinth of geographical references is particularly complicated in the realm of carpets, and specifically when referencing the type of knotted carpet known as *damaschino*. According to Karl Erdmann, knotted carpets have never been produced in Damascus or Syria. In this case, the term is one of effect: a knotted surface shimmers, much like damascened metal. 'Tapedi damaschini' were most likely of Mamluk (Egyptian) production and, as Erdmann explains, 'the term "damaschino" disappeared from Venetian archives during the sixteenth century, and [was] replaced by the term "tapedi cagiarini", which can only be translated as "carpets from Cairo".'[44]



2 Matteo Pagan, *Procession in St Mark's Square on Palm Sunday*, frame 8: *Signoria*, 1556–69. Woodcut, c. 3.9 × 5.2 cm. Venice: Museo Correr. Photo: Reproduced with the kind permission of the Museo Correr, Venice.

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Clearly, and as scholars widely recognize, using geographical terminology as a map to origins is a dangerously disorienting approach. The inconsistent pattern of terms referring to place – sometimes literal but more often allusive – makes it extremely difficult, when reviewing an inventory, to ascertain whether an object was an import or was locally produced in a foreign style or technique. As in the case of the connoisseurial trap discussed above, scholarship in this area is unlikely to advance unless new, highly specific sources are revealed. In the meantime, a productive alternative is to consider what the dilemma itself means. The fact that origins could be completely subsumed by technical and stylistic terms reveals how absolutely intertwined these categories for describing material culture were. The effort to parse out and pin-point provenience, or to declare something an authentic import or a local imitation, perhaps in order to locate it in the right museum gallery, steers scholars away from some key contemporary considerations.

It might be reasonable, for example, to assert that the lure of the exotic was in some sense the lure of fine craftsmanship – *lavoro* was, after all, one of the descriptive categories favoured by Sansovino and his fellow authors of inventories and chronicles.[45] If the Turks made the best rugs, those are the rugs that the savvy Venetian consumer would want to buy.[46] Origin in the sense of provenience mattered to the extent that it was associated with the most skilled labour and the finest traditions of manufacture.[47] (A useful comparison, by way of contrast, is today's 'Made in China' moniker, which in common parlance is likely a reference to perceived quality as much as or even more than to a particular site of production.) Another of Sansovino's terms, *rarità*, offers a similarly oblique way of thinking about origins, since imported goods, by nature of the distance they must travel, are almost sure to be less common than the locally produced equivalent. Ironically, many so-called exotic materials, including carpets, damascened vessels, ceramics, and stamped leather book bindings, were actually quite familiar to Venetians of means, particularly in comparison to the lands from which they originated. Carpets are again a case in point. The lexicon associated with this craft is wide-ranging and diverse and includes many of those problematic geographical terms, which generally refer to design or pattern rather than source: *cagiarini* (for Cairo or Egypt), *damaschini*, *barbareschi* (North African), *rodioti*, *turcheschi*, *simiscasa* (probably meaning Circassian), and so forth.[48] Confusing references aside, this rich vocabulary signals extensive local knowledge and a level of connoisseurship that is not readily apparent in the abbreviated texts of Michiel and Vendramin.[49] In the case of carpets, one can speak of an exoticism characterized not only by expense, prestige, and rarity, but also by significant familiarity for early modern Venetians – a familiarity evident in the bountiful displays that grace contemporary images as well (*plate* 2).

At this juncture, it is productive to probe that vexing term that is essential and recurring but also highly elusive: the exotic.[50] In the scholarship concerned with Venice and its relationships with the Levant, 'exotic' is used both loosely and broadly to mean everything from an import to a flamboyant mode of dress.[51] Of particular relevance to this study is the term's association with material goods, and specifically the ways in which these were perceived in the realms of trade and collecting. Its shortcomings here have already been suggested: frequently, local objects resembled and were possibly even confused with 'exotic' imports. To adopt the language of Christopher Wood, they circulated without the 'metadata' of production – who made them, when, and where (notably the stuff of basic museum labels) – and were classified, valued, and described instead in the language of the visible, that is of material and form.[52] In addition, many Levantine imports were widely available

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and hence quite familiar. In short, 'the exotic', understood as an alliance between the alien (a thing from away) and the strange or unknown, is an unsatisfactory formulation that binds familiarity too tightly to origin. An alternative concept, still rooted in the basic task of differentiation but not trapped in a rigid formula of opposition between the foreign and the familiar, is that of discernment, which proves useful both theoretically and practically, narrowing the broad but overly determined notion of the 'exotic' to a set of visual skills that were vitally useful in Venetian society.[53]

In the realm of trade, discernment was a critically important mercantile strategy. For purchasers, whether individual consumers or those buying in bulk, the ability to distinguish among goods was a tool so essential as to go unremarked.[54] Thus we can imagine that traders in the emporia of the east, through close examination and knowledgeable comparison with other similar products, were able to determine the origin of goods even if this information is absent from shipping records and customs logs. As historians, we may read about 'ginger of all kinds', but we can be confident that those purchasing ginger to ship back to Venice were able to evaluate it more precisely and according to a range of relevant categories such as price, quality, and provenience.[55] On the more rarefied end of the mercantile spectrum is the detailed familiarity with gemstones that is apparent in various sixteenth-century Venetian sources, such as Ludovico Dolce's treatise of 1568 *Libri tre ne i quali si tratta delle diverse sorte delle gemme*, with its extensive list of names and terms.[56] Blake de Maria examines a Venetian consortium involved in the trade of Indian galangal (a variety of ginger) and gemstones at the end of the century. An appraisal of cargo from 1591 echoes the classification of gems provided in 1516 by Duarte Barbosa, in which classes of rubies are linked to particular geographical sources.[57] Barbosa compares *spinelle*, or Indian rubies, with rubies from Pegu (Myanmar) and from neighbouring Balassia, attending to clarity, intensity of colour, and hardness, as well as to price, markets, and provenience. Surely beneath all acts of trade there existed an evolved if unarticulated system of discernment analogous to that spelled out by Barbosa and implemented by Venetian traders.

Indeed, the *paragone*, or comparison (a well known model of discernment for historians of art), thrived in the local Venetian marketplace.[58] The silk and wool industries, characterized by the tremendous variety of wares and hence the need for careful classification, institutionalized special shopping days designated *da parangon* (in Venetian dialect), in which high quality samples were put out for the express purpose of comparison.[59] During a *parangon*, goods were displayed without indication of seller or price, so that comparisons could be based purely on the appearance of the goods themselves. Merchants were instructed to remain silent and not interfere with shoppers – suggesting (relative to the chaos of daily markets) a rarefied space of connoisseurial assessment and valuation. Similarly, in 1543, in a debate over industry and market controls, a panel of silk experts was convened to use and then closely compare three red dyes based on the New World cochineal beetle with a reel of traditionally produced crimson silk. Because comparison failed to distinguish the new imported dyes from the established red, a group of entrepreneurial merchants was given permission to import cochineal, which soon dominated the market.[60] In fact, distinctions among red cloth seem to have been particularly evolved in Venice where *cremesin*, for example, was the most elevated red worn by the doge while the relatively humble *scarlatto* was used in ducal mourning.[61] From *incarnato* (fleshlike) to *avvinato* (ruby), *rosa secca*, *paonazzo*, and *sguardo*, the variants of red were numerous and meaningful.[62] Discernment was an especially valued skill in the context of

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abundance, and this is another trope that marks the landscape of early modern Venetian materiality. Countless texts, from the fifteenth century on, praise the wealth of the city and its markets. As the political commentator Giovanni Botero put it in 1605, Venice is 'a summary of the universe, because there is nothing originating in any far-off country but it is found in abundance in this city'.[63]

The skills of discernment that allowed Venetian traders and consumers to sift through and make selections from a daunting array of goods can help re-frame theoretical understandings of this material as well. Comparison was the fundamental rhetorical posture underscoring virtually all travelogues of the period, so much so that the failure to describe successfully is characterized in one Venetian text as an inability to 'dar similitudine': to draw out similarities was to render the unfamiliar comprehensible and thus believable.[64] The other side of the comparative coin, differentiation, regularly punctuates Venetian descriptions of the Levant, taking at its most extreme the form of out-and-out opposition. In his *Trattato di Terra Santa e dell'Oriente*, the late fifteenth-century pilgrim Francesco Suriano states that the Muslims he encountered on his travels 'do everything the opposite and backwards from us'. A long list follows:

> The men do the housework, and weave, and the women conduct business.
>
> The women carry things on their shoulders, and the men on their heads.
>
> The men eat sitting, and the women standing.
>
> . . .
>
> All day they drink, except when they eat.
>
> They are always washing their feet, and always have dirty hands.
>
> Women wear one garment, and men three or four.
>
> We take off our hat in respect, they their shoes.[65]

Although Suriano's text is unusual in its literal and insistent use of opposition, the basic strategy of contrast was a widespread interpretative trope, one that preceded observation and structured description.[66] Nevertheless we must be cautious in levying it toward a full historical understanding of otherness and of reducing relationships between Venice and the Levant to a simple catalogue of contraries. Indeed, these travel narratives reveal a dual lens, through which the lands to the east were seen as like and unlike, and profitably understood as both. As Giovanni Curatola puts it, Venetians had broad familiarity of the 'laws, habits, and customs' of the Islamic world and 'succumbed to the appeal of exoticism far less so than [we do] today'.[67] It might be profitable, instead, to consider the oppositional trope as an act of discernment in concert with the broader mercantile culture, part of a set of practical skills grounded in applied knowledge of the physical world – not a set of abstract generalizations that rendered things either familiar or strange, but real tools of applied meaning-making along a comparative spectrum. Considered thusly, the relative familiarity of imported objects is as significant as the otherness generally emphasized by scholars and meaning is less bound to an absolute set of geographical

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3 Lorenzo Lotto, *Family Portrait*, 1523/24. Oil on canvas, 96 × 116 cm. St Petersburg: State Hermitage Museum. Photo: © The State Hermitage Museum/Vladimir Terebenin.

coordinates. Understanding the perceived relationship between objects and origins in early modern Venice requires a more flexible analytical approach.

Methodological models found outside traditional art history and the art museum can help, since they are relatively free from the circular trap set by a fixation on origins and enable the location of Venetian objects in a thick historical context articulated by a wide array of sources. The work of anthropologist Mary W. Helms, for example, offers compelling approaches for rethinking interpretations of space and distance.[68] Helms considers displaced objects – those relocated for motives of trade, diplomacy, pilgrimage, and so forth – as part of a large network of symbols and practices that defines the relationship of the local to the unfamiliar broadly, beyond the scope of a single artefact. The so-called *tapedi a moschetta* or *tapedi moschetti* ('mosque rugs', as they are referred to in sixteenth-century Venetian inventories) offer rich possibilities for this sort of analysis. Probably produced as prayer rugs and clearly interpreted as such by the Venetians, these portable textiles often bore a stylized image of a *mihrab*, the niche in the mosque toward which Muslims direct their worship.[69] The modest size of these rugs, the quantities some individuals owned, and our knowledge of Venetian interiors derived from inventories and paintings, indicate that in Venice Muslim prayer rugs were used to cover furnishings: inventories and other documents frequently refer to such rugs as '*tapedi da tavola*' or '*da cassa*', for use on

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a table or chest.[70] In the example shown here, a double portrait by Lorenzo Lotto from 1523–24 (*plate 3*), the distinctive 'keyhole' shape that stands for the *mihrab* is visible, clearly indicating the carpet's intended function.[71] Art historians widely understand such displays as demonstrations of wealth, status, taste, and knowledge of the larger world.[72] The owners of the rug (that is, the subjects of the portrait) were also making a statement about power: the power to access, import, and redefine a foreign object through its use. These interpretations end with the rug and its owners. But a 'thicker' context – one building on the work of Mary Douglas and Doug Isherwood that takes consumption as form of cultural production, as well as on Alfred Gell's notion of the object as agent – might suggest how the rug reflects back on its very source and thus on a larger set of ongoing cultural negotiations between Venice and its Muslim associates.[73] The placement of a prayer rug on a table top, for example, is directly opposed to its native use (certainly familiar to Venetians) as a floor covering upon which to kneel, and recalls Francesco Suriano's litany of contraries: 'We love dogs, they cats; we drink wine, they water; we regulate ourselves by the sun, they by the moon; we eat *in alto* [at table], they on the ground; [etc.].'[74] Such placement re-enacted these defining oppositions materially. Thus, rugs were emblematic not just of wealth as expressed through ownership or of power as expressed through display, but of difference as expressed through use and manipulation. In this interpretative scenario, it matters not so much where an object actually came from as how it was made to articulate relationships between the alien and the familiar. Origin, in this case, is less literal than symbolic; it is less about source than about how a perception of source was manipulated to create meaning. And the prayer rug is an agent of this meaning rather than the passive recipient of an art-historical or museologically driven category.[75]

If carpets were characterized by relative familiarity – in usage, classification, and perhaps even place of production – then damascened brasswork represents the

4 Lidded bowl, 1500–50. Brass, engraved with silver inlay, 6 (height) × 16.6 (diameter) cm. London: Victoria and Albert Museum. Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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other end of the provenience spectrum and so raises distinct historical issues. As discussed above, modern scholars puzzle over the origins of much of this metalwork, sometimes using the blurred term 'Veneto-Saracenic' to acknowledge uncertainty about its place of production. One might safely presume that Venetian consumers, immersed in a culture of manufacture and trade in such wares, were more aware of the origins of the things they owned than are today's connoisseurs. But again the more interesting question concerns what rendered such an object exotic in the first place. For by the early sixteenth century, in addition to European production, the eastern market for inlaid metalwork had largely dried up, driving Levantine artisans to respond more actively to European tastes. They adapted inscriptions, which were traditionally honorific and personalized, into a more generic and all-purpose format. Sometimes blank shields were included, to be completed at the specific request of an eventual European owner. They developed new shapes in answer to western demand, including ornate ewers and flat-topped bowls: an example in the collection of Victoria and Albert Museum (*plate* 4) is of a type some hold to be of eastern production and others suggest was cast in Venice, decorated in the Levant, and then shipped back west.[76] And some objects were literal composites, such as the Priuli wine-cup, with its (presumed) Venetian foot, imported bowl, Syrian ornamentation, and Venetian coat of arms (see *plate* 1).[77] The cup is both exotic and local, both foreign and familiar, to the extent that such binary distinctions do not hold – or, at the very least, suggesting the need for caution when making assertions about attitudes toward owning imported objects in early modern Venice.

Classifications and Mobility

Damascened metalwork is complicating for another reason, one that points toward the museological context with which this essay began and the challenges it presents. As a genre, damascened objects resist not only definition by provenience but also easy classification along modern art-historical lines. Damascene ware was widely owned by the moneyed elite of Venice, part of their household furnishings along with glassware, fine ceramics and porcelain, and carpets. Some of it was more refined and some more work-a-day, but in this setting it was all utilitarian.[78] At the same time, there are well-known instances of damascened metalwork appearing alongside the oddities and exotic specimens of curiosity cabinets, where it spoke a different language, as a sign of alterity.[79] A third, notably different case indicates that these materials were also prized and evaluated in a manner we might define as connoisseurial. This is the collection of Bernardin di Redaldi as described in a posthumous inventory of 1527 that goes well beyond the standard list of objects to provide details of shape, scale, materials, and ornamental patterns (squares, roundels, foliates, etc.), including the distribution of gold and silver.[80] Though brief and non-judgemental, these descriptions – despite their notarial nature – are considerably more precise than those found in any of the aforementioned texts, including the collection notes of Marcantonio Michiel, indicating a high level of discernment and appreciation. The case of damascene ware thus calls attention to the contingency of classificatory schemes: today's categories of decorative art, exotic curio, and fine collectible all capture yet fail to contain the sixteenth-century Venetian understanding of this craft.

This same failure might also be turned on its head, in a search for categories that better match and thus explain how imported goods were valued in early modern Venice. The language of trade, which seems promising for an investigation of imported goods, does not prove particularly helpful. In the inventories of ships and

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related customs documents, basic commodities and more rarefied goods are bound together without any clear pattern in how they are grouped and no distinctions in the sorts of language used to describe or classify them.[81] Although modern scholars regularly refer to 'luxury goods', a group of items that spans the functional and the collectible, no equivalent category emerges in the mercantile records of Venice. Domestic inventories likewise refute such schemes, tending to group objects by location in the home. Certainly the concept of luxury items existed – as *lusso*, *polizia*, and *materia di pompe* – and numerous attempts were made to control them, culminating in the establishment of a dedicated state agency, the Magistrato alle Pompe, in 1514. But decades of legislation, covering everything from jewels to foodstuffs to dinner guests, indicate that it was rarely the goods themselves that were problematic but rather their manipulation, in quantity, scale, and manner of display.[82] Carpets are again illustrative: in 1489 the Venetian Senate scorned the newly fashionable trend of laying carpets on dinner tables as a 'useless and unnecessary superfluity', banning the practice at wedding banquets and other similar occasions.[83] Thus, 'luxury' was less an absolute category than an ever-shifting approach to the use of objects, having more to do with excess than essence.[84]

Similarly, the museological framework of 'minor' and 'decorative' arts is incompatible with Venetian terminology and usage.[85] Trying to understand the value of imported goods through these modes of classification proves remarkably difficult. In fact, the only category that seems pertinent is one so common that it very nearly disappears – namely '*mobili*'. Generally translated as furnishings or material goods, it literally means 'mobile things', in contrast to *immobili*, or real, immoveable property, and is ubiquitous in wills and inventories.[86] As a term, it is useful for calling attention to the peripatetic history of objects and to the value of allowing a meandering path, as opposed to rigid geographical categorizations, to guide historical interpretations.[87] '*Mobili*' also intersects productively with the concept of estrangement and transformation, or diaspora, as this is articulated by Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch: 'Things that have lost their place – either in a local-social context or even in time – achieve a new significance; their "thingness" is transformed, and eventually they will speak in a different way, too.'[88] For curators of the recent Victoria and Albert exhibition *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, diaspora served as a useful touchstone for rethinking the hegemony of the museum, which has cast the so-called decorative arts into an ornamental role that belies their importance as cultural artefacts. At the Victoria and Albert, diaspora referred specifically to the migration of objects out of their native setting, the home, and into the ahistorical galleries of the museum. Curators sought, through greater contextualization and attention to use, to '[reverse] the diaspora of objects' as exemplified by the 'disembodied museum exhibit' and conceptually reintroduce them into the domestic sphere.[89] Another way of considering diaspora, more pertinent here, is to allow its very essence – of displacement, movement, adaptation, and reuse – to productively inform meaning rather than stubbornly obfuscate the museological holy grail of origins. Mobility can be understood not just as a circumstance in the life of an object but as a defining characteristic.[90]

As Nicolò Machiavelli put it, the wealth and titles of the Venetian patriciate were based not on possession of land but 'on merchandise and moveable things'.[91] This was the fame of Venice, where rank was rooted not in a landed class but with those who had built their livelihoods and their places in the social hierarchy through the movement of goods. So Mercury, god of trade and travellers, crowns the magnificent woodcut map of the city by Jacopo de' Barbari from 1500, proclaiming, 'I … shine

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favourably on this above all other emporia'; the city is equated with a marketplace, and the presence of the fleet-footed god of commerce implies a network of trade routes radiating out from it.[92] A similar message was communicated in the loggia reserved for the nobility at the city's central market at Rialto. There, from at least the mid-fifteenth century, a large painted map contextualized the activities taking place around it.[93] Although the specifics of its appearance are unknown – except that, as a *mappamundi*, it was not a tool of navigation but the symbolic representation of a world view – a useful connection can be made between the Rialto map, situated at the very centre of the Venetian system of trade, and a globe produced in 1492–93 by the Nuremberg-born geographer Martin Behaim for that city's merchant community.[94] Not merely a diagram of lands and seas nor a constellation of cities, the Behaim globe is 'copiously annotated, with inscriptions detailing the commodities and the nature of the business opportunities at various key commercial locations in the world'.[95] For instance, the text accompanying the map of the Spice Islands enumerates a long chain of exchange and tariffs, from indigenous merchants in Java through a series of markets in Ceylon, Aden, Cairo, Venice, and eventually northern Europe. Surely the world view of Venetian traders was very much like that mapped out in Nuremberg: less a set of fixed coordinates than a space marked by the paths of goods, mundane and rarefied, as they were acquired, taxed, transported, processed or packaged, and distributed anew.[96] In this network, displacement is not the anomaly or the problem to be solved but a defining characteristic of the materials at hand.

By contrast, the fixity of the modern museum, and much of the art-historical work that, directly or indirectly, stems from it, is a challenge to the mobility that once defined many objects now located there, including Veneto-Levantine goods with their syncretic natures and complex geographical histories.[97] Museums have not traditionally dealt in displacement but have focused on two stable bookends: the aesthetic present of the object and the moment of production. The latter is the concern of museum labels, known darkly and perhaps even ironically (when set against the comments of the late eighteenth-century French critic Quatremère de Quincy, who famously condemned the museum as a mausoleum for dead objects), as 'tombstones'.[98] Tombstone labels attend above all to origins: who made the object, where, when, and of what. Museum installations, by contrast, attend to the timeless object-in-the-moment, highlighting materiality, form, and presence. The historical space bracketed by these museological bookends – that filled by the biography of the object – is more difficult to capture and often goes unacknowledged.[99] The recent reinstallation of Islamic art at the Metropolitan Museum, in an effort to break away from religious determinism, reinforces the geographic paradigm queried in these pages.[100] Titled 'The Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia', the layout, though enveloped by a larger chronology and punctuated by media-specific installations, takes geography as its guiding structure. Unsurprising as it is – perhaps because it is unsurprising – this museological paradigm deserves scrutiny, for it has a tremendous and at times stagnating influence on how objects of art are studied, analysed, and interpreted.[101]

This circumstance is regrettable when it comes to objects like those considered here, with significant histories of circulation and for which displacement was an essential part of their meaning. In early modern Venice, the 'origin' of objects was conceptually fluid, referencing not only provenience but point of purchase, style, technique, function, and the imaginary. It called up ideas of place as much as a place itself. Such fluidity challenges art-historical methods, and especially museological ones. 'Cross-cultural comparisons are the building blocks from which much of

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art history is constructed', wrote the curator John Carswell in 1985, 'but these comparisons are usually confined to illustrations in scholarly treatises, [which act as] a sort of *musée imaginaire*.'[102] Museum structures are less malleable; gallery walls and protective cases sequester previously nomadic objects, while composite and cross-cultural works are constrained by the earth-bound realities of floor plans. Perhaps their liberation lies in the promise of the digital age, with new technologies that permit the layering of asynchronous maps and images and the visualization of mobility through animation. Imagine GoogleEarth as virtual surrogate for Behaim's globe, a surface upon which the routes of objects can be traced and their fluid, fluctuating histories activated.[103] With tools such as this, museums are poised to set in motion the peripatetic objects their galleries have encumbered and to restore mobility as a primary vector of interpretation. In the meantime, art historians must be cautious about tying our objects of study too tightly to the static, even stifling, geographical scheme of the museum.

Notes

I thank Rebecca M. Brown, Kathryn W. Gunsch, Faidra Papavasiliou, Monika Schmitter, and Nino Zchomelidse for their guidance and support at various stages in the preparation of this essay, and the generous reviewers for *Art History*.

1 On museums privileging place of production, see Avinoam Shalem, 'Histories of belonging and George Kubler's prime object', *Getty Research Journal*, 3, 2011, 5–8.

2 Victoria and Albert Museum, 'Search the Collections', http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O84934/the-priuli-wine-unknown/ (accessed 17 May 2016).

3 Rosamond E. Mack, *From Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300–1600*, Berkeley, CA, 2002, 141–4 and 215, n. 22. Evidence locating such production specifically in Venice is thin, though a northern Italian production is likely; see Sylvia Auld, *Renaissance Venice, Islam, and Mahmud the Kurd: A Metalworking Enigma*, London, 2004, 8.

4 Auld, *Renaissance Venice*, 8.

5 In addition to the confusion evident in museum labels and catalogues, see discussions of complexities in production and market in Rachel Ward, 'Plugging the gap: Mamluk export metalwork, 1375–1475', in Annette Hagedorn and Avinoam Shalem, eds, *Facts and Artefacts: Art in the Islamic World: Festschrift for Jens Kröger on his 65th Birthday*, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2007, 263–86; and Doris Behrens-Abouseif, 'Veneto-Saracenic metalware, a Mamluk art', *Mamlūk Studies Review*, 2005, 9: 2, 2005, 147–72. Based primarily on style and technique, Sylvia Auld sorts known objects into three groups according to place of production; see *Renaissance Venice*, 8–9, ch. 5 (54–70), and throughout her impressive catalogue, 108–307. She also outlines the historiography of a generally discredited theory that some of these objects were produced by Muslim craftsmen living in Italy (36–43), though emerging archival evidence suggests this debate may again need revisiting; see Marco Spallanzani, *Metalli islamici a Firenze nel Rinascimento*, Florence, 2010, 11–12. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for *Art History* for this reference.

6 See for example Ernst J. Grube, who comments provocatively on the confusion over originals and copies but then argues for improved technical and archival methods for identifying sites of production; 'Introduzione al "problema"', in his *Arte veneziana e arte islamica: Atti del primo simposio internazionale sull'arte veneziana e l'arte islamica*, with Stefano Carboni and Giovanni Curatola, Venice, 1989, 15–19. More recently, see Catarina Schmidt Arcangeli's excellent 'Introduction', to Arcangeli and Gerhard Wolf, eds, *Islamic Artefacts in the Mediterranean World: Trade, Gift Exchange and Artistic Transfer*, Venice, 2010, 9–10 (the articles that follow are varyingly successful in realizing the critical agenda she lays out). Finbarr B. Flood's theoretical framing and sensitive discussion of Mansura bronzes is also helpful, as is his discussion of 'cosmopolitan contact zones'; see *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval 'Hindu–Muslim' Encounter*, Princeton, NJ and Oxford, 2009, 58 and 61.

7 Museums, as products of this era, were essential tools in constructing national identities; thus they can be productively engaged by breaking the fixed political boundaries identified with those nation states, along the lines suggested in Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London, 1994. Among the extensive literature on museums and nations, see Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, Cambridge, 1994; Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, London and New York, 1995; Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago, eds, *Grasping the Museum: The Idea of the Museum*, Aldershot, 2004; Simon J. Knell *et al.*, *National Museums: New Studies from around the World*, Oxford and New York, 2011; Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius, *National Museums and Nation-Building in Europe, 1750–2101: Mobilization and Legitimacy, Continuity and Change*, Oxford, 2015; and Peggy Levitt, *Artifacts and Allegiances: How Museums Put the Nation and the World on Display*, Oakland, CA, 2015.

8 An example of new, revelatory work concerns the renowned artist Mahmud al-Kurdi: see the paired essays by Sylvia Auld, 'Master Mahmud and inlaid metalwork in the fifteenth century', and Susan La Niece, 'Master Mahmud and inlaid metalwork: A scientific perspective', in Stefano Carboni, ed., *Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797*, New Haven, CT, 2007, 212–25 and 226–9.

9 As Alexander Nagel puts it with regard to porcelain of unknown provenance in Renaissance painting, 'it is hard to know whether it is Turkish or Chinese. More important, that is the wrong question to ask . . . .'; 'Roundtable: The global before globalization', *October*, 133, 2010, 8. See also Flood's critique of 'modern frontier historiography', *Objects of Translation*, 4.

10 Many recent studies have considered the displacement and relocation of objects but rarely is movement itself prioritized as part of interpretation. Eva Hoffman's work on 'pluritopic' objects, with its emphasis on circulation and movement as defining facts, is a notable exception; see 'Pathways of portability: Islamic and Christian interchange from the tenth to the twelfth century', *Art History*, 24: 1, February 2001, 17–50.

11 Anna Contadini notes the paucity of reflection on the meaning of imported and cross-cultural objects in Italian Renaissance texts. In response, she uses stylistic analysis to explore an internationalism in which imported forms were 'naturalized to the extent that awareness of their origins might be erased'; 'Threads of ornament in the style world of the fifteenth and sixteenth century', in Gülru Necipoglu and Alina Payne, eds, *Histories of Ornament from Global to Local*, Princeton, NJ and Oxford, 2016, 290 and 305.

12 Patricia Fortini Brown, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture, and the Family*, New Haven, CT and London, 2004, 84.

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13 Though the adjectives 'Islamic' and 'Islamicizing' are widespread, I have avoided them here because of their religious overtones. Flood's sensitivity to historically relevant and sensitive labels, both religious and ethnic, is helpful here; see *Objects of Translation*, 3–5.

14 According to Mack, 'Italians understood little about the different geographic and artistic origins of the foreign objects they admired'; *Bazaar to Piazza*, 1.

15 Of course place of production is not the same as find site. My adoption and adaptation of the term 'provenience' is based on its assertion of a fixed locale, in contrast to the geographic dynamism implied by 'provenance'.

16 As Stephen Greenblatt puts it, 'mobility must be taken in a highly literal sense'; see *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, Cambridge, 2010, 250.

17 I avoid the term 'hybridity' for the reasons indicated here, as well as for its association with an anachronistic colonial context and related political implications. See Annie E. Coombes and Avtar Brah, 'Introduction: The conundrum of "mixing"', in their *Hybridity and Its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture*, London, 2000, 1–16; and with specific relevance to material culture, Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn, 'Hybridity and its discontents: Considering visual culture in colonial Spanish America', *Colonial Latin American Review*, 12: 1, 2003, 5–35. On 'globalization', see the 2013 'Roundtable: The global before globalization' for a helpful set of critiques of the global turn in the late medieval and early modern period. Luca Molà and Marta Ajmar-Wollheim summarize familiar understandings of the ubiquity and complexity of cross-cultural objects in 'The global renaissance: Cross-cultural objects in the early modern period', in Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello and Sarah Teasley, eds, *Global Design History*, New York, 2011, 11–20. Seeking to complicate scholarly interpretations of influence are, among others, Claire Farago, 'On the peripatetic life of objects in the era of globalization', in Mary D. Sheriff, ed., *Cultural Contact and the Making of European Art since the Age of Exploration*, Chapel Hill, NC, 2010, 17–41; Jessica Keating, 'Metamorphosis at the Mughal court', *Art History*, 38: 4, September 2015: 733–47; and Contadini, 'Threads of ornament'.

18 The literature on Renaissance consumption, including with regard to the circulation of goods, is also extensive. See in particular Richard Goldthwaite, who draws on anthropological theory to explore consumption as an active instrument of culture (*Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300–1600*, Baltimore, MD and London, 1993); Evelyn Welch, concerned with the mechanics of markets and their meanings (*Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy, 1400–1600*, London, 2005); and the essays collected in Paula Findlen, ed., *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500–1800*, London and New York, 2013. In her broad but relatively untheorized survey, Lisa Jardine celebrated the Renaissance profusion of goods as seeds of our own 'bravura consumerism'; see *Worldy Goods: A New History of the Renaissance*, London, 1996, 34.

19 Analogously and with regard to travelling artists, David Kim's focus on mobility 'repositions works of art from exclusively representing the end product of patronage and artistic labor to mediating ideas about the physical self in the world, standards of behavior between that self and others, and the functions of art within a natural environment'; *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance: Geography, Mobility, and Style*, New Haven, CT and London, 2014, 6.

20 Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China*, Cambridge, 1991.

21 Daniela Bleichmar and Meredith Martin describe their edited volume on early modern mobility and materiality as a counter-museum, one that eschews fixed museological taxonomies and places movement at the centre of meaning; many of their arguments are mirrored in the present essay. See 'Objects in motion in the early modern world', *Art History*, 38: 4, September 2015, 605–19.

22 Vague attention to provenience is surprising because of the extent to which Venice was immersed in mercantile activity; see for example Ugo Tucci, *Mercanti, navi, monete nel Cinquecento veneziano*, Bologna, 1981, on the predominance of a mercantile frame of mind even among patricians.

23 On such challenges as they pertain to the study of the fourteenth-century trade in Tartar silks, see David Jacoby, 'Oriental silks go west: A declining trade in the later Middle Ages', in Arcangeli and Wolf, *Islamic Artefacts*, 74.

24 An exception may be cotton and cotton-based cloth, where there is somewhat heightened attention to the link between provenience and quality, though even here clear and unmistakable references to the origins of the products are few; see Eliyahu Ashtor, *Studies on the Levantine Trade in the Middle Ages*, London, 1978, especially chs VII and IX.

25 Kurt Erdmann, *Seven Hundred Years of Oriental Carpets*, ed. Hanna Erdmann, trans. May H. Beattie and Hildegard Herzog, Berkeley, CA, 1970, 97. An analogous case pertains to Venice itself: some documents reference carpets termed 'Venetian', but these were most likely labelled as such because they passed through or were purchased there; see Walter B. Denny, 'Oriental carpets and textiles in Venice', in Carboni, *Venice*, 191, n. 11. The slippery matter of place-based nomenclature and origins is considered in more detail below.

26 On the matter of origins and taxation, see Ashtor, *Levantine Trade*, ch. VII, 682, on cotton; and with regard to textiles, Giovanni Curatola, 'Tessuti e artigianato turco nel mercato veneziano', in Carlo Pirovano, ed., *Venezia e i Turchi: Scontri e confronti fra due civiltà*, Milan, 1985, 186–95, and Curatola, 'Venice's textile and carpet trade: The role of Jewish merchants', in Carboni, *Venice*, 207–8. Tucci examines the broad financial picture of Venetian trade through the study of one ship in 'Costi e ricavi di una galera veneziana ai primi Cinquecento', ch. 5 in his *Mercanti, navi, monete*. The concerns of the guilds often appear in their *mariegole* (charters), as in the mid-fifteenth-century example of the mercers reproduced in David Chambers and Brian Pullan, eds, *Venice, A Documentary History, 1450–1630*, Oxford and Cambridge, 1992, 281–5. On a 1569 case concerning the leather trade and the matter of origins with regard to both merchandise and labourers, see Anna Contadini, '"Cuoridoro": Tecnica e decorazione di cuoi dorati veneziani e italiani con influssi islamici', in Grube, *Arte veneziana e arte islamica*, 231–51.

27 Patricia Fortini Brown, 'Painting and history in Renaissance Venice', *Art History*, 7: 3, September 1984, 263–94.

28 This organization is unique to the Odoni notes; typically, Michiel organizes his collection descriptions by object type and medium. See *Der Anonimo Morelliano*, ed. Theodor Frimmel, *Quellenschriften für Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttechnik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit*, vol. 1, Hildesheim and New York, 1974.

29 In a stance typical of the period, Michiel is generally indifferent to the provenience of ancient works as well: whether something is Greek or Roman is not important to him, only the fact of its antiquity. See Monika Schmitter, 'The display of distinction: Art collecting and social status in early sixteenth-century Venice', PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1997, 111.

30 'I order that none of these things shall be sold, or pawned, or loaned'; all translations from Vendramin are from Chambers and Pullan, *Venice*, 428–9.

31 '… tante cose, quali per l'antichità, per lavoro, per la materia, e per la rarità erano stimatissime'; *Venetia città nobilissima, et singolare* (1581), ed. Giustiniano Martinioni, Venice, 1663, 11. That this particular example is from a later edition of this book (reissued with additions in 1604 and 1663) underscores the endurance of Sansovino's categories.

32 Schmitter, 'Display of distinction', 37, notes that in 1615 Vincenzo Scamozzi characterized the Grimani collection through the terms of multitude, diversity, excellence, and rarity (*moltitudine, diversità, eccellenza, rarità*) and observes that hierarchies of collecting were more fluid in the sixteenth century.

33 The most consistent exception is the case of relics, for which origins helped confirm authenticity, as for example the 'sangue miracolo di Christo, [che] fo portà da Costantinopoli' (miraculous blood of Christ [that] was brought from Constantinople); Sanudo, 53. With specific relevance to Venice and its patron, Saint Mark, see Elizabeth Rodini, 'Mapping narrative at the church of San Marco: A study in visual storying', *Word and Image*, 14: 4, October–December 1998, 387–96.

34 '… de una spesa extrema, e tuta salizada in ogni canto di marmori, porfidi e serpentini, come è la chiexia de San Marcho, e molto meglio lavorati che è nostri, soffità tuta d'oro con lavori alla damaschina con intagli'; as cited and translated in Deborah Howard, 'Venice and the Mamluks', in Carboni, *Venice*, 84 and 89, n. 64.

35 See 'Di Messer Josafa Barbaro gentil'huomo venetiano, il viaggio della Tana, & nella Persia', in Giovanni Battista Ramusio, ed., *Delle Navigationi et Viaggi in molti luoghi corretto, et ampliato…*, vol. 2, Venice, 1574, 91v-112r; Benedetto Ramberti, *Libri tre delle cose de Turchi*, Venice, 1539; Barbon

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Morosini, 'Viaggio in terrasancta', Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. VI 6 (=5887).

36 '… era un bel paviglione di boccascin [*unidentified textile*], dalla parte di de[n]tro tutto lavorato [et] ricamato. La porta della camera era di sandal à tarsia con fili d'oro, [et] radici di perle, per dentro lavorata [et] intagliata'; see 'Di Messer Josafa Barbaro', 44r.

37 Stefano Carboni, 'Vetri preziosi: La Circolazione del vetro di origine islamica in Italia', in Arcangeli and Wolf, *Islamic Artefacts*, 183–94. See also in relation to this topic and period, across various media, Avinoam Shalem, *Islam Christianized: Islamic Portable Objects in the Medieval Church Treasuries of the Latin West*, Frankfurt am Main, 1996.

38 In his mid-fifteenth-century treatise, the Dalmatian-born merchant Benedetto Cotrugli notes the wide range of knowledge required for his profession, including familiarity with the 'conditioni d'ogni robe et mercantile che si mettino et traghino d'ogni parte' ('the nature of all goods and merchandise to be had and brought from all places'); *Il Libro dell'arte di mercatura*, ed. Ugo Tucci, Venice, 1990, 213. Peter Burke emphasizes that cultural insiders take certain things for granted and may not report on them as extensively as historians would like; see *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication*, Cambridge, 1987, 15.

39 This is not a new observation – it is frequently made in this and other fields – but it is often taken as a blockade to further inquiry.

40 See analogous considerations regarding inventories citing 'India' and 'the Indies' in Jessica Keating and Lia Markey, '"Indian" objects in Medici and Austrian-Habsburg inventories: A case study of the sixteenth-century term', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 23: 2, November 2011, 284–6. In the context of courtly collecting they conclude that, although these terms generically referenced the foreign, knowledge of specific object histories, including origins, was retained.

41 On carpet terminology, see Erdmann, *Oriental Carpets*, 23. In an interesting twist on the use of '*turcheschi*', Denny refers to English documents that speak of 'Venetian' carpets, a term that must refer to point of import or purchase as no carpet industry is actually known in Venice; 'Oriental carpets', 181-3. On cloth, see Elizabeth Currie, 'Textiles and clothing', in Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Demmos, eds, *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, London, 2006, 343.

42 Marco Spallanzani tracks the use of *da/di Domasco*, *domaschino/a*, and *alla domaschina* in relevant Florentine documents spanning 1390–1553. He concludes that, while the terms were not synonymous and may map a general shift from foreign to local production, they were used too loosely to be able to ascribe clear origins to particular objects. See *Metalli islamici a Firenze nel Rinascimento*, Florence, 2010, 8–10 and 69–71.

43 Ronald Lightbown, 'L'Esotismo', trans. Rosa Dimichino, in Federico Zeri, ed., *Storia dell'arte italiana*, pt. 3, vol. 3, Turin, 1978, 466. Mack, *From Bazaar to Piazza*, 142, indicates that the Arabic refers to 'a person of Persian rather than Arab origin'. Benvenuto Cellini's denotation of certain metalwork as *turchesca* may be a reference to materials (inlay in steel) rather than origins; see Sylvia Auld, 'Master Mahmud: Objects fit for a prince', in Grube, *Arte veneziana e arte islamica*, 188.

44 Erdmann, *Oriental Carpets*, 97–8.

45 This worked in the inverse too, as Venice itself was seen as a source of finely made goods. Both Filippo Strozzi of Florence and Isabella d'Este of Mantua were specific in their directives to purchase Murano glass, for example; on Strozzi see Reino Liefkes, 'Tableware', in Ajmar-Wollheim and Demmos, *At Home*, 259; on Isabella d'Este, see Welch, *Shopping*, 249–51.

46 Ottoman Turkish rugs dominated the European market through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; Denny, 'Oriental carpets', 179.

47 Anna Contadini, focusing again on the word *damasco* and its variants, makes a similar assertion in reference to silk, indicating that this term pointed to a quality of material rather than a site of production; see 'Threads of ornament', 294–5.

48 As listed in Mack, *From Bazaar to Piazza*, 77.

49 As Pierre Bourdieu put it with regard to cognac and burgundy: '… [the] mastery of a verbal accompaniment, preferably technical, archaic and esoteric, … separates informed tasting from mere passive consumption…'; *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge, MA, 1984, 279. On naming, carpets, and familiarity, see Curatola, 'Tessuti', 186.

50 Most frequently, this term is used as a straightforward reference to things from abroad, as with Anna Contadini, 'Artistic contacts: Current scholarship and future tasks', in Charles Burnett and Anna Contadini, eds, *Islam and the Italian Renaissance*, London, 1999, 9–11. Increasingly, theoretically engaged analyses eschew the term, which smacks of the '"fixity" in the ideological construction of otherness' that Bhabha indicates is a hallmark of colonialism; *Location of Culture*, 66.

51 These two examples come from Brown, *Private Lives*, 86 and 164.

52 In the absence of such metadata, according to Wood, 'there tends to be a high premium put on qualities of workmanship and material, material value and material aesthetic' – precisely the concepts that were at play in Venetian texts; 'Global before globalization', 8–12.

53 See Bourdieu, *Distinction*. Chandra Mukerji suggests how fashion began to displace tradition as a way to make sense of and control, through discernment and differentiation, the proliferation of new goods and choices in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; see *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism*, New York, 1993, 9–10.

54 Ugo Tucci indicates that, into the sixteenth century, a mercantile outlook characterized the educational background and worldview of Venetian men of both the noble and mercantile classes; *Mercanti*, 115–41.

55 On ginger, see Ashtor, *Levantine Trade*, ch. X, 579, citing documents in the Datini archives of Prato to illustrate the highly general nature of contemporary cargo inventories.

56 Dolce based his work (without attribution) on a Venetian publication of 1502, the *Speculum lapidum clarissimi artium et medicine* by Camillo Leonardi.

57 Barbosa was a Portuguese traveller whose text was first published in 1550 in Venice by Giovanni Battista Ramusio. See Archivio di Stato di Venezia, notarile atti, busto 516, 65v–66r; and Ramusio, *Delle navigationi et viaggi*, 1550–59, reprinted with an introduction by R. A. Skelton and an analysis of the contents by G. B. Parks, Amsterdam, 1967–70, vol. 1, 321; both cited in Blake de Maria, *Becoming Venetian: Immigrants and the Arts in Early Modern Venice*, New Haven, CT and London, 2010, 41–2.

58 Discussion of the *paragone* pervades theoretical writing on the arts in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, most often as a debate between the relative merits of painting and sculpture. For a useful summary and extensive bibliography, see Claire Farago, 'Paragone', *Oxford Art Online*, updated 26 September 2010; accessed 5 June 2016.

59 Luca Molà, *The Silk Industry of Renaissance Venice*, Baltimore, MD, 96-105; and Welch, *Shopping*, 123–5.

60 Molà, *Silk Industry*, 120–5, and de Maria, *Becoming Venetian*, 46–7.

61 Paul Hills notes that shades of red were closely tied to the matrix of cloth into which the dye was worked, meaning that visual distinctions of colour were even more specific than the nomenclature reveals; see *Venetian Colour: Marble, Mosaic, Painting and Glass 1250–1550*, New Haven, CT and London, 1999, 204–6.

62 Molà, *Silk Industry*, 107–37.

63 As translated in Chambers and Pullan, *Venice*, 167–8.

64 Describing a palace, this anonymous late fifteenth-century traveller to Persia writes that it was fabricated in such a way, 'that I cannot draw comparisons' ('che non so dar similitudine'); 'Itinerario da Aleppo in Thauris, 1496', Biblioteca Correr, Cicogna Cod. Misc., b. 2727/10, 11r.

65 'Qui se dinota come ogni cossa fano in contrario et alla riversa per non se accordar cum nui . . . Li homeni fano li exercitii de cassa, e tesseno la tela, e le femene fano le mercantie. Le done portano lo peso in spala, e li homeni in capo. Li homeni mangiano sedendo, e le femine in piede. . . . Tuto lo giorno bevono, excepto quando mangiano. De continuo se lavano i piedi, e le mane sempre hano sporche. Le femine portano uno vestimento, e li homeni tre o quatro. Nui se cavamo la bireta per onorore, e loro le scarpe'. Fra' Francesco Suriano, *Il Trattato di Terra Santa e dell'Oriente di Frate Francesco Suriano, missionario e viaggiatore del secolo XV*, ed. P. Girolamo Golubovich, Milan, 1900, 199–200. Benedetto Ramberti sets up a similar if less rigorous set of comparisons with the Turks, including the observation that they eat on the floor, at night, with no manners, 'as animals do' ('come sogliono fare gli animali'); *Turchi*, 28r–v.

66 On the tendency toward framing in opposites, see Alberta Fabris Grube, 'Viaggiatori italiani e veneziani nel medio oriente islamico: I loro testi come fonti storiche', in Ernst J. Grube, *Arte veneziana e arte islamica*, 71–2. The ancient roots of this trope lie at least with Herodotus

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in the fifth century BCE, who describes the Egyptians through contrast with the Greeks; see Frank Lestringant, 'Le livre des contrariétés: L'occident, le Turc et les autres', in David Cowling, ed., *Conceptions of Europe in Renaissance France: Essays in Honor of Keith Cameron*, Amsterdam and New York, 2006, 194.

67 Curatola, 'Textile and carpet trade', 55. As Lestringant puts it, referencing Claude Lévi-Strauss, the rhetorical figure of opposition 'permits a simultaneous demonstration of connection and opposition' ('permet de montrer simultanément une liaison et un antagonisme'); 'Le livre des contrariétés', 198.

68 Mary W. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance*, Princeton, NJ, 1988. Also critical is anthropologist James Clifford's concept of routes over roots, which Flood very helpfully realizes in an art-historical context in *Objects of Translation*; see Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA, 1997.

69 Walter Denny, "Saff and Sajjadeh: Origins and meaning of the prayer rug' *Oriental Carpet and Textile Studies*, 3: 2, 1990, 93–104, concludes that, though the iconography of the niche is complex, the *mihrab* is certainly one of its referents. More importantly for this paper, persistent references to *tapedi moschetti* indicate that this is how such rugs were understood in Venice. For more on this matter, see Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 84.

70 Function was a key descriptor. In a lawsuit brought in the 1550s by the Venetian Francesco da Priuli over a lost shipment of carpets from Cairo, the carpets are described above all according to their use: for table, chest or bench, stool (*scagno*), or floor; see Giovanni Curatola, 'A sixteenth-century quarrel about carpets', *Muqarnas*, 21, January 2004, 130. Functional descriptions were distinct from typologies; indicating that a rug was '*da cassa*' pointed to use rather than to form; Giovanni Curatola, 'Tessuti', 190. On the other hand, sixteenth-century Cairene carpet makers began to make square and cruciform carpets for export, in response to this new European table-top usage; Erdmann, *Oriental Carpets*, 98, and Anna Contadini, 'Middle-Eastern objects', in Ajmar-Wollheim and Demmos, eds, *At Home*, 318.

71 Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior, 1400–1600*, New York, 1991, 64 and 373, n. 10.

72 See for example Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 76, and Jardine, *Worldy Goods*, 429. Contadini, 'Middle-Eastern objects', 315, indicates that the elevation of the carpet onto furnishings reflects that status of the rugs themselves.

73 Douglas and Isherwood consider goods as part of an 'information system'; beyond satisfying human needs and serving as display, they 'make and maintain social relationships' and are a 'nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty'; see *The World of Goods*, New York, 1979, 60 and 62. Gell suggests examining art objects not as symbolic systems, like language, but as embedded in systems of action, underscoring the potential for causation, result, and transformation; see *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford, 1998, 6.

74 'Nui amano li cani, e loro li gatti. Nui bevemo vino e loro l'aqua. Nui se regemo per lo sole, e loro per la luna. Nui mangiamo in alto, e loro in terra.' Suriano, *Trattato di Terra Santa*, 199.

75 An excellent model for the deep historical investigation of a particular commodity, namely the reception, perception, and use of brocaded 'Tartar' cloth in medieval Europe, can be found in Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles*, Cambridge, 1997.

76 See Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 143. James W. Allan suggests that flat-lidded boxes like this one were cast in Venice and decorated in the Levant (see *Metalwork of the Islamic World: The Aron Collection*, London, 1986, 100); Auld disagrees, considering such a production model economically unviable; *Renaissance Venice*, 44–5.

77 On the wine-cup, see Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 143–4 and fig. 152.

78 See the range of values ascribed to various damascened objects in the inventory of Doge Andrea Gritti, 1557, as outlined in Brown, *Private Lives*, 86.

79 Sylvia Auld, 'Objects fit for a prince', 185–201, 187. Vendramin's will creates a hierarchy of treasures from paintings, at the top, to damascene ware and then 'animal horns and other diverse things', at the bottom; see Chambers and Pullan, *Venice*, 428–9.

80 Bertrand Jertaz, 'Porcelaine de Chine et bronze islamique à Venise. La Collection Redaldi (1527)', *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, ser. III, vol. XX, 1, 1971, 23–60. In a forthcoming article, I consider this inventory in more detail, arguing that it points to a new form of appreciation for damascene ware.

81 Ships' cargos were a mixed lot. Among other things, a Venetian ship of 1542 hauled textiles, boxes of ashes, capers, ostrich feathers, and diamonds; and a French ship described in Venetian documents of 1544 carried quicksilver, cinnabar, paper, 'every type of textiles', coral, verdigris, *gorami* (leather), oil, honey, nuts, coarse amber, pepper, 'cinnamon and other spices, primarily mace'; as translated in Curatola, 'Quarrel', 132.

82 See Patricia Fortini Brown, 'Behind the walls: The material culture of Venetian elites', in John Martin and Dennis Romano, eds, *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297–1797*, Baltimore, MD, 2000, 295–338. Richard A. Goldthwaite argues that, in Renaissance Florence, 'consumption demonstrated taste more conspicuously than wealth', suggesting how a context of consumption defines the value of goods; see *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300–1600*, Baltimore, MD, 1993, 248.

83 As cited and translated in Brown, 'Behind the walls', 322 and 337, n. 108.

84 Allsen's work is again a fine model, in this case for his analysis of luxury within historically sensitive frames of use; see *Commodity and Exchange*, particularly 11–13 and ch. 4. Douglas and Isherwood, *World of Goods*, 98 and *passim*, argue that luxuries are not superfluous or exceptional objects but 'neutral' parts of a social economy of goods.

85 'Merci minute' refers to ordinary goods of daily trade, ranging from scissor blades and razors to caps and the trimmings for textiles; Tucci, *Mercanti*, 103.

86 These terms are used in contemporary Italian as well. There are countless historical examples from Venice, but see Isabella Cecchini's discussion of '*Mobili* inventories' (classified as such in the Venetian courts of law) in 'A world of small objects: Probate inventories, pawns, and domestic life in early modern Venice', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 35: 3, Special Issue: *The Material Culture of Debt*, summer 2012, 39–61.

87 Jardine, *Wordly Goods*, 17, makes a similar point with regard to a Renaissance portrait, indicating how museum displays can mask the original portability of an object.

88 Saurma-Jeltsch, 'About the agency of things, or objects and artefacts', in Saurma-Jeltsch and Anja Eisenbeiß, eds, *The Power of Things and the Flow of Cultural Transformations: Art and Culture between Europe and Asia*, Berlin, 2010, 17.

89 Ajmar-Wollheim and Demmos, *At Home*, 21.

90 A similar set of concerns is powerfully articulated in Flood, *Objects of Translation*, 1, and implemented in Hoffman, 'Pathways of portability'.

91 '… fondate in sulla mercanzia e cose mobili', Niccoló Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, ed. Corrado Vivanti, Turin, 2000, 65.

92 'Mercurius preceteris huic fauste emporiis illustro'; as translated and cited in Deborah Howard, 'Venice as an "Eastern City"', in Carboni, *Venice*, 67 and 71, n. 40.

93 Deborah Howard, *Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture, 1100–1500*, New Haven, CT and London, 2000, 7 and 113–14. For documents related to the rebuilding of 1459 and the 1514 fire that finally destroyed the structure and its paintings, see Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio*, New Haven, CT and London, 1988, 268.

94 On *mappaemundi* and their fusion of historical, geographic, and symbolic meaning, see David Woodward, 'Medieval *mappaemundi*', in J. B. Harley and D. Woodward, eds, *The History of Cartography*, vol. 1, *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, Chicago, IL, 1987, 326–43.

95 Jardine, *Worldly Goods*, 296.

96 Luciano de Zanche's study of the rise of the state-run Venetian postal service offers suggestive hints of how geographical distance, traversed with great effort in the pre-modern era, left its narrative trace on the objects that were transported; see *Tra Costantinopoli e Venezia: Dispacci di stato e lettere di mercanti dal basso medioevo all caduta della Serenissima*, Prato, 2000.

97 The structure of Mack's book *Bazaar to Piazza* is revealing: it has the laudable intention of interpreting materials through a mercantile lens but soon gives way to a museological scheme of organization by

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medium, with chapters moving from carpets to damascene ware. The museum exercises a similar if not so literal influence on many other studies in this field.

98 Quatremère de Quincy, *Considérations morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l'art*, Paris, 1989, 47–8.

99 Though not always, and particularly recently. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, High Museum of Art, and others have devised installations dedicated to the topic of circulation and exchange, foregrounding the peripatetic history of objects. The Metropolitan's *Interwoven Globe* exhibition (2013–14) is a notable example; see Amelia Peck, ed., *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500–1800*, New York, 2013. The concept of object biography is widespread in contemporary scholarship. See the seminal volume by Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, 1986, and especially Igor Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things: Commoditization as process', 64–91. Other recent related studies include Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, *The Global Lives of Thing: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World*, London and New York, 2015; Lorraine Daston, ed., *Biographies of Scientific Objects*, Chicago, IL, 2000; and Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, Princeton, NJ, 1997.

100 'Rather than presenting Islamic art as the product of a religiously driven monoculture', observed the critic Holland Cotter, the Met portrays a culture that is 'varied, changing, largely secular . . . [and] absorptively cosmopolitan …'. This anti-essentialist message seems to Cotter particularly apt in the post-9/11 political climate, though the title of his review favours other absolutes: see 'A cosmopolitan trove of exotic beauty', *New York Times*, 27 October 2011.

101 Alessandra Russo makes the cogent point that the categories demanded by museum collections often do not serve well the multiplicity of historical narratives that are at stake; see 'Cortés's objects and the idea of New Spain: Inventories as spatial narratives', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 23: 2, November 2011, 246.

102 John Carswell, *Blue and White: Chinese Porcelain and its Impact on the Western World*, Chicago, IL, 1985, 11.

103 A project I developed with Ben Tilghman and John Hopkins University students at the Walters Art Museum uses GoogleEarth to trace the history of objects over space and time: http://thewalters.org/earth/. In 2015, the Walters held a professional convening to discuss museological interpretations of the mobile object.

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