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Objects of Exchange: Diplomatic Entanglements in Fifteenth-century Naples

*By focussing on objects of exchange in Quattrocento Naples, this study argues that the city played a key role in shaping both a diplomatic culture as well as new approaches to the material world that emerged in fifteenth-century Italy. These developments were intrinsically linked to the convergence of cultures that such a port city occasioned. Naples was a gateway, serving as the diplomatic contact zone for Eastern and Western ambassadors as well as a point of exchange for goods coming in and out of Europe. Records show that foreign embassies were recurrent throughout Aragonese rule, proffering gifts of exotic animals, as well as textiles, metalwork, ceramics, and other precious objects. This study investigates how these material goods were not merely stationary objects in Renaissance princely collections but pointed to the activities taking place within and outside the studiolo, acting as material memories of encounters, mercantile routes, and territorial expansion. Naples was a site of mediation, an intersection of divergence and convergence, evident in the drawn-out negotiations with the Ottoman and Mamluk empires throughout the fifteenth century. Such diplomatic entanglements are here situated within fifteenth-century diplomacy more broadly, rather than understood as one-off events or seen simply within an «East vs. West» dichotomy, thereby providing new insight into how we understand this period and the emergence of a «new diplomacy». Central to these negotiations were material things—raw goods, aromatics, ceramics, textiles, and other art objects or luxury items—that served as the cogs in trade or were exchanged as diplomatic gifts to broker trade and politics. Naples is thus examined not as a passive consumer of goods from other centres, but rather as an entrepôt that absorbed, translated and transformed foreign material cultures, artefacts, and motifs, moulding both a diplomatic culture as well as new approaches to the material world.**

Introduction

In his discussion of the social virtues of magnificence, the Neapolitan humanist Giovanni Pontano dedicates a section to gifts, noting:

On some occasions rarity can also determine value. It is said that [King] Alfonso [II of Naples] jumped for joy when Ciriaco d'Ancona gave him a metal plaquette, which contained a fly with its wings spread: a very small thing, but its rarity made it great in the eyes of the prince, who was measuring not its price, but its rarity. Sometimes art makes an acceptable gift. What did the same Alfonso keep with such pleasure but a picture by the painter Giovanni [Jan van Eyck]? There are some that prefer the tiniest little vase of that material which they call porcelain to vases of silver and of gold even though the latter are of higher cost. It does happen occasionally that the excellence of the gift is not judged so much by its cost, as by its beauty, its rarity, and its elegance [...] Not long ago the King of Syria [the Mamluk Sultan of Egypt] sent to [King] Ferrante [of Naples] a giraffe and a donkey among other gifts, procured from the furthest regions of the Orient. [...] Amongst the gifts were many precious objects, but these two animals made the [gesture of the] gift all the more excellent because of their strangeness, as they had never been seen before¹.

Pontano's emphasis on rarity characterises a new approach to this category of value in collecting practices². While gold and silver might be favourably received,

the kinds of objects that rulers were keen to show off were those that were not easily obtainable close to home: strange animals, Chinese porcelain, Mamluk metalware and other unexpected items. Such objects were often accompanied by ceremony, ritual and embassy, and would have carried these associations with them, as they made their way into a collection. Indeed, resident Italian ambassadors at the court of Naples reported on the vast array of objects gifted to the kingdom from the Mamluk, Ottoman and Tunisian courts. It was these rare objects, and the diplomatic occasions in which they were exchanged, that informed a new approach to the material world, giving rise to a culture of collecting and the emergence of a space made specifically to house and display such objects.

Almost all *studioli* from the fifteenth century have been altered or destroyed, but paintings of saints in their studies offer a glimpse of the types of objects that were found in these collecting spaces. In the Neapolitan context, Colantonio's *Saint Jerome in his Study* and Antonello da Messina's painting of the same subject provide rich examples (fig. 1). In Antonello's painting, on the shelf above Jerome's head appears an *albarello*, a receptacle used to store spices and medicines from the East, while beside it another ceramic vessel in blue and white glistens with lustre (fig 2). To the left of his desk, on a ledge below, two more ceramic vessels are used as pots for live plants (fig 3). The blue and white motifs found on these ceramics are inspired by Chinese porcelain and Islamic wares and are repeated in the Valencian floor tiles. Metalware, most likely decorated with damascene motifs, litter the shelves nestled beside beautifully bound books, indicating the scholarly activities that take place there, the pages opening up a new world of learning and adventure for the armchair traveller. The *studiolo* was like an *entrepôt*, where diverse objects from around the world converged, encountered one another, and often were dispersed again as they were given away, sold, transformed, or reinstalled somewhere else. The Renaissance *studiolo* can thus be seen as a metaphor for port cities such as Naples that brought in galleys from across the Mediterranean laden down with all sorts of goods.

Venice's international mercantile connections have led many scholars to focus on this maritime republic as the main source for eastern encounters, but little attention has been given to the court of Naples, which had a steady flow of diplomatic embassies from the Ottoman, Mamluk, and Tunisian courts throughout the end of the fifteenth century³. By focussing on the exchanges taking place in Naples, this study argues that the city played a key role in shaping both a diplomatic culture as well as new approaches to the material world that emerged in fifteenth-century Italy. These developments were intrinsically linked to the convergence of cultures that such a port city occasioned. Naples was a gateway,

serving as the diplomatic contact zone for eastern and western ambassadors as well as a point of exchange for goods coming in and out of Europe. Objects in cross-cultural exchanges were not merely stationary objects in Renaissance princely collections but pointed to the activities taking place within and outside the *studiolo*, acting as material memories of encounters, mercantile routes, and territorial expansion. Early modern objects were mobile, circulating and travelling long distances through trade and diplomacy, while such artefacts could also be arrested in time when placed in a collection or a domestic space. This complex relationship between mobility and stasis points to the latent sociability of objects and how their modes of exchange contributed to their value, their symbolic meanings, and their agency.

When objects circulate they do not simply move from one location to another, but rather leave traces, altering their new settings and taking on new identities, leading to cultural transfer⁴. Postcolonial studies have challenged a straightforward understanding of cultural transfer, claiming that it is too Eurocentric and glosses over the dynamics of intercultural processes and transformations⁵. As a response, Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmerman have proposed the idea of *histoire croisée* or «crossed history», which analyses both the global and the local not simply from a comparative point of view, but by investigating the multilateral entanglements of multiple actors with varying viewpoints⁶. This approach moves away from binary oppositions (East/West or North/South, for example) and places emphasis on frames of reference, rather than on transfer between two points, which usually implies some form of beginning and end. The use of the term *croisée* refers to a criss-cross, the possibility to reverse and reciprocate, which moves away from a linear process and places emphasis on intersections, whereby persons, practices, and objects are intertwined or transformed by this crossing process. Similarly, «sites of mediation» refer to the places where dynamic processes of transcultural and translocal interactions, interconnections and entanglements take place⁷.

Naples was such a site of mediation, a point of divergence and convergence, evident in the drawn-out negotiations with the Ottoman and Mamluk empires throughout the fifteenth century. Such diplomatic entanglements need to be situated within fifteenth-century diplomacy more broadly, rather than understood as one-off events or seen simply within an «East vs. West» dichotomy. Indeed, the continuous attempts at peace negotiations between the major players within Italy (Venice, Naples, Rome, Milan and Florence) were intricately bound up with larger trade negotiations and territorial struggles with courts across the Mediterranean, such as the Ottomans and the Mamluks. What happened at home had a

knock-on effect on what happened abroad, and vice versa. These unstable times gave rise to what many have called the «new diplomacy»; however, as scholars have recently argued, this is not a picture of a coherent Italian Renaissance with an erudite humanist like Lorenzo de' Medici at its centre, but rather an incoherent set of moves and countermoves by multiple players with multiple perspectives often acting as «double agents»⁸. Central to these negotiations were material things – raw goods, aromatics, ceramics, textiles, and other art objects or luxury items – that served as the cogs in trade or were exchanged as diplomatic gifts to broker trade and politics. The case of Naples provides a unique focus, as it was not a republican mercantile centre such as Florence or Venice but rather the fulcrum of the Neapolitan kingdom. For most of the fifteenth century, it was also the central stage from which the Aragonese sought to propagate their power and extend their kingdom, instigated by Alfonso the Magnanimous' projection of himself as a new Roman ruler set to reunite the eastern and western empires⁹.

Diplomatic entanglements

In July 1480, Turkish troops invaded Puglia, on the southern heel of Italy in the Kingdom of Naples. The Aragonese acted quickly. The future Alfonso II of Naples, Duke of Calabria and son of King Ferrante of Naples, travelled from Tuscany where he had been commanding troops following the Pazzi War. By the time Alfonso's troops arrived, the Turkish leader Gedik Ahmed had captured and occupied the fortress and town of Otranto¹⁰. The Turkish incursion caused great strain on the military and monetary resources of the Neapolitan court, forcing the royal family to pawn much of their library and jewels. The invasion also caused various Italian states and the papacy to loan funds to support the campaign, since such an incursion threatened not only the peace of Italy but also, it was thought, its religious constitution. The death of Mehmed II in spring 1481 and the increasing strength of Italian troops allowed for the recapture of Otranto and the reclamation of Neapolitan lands, sending the Turkish troops back across the Adriatic. An embassy that took place in April 1483 to negotiate peace between Naples and the Ottomans provides rich documentary evidence of how such diplomatic occasions gave rise to the performance of cultural identities, and as I argue here, how the material objects in these exchanges — animals, textiles, silver, and other collectible items — served as material memories of those exchanges. Dynamic relationships were formed through encounters, but those objects also constituted other associations, beyond initial contact, through circulation, replication, and translation.

In April 1483 numerous ambassadors recorded the visit of the Turkish am-

bassador to Naples. The narrative related here combines the reports of April 1483 from the Milanese ambassador Branda da Castiglione writing to Duke Gian Galeazzo Sforza of Milan, and the Ferrarese ambassador Battista Bendedei writing to Duke Ercole d'Este of Ferrara (no Neapolitan records survive)¹¹. Both Castiglione and Bendedei note that various diplomatic and political figures, including all of the visiting ambassadors, gathered in the *Regia Corte* to receive the new ambassador of the Grand Turk, who had come to confirm peace. King Ferrante, the Turkish ambassador, and the rest of the diplomatic party then processed from the Castel Nuovo to the house of the Duke of Ascoli, accompanied by trumpets and tambourines. The following day they all reassembled in the Sala Grande della Regina in the Castel Nuovo, which was decorated with beautiful gold tapestries. They moved into another room that was similarly decorated, where another Turkish ambassador appeared with a company of around twenty people, most of whom were dressed in silk «al modo loro» (in Turkish dress). They were attended by numerous political and diplomatic figures from the Neapolitan kingdom and across the Italian peninsula. The Turkish ambassador first kissed the hand of King Ferrante, stating that the «Turkish Sultan» (Bayezed II) greeted him with a good heart and with the intention of always maintaining peaceful relations. The Turkish ambassador then stated that the sultan's friends were the king's friends and his enemies the king's enemies: «amici per amici et inimici per inimici». This was all done through an interpreter who knew Italian well, according to the Milanese informant.

The reports confirm that the king received the ambassador with great celebration and said that he was very pleased with the ambassador's visit, stating that he also intended to have «great peace with this great ruler». The Ottoman ambassador then fetched the rest of his company, five of whom presented gifts from Bayezed II. These included around ten pieces of silver, comprising various bowls and cups; ten pieces of cloth, two of which were gold and the others silk in various colours, *alla turchescha*; and other textiles (*damaschi* and *zambellotti*). In addition, four Turkish dogs and two beautiful horses were presented. The gifts, it was reiterated, were given not because the king needed these things but to show the love and benevolence of the sultan towards King Ferrante, and as a sign of perpetual peace, so that their friends were friends and their enemies, enemies.

The ambassadors' reports are similar, describing the same gifts, and throughout their letters include the constant repetition of «amici per amici e inimici per inimici». While the heightened peace negotiations lasted some days and the reports are focussed on the concentrated hours of the visit, the exchanges that took place were subsequently recounted, translated, and circulated through

tales — by word of mouth and letters — that made their way across Italy, and even abroad, to their respective state rulers. Ambassadors sent from the Mamluks or the Ottomans, like their Italian counterparts, often stayed for a number of months, usually at the cost of the hosting court, and such prolonged stays gave rise to further cross-cultural exchanges. The experience of ritualised diplomatic performance and the ambassadors' extended stay thus became memorialised in verbal and textual narratives, but also through objects of diplomatic exchange.

Material exchanges

Diplomatic gifts had been exchanged with the Mamluk, Tunisian, and Ottoman courts early on in Aragonese rule. As early as 1438, King Alfonso I of Naples is recorded covering expenses for the accommodation of the Tunisian ambassador «moro Hamer Mendorra», who had presented to Alfonso various gifts including two lions and a lioness. While quite the exotic gifts, it was noted in 1439 that Alfonso had to cover costs for the damage these animals had made to the building in which they were held¹²! In 1472, the organist Perpinet was paid for an organ that King Ferrante was to give as a gift to the King of Tunis's son¹³. Exotic and expensive animals including leopards, dogs and, most often, horses were common gifts between states and were used as pawns in complicated diplomatic manoeuvring. In 1482 the Milanese ambassador to Naples reported that the Great Sultan of Egypt, Qaytbay, had sent some animals from Alexandria as part of negotiations to gain favour with King Ferrante during the territorial struggles between the Mamluks and the Ottomans¹⁴. In 1482, during a particularly fraught moment between Florence and Naples, Lorenzo de' Medici received the gift of a Turkish war horse sent by Ferrante from the spoils taken after the recapture of Otranto¹⁵. In 1489 King Ferrante wrote to his daughter Eleonora of Aragon, Duchess of Ferrara about the gifts he had received from the Turkish ambassadors visiting Naples, including vases of silver, brocades and silks, and some dogs¹⁶. Ferrante noted that the ambassadors stressed the amicability and great peace («amicitia» and «bona pace») between Naples and the Grand Turk, an indication that gifts are never really freely given but rather, as anthropologists have long argued, are heavily laden with reciprocity and obligation¹⁷.

Other Italian states were also recipients of lavish gifts from Islamic polities as part of trade and territorial deals. In 1473, Mamluk Sultan Qaytbay sent Doge Nicolo Tron twenty pieces of porcelain, five pieces of muslin, sugar, aloewood, benzoic resin, a flask of balsam, ten containers of theriac, a horn of civet perfume, and sweets¹⁸. Well known are the gifts from Qaytbay's ambassador, Mohammed Ibn-Mahfuz, who arrived in Florence in 1487 and gave Lorenzo de' Medici rich tex-

tiles including a ceremonial tent, as well as ceramics, spices, and a giraffe, among other items further discussed below. Such diplomatic gifts extend beyond the limited time frame of gift and counter-gift between two individuals, and help constitute a protracted relationship over time not only between individuals or even groups, but as part of what Annette Weiner has coined a «reproductive system» involving a much larger network¹⁹. Indeed, while the focus of this study is on the fifteenth century, it should be underlined that Quattrocento exchanges were a continuation of much earlier gifting and trade networks. For example, as early as 1261 an embassy from the Mamluk sultan to Alfonso X of Castile arrived carrying lavish gifts such as textiles and exotic animals including an elephant, a giraffe and a zebra²⁰. Gifts to European courts from the Mamluks were also indicative of chains of exchange across larger geographic areas. Giraffes, spices, and Chinese porcelain were not local to Egypt or Syria but were obtained through trade and diplomacy with African and Yemeni courts, which in turn were gifted to Europeans.

European relations with the Mamluk sultanate were caught up in diplomatic entanglements that stretched across the Mediterranean as various powers competed with one another over trade monopolies and land rights. In the case of Naples, this extended to the hope for a pan-Mediterranean court, where no territory was seen out of grasp, from Tunisia to Cyprus to Milan. Cyprus provides a rich example of how deeply entangled diplomacy across the Mediterranean had become, with Naples playing a key role. During Ferrante's reign, the Mamluks and Aragonese were embroiled in a plot over the control of Cyprus, which resulted in a *coup* of 1473-1474 and eventually led to Ferrante's illegitimate son's residence in Cairo for over ten years. Upon the death of Jacques II, husband of Queen Caterina Cornaro of Cyprus, different factions attempted to take control of the island with the help of foreign powers. Many of the Catalans and Spaniards living on the island held Aragonese interests. Others looked to Venice for security, which heightened tensions between Venice and Naples, two states long at each other's throats. Jacques had agreed to a union between his daughter Charla and don Alfonso, Ferrante's illegitimate son (not to be confused with the Duke of Calabria, the future king of Naples, Alfonso II of Aragon), and it was this agreement that fuelled the attempted *coup* led by Archbishop Fabregues in November 1473²¹. After killing a number of people at Caterina's court, the Catalan conspirators forced the young daughter of the deceased king to marry don Alfonso, «promising him many rich Cypriot estates as a dowry», and «made him successor to the realm»²². The plot did not go according to plan, as the conspirators needed outside support and funds and King Ferrante was reluctant to give any after both Venetian and

Milanese ambassadors in Naples encouraged him not to interfere. Archbishop Fabregues thus fled Cyprus in January 1474, albeit with 60,000 *ducati* in jewels and other goods. In 1475, however, Naples was embroiled again in a plot to oust Caterina, when don Alfonso joined forces with Charlotte Lusignan, Jacques II's half sister, and travelled to Cairo to petition the Mamluk Sultan Qaytbay to join their cause. Don Alfonso did not succeed, and instead stayed at the sultan's court in Cairo for over ten years, until 1487²³. During this time, King Ferrante kept close ties with Alfonso, sending him wine, and one wonders what other kinds of goods were exchanged between father and son.

The German Felix Fabri noted in his travelogue that during his visit to Cairo, Alfonso had been incorporated into the Mamluk court, to the extent that he wore Mamluk clothing²⁴. Alfonso's return and his predilection for Mamluk dress is also documented by Notar Giacomo, who noted on 27 September 1487 that Alfonso returned from Cairo dressed «a la morescha»²⁵. The French merchant and chronicler Philippe Gérard di Vigneulles remarked that Alfonso was received back in Naples with great pomp and circumstance, greeted by the principle barons of the kingdom with trumpets and song²⁶. Vigneulles also noted that Alfonso was dressed «alla turca» and was accompanied by several «Turkish» servants, an obvious confusion between the Mamluks and Ottomans²⁷.

While Alfonso remained in Cairo there were numerous embassies from both sides, resulting in the continual exchange of gifts between Sultan Qaytbay and King Ferrante. A close relationship with the Mamluk sultan was crucial at a point when Neapolitan relations with the Ottomans were extremely contentious, eventually leading to the invasion of Otranto. Trade deals with the Mamluks were also key in Aragonese hopes to counter Venice's maritime power. Indeed, it is likely that Venice entered into war with Ferrara, the political ally of Ferrante, in part because of the contest over Cyprus²⁸. In 1479-80, Francesco Coppola was in charge of sending gifts to the Mamluk sultan's ambassadors, who were then resident in Naples. In December 1480, Francesco Gaetano, in his position as consul, was sent to Alexandria laden down with lavish textiles as gifts for the sultan in hopes of securing trade deals²⁹. In 1480, the Mamluk Sultan also sent King Ferrante gifts, including textiles and a giraffe. Giraffes were an exceptional and highly sought-after gift, as recorded by Pontano and also highlighted in the stories of gifts given to Lorenzo de' Medici. Indeed, representations of Lorenzo's giraffe proliferated in paintings in Florence while Ferrante's giraffe appeared in a large mural of Naples in Ferrara, which was painted on the balcony of his daughter Eleonora of Aragon's apartments³⁰. Aside from animals and luxury objects, weapons of war were also exchanged and it was rumoured that Ferrante was seeking a formal alliance with

the Mamluks. In 1483, European travellers to Cairo reported on a shipload of military equipment that King Ferrante had sent, which included complete sets of armour composed of helmets, brassards, and gloves as well as halberds, axes, swords, daggers, bows, catapults and gunpowder³¹.

The territorial struggles over Cyprus also meant that gifts were exchanged between Caterina Cornaro, Queen of Cyprus and the Mamluk court. In 1477, the Cypriot ambassador to the Mamluk court received ceremonial garb to wear during audiences with the sultan, and he was given benzoin and balsam incense, aloe and a vial of theriac (an antidote to poison) to pass on to Caterina. Also in 1477, the sultan gifted Cyprus a gilded saddle with a gold cover and silk bridle, and followed up these gifts with a horse and golden spurs³². It is likely that the saddle and bridle were decorated with the ubiquitous damascene motifs that appear on other Mamluk objects such as metalware and ceramics (see figg. 7, 15-17). Caterina was also the recipient of fourteen prized pieces of Chinese porcelain from Cairo. Gifts to the Mamluk sultanate from Caterina and the payment of tribute were clearly attempts to keep relations cordial and to dissuade any efforts to usurp her throne, as in 1476, when Caterina made sure to send tribute to the Mamluks. At this time don Alfonso of Aragon was in Cairo and rumours from a Milanese ambassador suggested that the sultan was eager to make Alfonso King of Cyprus³³.

Gifts exchanged between Cairo and Florence are also worth detailing, particularly because the primary sources recording the Florentine gifts vary in their descriptions, underlining the discrepancies in documentary evidence. In the Florentine Luca Landucci's chronicle, the embassy is recorded with a fair amount of detail. On 11 November 1487 he notes that some animals were sent from the sultan: «a giraffe, which was very big and very beautiful and gentle, which can be found in many paintings in Florence. As well a large lion, and goats and sheep that were very strange»³⁴. It was not until 18 November that the abovementioned animals were presented in the Signoria in a ceremony that required an interpreter, followed by their display in the piazza for the greater public. On 25 November the same ambassador presented to Lorenzo de' Medici «odoriferous things [i.e. aromatics], in beautiful vases *alla moresca* [in the Moorish style]; and flasks full of balsam, and a beautiful large tent *alla moresca*»³⁵. In 1487 Piero Dovizi da Bibbiena described these same gifts in a letter to Lorenzo's wife Clarice Orsini. He noted a «beautiful bay horse; strange animals, sheep and goats of various colours with long ears [which hang down] all the way to their shoulders with fat tails hanging to the ground»; «a large flask of balsam; two civet horns [likely holding civet musk]»; aloewood; «big vases of porcelain not similar to anything seen before nor

better worked»; cloth of various colours; «cotton wool [muslin] that they call turbanti [i.e used for turbans], very fine»; «cotton, that they call «sexe»»; large vases of confectionaries, mirabelle prunes and giengotuo [likely *genjiovo*, a medieval term for ginger]»³⁶.

The diverse descriptions of the gifts from Qaytbay are confusing and the translations here intentionally awkward and literal, both because interpretations of the passage differ greatly and this variation is significant for our understanding of these objects, but also because it signals that contemporaries too had difficulty describing these novel things. Many describe the vases as in the Moorish style, which modern scholars have often interpreted as Valencian, but they could equally be Islamic wares made in Damascus, and Piero describes them as porcelain. Could it be that authentic blue-and-white Chinese porcelain vases were mistaken for Valencian vases that looked similar, particularly if these were viewed from afar during the gift ceremony in the piazza? We know from inventories that the Medici's collections included Chinese porcelain³⁷; it is also likely that the Medici received porcelain as gifts on other, unrecorded, occasions and that some vessels were obtained through their mercantile endeavours. A letter from 1485 from Francesco Nacci and Matteo Gandolfo in Naples alludes to some «things» (*cose*) being sent from Qaytbay and in 1486 Gandolfo reported that he was waiting in Naples for «le robe» that had not yet arrived from the sultan³⁸. The fact that it was in Naples that they were waiting for such goods indicates the centrality of Naples in diplomatic negotiations with the Mamluks and as the main point of entry into Italy. Indeed, Qaytbay's ambassador Ibn-Mahfuz is recorded frequently at the Neapolitan court, where he received an annual provision from King Ferrante as well as clothing. Battista Bendedei, the Ferrarese ambassador who was also often resident in Naples, noted that Ibn-Mahfuz «has stayed here many times, so much so that he is very familiar with the king and duke»³⁹. Looking more closely at the diplomatic entanglements and the role that Naples played both within Italy and abroad sheds light on this port city and raises historiographical questions around the centrality of Naples at this time.

Literature that has taken a Tuscan-centric approach has highlighted Lorenzo de' Medici as a magnificent *de facto* ruler, collector, and diplomat, erudite and illuminated by his humanist learning, while his nemesis King Ferrante of Naples is often described as a cruel tyrant⁴⁰. More recent studies on Ferrante's diplomacy have shown that the Aragonese were crucial diplomatic players and central to the rise of the so-called «new diplomacy» that emerged in the fifteenth century⁴¹. This central diplomatic role meant that the Aragonese had access to luxury goods exchanged through diplomacy and trade, indicating the need to reassess collecting

and diplomatic practices in Naples.

Chinese Porcelain

The Medici have long been recognised as having the largest collection of Chinese porcelain in Europe in the fifteenth century. By the death of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1492, fifty-two items were recorded in his inventory⁴². In a study of Lorenzo de' Medici's collections his porcelain collection is declared as the largest in Italy, and it is noted that even the «Ottoman Sultans owned fewer pieces»⁴³. Such a statement takes an inaccurate and Eurocentric view of collecting. Evidence discovered in the archives in Modena disputes this generally upheld claim, indicating that Eleonora of Aragon possessed over 170 pieces of porcelain, by far the largest known collection in Italy at that time⁴⁴. Eleonora's porcelain has been overlooked in the literature, and yet it is significant not only for its sheer volume but also for what it might say about the global extent of Aragonese collections. It is no coincidence that the oldest reference to actual examples of porcelain in a European collection comes from Naples, in the 1326 inventory of the collection of Maria of Hungary, Queen of Naples⁴⁵. Visitors to Naples in the 1490s also remarked on tables full of porcelain in the Castel Capuano⁴⁶.

Much of the recorded Chinese porcelain coming into Italy in the fifteenth century was sent from the Mamluk sultans. The Mamluks' monopoly over the spice trade in the fifteenth century meant that they had luxury objects in abundance, traded along the silk roads, which they proffered as diplomatic gifts as a means of brokering territorial and commercial deals. Lists of lavish gifts from textiles to ceramics and slaves to camels were frequently compiled to track the numerous objects the Mamluks gave to and received from courts all over the world. For example, the Mamluks received pieces of Chinese porcelain from Yemen in the hundreds (400 or 500 in some lists); when they re-gifted these items to European courts, the Mamluks never exceeded thirty pieces at a time⁴⁷. As early as 1352, when a high-ranking Mamluk bureaucrat's goods were confiscated, 30,000 pieces of porcelain were recorded in his inventory, which included both blue-and-white and other varieties such as celadon⁴⁸. Placed in perspective, European access to these goods was rather limited. Despite this, or probably because of it, gifts such as porcelain that made their way into Italy at this time were highlighted as something noteworthy.

How Eleonora of Aragon obtained her porcelain is not clear. She was the daughter of King Ferrante of Naples and moved to Ferrara in 1473, when she married Duke Ercole d'Este. Ercole d'Este had also spent a large part of his early life at the Aragonese court, where he had been sent at the age of fourteen to be

educated and where he remained until he was nearly thirty⁴⁹. The court of Ferrara had close ties to Naples, and Eleonora and Ercole maintained many of the Neapolitan traditions to which they had been exposed during their time in the south. Upon moving to Ferrara in 1473, Eleonora began renovating her apartments in the Castel Vecchio and building new ones in the gardens of the castle. These spaces included two *studioli*, two chapels, and a number of oratories, as well as various rooms that served multiple functions, from bedrooms to entertaining spaces⁵⁰. The list of Eleonora of Aragon's collection of porcelain in the 1493 inventory is largely organised by colour, beginning with green porcelain («porzellana verde»), which amounts to seventeen pieces. This «green» porcelain is most certainly a reference to celadon glaze, highly prized in China for its similarity to jade and its subtle decoration⁵¹. Vases with celadon glaze were also listed among Lorenzo de' Medici's collection, one of which survives in the Bargello in Florence⁵². The rest of Eleonora's collection was in the blue-and-white style, like the vessels seen in Giovanni Bellini's painting of the *Feast of the Gods*, made for her son Alfonso d'Este's *camerino* (figg. 4-5).

Eleonora of Aragon's account books are full of payments for a wide range of goods, but there are no references to purchases of porcelain. We do, however, have archival evidence for the acquisition of one piece in Eleonora's collection, a soup plate or basin that she received as a gift from Diomede Carafa, Count of Maddaloni in Naples. The lack of payments in any of her account books for the rest of the porcelain suggests that these were given as gifts, possibly brought with her when she moved from Naples to Ferrara in 1473 or acquired on visits to Naples. The piece of porcelain that Diomede Carafa sent to Eleonora was described in a letter as a «scotellina di porcellana», probably referring to a small *scudella*, a basin usually used for broth⁵³. Diomede had been Eleonora's tutor and was the godfather of Isabella d'Este. A well-known collector and humanist and a key counselor to King Ferrante of Naples, Carafa was an influential figure for Eleonora, dedicating his treatise on good governance to her⁵⁴. Diomede Carafa's collection of antiquities, largely drawn from discoveries within the Neapolitan kingdom, thus interacted with objects from China, underscoring the meeting of the geographically distant with the temporally remote⁵⁵.

Eleonora kept close ties to Naples, attested by regular correspondence. She travelled there in 1477 to attend her father's second marriage to Giovanna of Aragon, and while she was there Eleonora bore her son Ferrante d'Este⁵⁶. At the coronation of her father's new wife, while Eleonora was still in Naples, the court received an embassy from the sultan of Tunisia⁵⁷. Eleonora easily may have been the recipient herself of gifts from the sultan, not only as daughter of the king but

as Duchess of Ferrara in her own right. When she returned to Ferrara, she left Beatrice and Ferrante d'Este in Naples in the care of the Duchess of Calabria, Ippolita Sforza, and thus the channels of communication were fairly open during this period, as she kept abreast of news of her children in the south. It appears that porcelain could also be bought in Naples, as in August 1487, when a payment was made to Giuliano de Mazo for five «scodelle di porcellana di color celeste», which could refer to either blue-and-white porcelain or the light blue-grey of celadons such as the Gaignières Fonthill vase⁵⁸.

Chinese porcelain was also frequently given by the Mamluk sultans to the Venetian doges throughout the fifteenth century. Doge Foscari received thirty pieces as well as theriac and balsam in 1442, while in 1461 Doge Malipiero received twenty pieces accompanied by benzoic resin, aloewood, balsam, civet perfume, two pairs of carpets, and sugar. Already mentioned is the long list of gifts including twenty pieces of porcelain to Doge Nicolò Tron in 1473. Doge Agostino Barbarigo in 1490 received a similar list of items, including thirty-three pieces of porcelain. In 1499 it was a similar list again, but this time the gifts included saddles (one was gilded silver and the other of crimson velvet with silver elements), as well as fourteen vessels of porcelain⁵⁹.

Aromatics and spices served a number of purposes in the early modern world: they were used as medicines, cleaning agents, seasonings for food, perfumes to scent both the body and the air, and even as apotropaics. The receptacles for these aromatics were also likely part of the gift, ranging from glass flasks and metal incense burners to drugs jars (*albarelli*) and porcelain. Such containers were both aesthetic and functional objects. At the Mamluk court, sugar was offered to guests on twenty large bowls of Chinese porcelain at the wedding of Sultan al'Ghawri's son, and 400 porcelain dishes were used at another one of his feasts to serve food⁶⁰. According to Vespasiano da Bisticci, Niccolò Niccoli dined with «vases of porcelain or other ornate vases» and drank out of crystal cups⁶¹. In Eleonora of Aragon's inventory, one small blue-and-white porcelain vase is described as being used for rose water. A Venetian who died in Damascus is recorded owning a variety of types of porcelain: a cracked blue-and-white bowl, four small green celadon bowls, and a large porcelain bowl containing ground ginger⁶². It is likely that the perceived magical properties of porcelain worked in tandem with beliefs in the medicinal properties of the spices it held: contemporary images of the Magi show them carrying gold, frankincense and myrrh in receptacles made of a range of materials, including Chinese porcelain (fig. 6). Considering that spices are often very colourful, the contrast between the white and blue of porcelain and the spice contents would have been visually stunning.

Trade and cultural translation

Diplomatic relationships certainly gave rise to the exchange of objects, but the presence of Catalan and Neapolitan merchants overseas also occasioned the transfer of material culture. Naples was an entrepôt, a stopping point for ships coming and going between Italy and the Levant, while colonies of merchants from the Neapolitan kingdom also lived in the cities of Cairo, Alexandria and Damascus throughout the fifteenth century⁶³. There was a Neapolitan *fondaco* with a changing resident consul in Alexandria recorded in the 1420s and 1430s. While the *fondaco* seems to have disappeared in the middle of the fifteenth century, a consul was once again reinstated in the 1480s and 1490s. Even during times when there was not a resident consul, notarial documents attest to merchants from Amalfi, Gaeta and Naples living for considerable time in the Levant, demonstrating the prolonged presence of Neapolitan merchants overseas⁶⁴.

The Count of Sarno, Francesco Coppola, invested in galleys and trade with the Levant, which was coupled with his rise in political power and favour with King Ferrante during the 1470s and 1480s. His profits from the soap, silk, and paper industries were intrinsically linked with his trade in raw goods, most of which came from the East, on top of his investments in coral fisheries in Tunisia⁶⁵. From Alexandria he imported sought-after spices to be sold at a profit in Europe. His favour with Ferrante enabled him to claim a monopoly over the kingdom's foreign trade and his wealth was so great that in 1482-1483 during the War of Ferrara he loaned the king twenty galleys, fifteen big round ships and eleven others. His favour with the king was soon to change, however, when he was accused of a conspiracy plot and his goods were confiscated. This included thousands of *ducati* in jewels and silver, agricultural industries and land holdings in Naples and across the kingdom and further afield, including 25,000 *ducati* in Alexandria, and his expensive textiles were distributed amongst the king's army. Among the spices in his possession was a significant amount of pepper and cinnamon, and it appears he had stores in Rhodes, as well as in Rome, Florence, Genoa, and Siena⁶⁶.

The 1488 inventory of goods belonging to the Gran Siniscalco of Naples also includes a variety of items both local and foreign⁶⁷. Amongst his possessions were copper candlesticks, paternosters, clothing, «Moorish» tablecloths, a «Moorish» *spalliera*, textiles, and many books. The Moorish tablecloths mentioned here might indeed be Oriental rugs, which were frequently used as table dressings. For example, at a banquet given in honour of Alfonso of Aragon in Naples by the Florentine banker Benedetto di Antonio Salutati in 1477, carpets covered the raised platform on which the tables were placed, in addition to more rugs that covered

the tables themselves. Near to where Duke Alfonso sat, a large basin containing various aromatics was placed on another rug⁶⁸. A much later Neapolitan inventory from 1561 belonging to a member of the Caracciolo family attests to the range of foreign objects in a Neapolitan household. Amongst the objects listed are four perfume burners (two in copper and two in bronze) along with other metalwork (likely damascene), as well as four porcelain pieces and various crystal vessels. The studio housed a variety of items including seventy-five antique vases, inkwells, an «arco turchesco» (likely a bow rather than an architectural element) and books. Stored within a wooden «*scrittorio*» were more antique vases and over 1,200 silver medals⁶⁹.

Inventories of Venetians who died in Damascus in the middle of the fifteenth century shed light on the types of foreign material culture that became part of the Italian household abroad⁷⁰. While these are unique cases of individual Venetian merchants living in Damascus, they reveal a great deal in general about the lives of Italians living and working in Syria in the fifteenth century. These inventories state that their possessions were packed up and dispatched back to Venice⁷¹. Goods from the East thus could enter Italy via inheritance rights abroad, and it is likely that some items from the Levant made their way into Neapolitan homes in a similar manner. Venetian merchants' dwellings were furnished with local items as well as those that came from farther afield, from the carpets with «Moorish patterns» that adorned floors, benches or tables to the Chinese ceramics and their imitations that graced shelves. Most of these merchants had a *studiolo* or study — a functional room from which to conduct business, but also reflecting the ideological notion of the *studiolo*, that of a space for contemplation as well as the collection of objects⁷². In most cases, the Venetians living abroad did so for an extended period of time, many for years at a time, which reflects the accumulation of eastern goods in their homes both as aesthetic objects as well as functional ones. The inventories reveal a wide range of ceramics, from 280 «big spice-jars piled up, glazed in black and some white and red» to Syrian blue-and-white porcelain imitation ware, to authentic Chinese porcelain. The Venetian Consul da Molin owned five large porcelain bowls while other merchants had a variety of porcelain pieces⁷³.

The trade and gifting of ceramics resulted in the transfer of motifs in local production, giving rise to new styles and tastes. Ceramics produced in Persia and the Ottoman and Mamluk world looked to Chinese porcelain as inspiration, incorporating blue-and-white motifs but combining them with local traditions (fig. 7). Similarly, these ceramics influenced potters in Spain and Italy, who began using a wider range of colours, employing some of the decorative motifs in blue and

white. Innovations to convey brilliance first emerged in Islamic Spain, where the technique of lusterware was employed. Here, vibrant colours such as manganese were employed to provide vegetal patterns in rich purples (fig. 8). The firing process of the lustre also gave rise to a metallic sheen and a coppery appearance, turning these ceramics into artefacts that mimicked more expensive metals such as gold or bronze.

Such brilliance can be found on *albarelli*, which survive in abundance in museums across the world, and they are often depicted in paintings of domestic interiors such as Antonello's (fig. 2). Examples that can be specifically linked to the Aragonese in Naples can be found in the Louvre, where the arms of the Aragonese are combined with those of the Sforza; these pieces were likely made in Naples to commemorate the marriage between Alfonso of Aragon and Ippolita Sforza, Duke and Duchess of Calabria (fig. 9). These *albarelli* are not necessarily highly refined works, but rather incorporate designs and framing devices loosely inspired by Chinese and Islamic blue-and-white wares. Around the rim of one, blobs of paint make a simple dot pattern, while on another, swirly lines incorporate a loose ivy motif mimicking the manganese lusterware vases associated with Islamic Spain, found for example on a dish that bears the arms of Sicily (fig. 10). Another example, likely made locally in Naples, contains a portrait of a woman, probably Eleonora of Aragon, and fuses these artistic styles (fig. 11). Here the «foreign» motifs have become localised in an Italian profile portrait of Eleonora that schematises her delicate veil and the pomegranate design of her dress.

The colours and motifs of ceramics extended beyond what was found on shelves, as the floors of chapels, *studioli*, and other interiors spaces were ornamented with bright tiles that mimicked the designs found on vessels, also exemplified in Antonello's interior (fig. 3). Surviving floor tiles can still be seen in a number of churches in Naples as well as in the Cappella Pontana, while the Museo Filangieri retains some from the Carafa Palace and the Louvre holds specimens from the Caracciolo chapel in San Giovanni a Carbonara in Naples (fig. 12)⁷⁴. The Caracciolo examples portray beasts and arms, encircled by vegetal motifs also found on Valencian wares (fig. 13)⁷⁵. The Castel Nuovo's floors were also decorated with Valencian tiles, ordered by Alfonso of Aragon in the 1440s, which contained colourful designs with manganese and red as well as others in blue and white incorporating Aragonese arms, devices and mottos, as represented in Colantonio's painting of Saint Francis (fig. 14). These tiles were sent over in batches on various Majorcan and Venetian galleys⁷⁶. Valencian tiles were of course not «foreign» for Alfonso and his Catalan court; rather, they referred to his Spanish roots. Transported to Italy, they reflected the larger cultural exchanges taking place in Naples.

The pots containing plants in Antonello's painting are *alfabeguers*, lusterware ceramics that were used to hold fragrant herbs to sweeten the air, the word deriving from the Arabic *al-'habac* (sweet basil) which became *alfabaga* in Valencian (fig. 3)⁷⁷. Already in 1397 the company of the so-called Merchant of Prato, Francesco di Marco Datini, was importing these into Italy, where they are recorded as «*alfabichieri*»⁷⁸. These linguistic mutations reflect forms of cultural translation that attend the movement and production of ceramics—both on the surface level of decoration and on a material level. As foreign ceramics are imported to a new place, they do not remain discrete «foreign objects» but rather transform local production, producing new hybrid objects and in turn new environments⁷⁹. From Antonello's painting and contemporary inventories, the origins of some goods are not always entirely clear, and many spaces would have been flooded with a kaleidoscope of objects carrying similar motifs but produced in diverse places around the globe.

Confusion about origins is also reflected in the terms that were used to describe the motifs found on many of these objects. Examples from the inventories of Venetians who died in Damascus are revealing. Some wares are described as «Moorish» (*moresco*), «Arab-style» (*arabesco*), or «in the style of Damascus» (*alla damaschina*) while others are «in the Florentine style» (*alla fiorentina*) or «in the Milanese style» (*milanexe*)⁸⁰. In 1472 the merchant-banker Filippo Strozzi, who lived between Naples and Florence, wrote to his relative Marco Strozzi, who was headed to the Levant, requesting Oriental carpets as well as «brass vases» *alla domaschina*, ink stands or candlesticks «or anything that you think is nice»⁸¹. *Alla domaschina* was used to refer to patterns found both on ceramics and metalware made in the Mamluk world, but often associated with Damascus (figg. 15-17). For example, Strozzi's inventory of possessions that were divided amongst his heirs records «five small white dishes with a circular leaf pattern *alla porcellana*, three soup plates of blue and white earthenware *alla domaschina*, a metal perfume burner *alla domaschina*, a pair of jasper *paternostri* with faces of the dead», among other metal objects *alla domaschina*⁸². While «*alla*» refers to something made «in the style of» it does appear that this was sometimes used to refer to works that were authentically «damascene».

Metalwork was highly prized in Italian collections, attested to by its appearance in paintings of domestic interiors such as Antonello's, as well as repeatedly found in inventories, demonstrating that such wares could be found in the homes of Italian elites and often in their studies⁸³. In the fragments of customs registers in the Neapolitan archives from the fifteenth century there is mention of «rame lavoreata» and «fiero filato», referring to some form of metalwork with applied

decoration⁸⁴. The «palla de profumare de metallo» (incense/perfume burner) listed among Strozzi's goods was an item that numerous collectors owned or sought (including the Medici, Ercole d'Este and Eleonora of Aragon)⁸⁵. These types of objects (fig. 16) could serve multiple purposes: in the Islamic world they were used for burning incense and in Italy they could be hung up to serve this same function, but they were also used as hand warmers and as decorative pieces⁸⁶. They also may have been gifted as the receptacles for spices proffered by the Mamluks, and it has been suggested that the damascene incense burner at the Museo Civico in Asolo in Cyprus might have been given to Caterina Cornaro by the Mamluk sultan as a diplomatic gift⁸⁷. Mamluk metalware including a perfume burner in the Este collections in Modena (fig. 17) might also have come by such a route, although we know that Ercole d'Este also sought to purchase one in Venice⁸⁸. The description of the 1483 embassy to Naples by the Ferrarese ambassador Battista Bendedei suggests that the silver presented to Ferrante was likely inlaid, similar to damascene work. He notes that five members of the Turkish party presented around ten pieces of silver. Some were in the style of «*broncini* small in size while the majority was that of brass, that is a common [type] of theirs in form and style: and some small cups»⁸⁹.

Interest in the designs on metalware and its brilliance, which was then mimicked in lusterware, also informed humanistic writings in which the notion of splendour could refer to luminosity. Indeed, Pontano's books on social virtues read like textual versions of *studioli*, inventories of a diversity of objects that were familiar to his courtly Neapolitan circle. This is evident in the excerpt with which I began this study of gifts and their relationship to magnificence, but passages from his treatise on splendour also highlight the function of objects as markers of distinction. Pontano remarks that King Alfonso had various vessels of silver and gold and beautifully embroidered tablecloths but that a more modest man could also show splendour in the range of decoration, art, form and material of the objects, whether in «gold, silver or porcelain»⁹⁰. In addition, objects such as «seals, paintings, tapestries, divans, ivory seats, cloth woven with gems, cases and caskets variously painted in the Arabic manner, little vases of crystal and other things of this type [...] bring prestige to the owner of the house, when they are seen by the many who frequent his house»⁹¹. Pontano also emphasizes the necessity of adorning spaces «with variety» and recounts how King Alfonso ornamented his «royal palace where he lived, the church where he celebrated sacred things and the houses of many ambassadors» with «carpets from France, gems from Syria, all at great price»⁹². The emphasis on variety and rarity is certainly influenced by the range of goods to which Pontano would have been exposed in Naples, from

gems to Chinese porcelain to objects crafted in the «Arabic» manner, referring to damascene patterns. Pontano's reference to Alfonso ornamenting ambassadors' houses also underlines the constant flow of resident ambassadors at the court of Naples, which in turn reflected the prominence of the hosting city.

This study has argued that objects of exchange were material mediators between courts across the Mediterranean. Paying close attention to diplomatic entanglements and types of artefacts exchanged has revealed Naples as a central negotiator and a site of mediation in Renaissance diplomacy, while also pointing to the important role of non-Italian states such as the Mamluks and the Ottomans. Examples of ceramics — from authentic Chinese porcelain and damascene *albarelli* to Valencian lusterware and local Neapolitan wares — demonstrate such interconnected histories. Diverse rulers left traces on the local visual and material culture of Naples, while the kingdom's role as a diplomatic and commercial entrepôt meant that foreign goods would continue to provide «rarities» to collect and inspire. Naples was not a passive consumer of goods from other centres, but as this study argues, it was a centre that absorbed, translated and transformed foreign material cultures, artefacts, and motifs, moulding both a diplomatic culture as well as new approaches to the material world.

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- * Partendo dallo scambio di oggetti nella Napoli del Quattrocento, questo studio tenta di dimostrare come la città avesse giocato un ruolo primario sia nella trasformazione del coevo gioco diplomatico, sia nei nuovi approcci alla vita materiale, per come questa andava evolvendosi nell'Italia del Quattrocento. Questi sviluppi innovative sono strettamente collegati al fatto che il porto della città fosse un punto di convergenza tra differenti culture: Napoli era una porta di ingresso che serviva sia come zona di contatto tra gli ambasciatori provenienti dell'Europa dell'Est e dell'Ovest, sia come punto di scambio tra gli oggetti che entravano e uscivano dall'Europa. Le ambasciate straniere ricorrono molto spesso nei documenti aragonesi, che recano testimonianza di offerte in dono di animali esotici, tessuti, lavori in metallo, ceramiche e altri oggetti preziosi. Questi oggetti non sono solo oggetti d'arte conservati all'interno di collezioni principesche europee, bensì recano memorie di scambi, rotte mercantili ed espansioni territoriali. Attraverso tutto il Quattrocento, Napoli appare come un punto di mediazione, particolarmente evidente nelle negoziazioni con gli imperi Ottomani e Mamelucchi. L'articolo intende leggere queste congiunture diplomatiche nel più generale contesto della diplomazia europea, offrendo nuovi documenti per capire l'emergere di quella che si definisce una "nuova diplomazia". La città di Napoli non viene quindi intesa come luogo che passivamente consuma le merci provenienti da altri

centri, bensì come una attore attivo che assorbe, traduce e trasforma ciò che proviene da culture allotrie.

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- 20 Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, cit., p. 96.
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- 22 Quoted in Hurlburt, *Daughter of Venice*, cit., p. 62.
- 23 *Ivi*, pp. 82-83. Forcellini, *Strane peripezie* (1914), cit., pp. 459-461.
- 24 Forcellini, *Strane peripezie* (1914), cit., p. 270.
- 25 Notar Giacomo, *Cronica di Napoli*, ed. by P. Garzilli, Napoli, 1845, p. 165.
- 26 Forcellini, *Strane peripezie* (1914), cit., pp. 459-461.
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- 31 Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, cit., p. 106. Forcellini, *Strane peripezie* (1914), cit., pp. 180-181.
- 32 Hurlburt, *Daughter of Venice*, cit., pp. 94-96.
- 33 *Ivi*, pp. 95, 273, n. 159.
- 34 «una giraffe molto grande e molto bella e piacevole; com'ella fussi fatta se ne puo vedere

- l'molti luoghi in Firenze dipinte. E visse qui più anni. E uno lione grande, e capre e castroni, molto strani.» Quoted in P. Meli, *Firenze di fronte al mondo islamico. Documenti su due ambasciate (1487-1489)*, in «Annali di Storia di Firenze», 4, 2009, p. 244.
- 35 «cose odorifere, in begli vasegli alla moresca; e fiaschi pieni di balsam, e un bello e grande paviglione vergato alla moresca, che si distese, e vidil.» *Ibidem*.
- 36 «Un bel cavallo baio; animali strani, montoni e pecore di vari colori con orecchi lunghi sino alle spalle, et code in terra grosse quasi quanto el corpo; una grande ampulla di balsam; ll. corni di zibetto; bongivi et legno aloe quanto può portare una persona; vasi grandi di porcellana mai più veduti simili, né meglio lavorati; drappi di più colori per pezza; tele bambagine assai, che lor chiamano turbanti, finissimi; tele assai colla calda, che lor chiamano sexe, vasi grandi di confezione, mirabolani et giengiotuo.» Quoted in L. Fusco and G. Corti, *Lorenzo de' Medici: Collector and Antiquarian*, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 78, 302, doc. 87. Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, cit., pp. 113, 203, n. 77.
- 37 R. Stapleford, *Lorenzo de' Medici at Home. The Inventory of the Palazzo Medici in 1492*, Pennsylvania, 2013, pp. 74-75. Fusco and Corti, *Lorenzo de' Medici*, cit., p. 378, doc. 293. The 1512 original can be found in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASF), compiled by Simone di Staggio dalle Pozze. It is part of the MAP (Medici Avanti il Principato) project, and can also be accessed online at <<http://www.archiviodistato.firenze.it/rMap/Sommario.html>>, doc. 165.
- 38 ASF MAP 39, 504. See also the discussion in Fusco and Corti, *Lorenzo de' Medici*, cit., doc. 87.
- 39 Quoted in Meli, *Firenze e mondo islamico*, cit., p. 245.
- 40 M. Bullard, *Lorenzo de' Medici: Anxiety, Image Making, and Political Reality in the Renaissance*, in *Lorenzo de' Medici. Studi*, ed. by G. Garfagnini, Firenze, 1992, pp. 3-40; M. Bullard, *Lorenzo and Patterns of Diplomatic Discourse in the Late Fifteenth Century*, in *Lorenzo the Magnificent: Culture and Politics*, ed. by M. Mallett and N. Mann, London, 1996, pp. 263-274; H. Butters, *Lorenzo and Naples*, in *Lorenzo il Magnifico e il suo mondo: convegno internazionale di studi (Firenze, 9-13 giugno 1992)*, ed. by G. Garfagnini, Firenze, 1994, pp. 143-151.
- 41 Dover, *Royal Diplomacy*, cit., pp. 57-94; C. Clough, *Federico da Montefeltro and the Kings of Naples: A Study in Fifteenth-Century Survival*, in «Renaissance Studies», 6, 1992, 2, pp. 113-172; Abulafia, *The French Descent Into Renaissance Italy*, cit.; F. Senatore, *The Kingdom of Naples*, in *The Italian Renaissance State*, ed. by A. Gamberini and I. Lazzarini, Cambridge, 2012, pp. 30-49.
- 42 Fusco and Corti, *Lorenzo de' Medici*, cit., p. 78.
- 43 *Ibidem*.
- 44 Eleonora had 177 pieces in total or potentially 181, if one includes the «porcella domaschina» listed. ASMO Guardaroba (G) 114. For a transcription of the inventory of her porcelain see L. Clark, *The Peregrinations of Porcelain: The Collections of Duchess Eleonora d'Aragona of Ferrara*, in «Journal of the History of Collections», February 2019, <http://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhy063>.
- 45 J. Levenson, ed. *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, Washington, New Haven and London, 1991, p. 131; J. Massing, *Studies in Imagery*, London, 2003, pp. 390-391; and D. Whitehouse, *Chinese Porcelain in Medieval Europe*, in «Medieval Archaeology», 16, 1972, 1, p. 73.
- 46 Marin Sanudo and an anonymous correspondent both comment on large quantities; see B. de Divitiis, *Castel Nuovo and Castel Capuano in Naples: the Transformation of Two Medieval Castles into "all'antica" Residences for the Aragonese Royals*, in «Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte», 76, 2013, 4, pp. 464, 469.

- 47 Lists of gifts are discussed in Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, cit.. A significant amount of Chinese porcelain also made its way to the Swahili coast; see S. Prita Meier, *Chinese Porcelain and Muslim Port Cities: Mercantile Materiality in Coastal East Africa*, in «Art History», 38, 2015, pp. 702-717.
- 48 Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, cit., pp. 137-8.
- 49 For Ercole d'Este see W. Gundersheimer, *Ferrara: The Style of a Renaissance Despotism*, Princeton, 1973; Tuohy, *Herculean Ferrara*, cit.
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- 52 Fusco and Corti, *Lorenzo de' Medici*, cit., pp. 78-79.
- 53 ASMO CPE 1248.4 (Maddaloni). D. Cohen and C. Hess, *Looking at European Ceramics. A Guide to Technical Terms*, Malibu and London, 1993, p. 65.
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- 55 I thank Sarah Kozlowski for drawing my attention to this particular aspect of the global and the local.
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- 57 G. Passero, *Giornale del Regno di Napoli*, BNN B Branc 93.D.29, Vincenzo Orsino, Napoli, 1785, p. 38.
- 58 G. Filangieri, *Documenti per la storia, le arti e industrie per le provincie napoletane raccolti e pubblicati. Indici degli artefici delle arti maggiori e minori. Dalla Lettera H alla Lettera Z*, vol. 6, Napoli, 1891, p. 101.
- 59 Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, cit., pp. 107-108; Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, cit., p. 23.
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- 62 D. Howard and F. Bianchi, *Life and Death in Damascus: The Material Culture of Venetians in the Syrian Capital in the Mid-fifteenth Century*, in «Studi Veneziani», 46, 2003, p. 254.
- 63 I. Schiappoli, *Napoli aragonese: Traffici e attività marinare*, Napoli, 1972, especially p. 65; E. Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, Princeton, 1983.
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- 66 Schiappoli, *Napoli Aragonese*, cit., pp. 243-249.
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- 68 M. Spallanzani, *Oriental Rugs in Renaissance Florence*, Firenze, 2007, pp. 107-108, doc. 83.
- 69 ASNA, Archivio Caracciolo di Villa, 125, II.45.

- 70 D. Howard, *Death in Damascus: Venetians in Syria in the Mid-Fifteenth Century*, in «Muqarnas», 20, 2003, 1, pp. 143-157. See also Howard and Bianchi, *Life and Death in Damascus*, cit., pp. 233-300.
- 71 In the case of Stefano Ravagnino the inventory included goods that he was safe-keeping for other Venetian merchants.
- 72 L. Clark, *Collecting, Exchange, and Sociability in the Renaissance Studiolo*, in «Journal of the History of Collections», 25, 2013, 2, pp. 171-184.
- 73 Howard and Bianchi, *Life and Death in Damascus*, cit., p. 254.
- 74 G. Donatone, *La maiolica napoletana del Rinascimento*, Napoli, 1993.
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- 79 L. Saurma-Jeltsch, *Introduction: About the Agency of Things, of Objects and Artefacts*, in *The Power of Things and the Flow of Cultural Transformations. Art and Culture Between Europe and Asia*, ed. by L. Saurma-Jeltsch and A. Eisenbess, Berlin, 2010, pp. 10-21.
- 80 Howard, *Death in Damascus*, cit., p. 145.
- 81 Spallanzani, *Oriental Rugs in Renaissance Florence*, cit., pp. 104-105.
- 82 «5 schodelette bianche con uno cerchio di fogliami alla porcellana, 3 serodelle (sic) di terra bianche e azure alla domaschina, una palla de profumare di metallo alla domaschina», «uno paio di paternostri di diaspro a facette con testa di morto», Spallanzani, *Ceramiche orientali*, cit., pp. 169-170, doc. 25. The original is found in ASFV Serie Stroziana, n. 54 c. 9, from 1494.
- 83 Spallanzani offers numerous examples: Spallanzani, *Ceramiche orientali*, cit., pp. 47-50. For other examples in relation to the study, see D. Thornton, *The Scholar in his Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy*, New Haven and London, 1997.
- 84 ASNA, Dipendeza della Sommaria, Serie II, 45. See for example the entries from March 1482, 3R-4R.
- 85 For similar metal items, see A. Contadini, *Middle-Eastern Objects*, in *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by M. Ajmar-Wollheim and F. Dennis, London, 2006, pp. 308-321; Contadini, *Translocation*, cit. For Eleonora see ASMO G114, 150R; Amministrazione dei Principi 638, 18R. For Lorenzo, see Fusco and Corti, *Lorenzo de' Medici*, cit., pp. 382, 384; Spallanzani, *Ceramiche orientali*, cit., pp. 169-170, doc. 25. For the question of the origins of so-called «Veneto-Saracenic» metalwork see D. Behrens-Abouseif, *Veneto-Saracenic Metalware*, in «Mamluk Studies Review», 9, 2005, 2, pp. 147-172; Contadini, *Translocation*, cit.; A. Contadini, *Threads of Ornament in the Style World of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, in *Histories of Ornament: From Global to Local*, ed. by G. Necipoglu and A. Payne, Princeton, 2016, pp. 290-308.
- 86 Contadini, *Middle-Eastern Objects*, cit.
- 87 Hurlburt, *Daughter of Venice*, cit., pp. 94-96.
- 88 A. Venturi, *L'arte Ferrarese nel periodo d'Ercole I d'Este, I*, in «Deputazione di storia patria per l'Emilia e la Romagna», serie III, 7, 1888, p. 114, n.1.

- 89 «resposto ch/ si prima li presento i' mano de cinque de li soi circa x pezi de argento. Alcuni in modo de Broncini picholi de grandezza poco maiori de quelli di ottone comuni a loro p/ o guisa e forma: & alcune pichole e taze: dende da circa x peze due drapo doro de veluto cum diversita de colori a loro modo, dalmasco e zambeloti». ASMO AMB NAP 4, 201-203, 1483 17 April, Battista Bendedei to Ercole d'Este.
- 90 Pontano, *Virtù sociali*, cit., pp. 231-233.
- 91 *Ivi*, pp. 233-235. Translation from Welch, *Public Magnificence*, cit., p. 215.
- 92 Pontano, *Virtù sociali*, cit., p. 235.



Fig. 1: Antonello da Messina, *St. Jerome in His Study*, c. 1475, © The National Gallery, London.



Fig. 2: detail of Figure 1, showing ceramics, books, and metalware.

Fig. 3: detail of Figure 1, showing ceramics and tiles.



Fig. 5: Ming Chinese porcelain bowl, c. 1368-1398, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 6: Andrea Mantegna, *Adoration of the Magi*, about 1495-1505, Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.



Fig. 7: Vase, Syrian, 15th century, Fritware, decorated in dark blue over a white slip. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, C.413-1918.

Fig. 8: Albarello (drug jar), Valencia, 1450-1475, Tin-glazed earthenware with lustre decoration, 10-1907. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 9: *Albarelli* with arms of Duke and Duchess of Calabria (Alfonso of Aragon and Ippolita Sforza), made in Naples (?), 1465, Tin-glazed earthenware. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo by author.

Fig. 10: Dish with arms of Sicily (or Aragon-Sicily), made probably in Manises, Valencia, Spain, tin-glazed earthenware, 1450-1500. Photo: Metropolitan Museum, The Cloisters Collection, 1956, 56.171.129.



Fig. 11: *Albarello* with a portrait of a woman (Eleonora of Aragon?), Naples, c. 1475, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 245-1894.

Fig. 12: Floor tiles from the Caracciolo chapel, San Giovanni a Carbonara, Naples, c. 1435, made in Naples or Valencia. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo by author.



Fig. 13: Dish, Valencia, 1430–1470, Tin-glazed earthenware, painted in lustre, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, C.2054-1910.



Fig. 14: Detail of Colantonio, *St. Francis consigns the Rule to his followers*, 1445, Museo di Capodimonte, Naples. Photo by author.



Fig.15: Mahmud al-Kurdi, box and cover, brass chased and overlaid with damascene motifs and inscriptions, Syria or Egypt, 1450-1550, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2290-1855.



Fig. 16: Venetian or Syrian (?), Perfume burner, c. 1450-1500, Brass, pierced, engraved and silver damascened with black lacquer infill. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M.58-1952.

Fig. 17: Syrian/Egyptian, Mamluk perfume burner, c. 1400-1500, Brass, pierced, engraved and silver damascened with black lacquer infill. Galleria Estense, Modena. Photo by author.