

The First Line of Contact
The Young Christian Made Ottoman Slave in the Sixteenth Century

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by

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For Becky

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Genealogy of the Sultans of the House of Osman¹
From Osman to Mehmed III



¹ Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries* (London: Saqi Books, 1994), 10.

Map of the Levant World



Source: Angus Konstam, *Atlas of Medieval Europe* (New York: Thalmus Publishing, 2000), 174.

Introduction

Pirates captured Giovanni Antonio Menavino in 1504 when he was just twelve years old. Sailing past Corsica three pirate galleys seized his ship while he was accompanying his father, a Genoese merchant, on a voyage from Genoa to Venice. The pirates then took them to Constantinople, a hub for the Mediterranean slave trade, where young male prisoners such as Menavino fetched a high price. The giant slave market in the Ottoman capital was run by one of the sultan's pashas, or lieutenants. As a gift, his captors presented young Menavino and two of his companions to the Ottoman sultan.

From 1504 to 1514 Menavino served as an *icoglan* (or *icoglani*: "intimate pages" or "attendants"), directly serving the sultan's person, bringing him water, carrying his sword, or cleaning his room. The corps of *icoglans*, about three hundred Christian boys, were investments of the sultan himself, and were destined for the highest positions in the Ottoman military and administrative hierarchy. Menavino and his companions had unprecedented proximity to both Islam and the sultan. Islam was thrust at them: the majority of the captives were forced to convert and adopt Muslim names. In the mid-fifteenth century, the sultan established the *Enderun Kolej*, an elite Palace school where a team of four eunuchs taught Islam methodically and rigorously to these young boys for anywhere from two to seven years. The sultan himself was involved in their education, and they served him intimately. Menavino relates how the Sultan Bayazid II himself presided over his entrance into the Seraglio, and how they even conversed in Italian, as the young Christian attempted to secure the freedom of his father. They were a class of

Christians whose situation was often lamented.² The sufferings of these Christians was bemoaned throughout Europe, but their own voices have been to this point inaudible.

The *icoglans* were strictly supervised, lived regimented lives, and attended a school within the Seraglio devoted to their Islamic education. At the age of twenty-five the sultan would promote them to more honorable and lucrative posts within his entourage.³ But Menavino escaped before he reached the age of promotion, journeying from Persia, Greece, and back to Italy aboard a Christian ship. More than thirty years after his return he published his only book, *I cinque libri delle legge, religione, et vita de' turchi*, or *The Five Books of the laws, religion and life of the Turks*. His stated goal is humble and his tone modest: "I was a slave to [Selim], and his father [Bayazid] for many years, and had access to the most intimate and secret parts of his house, where I came to see, hear, and learn many different things. I want to briefly describe and touch upon the aspects most important of the religion, and the life and government . . . of the [Grand Turk]."⁴ Throughout the volume, Menavino never strays from these bounds, relating only what he learned and saw.

Menavino deserves deeper inspection for neither he nor other enslaved Christians serving the sultan have been sufficiently studied. Nancy Bisaha and Halil Inalcik reference Menavino as an important source for information of the Seraglio, but they neglect his chief importance to any study of the Christian contacts with Islam. He is

² One such lamentation is bound in Menavino's book: Bartolomeo Giorgievits's *La Miseria cosi de i prigioni, come anco de Christiani, che vivono sotto il tributo del Turco*.

³ Giovanni Antonio Menavino, *I cinque libri delle legge, religione, et vita de' turchi: et della corte, et alcune guerre del Gran Turco: di Giovantonio Menavino Genovese da Vultri. Oltre cio, una prophetia de' Mahomettani, et la miseria de' prigioni, de' Christiani, che vivono sotto il Gran Turco, et altre cose Turchesche, non piu vedute: tradotte da M. Lodovico Domenichi* (Venice: Appresso Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1548), 104.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

representative of a class that occupied the front line in the collision between the Muslim and Christian worlds.

To write of the Turks in the sixteenth century was hardly unprecedented. Following the invention of the printing press, many in Italy and across Europe used the printed word to disseminate and instill a general fear of an Ottoman invasion of central Europe and Islamic domination over Christianity. Mehmed's capture of Constantinople in 1453, made westerners vividly aware of the Ottoman threat, one Europe had previously only vaguely considered.

The literary response to this new threat, especially by humanists, was slanted against the Turks. This followed a tradition stemming from Europe's first encounters with Islam in the seventh century. Islam was painted as a religion founded on bellicosity and barbarity,⁵ a perception that continued through the Mediaeval age. Calls to arms against the Infidel Turks became the era's *Carthago delenda est*: "[A]lmost any public occasion an orator trained in the new rhetoric might step forward and deliver an *Exhortatio ad bellum contra barbaros*. One gets the impression that the composition of an oration against the Turks was 'the thing to do' and that every self-respecting man of letters kept several in his repertory for the appropriate occasion."⁶ Such calls to war culminated when Constantinople fell, which yielded numerous small campaigns, but nothing more. Nancy Bisaha notes that the fall of the Byzantine capital spurned more fear and excitement than any other event before or after. It seemed disproportionate that

⁵ Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East & West: Renaissance humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 15.

⁶ Robert Schwoebel, "Coexistence, Conversion and the Crusade against the Turks," *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965): 165.

three days of Turkish plunder created an unrivaled hysteria and perceived threat to Western culture, learning, and religion.⁷

However, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, this invasion had never materialized, despite Ottoman territorial gains in the Balkans and Greece. In 1480 an Ottoman force had landed on the heel of the Italian peninsula and captured Otranto, sparking widespread panic. Yet the force was soon expelled and now represents the only Ottoman incursion on Italian soil. By 1500 the European mindset had gradually switched from fears of Turkish conquest, to acceptance of Turkish coexistence. Coexistence in turn promoted commerce, which similarly promoted increased contact between Turk and Christian.

Authors increasingly wrote with firsthand knowledge of their subject and traveler's narratives outweighed the polemics of trembling Christian priests. The approach of European authors towards the Turks and Islam paralleled this evolution. The bulk of work produced regarding the Turks remained negative, especially in the form of captivity narratives that recounted Turkish barbarity towards Christian slaves.

But by the mid-sixteenth century, perception of the Ottomans was more varied than it had been. Histories of the Ottoman Empire and Islam emerged that, while acknowledging the perceived blasphemy of the faith, described them with admiration and respect. Theodore Spandounes, an Italian businessman who had gone to Constantinople to find his brother, wrote one of the most widely read tracts on the Turks, written in 1538, ten years prior to Menavino's publication. Spandounes' dissection of Constantinopolitan society reveals an impressively functioning, complex world where Christians and Jews

⁷ Bisaha, *Creating East & West*, 68.

operate without fear and to a degree of success.⁸ Ogier Ghislan de Busbecq, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador to Suleiman, praised the Ottoman system of meritocracy, exemplifying a growing trend where Ottoman expansion and military success was actually the result of Ottoman ingenuity—rather than their barbarity. He lauds their system in which holders of high offices might come from humble beginnings.⁹ Sir Henry Blount, an Englishman who traveled widely in the Levant, writing at the beginning of the seventeenth century echoes this sentiment of praise and respect: “He who would behold these times in their greatest glory could not find a better Scene than Turkey . . . [The Turks] are the only modern people, great in action . . . whose Empire hath so suddenly invaded the world, and fixt itself such firme foundations as no other ever did.”¹⁰ Menavino’s *I Cinque Libri* is in this tradition. These works were few: not necessarily praising the Turks openly, but rather refraining from overly insulting them.

There are many works by escaped Christian captives, yet they are mostly autobiographies. Piracy was also not the only means for ensnaring young slaves, The Ottomans had a unique system of taxation called *devshirme*, that was a levy on Christian subjects that allowed the sultan to take Christian boys from their families to compose the Janissary corps. Prisoners of war also joined the large *kul*—that is, “slave”—class. Johannes Schiltberger, a teenage prisoner of war after the Battle of Nicopolis in 1396 went on to serve Bayazid I for six years, and then Timur. Schiltberger’s may be the first book of its kind, and his thirty-two years in captivity prior to his escape are astounding,

⁸ Theodore Spandounes, *Delle historie et origine de principi de Turchi, ordine delle corte, loro rito et costumi. Lucca: V. Busdiago, 1550*, trans. and ed. Donald M. Nichol (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4.

⁹ Ogier Ghislan de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, trans. Edward Seymour Forster (London: Sickle Moon Books, 2001), 40.

¹⁰ Sir Henry Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant: A breife relation of a iourney, lately performed by Master H.B. Gentleman, from England by the way of Venice, into Dalmatia, Sclavonia, Bosnah, Hungary, Macedonia, Thessaly, Thrace, Rhodes and Egypt, unto Gran Cairo: with particular observations concerning the moderne condition of the Turkes, and other people under that Empire* (London: John Legat, 1636). 2-3.

But he lacked the proximity and education of Menavino and his fellow *icoglans*. Despite the fact that many Christian boys served the Ottomans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, their perspective and story has gone mostly unnoticed.

This study will shed light on this corner of Western-Muslim relations, yet relies on many historians of the period. Comprehending what Mario Apostolov calls “the Christian-Muslim frontier” allows us to understand the place of Christian captives such as Menavino in Turkish and European society, and where *I Cinque Libri* resides in the literature on the Turks. Norman Daniel, Robert Schwoebel, David Blanks, and Michael Frassetto have all explored mediaeval and pre-modern European perceptions of Islam. Schwoebel, Nancy Bisaha and Kenneth M. Setton build upon the mediaeval roots and transport this mindset to the setting of the Renaissance. Daniel Vitkis, Nabil Mater, and Peter Earle explicate Mediterranean piracy, and Palmira Brumett’s work on Levantine diplomacy all described the backdrop for Menavino’s capture at sea. And finally, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* helps bring this analysis to a modern setting. Said asserts that modern Western conceptions of Islam are in fact the product of man’s dangerous historical proclivity to divide cultures in to “us” and “them.”¹¹

This paper takes a direct, firsthand approach to understanding Christian-Muslim relations in the sixteenth century. Menavino is not the paragon of accuracy and objectivity, nor can his story replace the many studied before it. But his is a voice from a previously mute constituency under the Ottoman sultan, a group of Westerners closer to him than any. His *I Cinque Libri* not only tells this story, but teaches us how continual contact and interaction can illuminate a previously unfamiliar world. Proximity is the

¹¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 45.

antidote to ignorance—whether favorable or not, it promotes the coexistence of disparate cultures. Menavino was *there*, coexisting with an unknown world.

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Chapter 1
Giovanni Antonio Menavino: Creating *I Cinque Libri*

Giovanni Antonio Menavino offers little autobiographical data in *I Cinque Libri*. He wrote in a time in which traveler-authors rarely eschewed the opportunity to utilize the first-person to enhance their own character and achievements. Therefore it follows that our overall knowledge about the man is sparse. Given this, much of the information presented here are inferences, hypotheses, and possibilities. The fact that a certain inference seems more likely than another, however, does not push it into the realm of fact. All we concretely know about Menavino he provides, and an extrapolation from what he provides is not the basis for any further extrapolations. Yet while any inference about Menavino may in reality be false, that inference should be considered as possible for the innumerable Christian boys who served in his position, but who never escaped, or never wrote a book. If approached in this way, an inference, which may not be useful in analyzing Menavino, retains its usefulness when applied to the demographic of captives his book represents.

This scarcity of personal information prompts many a question regarding Menavino's life that is *not* discussed in *I Cinque Libri*. Concerning his pre-captivity years, what sort of upbringing did he have? What was his family's socioeconomic status? What kind of education did he receive? And concerning his post-captivity years, why publish his book more than thirty years after his return to Italy? Who read his book? And most importantly, why did he write it? Working to answer these questions will provide a character sketch of twelve-year-old Menavino when pirates captured him. Moreover it should provide clues as to how he came to produce *I Cinque Libri* after his tenure in captivity.

Menavino's Biography

Menavino expresses his own excitement to be traveling with his father on a merchant voyage from Genoa to Venice: “I, in the thriving of my youthful age, that being twelve . . . together with my dear father were eager . . . to be within the confines of the borders of Venice.”¹² However, this eagerness soon changed to fear as three Turkish galleys, under the banner *Chiamalli*, overtook and boarded his ship while sailing near Corsica, which was under Genoese control at the time. He describes his father’s great spirit in readying the ship for battle, “electing that it was better to accelerate death amongst Christians than endure extremely long servitude under the Turks.”¹³ Yet the realities of the situation soon outweighed his father’s zeal. Their ship was ill equipped for battle, so the Turks boarded rather easily. After transferring the captives to their vessels, the corsairs continued to harass Christian ships until there were so many they stopped in Modon, in Greece, and bartered some of their booty.

The ship then sailed to Constantinople. Upon arriving Menavino writes that he, “in the company of three other companions of about the same age, [was] mandated as a gift to the Grand Turk, named SULTAN BAIAXIT, who was . . . very happy with such a presentation by the *Chiamalli* and by the other various captains who paid him courtesy, and we three were taken into the . . . Seraglio with him.”¹⁴ He questioned Menavino

¹² Giovanni Antonio Menavino, *I cinque libri delle legge, religione, et vita de' turchi: et della corte, et alcune guerre del Gran Turco: di Giovantonio Menavino Genovese da Vultri. Oltre cio, una prophetia de' Mahomettani, et la miseria de' prigioni, de' Christiani, che vivono sotto il Gran Turco, et altre cose Turchesche, non piu vedute: tradotte da M. Lodovico Domenichi* (Venice: Appresso Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1548), 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

about his own intelligence and then eunuchs removed him to be bathed and clothed in green velvet.

He was then escorted to the presence of the sultan. Bayazid knew some Italian and inquired whether Menavino had similar clothes in Italy, to which Menavino responded that they did not. Menavino describes the fascinating dialogue between captive and master. Prior to his presentation to Bayazid Menavino's father asked that if such a circumstance should arise, to implore the sultan to release him. Fulfilling his promise, Menavino requested this of the Grand Turk, but apparently the corsairs had already sold his father. However, as fortune would have it, some Genoese merchants had purchased and liberated his father and he had returned to Constantinople to find his son. The sultan then graciously granted Menavino one day to see his father, and provided him with an entourage of ten young soldiers to ensure that he would not try and escape. In Pera, a district within Constantinople, Menavino mentions the final requests of his father: "He continually ordered me that even though I was among the Turks, that I should never forget the Christian faith."¹⁵ He left his father, unaware that they would reunite ten years later in Vultri.

Before commencing his discussion on the laws and religion of the Turks, Menavino tells of how he began his studies of Islam. Interestingly, his first observation was that the laws of the Turkish faith were, "completely different from the very little my father had taught me."¹⁶ Together with four grandchildren of the Grand Turk he began learning the Turkish alphabet, and soon was learning both the written and spoken forms of the language. As his education progressed, he learned of Islam's rituals, sacrifices and all the instructions of the Qur'an.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., 16.

With that, Menavino's personal voice disappears from *I Cinque Libri*, only to sporadically return throughout the body of the text, and finally at the end while describing his escape. But as gripping as his story is, it reveals little about his own life. Discerning the nature of his childhood is vital, as the experiences of his first twelve years directly impacted his life in the Seraglio and views of Islam.

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Menavino's Intelligence: Renaissance Education, and Literacy

The first point of inquiry is his education. According to Menavino's preface to *Il Primo Libro* his Italian education distinguished him from his companions. "The interpreter beginning to question us about certain things relating to our Italy . . . first asked us if we knew how to read; and I and another of my companions quickly responded affirmatively; and not only read, but then duly to write, and the other boy didn't know how."¹⁷ Apparently, according to Menavino, the Turks held Christians in high regard for their intelligence, especially those from Tuscany, because, Menavino writes, "from a very young and tender age, [Tuscan children] are put to study under the good care of tutors."¹⁸ His inspectors then gave him and his companion a test in translating and interpreting. The inspector tested first his companion, then Menavino. He dictated a certain passage to each boy who was expected to write down what he heard. When the two boys' passages were compared they were not similar, and Menavino's was judged as correct. It is after this that he was mandated to the Grand Turk's Seraglio, where he would serve as an *icoglan*.

¹⁷ Ibid., 12.

¹⁸ Ibid.

From this narration of his inspection in Constantinople we know that he could both read and write, and that in Genoa he was taught by a tutor, a common Tuscan practice. What he does not reveal is what exactly he read, on what he would write, and how long he had been schooled. What knowledge did he possess when he was captured? What grasp did he have of international events and politics? How much did he know of Christianity? As he provides no information to answer these questions, we must look to data from the Renaissance regarding schooling and literacy to uncover what an average Italian boy knew.

Children's literacy and education in this period was scarce, there was no public education, and only the wealthy received any formal education. Paul Grendler's two studies of Renaissance education, the first in Florence in 1480, and the second in Venice in 1587 reveal that schooling was indeed reserved for a select few. Grendler's first study of Florence derives from the work of Armando Verde, who studied Florentine households (Table 1.1). An analysis of this data, provided by Brian Richardson, reveals that of boys between ages six and fourteen, twenty-eight per cent were in school; also, accounting for those schooled at home, or privately, the overall male literacy rate in Florence in 1480 was around thirty per cent.¹⁹ Girls were never mentioned in these studies. Assuming that these statistics did not vary greatly over the following twenty-five years during which Menavino was educated, it can be assumed that he was part of a quarter of the population who could both read and write.

Menavino's education made him part of a privileged minority, and his father was a merchant, so he probably came from a rather successful socioeconomic background. Regardless of his father's monetary stature, did most male children of wealthy parents

¹⁹ Brian Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 109.

have a personal tutor, such as Menavino states? What were conditions elsewhere in Italy? Again we can turn to Grendler to answer these questions (Table 1.2).

Table 1.1: Florentine Boys in School, 1480

Age	Total in School	At School	Eliment. School	Abbaco	Grammar	Home
4	5	5	0	0	0	0
5	23	16	7	0	0	0
6	41	29	11	1	0	0
7	82	48	34	0	0	0
8	61	36	22	2	0	1
9	86	38	42	3	0	3
10	121	59	48	12	1	1
11	129	41	45	38	1	4
12	154	43	50	52	6	3
13	122	30	18	58	5	11
14	96	26	15	41	4	10
15	58	18	5	28	3	4
16	30	6	3	9	2	10
17	13	3	0	6	1	3
18	4	1	0	1	0	2
No age	6	4	0	2	0	0
TOTAL	1,031	403	300	253	23	52

Source: Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: literacy and learning, 1300-1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 75.

Table 1.2. Venetian Teachers and Pupils, 1587-1588

Type of School	Teachers	Pupils
Independent-Latin	160 (65.3%)	c. 1,650 (35.7%)
Communal-Latin	5 (2.0%)	c. 188 (4.1%)
Church-Latin	8 (3.3%)	c. 322 (7.0%)
Independent-Vernacular	72 (29.4%)	c. 2,465 (53.3%)
TOTALS	245	c. 4,625

Source: Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, 43.

Grendler claims that his data on Venice is representative of other Italian cities as well.

Brian Richardson's analysis tells that around twenty-six per cent of boys between six and fifteen attended a school of some kind.²⁰ As around half of these boys received independent tutelage, Menavino was part of around thirteen per cent of boys in Renaissance Italy were taught by tutors.

²⁰ Ibid., 43. Richardson, *Printing, Writing and Reading*, 110.

But in this setting, what exactly did he learn? And maybe more importantly, what exactly did he retain? Retention of information was made especially difficult if the vernacular was not read, though we do not definitively know that Menavino received a Latin or vernacular education. But on the subject matter tutors exposed to Menavino, Richardson writes, “Those Italian children fortunate enough to receive an education in the three R’s began with reading . . . [and] the teaching of reading thus immediately introduced into education the fourth R, religion, because even these early stages were closely associated with prayers.”²¹ The conception that Menavino had of Christianity is crucial to how he digested the precepts of Islam while in Constantinople. How strong were his Christian tendencies in 1504? When the eunuchs of the *Enderun Kolej* exposed Menavino and the *icoglans* to the tenets Islam, did he define them against a pre-existing impression of Christianity, or did his age imply that he did not know enough to make such a comparison?

We know only that he learned to read and write from a tutor, and to try and discern his own religious affiliations and affinities at that age is difficult. But given our knowledge of the atmosphere of childhood education in Renaissance Italy, to say that Menavino had a grasp of Christianity is not an unfounded claim; it is merely impossible to prove. This education proved extremely important when he arrived in Constantinople, as it distinguished him from other Christians being simultaneously inspected.

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The Mystery of Menavino’s Dedication, and the New Medium of the Printed Book

²¹ Ibid., 108-9

As little as we know about Menavino's life before his servitude under the sultan, we know even less about his life after it. The text ends with his escape—there is no epilogue. We do not even know when he died. *I Cinque Libri* was published more than thirty years after his return from Constantinople. There is no information on the book's publication either. What took so long? If thirty years had already passed since his return, why did *I Cinque Libri* suddenly get published in Venice in 1548? Could it even have been written posthumously? Again, as with his education, it is impossible to find *definite* answers to these questions, but an investigation of his foray into the Italian print world should provide *possible* answers and clues into how his book was completed.

The book itself is bound with two works by Bartolomeo Giorgievits, a Croatian noble captured by the Turks. The first, entitled *Una prophetia de' Mahomettani*, relates a Muslim prophecy of the "Red Apple." The prophecy foretells of Muslim domination of Christendom, but then Christianity's eventual overthrow of Islam. The second supplement is entitled *La miseria de' prigionieri, de' Christiani, che vivono sotto il Gran Turco*, in which Giorgievits accounts some of his own travails, and those of other Christians forced to endure extremely arduous servitude under the Turks. Giorgievits' portrayal of the Turks is of a barbarous and heretical people whose very nature is derived solely to propagate cruelty and death. As we shall see, this bears no resemblance to Menavino's tone or message in *I Cinque Libri*. So why bind in the same volume the works of two different authors, who share only their previous condition of servitude, and that convey two different messages regarding a very important subject matter?

This decision almost certainly lay in the hands of the book's publisher: Vincenzo Valgrisi. A Frenchman by birth, Valgrisi came to Venice sometime in the 1530s and began printing on his own about 1540 (though Brian Richardson marks the beginning of

Valgrisi's operation to be 1539, along with other "prolific newcomers" that brought stiff competition to the established publishing houses.)²² His shop was situated at the San Marco end of the *Merceria Orologio*, one of the centers of the Venetian book trade. Patrick King notes that "he issued over two hundred books between 1540 and 1572,"²³ of which Menavino was one. Valgrisi's business became quite successful by mid-century. He owned the rights to Andrea Mattioli's translation of the Greek physician Dioscorides, for example, which Conor Fahy calls one of the most notable texts of the Renaissance,²⁴ and which sold approximately thirty-two thousand copies.²⁵ This is a striking total considering the average press run for a book published at that time in Venice was around three thousand copies.²⁶ Menavino's words were clearly in the possession of someone successful and experienced.

Valgrisi's decision to bind both Menavino and Giorgievits was probably influenced by many factors and it would be pure speculation to list what contributed to his final decision. Maybe, seeing as Giorgievits penned his two contributions to the volume in 1545, Valgrisi saw an opportunity to disperse Menavino's work to provide a foil for Giorgievits, while increasing its readership seeing as Giorgievits was so widely read at the time. In 1545 the Venetian Council of Ten—the most powerful institution of government in Venice—decreed that nothing could be published without the consent of the author. This fact alone might provide proof than Menavino had to be involved in the book's publication. However, the Council also decreed in the same year that the author's heirs could also grant a publisher the requisite authority to publish someone's work

²² Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 90.

²³ Patrick King, *Printing in Venice, 1501-1564* (Stony Stratford, Bucks: Patrick King Ltd., 1992), 53.

²⁴ Conor Fahy, "The Venetian Ptolemy of 1548," in *The Italian Book: Studies Presented to Dennis E. Rhodes on his 70th birthday*, ed. Denis V. Reidy (London: The British Library, 1993), 90.

²⁵ Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers*, 66.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

posthumously.²⁷ The relationship between writer, publisher and the text itself was indeed intricate. Since neither Menavino nor Valgrisi note when exactly Menavino completed his work, discerning a motive behind his composition and subsequent publication is difficult.

Analyzing Menavino's dedication also highlights the complex relationship between printer and writer. In it Menavino tells his dedicatee, the King of France, Henry II, of his ten years of servitude under the sultans Bayazid and Selim, whose incredible might, "is evident to all the world."²⁸ Menavino implores *Il Roi de la France* to, "make an operation against our common enemy, the Turk, as this operation is reserved for you alone, as you are the first born of the sacred Church."²⁹ He entreats his reader to allow the truth of his words to compensate for the inelegance of his writing style, and he concludes his dedication by pledging himself as the king's "humble and most truthful servant."³⁰

The tone and message of this dedication are incongruous with the tone and moral of the body of the text. While his dedication seems to urge the king to arms against the infidel—a very common motif in books of Menavino's subject—Menavino's words do not paint his former captors as brutal, as necessarily heretical, or even worthy of attacking. Menavino does not recount any atrocities committed against himself, Christian people or nations, and moreover, the military history he provides in *Il Quinto Libro* does not mention the Ottoman incursions into the Balkans, rather emphasizing the wars of succession among Bayazid's sons. So how can one explain this disconnect? After all, Giorgievits' dedication, appearing in the very same volume, matches precisely the tone

²⁷ Ibid., 73-76.

²⁸ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 8.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

and message of his text. Giorgievits' dedication to Charles V sounds almost identical, though the latter profusely embellishes his words with complements and pleasantries:

There was never, in the last seven hundred years of Christianity, a more powerful Emperor, no one more replete with victories, nor more inclined with the courage to fight this war, nor more educated in the practice of war. For around seven hundred years the armies of the Turks have been superior, and until this moment no one has appeared, because no one is equal to you in riches, in fortune, and in good will.³¹

However, while Menavino and Giorgievits share dedicatory styles and messages, it is in the congruity with the body of their texts that they differ. The words of the latter are teeming with outright hate and appropriately follow a dedication that asks Charles V to wage war against the Turks. This leads one to call into question the sincerity of Menavino's dedication.

Dedications were a subset of a much larger system of patronage that authors of that time craved. A dedication could indeed serve many disparate ends from the author's point of view: to solicit money, a job, or even celebrity endorsement from the dedicatee. For example, some forty-one different humanistic works were dedicated to Cosimo de' Medici (for instance the first Italian translation of Thucydides in 1545, published by Vincenzo Valgrisi)³² and in return he gave the authors books, money, houses, and jobs in Florence's university.³³ Regardless whether the dedication bore fruit for the author, it is clear that money was usually the goal. There exist many examples in which the author's dedication did successfully lead to the material gain of the author, most significantly that of Andrea Mattioli of Siena, whose translations of Greek physician Dioscorides were dedicated to Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol, and who was subsequently appointed doctor

³¹ Bartolomeo Giorgievits, "La Misera così de i prigionieri, come anco de Christiani, che vivono sotto il tributo del Turco, insieme co i costumi, & cerimonie di quella nazione in casa, & alla Guerra," in *I cinque libri delle legge, religione, et vita de' turchi: et della corte, et alcune guerre del Gran Turco* (Venice: Appresso Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1548), 205.

³² King, *Printing in Venice*, 53.

³³ Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers*, 52.

to the sons of the emperor.³⁴ In fact, as there were often financial agreements between the authors and their publishers, often times the latter would write the dedication. Valgrisi, Menavino’s publisher, for example, is documented as having composed the dedication to Francesco Contareni, which appears in his publication of Tacitus, which was the first translation into the Italian vernacular.³⁵ Thus, it is very possible that Valgrisi mandated that Menavino and Giorgievits write dedications in the tone that they did. However there is no evidence that Menavino personally gained from composing his dedication he did. Given that dedications had motives and purposes, Menavino’s sincerity is questionable.

Could *I Cinque Libri* have even reached the hands of its dedicatee in the first place? Could it have reached Paris? Yes. Is there any evidence directly proving that it did? No. Being published in a Venetian printing house certainly enhanced the degree of the book’s dispersion. Venice had by the end of the fifteenth century established itself as the center of both Italian and European printing. An analysis by Amadeo Quodam of the holdings of the British Library reveal Venice’s dominance in the world of printing as unquestionable (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3. Quodam’s estimates of editions printed 1465-1600 (percentages of total output)

	1465-1600	1465-1500	1501-25	1526-50	1551-75	1576-1600
Venice	52.4	42.7	48.9	73.7	61.6	40.7
Rome	11.4	15.0	16.8	7.8	4.3	13.8
Florence	8.7	7.7	8.0	5.2	8.8	12.3
Milan	5.1	9.0	8.8	1.9	2.6	3.1
Bologna	3.6	4.6	5.8	3.3	3.1	1.7
Brescia	2.0	3.0	0.7	0.7	3.3	1.6
Naples	1.7	1.8	1.2	1.3	1.6	2.5
Ferrara	1.7	1.2	0.9	0.7	1.6	3.3

Source: Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers*, 6.

³⁴ Fahy, “The Venetian Ptolemy of 1548,” 90.

³⁵ King, *Printing in Venice*, 50.

Venice's immense trade network allowed books to be distributed around the Mediterranean and throughout Europe. Many of the wealthiest publishing houses actually had agents in various cities in Italy or Europe who helped disperse their volumes. Vincenzo Valgrisi was no different. According to data he gave to the Church during the Inquisition, "he had outlets in Padua, Bologna, Macerata, Foligno, Recanati, Lanciano, Frankfurt, and Lyons."³⁶ This is supported by the fact that all three editions of Menavino printed in German were published in Frankfurt, in both 1563 and 1577. One could trace *I Cinque Libri* as reaching as far away as Lyons, but there exists no evidence that it reached Paris or the hands of *Il Roi*.

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Menavino's education was integral to both determining his place within the harem and his first encounters with the unknown religion of Islam. His schooling in Italy meant that he was part of a small percentage of the population, and has implications that he came from a more privileged background. Moreover it implies that he was already familiar with Christianity, and he claims that in the preface to *Il Primo Libro* that he "never forgot the Christian faith."³⁷ But one cannot determine to what extent his loyalties to Christianity affected his absorption of Islam. His words are the only tool to gauge this extent, and the indication is that he did not comprehend Islam strictly in comparison to Christianity.

At this juncture, we have, to the best possible degree, a conception of Menavino's pre-captivity life, and the circumstances that could have contributed to the completion and production of *I Cinque Libri* after his captivity. As the paucity of information he provides hinders us from uncovering certainties about his life, and his book's production,

³⁶ Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers*, 35.

³⁷ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 15.

it becomes futile to speculate any further. That is to say, the focus of this investigation cannot linger on *how* or *why* he wrote this book, but rather *that* he wrote it. If he had not, no matter the motive, the voices of thousands of Christian slaves to the Ottoman sultan would have remained unheard. He was only one man, and this is only one book, but without them, the portal into the world of young Christians in Muslim captivity would never have been opened.

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Chapter 2 Menavino & His Demographic

When Menavino and his father set sail for Venice they entered into a dangerous maritime world. “No ship’s captain setting off on a peaceful commercial voyage ever knew whether he would reach his destination. Any voyage might end with his ship captured, his cargo plundered, and he himself, his passengers, and his crew sold into slavery.”³⁸ Menavino and his father certainly validate Peter Earle’s statement. Piracy was abundant and relatively unchecked, save maybe Venice’s unceasing war with the Uskoks of Senj. The complacency and complicity of the major powers with interests in the Mediterranean fostered and sustained this state of anarchy. In the East, the Ottomans directly endorsed pirates, most notable the Barbary corsairs.³⁹ The sultan was in fact entitled to a certain percentage of their booty and, in return, the Ottomans would not hinder Barbary attacks on Christian shipping. In the West, internal rivalries prevented Christendom from uniting against this menace. Rather than extinguish, Christian nations employed the pirates to disrupt the trade of a rival.

On land, most notably in the Balkans, the life and freedom of Christians were equally precarious. Even before the fall of Constantinople the Ottomans were traipsing across southeastern Europe. An earthquake on the night of March 1, 1354 destroyed all the Byzantine fortresses at Gallipoli, and Sultan Orhan’s son Suleiman occupied all of them, firmly establishing an Ottoman presence on European soil.⁴⁰ With victories at Chermanon in 1371, on the Plains of Kosovo in 1389, and Nicopolis in 1396, the

³⁸ Peter Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970), 6.

³⁹ A pirate operates with complete personal freedom, while a corsair is a type of pirate that operates under the patronage of a sovereign nation.

⁴⁰ Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, trans. Norman Itkowitz and Colin Imber, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), 9.

Ottomans absorbed thousands of Christians into their jurisdiction. Theodore Spandounes claimed that in the time of Bayazid II 1,112,000 Christians paid him tribute.⁴¹ Sometime in the late-fourteenth century the Ottomans conceived a new way to tax these Christian subjects by a system called *devshirme*. The *devshirme* was a human levy—the sultan’s army had the right to enter any town and collect the requisite percentage of Christian boys. Around five or six thousand boys were seized from their parents (or occasionally offered up by them) and forced into the sultan’s service. Though only a few of these boys would become *icoglans*, like Menavino, the rest comprised the foundation for the Janissary corps, which meant they had to denounce the Christian faith, take a Muslim name, and get circumcised.⁴² Again, as a lack of unity among Christian princes allowed and exacerbated Mediterranean piracy, so too did it fail to cohere on the battlefields of southeastern Europe. Except the victories of the Hungarian John Hunyadi at Belgrade in 1440, the sultan’s progress in the region was unimpeded. This freedom in turn permitted the flourishing of *devshirme*, which would replenish the sultan’s slave and military entourage through the end of the seventeenth century.⁴³

Whether at sea or on land Christian boys were on the frontline in a constant zone of contact, where the expansion of the Ottoman Empire collided with the various princes of Christendom. Mario Apostolov defines this zone as the line stretching from Vienna to Mecca, which separated *Dar-ul-Islam*, the domain of Islam, and *Dar-ul-Harb*, the zone of confrontation against non-Muslims.⁴⁴ The capture of Menavino and others at sea, and the seizure of boys through *devshirme* placed these unfortunate young Christians on the

⁴¹ Theodore Spandounes, *Delle historie et origine de principi de Turchi, ordine delle corte, loro rito et costumi. Lucca: V. Busdiago, 1550*, trans. and ed. Donald M. Nichol (New York: Cambridge University Press 1997), 121.

⁴² Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries* (London: Saqi Books, 1994), 37.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴⁴ Mario Apostolov, *The Christian-Muslim frontier: a zone of contact, conflict or cooperation* (New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2004), 11.

vanguard of this zone of confrontation. They embodied the collision of East and West, Islam and Christianity, the Ottoman Empire and Christendom.

The political and diplomatic maneuvers (or lack thereof) of the major players in the Mediterranean region did not merely provide the means by which Menavino and other Christians were captured, these maneuvers directly influenced his and their entrance into the service of the sultan. The sultan was the benefactor of Barbary corsairs, who disrupted Christian shipping well into the eighteenth century. But what exactly did it mean to be captured by Turkish pirates? Or similarly, ensnared by *devshirme*? What was the procedure and how did the procedure affect these Christians absorption of their new surroundings? Menavino's captivity was indeed part of the larger collision taking place in the Mediterranean.

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Levantine Diplomacy, Briefly

The political world of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Mediterranean is well-trodden historical ground; historians have approached this period from many different angles—via religion, commerce or culture. It is not the objective here to provide a striking new insight that challenges or means to question the explications provided by historians of this arena, but to instead, at the very least, explain the political world of Menavino's time, and how this world influenced Menavino.

Halil Inalcik calls Mehmed the Conqueror, “the true founder of the Ottoman Empire.”⁴⁵ After seizing Constantinople, Mehmed concerned himself with ensuring the glory of his empire's future capital, taking pains to repopulate it. He even prevented the

⁴⁵ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 29.

sack of Hagia Sofia, despite the claims of Christian polemicists.⁴⁶ With his new capital in order, he renewed his focus on expansion in southeastern Europe. In 1480 the worst fears of Christendom seemed to be realized when a force led by Gedik Ahmed, a zealous Muslim intent on ravaging Christian territory, landed a force at Otronto, on the southeastern coast of the Italian peninsula. Italy braced for a full-scale invasion, and the pope himself prepared to flee to France.⁴⁷ However, the death of Mehmed and the ascension of his son Bayazid II would prevent this from manifesting.

Bayazid focused initially on his rivalry with his brother Cem, who continually challenged Bayazid's claim to the throne. But after the latter put the former to flight multiple times, Bayazid decided to pay the pope and the Knights of Rhodes to keep his petulant brother imprisoned, and initiated roughly fifteen years of peace between the Sublime Porte and Christendom. Simultaneously, he focused on consolidation of his empire rather than expanding it, much to the chagrin of Gedik Ahmed, whose frustration led to his own execution. The death of Cem in 1495, however, marked the recommencement of Ottoman military activity, this time against the Republic of Venice.

At the outset of what would become a three-year war, the Turkish Grand Vezier offered what would prove to be an extremely foreboding and prescient warning to the Republic: "Tell the Signoria that they have done with wedding the sea; it is our turn now."⁴⁸ The armies of the sultan soon seized the former Venetian ports at Coron and Modon (where Menavino stopped en route to Constantinople) in Greece, and the Battle of Zonchio in 1499 "shattered" Venetian naval supremacy.⁴⁹ By the beginning of the

⁴⁶ Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East & West: Renaissance humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 66.

⁴⁷ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 29.

⁴⁸ Quoted in John Julius Norwich, *A History of Venice* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 383.

⁴⁹ Lester J. Libby, "Venetian Views of the Ottoman Empire from the Peace of 1503 to the War of Cyprus," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, no. 4 (Winter, 1978): 103.

sixteenth century the Republic were forced to weigh their commercial interests against their territorial claims. The loss of those long-standing Venetian holdings in Greece symbolized that she was ceding control of the Eastern Mediterranean to the sultan.⁵⁰ The Treaty of 1503 then formalized both observations: Venice considered commerce as more important than territory, and the Turk ruled the seas of the Levant.

The Ottomans not only proved their military might on land, but also that they could dominate the seas as well. Their influence extended – throughout the sixteenth century corsairs operating with the Ottoman patronage would enjoy free reign from Cyprus to the Bay of Biscay.

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Slaves by the Sea: Pirate Captives (and Captains) of the Mediterranean

Many political and commercial factors contributed to the ubiquity of Mediterranean piracy. The dependence on the sea-borne trade provided the opportunities that made the Mediterranean world “a paradise for the corsair.”⁵¹ This dependence was accompanied by an incessant internal bickering among Christian states that distracted their collective attention not only from the Ottoman expansion, as Coelius Augustinius Curione noted,⁵² but also from the growth of corsair activity at sea. Rather than presenting a unified front against the pirates, both Christian and Muslim states used them mercenarily to undermine the trading operations of a competing nation. Following the

⁵⁰ Palmira Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 22.

⁵¹ Peter Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970), 14.

⁵² Coelius Augustinius Curio, *A Notable History of the Saracens: Briefly and faithfully describing the originall beginning, continuance and successes aswell of the Saracens, as also of Turkes, Souldans, Mamalukes, Assassines, Tartarians and Sophians. With a discourse of their affaires and actes from the byrthe of Mahomet their first peļuish prophet and founder for 700 yeères space. VVhereunto is annexed a compendious chronycle of all their yeerely exploytes, from the sayde Mahomets time tyll this present yeere of grace, 1575*, trans. Thomas Newton (London, 1575), 1.

sixteenth century, the larger European powers, such as England and France, who possessed potent navies to wipe out the North African corsairs, used the corsairs' presence to wedge themselves into the operations of Mediterranean trade. France, for example, adopted a Goldilocks-policy towards corsairs: "France wanted . . . just enough corsairs to eliminate [their] rivals, but not too many."⁵³ Britain also showed its willingness to tame, but not wipe out, corsairs by using concentrated raids on North African pirate dens to establish their superior strength, after which they settled trading agreements with these pirates. In doing so, France and Britain could assert their naval supremacy over the corsairs, and discourage them from attacking British and French shipping.

Venice also refrained from launching a full-scale operation against pirates. The Treaty of 1503 contained a mutual guarantee between the Venetians and the Ottomans to ensure the safety of the others commercial interests. The Venetians thus did not commit any galleys to extinguish piracy so as not to risk raising the ire of the sultan. They hoped that this neutrality would protect their commerce.⁵⁴ However, as the Treaty included an annual Venetian deposit into the Turkish treasury, the Turks effectively viewed the Republic as a vassal state.⁵⁵ Thus the Porte did not commit any galleys to enforce their treaty obligations. With European powers reticent to take up serious arms against the banditry of the Mediterranean, pirates could make any encounter "immediately profitable,"⁵⁶ and whether Christian or Muslim vessel, profit was the only incentive.

It would be false to think that Mediterranean piracy operated in one direction—Muslim attacking Christian shipping. The Uskoks of Senj, a conglomeration of Ottoman,

⁵³ Quoted in Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary*, 16.

⁵⁴ Alberto Tenenti, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice, 1580-1615* trans. Janet Pullan and Brian Pullan, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 17.

⁵⁵ Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy*, 22.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

Austria, and Venetian refugees who inhabited the Dalmatian coast found attacks on Ottoman vessels to be the most lucrative.⁵⁷ Alberto Tenenti, meanwhile, in describing the extent with which the Uskoks disrupted Venetian shipping, asserts that “seldom had so small a group of men created such a persistent international problem.”⁵⁸ Christian pirates from Malta were as vehement and vexing to Ottoman shipping as Muslim corsairs were to Christians. In fact, Maltese pirates were often more cruel towards their captives than their Muslim counterparts, who recognized the monetary value of their captives’ health.⁵⁹ However, neither the Uskoks nor the Maltese were nearly as disruptive and powerful as the Barbary corsairs.

These corsairs originated on the North African coast, most notably in Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers. After the Inquisition and expulsion of the Moors from Spain, the fleeing Muslims established themselves firmly in North Africa, whose coastal topography proved an ideal hive for piracy, and concentrated their attacks on Spanish shipping. Soon they expanded to target all Christian shipping in general.⁶⁰ Piracy as an occupation flourished because it provided poor Muslims with an opportunity for upward social mobility, and “made both thieving and gambling respectable.”⁶¹ By the turn of the sixteenth century the areas of most intense Barbary activity were around Sardinia, Sicily, Malta, Corsica, and even the Italian mainland itself. The Ottoman expansion in North Africa in the first half of the sixteenth century brought Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers under Ottoman control, and with that the sultan’s patronage of Barbary activity followed. “In

⁵⁷ Catherine Wendy Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj: Piracy, Banditry, and Holy War in the Sixteenth-Century Adriatic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 175.

⁵⁸ Tenenti, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice*, 3.

⁵⁹ Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary*, 64.

⁶⁰ Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Barbary Corsairs* (Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 8.

⁶¹ Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary*, 18.

the sixteenth century the Barbary corsairs were the allies of the Turks in a general maritime war between Islam and Christianity.”⁶²

There was no uniform method by which the Barbary corsairs captured Christian shipping, though most would use cover to surprise their victim. The human slave was the most profitable commodity that a Barbary corsair could seize. Thus, upon overrunning a certain Christian vessel, the manner in which they dealt with their human booty was crucial. The reports of Barbary boarding reveal that they were extremely well organized and did not quibble amongst themselves. Moreover, they needed to sell their captives upon reaching shore, so they did not abuse them, as Islam teaches kindness towards slaves. These slaves did not have to wait long once on land to reach the market.

Constantinople, Algiers, and Tunis all had massive slave markets presided over by a representative of the sultan.⁶³ According the Qur’an, one-fifth of all the booty must go to God, or in this case, the state. The sovereign’s representative would review every slave purchased and had the right to take any he deemed suitable. In Menavino’s case, he was

Figure 1: Slave market in Algiers, from Peter Earle, *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary*, 83.

a gift from the pirates to the sultan. Each slave’s physical health was inspected, and his teeth, mouth, and hands were of special interest as they were supposedly the best indicators of fitness.

⁶² Ibid., 47.

⁶³ Ibid., 12.



Within these markets the pirates considered how to disperse each slave to achieve the maximum amount of economic utility and benefit to them. Menavino, for example was considered by his captors to be best used as a gift of thanks to the sultan due to his youthful appearance. His father for example posed more of a conundrum to the *Chiamalli*. “As a merchant he would not expect to be a slave long. Since privateering was a business, the privateer had no interest in feeding a merchant, poor as a slave but rich as a merchant.”⁶⁴ Groups of Christians spread throughout the slave markets of the Mediterranean with the sole charge of buying Christians put on the auction block and shipping them back to Europe. This system of redemption was integral to these markets. For example, when Algerian pirates captured John Fox and his companions and took them to Algiers, only the well-connected owner and the master of the ship were ransomed, while the poor deckhands endured horrific slavery rowing in the galleys of their captors.⁶⁵ As Menavino’s father was quickly sold by his captors, and then, with the help of Genoese merchants, freed to meet with his son, it is likely that he was redeemed

⁶⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁵ John Fox, “The Worthy Enterprise of John Fox, in Delivering 266 Christians Out of the Captivity of the Turks at Alexandria, the third of January 1577.” In *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity narratives from early modern England*, ed. Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 61.

in a similar fashion, though Menavino never mentions the institution of redemption in *I Cinque Libri*.

More likely than not Barbary corsairs, operating under the name *Chiamalli* were Menavino's captors. However, Menavino himself never attributes his capture to the Barbary corsairs, which leaves open the possibility that it was not a Barbary ship, but rather an independent coalition of pirates instead. Menavino and his companions were human currency—Menavino was but one of innumerable Christians who entered Ottoman service in this method, destined to serve within the Seraglio or the oars of Turkish galleys. Halil Inalcik notes that according to one estimate, by the seventeenth Century more than twenty thousand captives came through Constantinople per year.⁶⁶

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Slaves by Land: The Ottoman Institution of 'Devshirme'

Basilike Papoulia worked in the early 1960s compiling Oriental and western sources to analyze the function of *devshirme* in Ottoman society. V.L. Ménage's quotes her description of it as, "the forcible removal, in the form of a tribute, of children of the Christian subject from their ethnic, religious, and cultural environment and their transplantation into the Turkish-Islamic environment with the aim of employing them in the service of the Palace, the army, and the state."⁶⁷ Similarly, Ira M. Lapidus calls the *devshirme* a "'tax' in manpower taken from the Christian population."⁶⁸ Lewis Coser describes it as a "social invention not to be found in other Bureaucratic Empires . . .

⁶⁶ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 78.

⁶⁷ Quoted in V.L. Ménage, "Some Notes on the 'devshirme,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 29, no. 1 (1966): 64.

⁶⁸ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 258.

[*Devshirme*] was the periodical levies of young male of the sultan's Christian subjects."⁶⁹ These definitions do share the basic idea of this novel political tool: the sultan removed Christian boys from conquered territories to furnish his massive slave corps, as well as his army. These definitions also share the implication of how vital this system was to the sustenance of Ottoman power. Machiavelli poignantly noted that the Ottoman Empire was an absolute monarchy dependent on slavery.⁷⁰ However, the dependency was cyclical in that while the *kul* drove Ottoman society, the slaves were psychologically indoctrinated to be dependent on the sultan. As Halil Inalcik states, "Above all, they were slaves of the Ottoman sultan, forming around him an imperial group and completely dependent on him for all things."⁷¹

Of the roughly six thousand boys who each year were victims of *devshirme*, only about two hundred went on to serve the sultan as an *icoglan*. The bulk of these indoctrinated Christian boys comprised the Janissary corps, a well-trained and well-educated group of soldiers who would comprise the core of the Ottoman army. First instituted during the reign of Murad II in 1438, the Janissaries grew under Mehmed II because he needed a large army to conquer Constantinople.⁷² Over time, as former Janissary officers rose to the highest levels of government, the dependency they once had on the sultan was reversed. Selim I was the first to use the support of the Janissaries to help overthrow and force the abdication of his father Bayazid II, even though his father preferred another of his brothers.⁷³ From then on, it became necessary that any son of the

⁶⁹ Lewis A. Coser, "The Alien as a Servant of Power: Court Jews and Christian Renegades," *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 5 (October 1972): 578.

⁷⁰ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 78.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁷² Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 27. *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷³ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 32.

sultan wishing to ascend the throne did not need the blessing of his father, but rather the support and loyalty of the Janissaries.

Returning to the levy, while there seems to be agreement regarding what *devshirme* was, there is disagreement on how the system of *devshirme* was enacted. That is to say, was it a despicable institution by which children were wrenched from their parents, or was an ingeniously novel form of sustaining and replenishing those offices directly serving the sultan?

Godfrey Goodwin outlines what a typical levy entailed. In theory, every seven years any subordinate district would begin preparing for the arrival of the sultan's troops months in advance by comprising a list of the forty most able-bodied boys. He writes, "Whatever ambitions families might or might not have, it was an unhappy day when the troop trudged into the village."⁷⁴ The selected boys stood waiting with their fathers while the soldiers inspected their physical fitness and tested their intelligence by using phrenology. They weeded out the weaker boys, or those who were only children to finalize the list. They then marched out of town, leaving their weeping family members to return to their fields while they could dream of their future successes and prospects.⁷⁵

Bartolomeo Giorgievits, who was widely read and extremely influential in shaping the European opinion of the Turks, painted a similar picture. He outlines the levy in his supplement bounded with *I Cinque Libri*, on Christian servants of the Grand Turk:

It is legal for the Turk to select the best of the [Christian] boys; these [boys] are circumcised and removed from their parents' eyes to be elevated to be soldiers, never to return to see their parents again, and this makes it easy for the boy to forget Christ . . . No one could possibly put into words the screaming, crying, and sighing when one faces this separation . . . The father sees his son, who has been

⁷⁴ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 36.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

raised in the service of Christ, to be enlisted in the army of the Devil to fight against Christ.⁷⁶

M.E. Yapp notes that this portrayal of *devshirme* “left a lasting image in European views of Ottoman government.”⁷⁷

There were those for whom the cruelty of the system did not detract from its sheer ingenuity, its practicality, and its simplicity. Through this institution the Ottoman sultan had a constantly refreshing source of boys with whom he could replenish his army and his slave corps. In doing so the Ottomans established a system in which personal standing was augmented by merit, and birth meant nothing, unless of course you were the progeny of a sultan. Ogier Ghislan de Busbecq, the emissary of the Hapsburgs in Constantinople lauded this mentality. Busbecq saw young Christians as they entered the city, and worked hard to secure the freedom of Spanish sailors; meanwhile he was in continuous contact with the Grand Vezier Roostem Pasha, a Croat by birth. Busbecq writes, “In Turkey . . . no value is attached to anything but personal merit.”⁷⁸ The merits of *devshirme* aside, it was indubitably a uniquely Ottoman institution that not only provided the sultan with a constant supply of servants, but also suctioned thousands of Christian boys in to Ottoman service every year. The exact number is of some debate, as Inalcik and Coser both agree that it was three thousand per year, while Goodwin believes it was between five and six thousand.⁷⁹

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⁷⁶ Bartolomeo Giorgievits, “La miseria de’ prigionieri, de’ Christiani, che vivono sotto il Gran Turco, et altre cose Turchesche,” in *I cinque libri delle legge, religione, et vita de’ turchi: et della corte, et alcune guerre del Gran Turco* (Venice: Appresso Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1548), 216-17.

⁷⁷ M.E. Yapp, “Europe in the Turkish Mirror,” *Past & Present*, no. 137 (November 1992): 148.

⁷⁸ Ogier Ghislan de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, trans. Edward Seymour Forster (London: Sickle Moon Books, 2001), 14.

⁷⁹ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 78. Lewis A. Coser, “The Alien as a Servant of Power,” 578. Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 37.

Devshirme brought thousands of new Christians under the sultan's direct control. Simultaneously the galleys of Muslim corsairs brought in thousands more additional captives to Constantinople. By both these means, young Christians in significant numbers unwillingly became the first frontier between the Muslim and Christian world. As Menavino recounts in his own brief story of his initiation, these boys had the opportunity to engage in direct personal contact with the Ottoman sultan. Menavino and Bayazid even conversed in Italian.⁸⁰ This proximity was only achieved however, as the result of the political affairs of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Mediterranean, both on land and at sea. But the proximity did afford these boys an opportunity to learn the rules of Islam in a way drastically different from most European scholars of the day. Menavino's discussion of Islam is the result of this closeness, and his strikingly different approach should be seen as representative of his contemporary Christian captives. His presentation as written in *I Cinque Libri* buttresses the notion that amongst the collisions between the known and the unknown, the same and the other, the East and the West, continual contact and interaction provides the best basis for coexistence and comprehension.

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⁸⁰ Giovanni Antonio Menavino, *I cinque libri delle legge, religione, et vita de' turchi: et della corte, et alcune guerre del Gran Turco: di Giovantonio Menavino Genovese da Vultri. Oltre cio, una prophetia de' Mahomettani, et la miseria de' prigioni, de' Christiani, che vivono sotto il Gran Turco, et altre cose Turchesche, non piu vedute: tradotte da M. Lodovico Domenichi* (Venice: Appresso Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1548), 14.

Chapter 3

The Exposure of Christian Captives to Islam: Introducing the First Two Libri

In entering into the sultan's service, Menavino and those like him were stripped of their own liberty, and suddenly made "dependent on [the sultan] for all things." In trying to comprehend this drastic change we would err to believe that Menavino could anticipate just how this dependence would manifest itself; but a better approach is to consider how, faced with the sheer size and foreignness of Ottoman society, these young Christians began to absorb and assimilate into this new world. More specifically, as it was the foundation of Ottoman government and daily life, we must discover how these boys experienced Islam. How they did so would not merely define their tenure in captivity, but also, for those able to permanently emancipate themselves, how it would be reflected later in their lives.

A difficult task confronts those trying to extrapolate and infer from the primary accounts available how these boys experienced Islam: can we know for sure whether they converted to Islam or not? For those entering through *devshirme* conversion was a certainty, as each boy was given a Muslim first name, such as Ali, Sinan or Osman, and circumcised to finalize their acceptance of the Faith.⁸¹ The certainty of Menavino's conversion is not based on his own words, however, because he neither affirms nor denies such an event. Did he withhold Christianity even in the constant presence of the Turks, as his father warned him as they conversed for the last time? Did he even have a choice? Modern historians such as Godfrey Goodwin and Halil Inacli show that conversion to Islam was incumbent on any boy entering into the *Enderun Kolej*. The goal was not simply to win over more Christians to the Muslim faith, but, as was the case for Menavino and the boys like him, to also instill in each of them the deepest devotion

⁸¹ Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries* (London: Saqi Books, 1994), 37.

and admiration of the sultan, so that serving him was not merely a duty, but a privilege and an honor.

To be truly devoted to the sultan it was necessary that Menavino be a Muslim, so as to fully understand the mentality and actions of his master. Conversion, however, depended on the position one was destined to occupy in the service of the Grand Turk. Menavino was an *icoglan* (“inside boy, or page of the privy household”⁸²), and despite his assertion either way, probably required him to convert to be allowed in such close presence and service of the Grand Turk. Inalik, incidentally cites Menavino to help conjure the mindset of the *icoglan*, especially regarding his attitudes towards Islam: “According to Menavino, who had himself been an *icoglan*, the Palace education aimed to produce ‘the warrior statesman and loyal Muslim who at the same time should be a man of letters and polished speech, profound courtesy and honest morals.’”⁸³ For Bartolomeo Giorgievits, who endured extremely harsh captivity in the Turkish galleys, conversion was not mandatory, such positions were occupied almost exclusively by non-Muslims. John Fox, captured by eight corsair galleys in 1563 and served in Alexandria for fourteen years, was another galley slave who did not convert.

For those in the position of Giorgievits and Fox conversion could greatly improve their quality of life. In fact, to many in Europe the Muslim world offered an opportunity to flee the hardships of their lives. As Nabil Mater writes in the introduction to Daniel Vitkus’s collection of English captivity narratives: “At a time when ‘every major European town and city’ had ‘thousands’ of poor, many viewed conversion to Islam and emigration to the Muslim dominions as the only way to start new lives . . . Europeans

⁸² Ibid., 37.

⁸³ Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, trans. Norman Itkowitz and Colin Imber (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), 79.

converted to Islam in large numbers.”⁸⁴ Mater is not speaking solely about captives converting to Islam; however in highlighting that ordinary Europeans chose to cast of Christianity for Islam, he implies that temporal comfort trumped Biblical promises of eternal happiness for those in poverty.

Writing at the end of the seventeenth century, Joseph Pitts, an Englishman captured en route to Bilbao at the age of fourteen, attributes this one-way street of conversion to a fundamental flaw in the exposition of Christianity to children. He claims that poor Christians who turn Muslim do so because the Christian religion was not “properly revealed” in early childhood education, and contends that he is “verily persuaded that many poor ignorant souls which have turned Mohammetans would never have done what they did had they been catechized as they ought: no man knows how far the benefit of a good and pious education extends.”⁸⁵ Pitts himself converted to Islam while a slave in Algiers. Menavino meanwhile received the strict schooling in Islam that Pitts saw as missing from Christian catechism. Though Pitts wrote exactly two centuries after Menavino’s capture, it is clear that his conversion and Menavino’s education allowed both of them a remarkable perspective of Islam. Both men write two of the only existing European accounts of the *hajj*–pilgrimage to Mecca—but their strikingly similar elucidations of Islam exemplify that Christian boys such as themselves possessed a firm grasp of Islam.

The five years Menavino spent in the *Enderun Kolej* were the most vital five years of his captivity because in these years the eunuchs of the Seraglio nurtured his

⁸⁴ Nabil Mater, “Introduction: England and Mediterranean Captivity, 1577-1704,” in *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity narratives from early modern England*, ed. Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 2.

⁸⁵ Joseph Pitts, “A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans, with an Account of the Author’s Being Taken Captive, 1704,” in *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity narratives from early modern England*, ed. Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 224.

growth as a Muslim, and guaranteed that he knew every nuance of Islamic faith and practice. He and his fellow pages lived strictly regimented daily lives under the care of the *ak agas*—or white eunuchs, who were their taskmasters—with the goal of instilling obedience and devotion to the Grand Turk. Halil Inalcik writes, “All means . . . were used to inculcate this ideal in [these] young men . . . destined to fill the highest offices of the empire.”⁸⁶ Their education was so regulated, reveals Inalcik, that every part of their day was apportioned for a specific purpose, and moreover, that every infraction was met with an appropriate punishment, even death if necessary. However, Menavino tells us that while punishments were harsh, any page who performed impressively would be rewarded with an appearance and recitation to the sultan himself.⁸⁷

The sultan personally had much invested in the *icoglans*. Bayazid II, under whom Menavino served, was particularly involved in the selection of the *icoglans*, and would occasionally preside over their initial inspection. Menavino, after all, recounts how sultan Bayazid interviewed him, and Menavino, despite his age, used the rare opportunity to plea for his father’s freedom.⁸⁸ The infrastructure of the *Enderun Kolej*, which Menavino outlines in *Il Terzo Libro*, provides a sketch of what was taught Menavino in his five-year education, and who taught him. The precepts of Islam were not the lone subject matter, as four different eunuchs acted as professors, revealing the important Turkish and Persian books to their students.⁸⁹ With an education unrivaled in its comprehensiveness, and with teachers who revealed the religion with immeasurable fluency and dedication, Menavino

⁸⁶ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 79.

⁸⁷ Giovanni Antonio Menavino, *I cinque libri delle legge, religione, et vita de’ turchi: et della corte, et alcune guerre del Gran Turco: di Giovantonio Menavino Genovese da Vultri. Oltre cio, una prophetia de’ Mahomettani, et la miseria de’ prigionj, de’ Christiani, che vivono sotto il Gran Turco, et altre cose Turchesche, non piu vedute: tradotte da M. Lodovico Domenichi* (Venice: Appresso Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1548), 97.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

and his companions absorbed Islam in a manner that was markedly different from fellow Christians and Europeans. Did this rigorous Islamic education have any implications about his own conversion? Learning Islam does not guarantee conversion. However, given this education, his intimate proximity with the sultan, the destiny of his position to be among the highest ranks of Ottoman administration, and that boys indoctrinated in a like manner were given Muslim names and circumcised, it can be stated with a good deal of certainty that Menavino converted to Islam.

The result and display of this knowledge and these circumstances comprises the first two books of *I Cinque Libri*. As the title suggests, *I Cinque Libri* is divided into five parts: *Il Primo Libro: della vita, et legge turchesca; Il Secondo Libro: delle chiese, hospitali, et religione de Turchi et Modo di ministrar giustitia; Il Terzo Libro: del vivere et ordini del Serraglio del Gran Turco; Il Quarto Libro: delle genti d'arme salariate dal Gran Turco & suoi capitani et gentil'huomini; and Il Quinto Libro et Ultimo: dell'essercito della Grecia, et Natolia, et delle battaglie fatte tra I Signori della Turchia.*⁹⁰

Within each book there are anywhere between twenty-three and thirty-six *capitoli*—or, “chapters”—each of which varies in length from a short paragraph to pages in length.

However, the content of *I Cinque Libri* seems to betray the title. It does not discuss the daily life of Constantinopolitan society, nor the legislation of the empire—it focuses solely on the tenets of Islam. But rather than betray, the title enlightens the relationship of Islam and Turkish society. Islam was the society’s foundation and lifeblood, and it circulated throughout every extremity of the Ottoman imperial body. It was the basis for the “laws and life of the Turks.” By commencing his book with a

⁹⁰ Translation: The First Book: of Turkish life and laws; The Second Book: of the churches, hospitals, and religion of the Turks and method of administering justice; The Third Book: of the life in the Grand Turk’s Seraglio; The Fourth Book: of the salaried people at arms of the Grand Turk and his captains; The Fifth Book, and the Last: of the armies of Greece and Anatolia, and the battles for succession between the Noblemen of Turkey.

discussion of Islam Menavino deviates from the templates of contemporaries such as Colio Augustus Curione and Theodore Spandounes. Both men along with Menavino had, in a general sense, a very similar purpose in writing what they did: to shed light on a previously dark and mysterious society for the benefit of their European brethren. However, while Menavino establishes Islam as the necessary first glimpse into Turkish society, Curione and Spandounes both begin their works with Ottoman history, thereby choosing to delay the discussion of Islam until the later sections. Similarly, Bartolomeo Giorgievits begins his *Offspring of the house of Ottomanno* with a list of the Ottoman sultans, and, in a short paragraph, the sultan's major accomplishments. He too chose not to discuss religion until later, and decided that a more effective presentation of the Ottomans began with a history. The difference is representative of a difference in how the West viewed the East, and how the East viewed the East—writers like Curione and Spandounes, regardless of their overall stance towards Islam or the Ottomans, erred in believing that commencing with a history of the Turks provided the best first portal into Turkish society. *Icoglan*s such as Menavino learned to approach the Ottoman from a different perspective, one taught to them in the *Enderun Kolej*. From their time in the palace school they learned that Islam, not history, is the society's foundation, which is why Menavino begins as he does.

While *Il Primo Libro* restricts its discussion of Islam to the main commandments, *Il Secondo Libro* describes how these commandments were manifested in Ottoman society. This description shows that Islam was involved and vital to a wide range of Ottoman institutions, from the administration of hospitals to the criminal justice system. It is this *Libro* that Menavino details the process and itinerary of the *haji*, a fascinating rarity in contemporary European expositions of Islam and the Turks. He again refrains

from asserting positively or negatively that he himself undertook the journey. And again, circumstantial evidence offers clues supporting both assertions. The position of *icoglan* provided young neo-converts to Islam with a chance to witness and take part in the most revered pillar of Islam, one that many lifelong Muslims are unable to complete. In the sources cited here only Joseph Pitts explains the pilgrimage, at the beginning of which he acknowledges the position of the pilgrimage in Islamic practice: “Going on [the] pilgrimage to Mecca is . . . a duty incumbent on every Mussulman, if in a capacity of health and purse, but yet a great many that are in a capacity live in the final neglect of it.”⁹¹ Menavino is absent from his description of the *hajj* while Pitts’ is more of a personal narrative. Though many years and disparate circumstances separate the two, an analysis of Pitts’ account provides a conception of how a former Christian appreciates the *hajj*, if Menavino and his fellow *icoglans* did in fact convert.

Il Primo e Secondo Libri present to the European reader a markedly different conception of the Islamic faith. The form and content of these books are the direct result of the education Menavino received in the *Enderun Kolej* and the closeness to the sultan his position afforded him and his companions. Even he, at the age of twelve, immediately noted a disparity between what his father had taught him of Islam, and what his captors taught him.⁹² Discerning whether Menavino personally did or did not convert to Islam would indeed bolster our understanding of his own individual perspective on the faith, but in reality, the majority of Christian boys in his position did convert. His own religious persuasion should not tarnish the fact that his presentation of Islam is our best insight into how companions serving the Grand Turk comprehended and absorbed their new faith. While the majority of European texts on Islam in the sixteenth century

⁹¹ Pitts, “Religion and Manners of the Mohammedans,” 261.

⁹² Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 16.

underlined its heresy, or its corruption, or its barbarity, Menavino's approach emphasizes its piety, simplicity, and functionality.

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An Icoqlan's Understanding of Islam: Menavino's Il Primo Libro and Johannes Schiltberger

It would be erroneous to believe that each captive had the opportunity to write what Menavino did. He was fortunate enough to successfully escape his captors; and as Nabil Mater reminds us, "for each account that survives of a successful escape, however, there must have been numerous unsuccessful attempts."⁹³ Much of what we know about the infrastructure of the Seraglio in Constantinople comes from a limited supply of European sources. Twentieth-century historians such as Nancy Bisaha, Halil Inalcik and Godfrey Goodwin all cite Menavino as being the foremost European source on the Seraglio and the *Enderun Kolej*. Though M.E Yapp and Kenneth M. Setton mention Giorgievits and Spandounes as the most noteworthy of those discussing the Turks, they acknowledge that both men lack close personal contact with the sultan or even entered the Topkapisaray, the sultan's palace. Yapp and Setton make these concessions because Spandounes, and especially Giorgievits were much more widely read and more voluminously reprinted, thus are considered to provide a better image of the European perception of the Turk, though they may not be the most accurate. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Yapp writes that Giorgievits' work "left a lasting image in European views of Ottoman government;"⁹⁴ Menavino certainly did not have a traceable impact like that of Giorgievits, and despite the fact that editions of *I Cinque Libri* were made in

⁹³ Mater, "Introduction: England and Mediterranean Captivity," 32.

⁹⁴ M.E. Yapp, "Europe in the Turkish Mirror," *Past & Present*, no. 137 (November 1992): 148.

Florence and Frankfurt over the ten years after Valgrisi published it, his dispersion does not rival Giorgivits whose popularity soared throughout the sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries.⁹⁵

Yet, in spite of the popularity of works by Giorgievits and others Menavino had the personal contact with the Grand Turk the others did not. Thus a composition such as Menavino's was both importantly representative of Christians who endured similar travails and markedly distinguishable from his contemporaries who approached Islam from a clearly Western perspective. But while the proportion of Turkish slaves who tried to escape is small, those who succeeded even smaller, and those who recounted their ordeals smaller still, to find another author who served as a page to the sultan, then eventually escaped is extremely important in providing a similar perspective of a similar subject matter as Menavino. Johannes Schiltberger's narrative provides just this perspective, and the similar manner in which he and Menavino discuss Islam provide an

⁹⁵ Kenneth M. Setton, *Western Hostility to Islam and Prophecies of Turkish Doom* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1992), 30.



Figure 2. Cover plate to Schiltberger's *Travels*. Angus Konstam, *Atlas of Medieval Europe* (New York: Thalmus Publishing, 2000), 170.

important thread and validation that Menavino's approach to Islam is akin to that of fellow Christian pages.

Schiltberger's discussions of Islam will provide a fascinating foil for discussing Menavino's *Il Primo Libro*. Schiltberger's story of thirty-two years in the captivity of the Ottomans and Timurids compliments Menavino's own; while Menavino was captured at sea, Bayazid I purloined Schiltberger on land, after the Battle of Nicopolis. Born in 1381 near Munich, he was only fifteen years old when he ventured as a runner to his master and lord, Lienhart Richartinger, who supported King Sigismund at Nicopolis, along the Danube in Bulgaria. The battle, which "marked the climax of the struggle between the Ottomans and the Hungarians for control of the lower Danube,"⁹⁶ resulted in the demolition of Sigismund's troops – many were killed, and more made prisoner, including Schiltberger himself. Sultan Bayazid was so distraught at seeing so much Turkish blood

⁹⁶ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 16.

spilt that he, “was torn by great grief and swore he would not leave their blood unavenged.”⁹⁷ He ordered his troops to gather every prisoner before him the following day, and each soldier brought as many Christians as possible. Each set of prisoners was bound together by rope around the neck. Bayazid ordered the execution of all of them. Schiltberger watched as the two other prisoners on his rope were beheaded. “When it came to my turn, the [sultan’s] son saw me and ordered that I should be left alive, and I was taken to the other boys, because non under XX years of age were killed, and I was scarcely sixteen years old.”⁹⁸

Schiltberger was led through Greece to Adrianopolis, then to Gallipoli, and finally to the then Ottoman capital Bursa. While some of his companions were shipped as gifts to the kings of Babylon and Persia, he remained in the sultan’s service. He writes:

I was taken to the palace of the Turkish king (in Bursa); there for six years I was obliged to run on my feet with the others, wherever he went, it being the custom that the lords have people to run before them. After six years I deserved to be allowed to ride, and I rode six years with him, so that I was twelve years with him.⁹⁹

Schiltberger was a runner, not an *icoglan*, which meant he did not receive as thorough an education as Menavino, if he received one at all. Schiltberger was absorbed before *devshirme* rose in ubiquity – the first documented example of an imperially condoned levy on Christian boys is in 1438, during the reign of Murad II.¹⁰⁰ Moreover his capture occurred before the creation of the *Enderun Kolej*, which becomes apparent when his discussion of Islam is juxtaposed with Menavino’s. Yet, while his discussion of Islam is lacking, Schiltberger also recounts a brief history of the rise of Mohammed and the

⁹⁷ Johannes Schiltberger, *The bondage and travels of Johann Schiltberger, a native of Bavaria, in Europe, Asia, and Africa, 1396-1427*, trans. J Buchan Telfer, ed. Karl Friedrich Neumann (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰⁰ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 27.

relation between Christ and the Prophet, both of which Menavino declines to mention. To utilize Schiltberger is to highlight both the continuity that existed between his and Menavino's approach to Islam, and moreover to exhibit how Menavino's experiences in the *Enderun Kolej* bolstered his absorption of Islam beyond that of his Bavarian predecessor. Within the spectrum bounded by these accounts we can envision the conception Christian captives developed of Islam.

At the beginning of *Il Primo Libro* Menavino provides the account of his inspection upon disembarking the corsair ship in Constantinople: "The interpreter beginning to question us about certain things relating to our Italy . . . first asked us if we knew how to read; and I and another of my companions quickly responded affirmatively; and not only read, but then duly to write."¹⁰¹ The education he received in Vultri from his tutor very much contributed to his selection as an *icoglan*, and *i capitoli* that follow this narration show the products of that selection. His enrollment in the *Enderun Kolej* means that the knowledge he exhibits in this first book is not the result of a long and gradual learning process, rather the basic rules of Islam were explicitly taught to him. The method that he uses to explicate Islam's commandments is probably similar to the way it was first revealed to him.

Menavino's discussion of the Islamic faith is very simply organized: he lists the eight laws of Islam, describes their exposition, and concludes with a description of the Seven Deadly Sins. The Eight Laws are as follows, according to Menavino:

The FIRST commandment . . . says that God has created everything, and therefore all need to believe in him and equally the prophet Mohammed . . . The SECOND is that every Turk needs with diligence, love, care and reverence . . . honor his father and mother. The THIRD . . . [commands] do not do to someone something that equally you would not want to happen to yourself. The FOURTH is one needs to go at the designated hour to the Mosque. The FIFTH is fast continuously for one

¹⁰¹ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 12.

month of the year. The SIXTH is give alms and sacrifices . . . The SEVENTH is to marry . . . The EIGHTH and last is do not commit murder in any manner.¹⁰²

In this way Menavino introduces the reader to Islam. The fundamental commandments of Islam would certainly remind the Christian reader of their own faith. The first and fourth laws aside, which are specific to Islam, bear a striking similarity to the Ten Commandments. Menavino interestingly does not draw any parallels between the two faiths himself, rather leaving such a task to his reader.

Menavino's predecessors and contemporaries often clearly presented the blatant disparities between Islam and Christianity. It was conventional to portray Islam as the bastard child of Christianity and Judaism. Moreover, it was also common at his time to initiate any treatise on Islam with a hyperbolic depiction of Mohammed as a decadent idolater, which Menavino also eschews. One popular biography, cited by Kenneth M. Setton, claims Mohammed's mind was poisoned by a renegade monk from Rome named Maurus, a protégé of Nicolas, who was killed in his attempts to hijack the Papacy and become the third successor to St. Peter. Maurus, fleeing to the East after his mentor's execution, indoctrinated Mohammed in the "diabolic arts", ensured Mohammed's ascension to the throne of Arabia, where Mohammed followed Maurus's evil intentions to poison Christianity: "And in this way Islam was born."¹⁰³ As Daniel Vitkus highlights, "Islam was narrowly defined and caricatured as a religion of violence and lust-aggressive jihad in this world, and sensual pleasure promised in the next world."¹⁰⁴

Schiltberger does in fact commence his discussion of the Islamic faith with a story of Mohammed's ascension, but it lacks any of the vitriol found in the biographies

¹⁰² Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁰³ Setton, *Western Hostility to Islam*, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Daniel J. Vitkus, "Early Modern Orientalism: Representations of Islam in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe," in *Western Views of Islam in Mediaeval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 217.

mentioned by Vitkus and Setton. Schiltberger's account involves a thirteen-year-old Mohammed fulfilling a prophecy that states that a boy who is followed everywhere by a black cloud would, "be a mighty lord and man, and that he would greatly trouble Christianity." Mohammed, according to Schiltberger, became learned in "Infidel writing" and became the king of Babylon, then making his four closest friends, Omar, Otman, Abubach, and Ali his lieutenants through who he dictated the laws of Islam.¹⁰⁵ Schiltberger, who utilizes this story as means to introduce practices of Islam – as opposed to its precepts – neglects exposing each pillar as Menavino does, a difference which can again be contributed to the latter's education in the Seraglio.

Like Schiltberger, Giorgievits decides to begin his *Offspring of the House of Ottomano* with a history and discusses the Islamic faith after establish the historical framework, rather than vice versa. Of Bayazid I, whose son spared Schiltberger's life, Giorgievits writes, "Baiazetus the first of that name and fourth Emperor of the Turkes, was victorious, but a famous and cruel tyrant. He brought in subjection to his Empire almost all Greece, and was at length vanquished by the most mighty Tamberlane."¹⁰⁶ Of Bayazid II, Menavino's master, he only describes his actions in Moldavia and that he reigned thirty-one years.¹⁰⁷ Giorgievits, though extensively read by literate Europeans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, like Schiltberger, neglects the central tenets of Islam, preferring to initiate his discourse with single paragraph-long biographies of the Ottoman sultans. The differences in both Schiltberger and Giorgievits' approach to Islam

¹⁰⁵ Schiltberger, *The bondage and travels of Johann Schiltberger*, 67.

¹⁰⁶ Bartolomeo Giorgievits, *The ofspring of the house of Ottomanno: and officers pertaining to the greate Turkes court. Whereunto is added Bartholomeus Georgieuz Epitome, of the customes rytes, ceremonies, and religion of the Turkes: with the miserbale affliction of those Christians, whiche liue vnder their captiuitie and bondage. In the ende also is adioyned the maner hovv Mustapha, oldest sonne of Soltan Soliman, twelfth Emperour of the Turkes, was murdered by his father, in the yere of our Lorde 1553*, trans. Hughh Goughe (London: Thomas Marshe, 1569), 11.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

from Menavino's could be attributed to the former two authors' positions of service under the Grand Turk. As they were at more of a distance and were not educated in the *Enderun Kolej*, it may be inferred that not all Christian slaves to the Turk absorbed Islam in a similar manner, and that acceptance and understanding of this new faith was contingent upon what position one held under the sultan. Since Menavino and his fellow *icoglans* were groomed to serve in the state's highest administrative offices, it can with high probability be stated that his presentation symbolizes the most in-depth understanding any Christian slave had of Islam. After all, he was educated for that very reason.

What follows is Menavino's exposition of each of the eight laws, which fascinatingly exemplifies the depth of Menavino's own grasp on Islam, and even his knowledge of the Arabic language. For each law he outlines its origin and how it is to be followed in everyday life. For example, when elaborating on the Fifth law – on fasting at Ramadan – he explains additionally the penalties for breaking the fast, and the festival that ends the month-long fast. His insertion of Arabic to explain certain laws is interesting and puzzling. In doing so was he trying to prove the breadth of his own knowledge to his reader? When describing the exposition of the fourth commandment, he inserts the Arabic chants performed by every Muslim and their respective significations. For example, within this exposition he details how and what each Muslim prays: "They say SABANALLA, SABANALLA, SABANALLA which is to say: God has pity on we unfortunate sinners: they stay . . . until the time when the sacred IMAM returns and sings the specific psalm. . . They pray to God to inspire the Christians, the Jews, the Greeks, and generally all the infidels to revert from their religion."¹⁰⁸ While his use of

¹⁰⁸ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 18.

Arabic is indeed rudimentary, given such a rigorous and lengthy education, he and his companions came to learn the language well.

It was also common for authors writing on Islam to insert quotes of Arabic, most commonly, “LA, ILLA, E ILLALA, MOHEMETH, RESULLULA,”¹⁰⁹ as Menavino writes it; or, “LA IL LACK ILLALLACH”¹¹⁰ according to Schiltberger. Both quotes roughly signify: “There is only one God, Allah, and Mohammed as His Prophet.” Of the sources cited here, Giorgievits displays his mastery of Arabic most convincingly in his *Prophetia de’ Mahomettani*, his first supplement bound alongside *I Cinque Libri*. In it he recounts a Muslim prophecy that predicts the destruction of the Muslim world. He writes it first in Arabic, then translates it into Italian, and he finally concludes by examining how each Arabic word influenced his own interpretation of the Prophecy. Menavino does not do anything so comprehensive, but his minimal use implies a greater knowledge and possible fluency.

It is Menavino’s detailed expositions that provide the most wide view into his own understanding of Islam, and by proxy, that of his companions as well. His expositions undermine the dominant paradigm of his time that painted Islam as overwhelmingly violent and sensual. On *Il Primo Comandamento*, Menavino reveals the insufficiency of blind faith in Islam – that God’s eyes can detect insincere devotion – for He created humans in His own image, and He provided them with eyes to read His word, ears to hear His word, and sanity to comprehend His word. On *Il Terzo Comandamento* Menavino explains what seems to be the Golden Rule. Regarding *Il Sesto Comandamento* he tells that it is the duty of every rich person to give alms to the poor, especially to orphans and to widows who need more care than the rest. Of *Il Ottavo*

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹¹⁰ Schiltberger, *The bondage and travels of Johann Schiltberger*, 74.

Comandamento he writes that God “has a great hatred . . . for blood bathing the ground.”¹¹¹ These expositions transport Menavino’s discussion of Islam to a depth of analysis previously unseen by his targeted reading public.

The final section of *Il Primo Libro* Menavino entitles, “*Questi sono i comandamenti della Turchesca legge,*” in which he outlines the Seven Deadly Sins. They are Pride (*Superbia*), Avarice (*Avaritia*), Lust (*Lussuria*), Fury (*Ira*), Envy (*Invidia*), Sloth (*Accidia*), and Gluttony (*Gola*). As Menavino outlines them, the sins are not laws or commandments with tangible implications and enforcements, rather they direct and advise the general mentality of those who choose to abide by them. They represent the core of God’s directive to his people in how to act in His image. Therefore, Menavino does not enumerate these sins to make a commentary on the functioning of Turkish daily life, nor to highlight the eccentricities of Muslim doctrine – he does so to present a recognizable similarity between Islam and Christianity, that at their respective core, Islam and Christianity have a common mental foundation.¹¹² The publication of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* at the beginning of the fourteenth century propagated the discussion of the Seven Deadly Sins throughout Christendom, so Menavino’s readers would instinctively realize the parallel to which Menavino alluded.

Menavino’s portrayal of Islam, in form and content deviated from the trends of predecessors such as Schiltberger and Giorgievits who eschewed such a cerebral approach. Instead they concentrated on the readily apparent and external difference of

¹¹¹ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 35.

¹¹² R.W. Southern best exemplifies this fundamental similarity in an anecdote contained in his work *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962). The anecdote is as follows: on May 30th, 1254 representatives from the world’s major religions journeyed to Karkorum, in present-day Mongolia, for was Southern calls “the first world debate in modern history between representatives of East and West.” King Louis IX of France sent an envoy on behalf of Latin Christianity to join counterparts representing Nestorian Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. At the conference, an alliance emerged between those professing Islam and both Nestorian and Latin Christianity against Buddhism, because the three acknowledged notable agreements between their faiths, most notably that they were all monotheistic.

the faith. Schiltberger, who for twelve years served the Ottoman Sultan Bayazid I, began his 49th Chapter, entitled “Of the law of the Infidels,” with: “First, he has forbidden the Infidels that they should dare to cut the beard, because it would be against the will of God when he created Adam, the first man, in his Divine image.”¹¹³ His chapter continues by mentioning the law forbidding any man from removing his hat or uncovering his head, the law allowing polygamy, and the law against eating pig’s flesh. Schiltberger chose to neglect the basic tenets of the faith, or maybe he never learned them. Giorgievits returned from captivity as a “herald of Turkish cruelty” and whose writings from 1544 through the publication of his 1553 book *De Turcarum moribus epitome*, which enjoyed immense popularity and a wide distribution. Giorgievits’ most religiously in-depth discussion is his dissection of a Muslim prophecy in which the religion of Mohammed continues to reign for thousands of years, and holding sway over the Red Apple (with an metaphor for Rome or Constantinople, most likely the latter) but then the sword of a Christian prince will put the Turk to flight.¹¹⁴ Giorgievits also does not approach the fundamental laws as Menavino, though he also adds notable insights into the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

Menavino’s approach to Islam is more representative of his fellow *icoglans* than representing their own views. That is to say, his outline provides the reader with a peephole into a fascinating demographic who were forced to relinquish Christianity and study Islam. To say that all *icoglans* thought this way would be speculation. Simply, Menavino provides the best base camp from which we can assume and hypothesize about the mindset of his companions. His time in the *Enderun Kolej* permitted him a markedly

¹¹³ Schiltberger, *The bondage and travels of Johann Schiltberger*, 73.

¹¹⁴ Bartolomeo Giorgievits, “Prophetia de Maometani, et Altre Cose Turchesche,” in *I cinque libri delle legge, religione, et vita de’ turchi: et della corte, et alcune guerre del Gran Turco* (Venice: Appresso Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1548), 190.

different access to Islam than Schiltberger had in the days before the *Kolej* was created, and this difference extends to both Giorgievits and Spandounes. The intention is not to present Menavino as simply possessing an impressively accurate knowledge of Islam, but rather that his approach is indicative of the pragmatic religious submission of he and his companions in the Seraglio. Menavino's words seem to enhance Edward Said's contention that "knowledge means rising from immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant."¹¹⁵ As Menavino continues in *Il Secondo Libro* to recount the itinerary of the *hajj* he brings his readers closer than ever to Islam's most revered journey.

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Il Secondo Libro: Menavino and the Hajj

Following this novel introduction to Islam, Menavino in *Il Secondo Libro* highlights the depth with which Islam permeates Ottoman society, and moreover mentions the institutions that exemplify how Islam's pillars are manifested. For example, Menavino lists the major hospitals in Constantinople and examines the Ottoman judicial system.¹¹⁶ The fact that dervishes wielded the highest power in both the hospitals and the courts indicates that the tentacles of religion wound deeply and intricately through the structures of Ottoman society. The spectrum of topics contained in *Il Secondo Libro* ranges from a description of Hagia Sofia, not an uncommon topic of traveler's narratives written after the fall of Constantinople on the one hand, while on the other hand devotes much attention to the *hajj*.

The *hajj* is an endeavor incumbent upon any Muslim. Innumerable Muslims each year ventured to Arabia and kissed the *Kaaba*, the black-and-white marble stone .

¹¹⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 32.

¹¹⁶ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 50-55.

However, despite the volume of humanity annually completing this journey, there exist very few accounts of it in European literature. Bartolomeo Giorgievits only briefly, and disparagingly references it in his *Offspring of the House of Ottomano*. Joseph Pitts puts forth what he claims to be the only English-language description of the pilgrimage, which he himself completed at the end of the seventeenth century. Other than these sources, what can explain this dearth of European accounts?

It was a very expensive journey, and even though Menavino notes that both rich and poor went together, there is a shortage of evidence that any Christian living in the Muslim world, either as a slave or a vassal, would have been able to afford it. Pitts warns us that even for those Christians who did convert to Islam, their social status did not immediately balloon, and to do so could, in fact, injure it: “’Tis an error among some, too (I find), that as soon as ever a Christian turns Turk, he is emancipated or become free, but . . . I have known some that have continued slaves many years after they have turned Turks, nay, some even to their dying day.”¹¹⁷ There exist no data that accounts for how many Christians performed the *hajj*, but given that Menavino writes of it with such detail, maybe he did indeed complete it, and his own words provide clues to the affirmative.

His first section states that both rich and poor make this journey, as God commands that all Muslims must once in their lifetime. For the contingent venturing from Constantinople the voyage first stopped in Cairo where they would encounter “a large congregation of Moors . . . and Mamluks who accompany on the journey on foot to Mecca.”¹¹⁸ From there, under the direction of an appointed guide, they go to Medina, three days from Mecca, and visit the sepulcher of Mohammed. They bathe to symbolize a cleansing of sins, which, according to Menavino, is intended to symbolize a return to

¹¹⁷ Pitts, “Religion and Manners of the Mohammedans,” 306-7.

¹¹⁸ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 65.

the unadulterated state of Adam. They perform many ceremonies and pray for three hours before they then venture to Mecca. Menavino's description of Mecca is minimal, as he simply writes "They left [from Medina] for Mecca, where they performed many rituals and prayers, and constantly praying to God."¹¹⁹ At the conclusion of all the rituals, each delegation of Muslims from around the world departs—first those from India, then those from Persia, and finally those from Turkey and Africa. He writes how the return trip passes through Jerusalem where they visit the tomb of Jesus Christ. Though Menavino does not write this himself, it was and is the case that Muslims acknowledge that Jesus was a great prophet. Norman Daniel cites the medieval author William of Tripoli as writing: "Among the Muslims there is an important article of belief that Abraham is the friend of God, Moses again, the spokesman of God, Jesus, son of Mary, the word and spirit of God, and Muhammed the messenger of God,"¹²⁰ a phrase mimicked later in Schiltberger. Menavino ends his discussion of the *hajj* with the story of Abraham's erection of the city, an idea again noted in Schiltberger.

Did Menavino complete the *hajj* himself? Nowhere in his four *capitoli* on the *hajj* does Menavino state clearly that he himself completed the trip. Like Schiltberger, Menavino is austere and frugal in his insertion of personal narrative and this portion is no exception. According to Commander J. Buchan Telfer, translator of Schiltberger's *Travels* and author of the introduction to the volume, "[Schiltberger] completely eschew[ed] all references to himself,"¹²¹ and apparently his sparse narrative created the same conundrum for Telfer as Menavino does here: did Schiltberger too make the *hajj*?

¹¹⁹ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 67.

¹²⁰ Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: the making of an image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 38.

¹²¹ J Buchan Telfer, "Introduction" in *The bondage and travels of Johann Schiltberger, a native of Bavaria, in Europe, Asia, and Africa, 1396-1427*, trans. J Buchan Telfer, ed. Karl Friedrich Neumann (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), xv.

Telfer uses anecdotal descriptions to validate his claim that Schiltberger did complete the trip: “Whether or not Schiltberger traversed the Hyjaz of Arabia, will possibly remain a controverted point: the probability is that he did so.”¹²² Telfer reasons that, like Menavino in *I Cinque Libri*, Schiltberger describes from “personal observation,” such as a description of a pelican, common on the *hajj* route, and also he correctly places the sepulcher of Mohammed in Medina, as does Menavino. It was commonly and erroneously placed in Mecca by mediaeval predecessors,¹²³ and contemporaries such as Giorgievits, who in his *La Miseria cosi de i prigionii*, the second supplement contained in *I Cinque Libri*, wrote that Muslims treat Mecca, “the place they say Mohammed died,” as Christians treat Jerusalem; Giorgievits makes no mention of Medina¹²⁴.

A similar technique to Telfer’s could provide proof of Menavino’s completion of the journey. Menavino mentions wind patterns, bandits and topography rather than pelicans. Menavino writes how the guide advised people to take special precautions on the way from Cairo to Medina, because “it is known that large groups of people hide many Arabs, who at night and day dispossess men on the street of their clothing, and of their lives.”¹²⁵ He continues to remark that the terrain “is flat, and very sandy, to such a degree that the wind blows the sand in such a way that it creates extremely tall mountains; and the pilgrims take many breathes through a shroud, and others rest their lungs.”¹²⁶ Thus, in the same way that Telfer uses circumstantial evidence to claim

¹²² Ibid., xxvi.

¹²³ Ibid., xxvii. For Schiltberger’s exact comments on Medina, see Schiltberger, *The bondage and travels of Johann Schiltberger*, 71. For Menavino’s description of the grave, see *Il Secondo Libro, capitolo xviii*, in Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 70.

¹²⁴ Bartolomeo Giorgievits, “La Miseria cosi de i prigionii, come anco de Christiani, che vivono sotto il tributo del Turco, insieme co i costumi, & cerimonie di quella natione in casa, & alla guerra,” in *I cinque libri delle legge, religione, et vita de’ turchi: et della corte, et alcune guerre del Gran Turco* (Venice: Appreso Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1548), 229.

¹²⁵ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 65.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 65.

Schiltberger probably completed the *hajj*, so do I use such information to make the same assertion regarding Menavino.

European texts that discuss the *hajj* were few and far between. In fact only two of the sources surveyed here have such an account: the first is Menavino's, and the other is by Joseph Pitts. As stated above, Pitts indeed wrote in England two centuries after Menavino – enough time that its use in this study could be questioned. However, I urge that not to be the case. Pitts' text serves as a perfect complement to Menavino. Menavino's conversion to Islam is uncertain, his account of the *hajj* is basic and occasionally sparse, and his descriptions are all in the third person. Pitts admits his conversion to Islam, his account is meticulous and sprawling, and he relates it from his own individual perspective. As Menavino's completion of this journey is questionable, if he did indeed go, Pitts' document provides the best conception of how Menavino would have experienced it.

In his own preface Pitts ponders, "I question whether there be a man now in England that has ever been to Mecca." To introduce the *hajj* he writes, "The seventh chapter, which treats chiefly of the Mohammetans' pilgrimage to Mecca, where Mohammet was born and of their visit to his tomb at Medina, I think it to be very exact, as to truth, though the method and the wording may need an apology."¹²⁷ As discussed, however, while Menavino does not affirm or deny his conversion, Pitts remorsefully and sincerely does so: "I spake something before of the cruelties exercised upon me by the Turks but now shall give a more particular account of them, which were so many and so great that I being but young, too, could no longer endure them and therefore turned Turk

¹²⁷ Pitts, "Religion and Manners of the Mohammetans," 222-3.

to avoid them. GOD BE MERCIFUL TO ME A SINNER!” (his capitalization).¹²⁸

Overall, his main objective in writing this narrative, he says, was to aide his acceptance back into the community of Christendom, and serve as an act of penance in the eyes of God.

In comparison to the overwhelming majority of European texts produced anytime after the fall of Constantinople, Menavino wrote a wealth of information regarding the *haji*, but in comparison to Pitts he wrote scarcely a word. The first leg of Pitts’ journey took him to Cairo, and there enlisted the support of a guide who oversaw the transportation of large companies of pilgrims. From Cairo, Menavino proceeded to Medina, to the burial place of the Prophet. Pitts’ voyage took him to the Red Sea to the city of Jeddah, the port-town closest to Mecca. In Medina there is a cleansing ritual that is intended to return each who does so to a state free of sin, like that of Adam. Only after this cleansing may the pilgrim venture to the tomb of Mohammed, who Pitts calls “a bloody imposter,”¹²⁹ and each pilgrim is obliged to kiss the tomb. Both authors devote much ink to how Abraham founded the city of Mecca, and how he came to bring the *Kaaba* (or *beat-ollah*, according to Pitts) to reside there. However, their descriptions of the city itself, and the rituals that pilgrims perform do not share that parity; Pitts, who dissects the inner-workings of the city to such a degree as to mention thousands of blue pigeons which occupy the city, to no one’s apparent alarm, dwarfs the text of his Italian predecessor in depth and breadth of examination. On Mecca, Menavino simply writes “They left [from Medina] for Mecca, where they performed many rituals and prayers, and constantly praying to God.”¹³⁰ His very general and broad language is accompanied by

¹²⁸ Ibid., 306.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 294.

¹³⁰ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 67.

extreme brevity as well, as immediately following this sentence Menavino commences a discussion on the journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. Here it is so evident how useful, let alone fascinating, Pitts' document is: where Menavino's description is lacking, Pitts' is extremely thorough, and it is through his document we can consider what Menavino's brief statement actually implied. Pitts, as he rested in Mecca for nearly four months, entered the *beat-ollah* twice, as the temple only opened every six weeks, and professes that he "found nothing worth seeing" inside it. He moreover discusses how people do not want to leave the temple of Mecca even if the *beat-ollah* is closed, so they walk around it, a tradition known as the *tawoaf*; the tradition also states that one must kiss the black stone fastened outside the *beat-ollah* after each circuit, and after every seventh circuit one must recite two prayers.¹³¹ Whether Menavino kissed the *beat-ollah* is unknown, but Pitts' account reveals how he would have.

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Il Primo e Il Secondo Libro present the foundations of Islam to European readers in a form to which they were not accustomed. Islam was not simply a quirky faith comprised of odd traditions and barbarous practices, it was firmly founded in eight important tenets and moral guidelines for a safe path to heaven. Menavino highlights the Muslim obligation to give alms, and pray five times per day, while his contemporaries preferred to underscore the Muslim practices of polygamy. Many times, European writers would extrapolate the customs of the sultan to be representative of all Muslims, rich and poor. And while most authors chose to begin their works with Ottoman or Muslim history, Menavino leads with religion, by which he immediately establishes that

¹³¹ Pitts, "Religion and Manners of the Mohammedans," 276.

it is the lifeblood of Ottoman society. His description of the *hajj* offered his reader a rarely presented description of one of the most central expressions of Islamic devotion.

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Chapter 4
A Shift to the Secular: The Last Three Libri

Menavino's position as an *icoglan* not only provided him with a remarkable perspective on Islam, it also allowed him equally remarkable contact with the person of the Ottoman sultan. Within the first few pages of *I Cinque Libri* Menavino recounts his own first experiences with Bayazid—they actually conversed in Italian together. As the book shifts gears from the religious to the secular administration of the empire, it becomes unclear how their relationship evolved throughout Menavino's tenure. Was his first meeting with Bayazid representative of a close relationship between the two, or not?

Continuing his trend from the first two *libri* Menavino avoids the first person. Therefore anecdotes within the final books can only provide clues regarding his own relationship with his master. The inferences these clues prompt present a precarious task. What, if anything, can be extrapolated about Menavino from specific details he inserts in his final books? In the fifth book, for example, in which Menavino recounts significant events that occurred while he was in captivity, he relates the story of the death of Bayazid's son Alem Scia. He died of an unknown illness, according to Menavino, and when the news was conveyed to Bayazid, it arrived "written in white ink on black paper"¹³² and was followed by three days of mourning. While the anecdote is certainly interesting, it raises the question of how Menavino received this information—did he witness the arrival of the letter and Bayazid's response? Or did the details of the arrival spread throughout the Seraglio so that all knew of the black letter? Moreover, why would Menavino decide to include this story? It could be read as an authentication of the rest of

¹³² Giovanni Antonio Menavino, *I cinque libri delle legge, religione, et vita de' turchi: et della corte, et alcune guerre del Gran Turco: di Giovantonio Menavino Genovese da Vultri. Oltre cio, una prophetia de' Mahomettani, et la miseria de' prigionieri, de' Christiani, che vivono sotto il Gran Turco, et altre cose Turchesche, non piu vedute: tradotte da M. Lodovico Domenichi* (Venice: Appresso Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1548), 144.

the information he provides—by inserting it he tells the reader that he and his fellow captives were privy to details within the Seraglio that Europeans previously had no opportunity of witnessing.

How did this personal contact affect his representation of the sultan? As Daniel Vitkus notes, in Menavino's time, most descriptions of the Ottoman sultan portrayed him as "unjust, tyrannical, and oppressive," whose only goal was the bellicose conversion of Christians.¹³³ Bartolomeo Giorgievits' miniature biographies of the sultans embody this dominant portrayal. On Selim the Grim, the second sultan under whom Menavino served, Giorgievits writes, "Selimus . . . was marvelously cruel. He poisoned his father, and by that means obtained the Turkish Empire . . . Afterwards when we had subdued the great [Mamluk] Sultan, he sacked the most populous city [Cairo], and reigned but eight years, at what time he was justly punished for his cruelty."¹³⁴ Menavino's discussion of Selim has a noticeably different tone. Firstly, nowhere does he say that he poisoned his father Bayazid. Secondly, rather than portray Selim as barbarous and cruel, Menavino portrays him as indeed ruthless, but also compassionate. When he was brought the body and dying words of his brother Corcuth, Selim breaks down into tears and orders that the entire court "be draped in black for three days."¹³⁵ Like his portrayal of Islam, the European reader would be struck by Menavino's representation of the sultan as remorseful. Closeness to the sultan allowed *icoglans* a chance to understand the sultan as

¹³³ Daniel J. Vitkus, "Early Modern Orientalism: Representations of Islam in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe," in *Western Views of Islam in Mediaeval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 218.

¹³⁴ Bartolomeo Giorgievits, *The offspring of the house of Ottomanno: and officers pertaining to the greates Turkes court. Whereunto is added Bartholomeus Georgieuz Epitome, of the customes rytes, ceremonies, and religion of the Turkes: with the miserbale affliction of those Christians, whiche liue vnder their captiuitie and bondage. In the ende also is adioyned the maner hovv Mustapha, oldest sonne of Soltan Soliman, twelfth Emperour of the Turkes, was murdered by his father, in the yere of our Lorde 1553*, trans. Hughh Goughe (London: Thomas Marshe, 1569), 25.

¹³⁵ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 167.

a man, not as a monster—as emotional rather than callous. A European reading this book in the sixteenth century would immediately have noticed the difference.

Il Terzo Libro details the infrastructure of the Seraglio to a very comprehensive degree. Menavino outlines many of the slave positions underneath the Grand Turk, how many serve in each position, and how much they get paid. The volume of data presented here forces this analysis to only focus on the *capitoli* that reveal something about our author and his fellow Christian slaves. Theodore Spandounes book *Delle historie et origine de principi de Turchi* provides a perfect foil for Menavino’s discussion of Christians serving the Turk. Similar in both structure and content to *I Cinque Libri*, Spandounes’ mention of *icoglans* implies that despite the minimal circulation of Menavino’s work, Spandounes’ more widely-read text informed the European reader about Christian boys like Menavino and how they served the sultan.

Il Quarto Libro, which enumerates the administrative positions under the Turk in similar form to *Il Terzo Libro*, provides another opportunity to use a contemporary of Menavino as a tool to discuss other forms of Christian contact with the sultan in Constantinople. Ogier Ghislan de Busbecq’s *Turkish Letters* and *I Cinque Libri* mutually enhance the other—Busbecq, who served as Austro-Hungarian ambassador to Suleiman for over a decade, offers insights on Christian captives being dragged through the streets of Constantinople, and Menavino discusses how the sultan received and treated new Christian ambassadors. Busbecq’s work is a second example exemplifying, like Menavino, that continuous interaction with the Turks led to a certain degree of respect and awe at the functionality of an pluralistic society.

Finally, *Il Quinto Libro* outlines the sultan’s armies in Greece and Anatolia, and, more importantly, the wars of succession that took place during Menavino’s service. His

history of the various campaigns and maneuvers of Bayazid and his sons brings yet another unseen view of the Turks to the European reader. As most histories, such as those by Giorgievits and Curione, mention only Selim's ascension to the sultanate and his wars against Ismail Safavi when discussing the first quarter of the sixteenth century, Menavino tightens his focus to cover only those events that occurred while he was in the sultan's retinue. The small window of analysis then allows him to reveal his own close relationship with his first master Bayazid II, and detail his escape from Selim's service.

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Il Terzo Libro: Menavino & Theodore Spandounes

The content of *Il Terzo Libro* seems to almost belong in the ledger of the Seraglio's accountant. His outline discusses the horse-tenders, the launders, and even mentions a certain building called *Timarahane*, the mental hospital in Constantinople. While this information does provide the reader with an idea of how expansive the *kul*–or “slave”–system really was, hidden in this long enumeration are four *capitoli* which inform us about the *icoglans* as he saw them, about the palace school, and about life for young Christian slaves under the sultan.

In the ninth and tenth *capitoli* of this book, Menavino writes of three specific pages, each with a different designated task of the highest importance in the Seraglio: the “CIVADAR” constantly keeps the sultan hydrated; the “GIUPTER” provides water for everyone and brings the sultan's change of clothes; and finally, the “SULUSTAR” carries the sultan's bow, arrow, and sword.¹³⁶ These young slaves are the most pleasing to the Grand Turk, and must be the best looking, most intelligent, and possess the highest fluency in Arabic. These are the boys who are destined to serve as the future Grand

¹³⁶ Ibid., 92.

Veziars and highest pashas in the sultan's *divan*: "When they reach twenty-four years of age, they are taken from [their] services and placed in the higher levels of administration, at which time they are the most important men in the court."¹³⁷ Menavino never claims to have served in one of the three above capacities, however, while he did not, the most preferred Christian slaves used their posts as *icoglans* as stepping-stones to the higher levels of government.

The next level of servants who tend to the sultan's person is the *icoglari*, which Menavino translates as "young favorites." These boys' charge is the sultan's room—they make sure his bed is tidy, the fire is going, and that there is always fresh water. As he states in *Il Quinto Libro*, Menavino served the sultans Bayazid II and Selim I in this capacity. Menavino relates the other positions in which young boys served the Grand Turk: they laundered the king's robes, they tended to the spices that cooked the king's food, and guarded the king's treasury. These positions and duties seem to validate Halil Inalcik, who elaborated on the mutual dependency between sultan and slave. Inalcik estimates that between 1480 and 1612, the number of pages rose from 80 to 900.¹³⁸

Menavino then discusses the Seraglio's school, which he refers to as the *Lengioda*, or what Goodwin and others call the *Enderun Kolej*. Four eunuchs comprise the school's faculty: the first teaches the boys to read, the second the Qur'an and the articles of the Islamic faith, the third important Persian texts and a little practice writing, and the fourth books written in the vernacular. Formally, the headmaster of the *Enderun Kolej* is the sultan himself. He decreed that a eunuch could not whip a student more than once per day. Menavino spends more time discussing the whipping procedure than the

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, trans. Norman Itkowitz and Colin Imber (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), 80.

school's curriculum; if a student transgressed the eunuch would beat the soles of the offenders feet with a stick. However, as harsh as the punishments were, the rewards were greater: an excelling student earned the privilege of reciting a prayer or two in front of the sultan. Incumbent in the job of *icoglan* was not merely a dependency, but also devotion. To the *icoglan*, serving the sultan was the highest honor.

Finally, Menavino takes a step back to discuss all those slaves who serve the sultan. "It has already been stated that all of these [aforementioned] young slaves, eunuchs and nominated officials can never leave the Seraglio, and live to serve the Grand Turk, and all are his slaves, and sons of Christians, except the large part of the eunuchs, who are mostly Indian."¹³⁹ He continues, however, to say that when these boys turn twenty-five there is a big ceremony, and they are sent out to serve in important posts throughout the empire.

Here Menavino informs the reader just what he was forgoing when he escaped back to Europe. At the age of twenty-two Menavino was but three years shy of his major promotion and assignment in the provinces of the Empire. Or, if by the small probability he served in one of the three most privileged positions, CIVADAR, GIUPTER, or SULUSTAR, he needed only to wait two years for his promotion. Regardless, when Menavino fled from Trabuzon in 1514 he was giving up an extremely high-ranking position in the Ottoman Empire. Given his words in *Il Terzo Libro*, he was perfectly aware of his own destiny had he stayed, and despite his promising future prospects, he apparently could not bear more time in servitude.

Il Terzo Libro presents a favorable opportunity to compare Menavino with one of his more widely read contemporaries, Theodore Spandounes. Spandounes was an Italian

¹³⁹ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 104.

who at the end of the Turco-Venetian War (1499-1503) went to Constantinople in hopes of finding his brother, with whom his family had fallen out of contact. Upon discovering his brother's untimely death, he devoted his time to composing a book describing the history and life of the Turks. Though composed in 1503, it was not published until 1519, and manuscripts were personally given to Pope Leo X, and French rulers Louis XII and Henry II.¹⁴⁰ M.E. Yapp, Robert Schwoebel, and David Blanks cite his book as one of the most noteworthy portrayals of the Turks because it presented the Turks in a positive light—as a functioning society, and as even, at times, being disposed to Christianity.

It is not only the timing and subject matter that makes Spandounes' book a good foil for Menavino; they also share similar organizational styles, except, organizationally. Spandounes' book is almost a perfect inversion of *I Cinque Libri*. That is to say, Menavino commences with Islam, describes the various posts within the Seraglio, and ends with a brief history; Spandounes starts with Ottoman history, describes the various posts within the Seraglio, and ends with a discussion of Islam. However, they each posit emphasis to different topics as well. Menavino discusses Islam in more detail and only briefly highlighting aspects of the Turkish economy, while for Spandounes it is vice versa. The only other major difference between the two is the degree of contact the authors had with the Seraglio and the sultan. Menavino's proximity has been discussed and was unrivaled in its closeness. Spandounes, however, admits that his knowledge of the sultan came from sources he had within the Seraglio, and some Turkish historians. This disparity may explain certain inconsistencies between the two texts. Though the books are not perfect parallels, Spandounes work provides, to the most thorough extent,

¹⁴⁰ Robert Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk (1453-1517)* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1967), 209.

what the European reader knew of *icoglans*, other Christian captives within the Seraglio, and contemporary Islam.

Spandounes' discussion of the boys of the Seraglio means that there existed a well-dispersed discussion of *icoglans* and other similar Christian slaves circulating around Europe before Menavino's publication—the Papacy and the kings of France had knowledge of what Menavino would eventually reveal in *I Cinque Libri*. On the *icoglans* the two authors only differ in the minutiae: Spandounes claims that there are four elite attendants in charge of his sword etc., while Menavino only mentions three.¹⁴¹ Spandounes also touches on the schooling these three hundred or so Christian boys receive, but not in the detail of Menavino. Spandounes merely writes that there were a few eunuchs in charge of the boys' education.

As both Menavino and Spandounes have similar descriptions of the *icoglans*, it is clear that when Menavino published his book, he was bolstering much of what Spandounes had already published. However, Spandounes' discussion of Islam is not nearly as thorough. He follows the trend of his contemporaries in highlighting only the most outlandish differences between Islam and Christianity. He, like most writers of his time, save Menavino, concentrates more on the physical and visual differences of the faiths, rather than the mental foundations of Islam. Spandounes, for example, describes the austerity of Turkish mosques instead of describing what in their faith decrees them to be as such.¹⁴²

While Spandounes did ensure that the European reader knew of the *icoglans* and Christian boys in captivity, his minimal discussion of Turkish religion reveals how

¹⁴¹ Theodore Spandounes, *Delle historie et origine de principi de Turchi, ordine delle corte, loro rito et costumi*. Lucca: V. Busdiago, 1550, trans. and ed. Donald M. Nichol (New York: Cambridge University Press 1997), 110.

¹⁴² Spandounes, *Delle historie et origine de principi de Turchi*, 131.

Christian traveler's perceived Turkish society differently from the *icoglans*. Menavino placed his discussion of Islam at the outset of his book because he understood its function as the society's circulation system. Spandounes not only relegates his outline of Islam to the book's conclusion, but his cursory analysis of its blatant deviations from Christianity embody Europe's overriding approach to the faith: concentrate on the most visible differences at the expense of any discussion of the faith's pillars and moral core.

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Il Quarto Libro: Menavino & Ogier Ghislan de Busbecq

As Menavino's *Terzo Libro* offered an illuminating point of comparison with Theodore Spandounes, so too does *Il Quarto Libro* offer another, with Ogier Ghislen de Busbecq, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador to Sultan Suleiman, who first came to Constantinople in 1555. Menavino, who spends most of his fourth book listing the salaried men in the sultan's entourage, also writes at length regarding the process by which new ambassadors are admitted into court, a process echoed in Busbecq. The two authors each devote significant ink to the other's position under their common overlord; that is, Menavino here writes of how new ambassadors are accepted into the Seraglio, while Busbecq expounds on Christian captives and slaves. In an analysis where so much import is placed on proximity, Busbecq offers another example, this time in the diplomatic sphere, closeness almost inevitably leads to understanding and respect.

From his descriptions of the proceedings and the settings upon the arrival of a new ambassador, Menavino witnessed the whole process himself. It is necessary, he writes, for a new ambassador to declare himself when 10 days remain to Constantinople, upon from that moment on, he is under the watch of the Grand Turk, constantly reminded

and subjected to the presence of a squad of Janissaries.¹⁴³ Busbecq would write of this squad and its presence in a story about the Grand Vizier Roostem trying to prevent him from attending the departure of Suleiman to Asia Minor. Suleiman was crossing the Bosphorus to morally support his son Selim in his wars against his other brother Bayazid, As he was not fighting, Suleiman departed with a small force, which Roostem considered to be a display of meakness, rather than enormity. In a skirmish that followed the ambassador ordered his men (and even the help of sympathetic Janissaries outside) to remove his barred door. This was done and Busbecq witnessed (and commended) the spectacle of Suleiman's departure. When Busbecq questioned Roostem about the incident, he recounted:

Finally, I asked [Roostem] whether they regarded me as an ambassador or as a prisoner. 'As an ambassador,' he replied. 'If you regard me as a prisoner,' I said, 'it is useless for me to be employed to make peace, for a prisoner is not a free agent. If, however, you regard me, as you say, as an ambassador, why, being an ambassador, do I not enjoy liberty, and why am I prevented from leaving my house when I wish to do so? . . . All nations allow ambassadors their freedom; it is here that the law of nations comes in.'"¹⁴⁴

Though Busbecq was afforded more freedom in the future, his ordeal provides a personal manifestation of the control the sultan exerts on his ambassadors of which Menavino describes in *Capitolo Trent-uno*. Menavino paints the ambassadors as deferential and the proceedings cordial: "Two captains accompany the new ambassador in front of the sultan, with that necessary reverence . . . and salutes the sultan in an appropriate Turkish manner, and then the Grand Turk gives his hand to the ambassador, who humbly kisses

¹⁴³ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 130.

¹⁴⁴ Ogier Ghislan de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, trans. Edward Seymour Forster (London: Sickle Moon Books, 2001), 101.

it.”¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, Menavino also mentions the constant watch the new ambassador is placed, which made Busbecq truly feel like a prisoner.

Busbecq, in turn, devotes many words to the misery of Christian captives to the Grand Turk, and describes witnessing the humiliating procession of Spanish nobles through the streets of Constantinople following the crushing naval defeat at Djerba in 1560. Upon departing for Vienna at the end of his first stint in Constantinople, Busbecq sees a train of new Christian captives from Hungary being herded through the streets, and cannot withhold his own tears. “There is no commoner kind of merchandise than this in Turkey,” he writes, “just as on the roads out of Antwerp one meets loads of various kinds of goods, so from time to time we were met by gangs of wretched Christian slaves being led to horrible servitude.”¹⁴⁶ Though he laments the subjection of these Christians to intolerable slavery, however, he lauds the overall system of which they are a player: *devshirme*. Busbecq is captivated by the lack of an aristocracy, and how one rose in the Ottoman system on merit alone. Most Christians writing at the time, eager to pounce on any societal difference between Turk and European, saw this lack as a weakness.¹⁴⁷

Busbecq, however is in awe, as for the Turks, birth never contributes to ones place under the sultan:

Those who hold the highest posts under the sultan are very often the sons of shepherds and herdsmen, and, so far from being ashamed of their birth, they make it a subject of boasting, and the less they owe to their forefathers and to the accident of birth, the greater pride which they feel. They do not consider that good qualities can be conferred by birth or handed down by inheritance, but regard them partly as the gift of heaven and partly as the product of good training and constant toil and zeal . . . They hold that character is not hereditary, and that a son does not necessarily resemble his father, but his qualities are divinely infused into his bodily frame.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 130.

¹⁴⁶ Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, 44.

¹⁴⁷ M.E. Yapp, “Europe in the Turkish Mirror,” *Past & Present*, no. 137 (November 1992): 150.

¹⁴⁸ Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, 39-40.

What he says here, and continues to say, is not only striking in its outright praise of the Turkish institution of meritocracy, but especially because he describes this to admonish the birthright system of Europe, a system of which he is a direct product and to which he owes his own presence in Constantinople:

Thus, among the Turks, dignities, offices, and administrative posts are the rewards of ability and merit; those who are dishonest, lazy, and slothful never attain to distinction, but remain in obscurity and contempt. *This is why the Turks succeed in all that they attempt and are a dominating race and daily extend the bounds of their rule.* Our method is very different; there is no room for merit, but everything depends on birth; considerations of which alone open the way to high official position.¹⁴⁹ (my italics)

It is apparent in Busbecq's words that the height of administrative achievement in the Seraglio is matched only by the distance of the climb; therefore, Menavino, as described in *Il Terzo Libro*, was primed to make this climb, if he converted and if he had not fled his captivity in 1514. The meritocracy of the Ottoman system represented an underlying mindset which Busbecq, and Giovanni Botero, writing fifty years later, see as the source of Ottoman strength and success. Botero notes that the Ottoman government and infrastructure is basically in the hands of slaves, who see their service under the sultan as the greatest honor, and thus the government runs on the competition of these slaves for the praise and promotion of the Grand Turk.¹⁵⁰ Some of the slaves that Botero mentions, Busbecq witnessed, and Menavino served with would eventually rise within the sultan's inner-circle to places of power, in ways such as Menavino described, with promotion coming at age twenty-three or four.¹⁵¹ As Asli Cirakman, this possibility of promotion kept the wheels of Ottoman society turning and functioning.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 40.

¹⁵⁰ Giovanni Botero, *Relations of the Most Famous Kingdomes and Commonweales through the World: discoursing of their situations, religions, languages, manners, customes, strengths, greatnesse, and policies* (London: John Haviland, 1630), 510.

¹⁵¹ Asli Cirakman, "From Tyranny to Despotism: the Enlightenment's Unenlightened Image of the Turks," *The International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 1 (February 2000): 52.

That a Christian, who converted to Islam, of course, or anyone who originated in *Dar-ul-Harb* could become a Grand Vizier speaks enough to the fascinating composition of the pluralistic Ottoman society. Menavino, who mentions the continuing presence of Christians and Jews in Turkish life, does not mention the functioning of a pluralistic society specifically. Busbecq, however, is again fascinated by this aspect of Ottoman government. He writes to his friend of a conversation he had with the Grand Vizier Roostem, in which Roostem urged him to convert to Islam. The account ends with Roostem saying, “I cannot help thinking that those who have lived holy and innocent lives on this earth will share eternal bliss, whatever religion they may have practiced.”¹⁵² This anecdote, which Busbecq immediately comments as heretical, does, however, illustrate an individual opinion that helps define Ottoman attitudes towards other religions. Cirakman and Mario Apostolov both cite how important an eclectic society of sects and people directly contributed to the dynamism of the Ottoman Empire. The former cites the philosophy of the Duc de Rohan in the 17th century as representative of this dynamic quality: “the diversitie of Religion ought not to cause any diversitie of opinion in things that concerne the common good.”¹⁵³ Cirakman comments that for any sovereign, it is the preservation of the state, that is the goal, and Apostolov believes through and despite this eclecticism the Ottomans preserved a sense of coherence.¹⁵⁴

Despite this diversity of religions Busbecq still writes lamenting the lengthy subordination Christians must endure under the Grand Turk—that every seven years, for example, they must offer their best boys to become Ottoman army regulars. He

¹⁵² Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, 82.

¹⁵³ Cirakman, “From Tyranny to Despotism”, 50.

¹⁵⁴ Mario Apostolov, *The Christian-Muslim frontier: a zone of contact, conflict or cooperation* (New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2004), 30.

recognizes that his own lamentations are worthless, as it is too late for Christendom to undo the suffering of their brethren:

The grievous bonds wherewith the Turks oppress the Greeks are no worse than the vices which hold us in thrall—luxury, gluttony, pride, ambition, avarice, hatred, envy, and jealousy. By these our hearts are so weighed down and stifled that they cannot look up to heaven, or harbour any noble thought or aspire to any great achievement. Our religion and our sense of duty ought to have urged us to help our afflicted brethren . . . as it is, we seek the Indies and Antipodes over vast fields of ocean, because the booty and the spoil is richer and can be wrung from the ignorant and guileless natives without the expenditure of a drop of blood. *Religion is the pretext, gold the real object.*¹⁵⁵ (my italics)

He writes as if, upon seeing his fellow Christians enslaved, the chance for saving them has already past; the princes of Christendom had a choice to save their persecuted brethren or pursue sin and greed (notice too the similarities between his vitriolic words and the Seven Deadly Sins Menavino listed in *capitolo Sedici*, of *Il Primo Libro*) and that choice already having been made, cannot be undone.

Busbecq looks upon these Christian slaves entering into the service of the sultan and does not attribute it to Turkish barbarity and cruelty, but rather Turkish ingenuity and, most importantly Christian impotence. Busbecq's *Turkish Letters* show that even in the diplomatic world, proximity and contact directly catalyze cross-cultural understanding, and in some cases, even respect. Politically speaking, the ambassador to the Porte was the first line of contact between Christendom and the Ottomans, and even in this formal setting Busbecq did come to admire many aspects of Ottoman government and administration.

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¹⁵⁵ Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*, 26-27.

Il Quinto Libro: Menavino in Campo

The Fifth and final book of Menavino's *I Cinque Libri* moves away from observational accounts of the infrastructure of the Seraglio and turns towards a narrative history. Along with biographies of the Prophet, histories of the rise of the house of Osman were common in Menavino's time, as many sought to use the precipitous expansion of Ottoman territory to warn against continued incursion into Christian territory. Among his contemporaries, Theodore Spandounes, Henry Blount, Coelius Augustinius Curione, and Richard Knolles all wrote general histories of the Turks. The origins of the house of Osman was a very popular topic, and in works such as those by Curione, the rise of Osman and the successes of the growing Empire were meant to exemplify how the Turks took advantage of discord among Christian princes to augment their gains in both Asia Minor, and eventually even on the other side of the Bosphorus.¹⁵⁶ Given the volume of work on this subject, Menavino possibly saw no purpose in writing his own history of the Turks, and instead, wrote only of the chronology of events that took place during his tenure serving the Grand Turk. Thus, Menavino's history began with *capitolo otto*, entitled "*Dei figliuoli di Sultan Paiaxit, I quali haveva sopra la Natolia*" and subsequently, in *capitolo nove* he commences outlining the series of events that culminated in Selim succeeding the throne of Bayazid. Menavino tightens to the historical microscope to a magnification previously unused by contemporary Ottoman historians.

In limiting the scope of his history, Menavino outlines to the European reader a distinctly Ottoman ritual: succession by fratricide. According to Spandounes the practice

¹⁵⁶ Coelius Augustinius Curio, *A Notable History of the Saracens: Briefly and faithfully describing the originall beginning, continuance and successe aswell of the Saracens, as also of Turkes, Souldans, Mamalukes, Assassines, Tartarians and Sophians. With a discourse of their affaires and actes from the byrthe of Mahomet their first peļeuish prophet and founder for 700 yeļeres space. Whereunto is annexed a compendious chronycle of all their yeerely exploytes, from the sayde Mahomets time tyll this present yeere of grace. 1575*, trans. Thomas Newton (London: William How, 1575), iii.

originated with either Orhan Gazi (1326-1360) or his son Murad I (1360-1389).

Spandounes cites the former, but acknowledges that Turkish historians claim the latter initiated the policy.¹⁵⁷ It was not until Mehmed the Conqueror that the process was actually codified as legal. The successor to the throne was appointed by God, therefore the son who emerges victorious from the fratricidal struggle does so because of God's providence. Mehmed wrote, "For the welfare of the state, the one of my sons to whom God grants the sultanate may lawfully put his brothers to death."¹⁵⁸ Thus, the various sons of the sultan did a great deal of maneuvering prior to their father's death, trying to secure administrative duties near to the capital, doing their best to ingratiate themselves with their father, and simultaneously courting the Janissaries. After 1421, Inalcik notes, the support of the Janissaries became fundamental in securing the throne.¹⁵⁹ This becomes particularly evident here when Menavino narrates Selim's ascension.

Menavino's history reveals the death of each of Bayazid's sons culminating in the rise of Selim (the names of the sons are as Menavino wrote them). The first of the six to die was Alem Scia, who died of an unknown illness. The second son, Mohemeth, tried to make too many surreptitious contacts to gain the sultanate, so Bayazid had him poisoned. The third son, Sciem Scia, who Menavino declares to be one of Bayazid's favorites, died, like his brother Alem Scia, of an illness. Three sons remained: Ahameth, Corcuth, and Selim. Selim tried to forcefully wrest the sultanate away from his father, but lost in battle. Rather than execute him, Bayazid ordered him against Ahameth, who was trying to conquer Anatolia for himself. Corcuth too tried ingratiating himself with his father, but Bayazid found him to be too weak to rule.

¹⁵⁷ Spandounes, *Delle historie et origine de principi de Turchi*, 17.

¹⁵⁸ Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 59.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

Before the narrative of the wars of succession continues, Menavino takes a *capitolo* to discuss the death of Bayazid in 1512. Bayazid, in almost Learian fashion, abdicated the throne to his son Selim, and himself went to die in the place of his birth: Demotika—or Diometocca, as Menavino calls it—a town in Thrace. In this description of Bayazid’s trip home Menavino provides the largest clue that he and Bayazid remained closely involved from their first interaction during Menavino’s initial inspection until the sultan’s death: “Then Sultan Bayazid, having renounced his throne and given it to Selim, he took five hundred men and five young pages, of which I was one, at the service of his person; he took with him 4 sacks of aspers, and two sacks of ducats, and a case filled with jewels.”¹⁶⁰ Bayazid chose Menavino, and four others, from more than three hundred other *icoglans* to accompany him to his hometown. Menavino never admits that he and the sultan had a close personal relationship. Bayazid, according to Inalcik, was very personally involved in the education of his *icoglans*, exemplified by his first meeting with Menavino in 1504. Menavino had served the sultan for eight years at this juncture and was twenty years old at this time. The relationship between the two could have taken any number of forms, and the possibilities could indeed write a storyline for a Johnny Depp movie or Tom Stoppard play. Bayazid, according to Menavino, died en route to Demotika. Menavino tells how the sultan’s Jewish doctor tried performing a number of remedies, but all in vain. Giorgievits claims that Selim poisoned his father,¹⁶¹ but Menavino does not corroborate this claim. Menavino was there at Bayazid’s death and moreover, throughout the history in *Il Quinto Libro* Menavino includes all behind-the-scenes details. He writes how Bayazid ordered his son Mohemeth’s death—the deed was

¹⁶⁰ Menavino, *I Cinque Libri.*, 161.

¹⁶¹ Giorgievits, *The offspring of the house of Ottomanno*, 25.

performed when a servant poisoned his drink while he was walking in his garden.¹⁶²

Menavino was clearly privy to the secrets of the Seraglio, and would have noted that Selim poisoned his father.

Following his *capitolo* on the death of Bayazid, Menavino returns to the movements of the new sultan Selim against his two remaining brothers, Ahemeth and Corcuth. First he orders the strangulation of the former. With the death of Corcuth, the final brother, Menavino reveals a humanity and compassion rarely seen in European portrayals of the sultan:

If he could stay the execution for one hour so he could write. As he was a man of grand philosophy, his executioner permitted him his hour, in which he wrote two rhymed *capitoli* on the lack of faith of his brother, who washes his hands in his own blood . . . Immediately after he finished writing and he had placed his writing in the hands of the King, he was strangled. The following morning they brought the body to Sultan Selim, and gave him the writing. When he started to read it, Selim forcefully wept and said that he was remorseful for having him killed, and draped the court in black for three days.¹⁶³

The inference that Menavino witnessed Selim's reactions from a closer perspective may seem a bit tenuous, but more importance may lie in questioning why did Menavino include this story, beyond the realm of just simply telling the facts? The use of the story is a juxtaposition of the barbarity of fratricide, and the humanity of Selim, who forgives and mourns his murdered brother. In one story Menavino is simultaneously affirming and debunking the common stereotypes of his contemporaries.

At this point Menavino reaches his own escape. On a campaign with Selim against Ismail Safavi, near the city of Trabuson, he writes, "at one moment, I felt a lot of self-confidence."¹⁶⁴ In his boldness Menavino used a Safavid contact who helped him get to Trabuson, where he and some companions got passage to Greece and Adrianopolis,

¹⁶² Menavino, *I Cinque Libri*, 147.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

from he made his way to Salonicchi, where he finally found some Christian boats to take him to Italy.¹⁶⁵

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Why did Menavino escape? There may be a tendency to think Menavino had accepted his fate in captivity, or even liked his destiny as a high-ranking administrator. But his escape provides a pivotal reminder that captivity was still difficult; despite all his seemingly good fortune, it still drove him to a breaking point. Just because he was being trained for the highest levels of government does not mean the training was not harsh or cruel. Christian captives lived hard lives. In fact his ten years in captivity had not sandblasted his memory of his old life. In trying to explain why he escaped, the simplest possibility may indeed have been the real reason: he missed his family in Italy. “[In Italy] I first saw my homeland, called Vultri; where I found my aforementioned father, and my dear mother; but thinking that I was dead, or that I would never return, they all thought it was a miracle, and cried for pure happiness, and they gave me many hugs and tender kisses.”¹⁶⁶ If Menavino is to be viewed as representative of those boys he served with, and those he left behind, then it is evident that their long slavery did not erase their old lives from their memory. To escape was to take a gigantic risk. To re-iterate Nabil Mater’s reminder: “for each account that survives of a successful escape, however, there must have been numerous unsuccessful attempts.”¹⁶⁷

The final books of *I Cinque Libri* disclose the fact that Menavino’s position as an *icoglan* afforded him not only a student’s perspective of Islam, but also a servant’s

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 181.

¹⁶⁷ Nabil Mater, “Introduction: England and Mediterranean Captivity, 1577-1704,” in *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity narratives from early modern England*, ed. Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 32.

perspective of the most powerful man in the Muslim world. And again this perspective produced a different understanding of the sultan himself. Therefore, Menavino presents him in a way the European reader was not used to: as thinking, and feeling being. The description of the sultan's barbarity in fratricide is juxtaposed with his personal remorse and compassion. Coupled with the works of Busbecq and Spandounes, it becomes clear that constant interaction and contact to, almost always, lead to increased understanding. It is no surprise then that Menavino, Spandounes, and Busbecq are often cited as exemplifying the "positive" attitude toward the Turks in European literature. Indeed Menavino's captivity must have been difficult because he was willing to risk his own life to escape this servitude. But despite the arduousness of his tenure in Constantinople, he still emerged with a comprehensive understanding of what had once been a completely foreign and unknown society to him. It should be assumed that his fellow captives possessed this understanding as well.

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Conclusion

From Menavino's era to the present it has been proven time-and-again that interpersonal interaction is the best tool when trying to comprehend the unknown. Menavino, however, wrote in a time when achieving this interaction was extremely laborious—the price for his objectivity was a sacrifice of ten years of his liberty. Norman Daniel too reveals the task of cross-cultural comprehension in the Mediaeval and Renaissance ages was indeed arduous:

*It is certain that the essentials of Islamic belief were known to those scholastic and other educated authors who took a serious interest in the subject; much was even publicized by popular writers . . . There was not, of course, any very subtle appreciation of the niceties of Islamic doctrine, and there was not usually a great desire to understand what was known . . . The physical frontier was not very clearly marked and was easily crossed. The frontier that divided the mental attitudes of Christians and Muslims was emphatically defined and crossed only with the greatest difficulty.*¹⁶⁸

Menavino and his companions, however, did not have the luxury of time and freedom when traversing this frontier—they were thrust across it. Menavino exemplifies the remarkable adaptability of Christian boys despite the difficulty of their circumstances. *I Cinque Libri* shows that these circumstances did not hinder his, or their absorption of Islam; rather, they enhanced it. Menavino's book truly represents what Edward Said would call, “[a] history of consciousness negotiating its way through an alien culture by virtue of having successfully absorbed its systems of information and behavior.”¹⁶⁹

As Europeans negotiated the alien world of Islam in Menavino's time, a similar task of comprehension presents itself to the current generations. And while the entire

Figure 3: Interfaith dialogue, Benedict XVI in the Blue

¹⁶⁸ Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: the making of an image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 66.

¹⁶⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 196.



Mosque, November 2006. *Source:* BBC online.

world rests at our fingertips, we, like those before, fall into a trap of overgeneralization. In Menavino's time it was common to exaggerate the practices of the Ottoman sultan—polygamy and concubinage, for example—as being customary for all Muslims.¹⁷⁰ Today the zealousness of Islamic fundamentalists is similarly extended to the entire Muslim world. Unfortunately, the mental frontiers that separate dissimilar peoples transcend both time and place.

Menavino teaches the value of cross-cultural interaction in destroying these generalizations, and that even regrettable circumstances can repair the international disconnect. It is fortunate that kidnapping is not our only means for entering into this international dialogue, but in the age of fiber optics the increased accessibility of information is not a panacea. But if captivity is the only method for interfaith understanding to the extent of Menavino and his companions, maybe we all need to bring down our firewalls.

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