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Gentile in Red

David Young Kim, *University of Pennsylvania*

AMONG THE MANY AND FAR-REACHING voyages undertaken by Italian Renaissance artists, the sojourn of Gentile Bellini at the Ottoman court in 1479–81 surely counts among the most fascinating. The events leading to the Venetian artist's journey to Istanbul are well known: after more than a decade of conflict in the Adriatic and Aegean with the Ottomans, the Venetian Republic dispatched their emissary Giovanni Dario to Constantinople to broker a peace treaty. In March 1479, the Venetian Senate approved a treaty with Sultan Mehmet II that professed a renewed friendship and peace "with the villages, fortresses, islands, and lands that raise the sign of San Marco."[1] One month later, on April 27, the Ottoman ambassador was received in Venice, and on August 1 a request from Sultan Mehmet II for a painter was announced to the Senate. This important undertaking was bestowed on Gentile Bellini, or, as Sanudo referred to him transcribing the intonation of Venetian dialect, "Zentil belin optimo pytor," then occupied with executing a cycle of paintings for the Great Council Hall.[2] In September 1479,

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The exhibition Bellini and the East (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, National Gallery, London, 2004–5) provided the initial impetus for the conception of this essay. I am grateful to the curators of the exhibition, Alan Chong and Caroline Campbell, for including me in the research and planning of that landmark exhibition. For their comments and suggestions, I would like to thank Ivan Drpić, Eric Dursteler, Holly Hurlburt, Timothy McCall, Gülru Necipoğlu, Elizabeth Rodini, Jane Tylus, Alberto Saviello, Rossitza Schroeder, Lydia Spielberg, Hugo van der Velden, Diana Wright, and the two anonymous reviewers. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

1. Stipulations for the renewed friendship between the two great Mediterranean powers included the republic's payment of an annual tribute of 10,000 ducats to the Ottomans to secure the position of the Venetian *bailo* in Constantinople and a further 100,000 ducats to settle outstanding debts, as well as the surrender of the Albanian fortress of Skodra, the island of Lemnos, and fortresses and lands in the Morea. See Franz Miklosich and Joseph Müller, eds., *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana* (Vienna, 1860–90), 3:295–98. For the translation and commentary on the terms and place names in the treaty, see Diana Gilliland Wright's meticulous analysis of the text, "Mehmed II Confirms Peace between the Ottomans and Venice: Text and Translation," http://nauplion.net/1478-Peace.pdf.

2. Jürg Meyer zur Capellen, *Gentile Bellini* (Stuttgart, 1985), doc. 14a, 109.

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Gentile, in the company of two assistants, boarded a galley captained by Melchior Trevisan and departed for Istanbul.[3] The corpus of extant work associated with the artist's experience of the Ottoman world includes the famed portrait of Mehmet II (fig. 1); the so-called Gardner scribe; drawings, most likely preparatory, after ethnographic types that include annotations for coloring in Venetian dialect; and a series of portrait medals.[4]

Aside from the visual import of the works themselves, the event of Gentile's travel has regularly received attention over the centuries, albeit colored at times by an orientalist imagination of a Western artist venturing eastward. On the occasion of an exhibition at the Brera in 1834, for instance, the Milanese painter Francesco Hayez, in a gloss on a seventeenth-century anecdote, painted the horrifying scene of the sultan ordering the decapitation of a slave's head for Gentile's benefit to serve as a realistic model for a depiction of St. John the Baptist.[5] Less fanciful and more engaged with the tradition of documentary reportage is the literary historian Louis Thuasne's *Gentile Bellini et Sultan Mohammed II*. Thuasne brought to light the historian Giovanni Maria Angiolello's description of Gentile's stay at the Ottoman court in the *Historia turchesca* (ca. 1482), an account Thuasne characterized as "particularly interesting for the study of the events contemporary to the author who knew how to relate them with impartiality."[6] Modern scholars, such as Franz Babinger, Jürg Meyer zur Capellen, and Julian Raby have refined our knowledge of the historical context of Gentile's travel, and a number of publications appeared concurrent to the exhibitions *Bellini and the East* (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, National Gallery, London) and *Venice and the Orient* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, L'Institut du Monde Arabe). The present-day increasing concern with the Islamic world and the more general topic

3. Ibid., doc. 17, 110.

4. See Elizabeth Rodini, "The Sultan's True Face? Gentile Bellini, Mehmet II, and the Values of Verisimilitude," in *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye, 1450–1750: Visual Imagery before Orientalism*, ed. James G. Harper (Aldershot, 2011), 21–40; Julian Raby, "Opening Gambits," in *The Sultan's Portrait: Picturing the House of Osman*, ed. Selmin Kangal (Istanbul, 2000), 64–71, 80–81. For further references in museum publications, see n. 7.

5. For a contemporary account of the exhibition, see Ignazio Fumagalli, "Esposizione degli oggetti di Belle Arti nell'I. R. Palazzo di Brera," *Biblioteca italiana, ossia giornale di letteratura, scienze ed arte* 75 (1834): 312–17. On the Hayez painting and its relation to seventeenth-century Venetian biographies of Gentile Bellini, see Fernando Mazzocca, *Francesco Hayez: Catalogo ragionato* (Milan, 1994), 236–37; David Young Kim, "The Horror of Mimesis," *Oxford Art Journal* 34 (2011): 335–36.

6. Notably, Angiolello's prose is compared with the characteristics of Venetian *relazioni*. Louis Thuasne, *Gentile Bellini et Sultan Mohammed II: Notes sur le séjour du peintre vénitien à Constantinople* (Paris, 1888), vi.

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Figure 1. Attributed to Gentile Bellini, *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*, 1480. Oil on canvas, perhaps transferred from wood; 69.9 × 52.1 cm. (National Gallery, London, Layard Bequest, 1916 (NG3099); © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, New York.) Color version available as an online enhancement.

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of transcultural exchange has only accentuated interest in Gentile's career, so much so that the portrait of Mehmet II has become a touchstone for East-West relations in exhibitions, press, and the theater.[7]

Scholarly inquiry has understandably focused on the circumstances bringing together the seemingly incongruous pair of Ottoman patron and Italian Renaissance artist, this despite the fact that Leonardo and Michelangelo, among others, reportedly received sultanic commissions.[8] In this essay, however, I intend to displace the usual focus of attention away from Gentile's occupation in Istanbul and examine instead the Venetian reception of his voyage. How did the artist's contemporaries understand the significance of his travel? What kinds of behavior—artistic practice, participation at the Ottoman court, membership in the Venetian ambassadorial entourage—elicited commentary? How did Gentile himself fashion his time abroad upon returning to his native place? Such questions are worth asking due to premises that often underlie interpretations of Gentile's time abroad as a court artist. Specifically, these assumptions concern the audience and motivations guiding Gentile's realistic style in portraiture. It is taken for granted that Gentile received and was permitted to retain the privileges and knighthood conferred by Mehmet II due to the artist's skill in fulfilling the sultan's request for, as the fifteenth-century Venetian observer Domenico Malipiero put it, "a good painter who knows how to make portraits."[9] Or as Giorgio Vasari declared in his biography of the Bellini family published in the *Lives*, Gentile's portrait of Mehmet II *di naturale* appeared to the sultan "more miracle than art," and upon taking leave from the Ottoman court, the artist received "infinite

7. Exhibition publications that have featured the Bellini portrait include Caroline Campbell and Alan Chong, eds., *Bellini and the East* (London, 2005), 78–79; Trinita Kennedy, "Gentile Bellini (1429–1507) Portrait of Sultan Mehmet II," in *Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797*, ed. Stefano Carboni (New York, 2007), 303. On the attributions to Bellini proposed by exhibitions, see Jürg Meyer zur Capellen, review of *Bellini and the East*, ed. Caroline Campbell and Alan Chong, *Kunstchronik* 60 (2007): 124–30, Miles Unger, "Hi, Venice? It's Istanbul. Can You Send a Painter?" *New York Times*, December 11, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/11/arts/design/11unge.html, Heather Lee Rogers, review of *Bellini and the Sultan: A Comedy in Istanbul*, written and directed by Ed Stevens, Robert Moss Theater, New York, August 13, 2013, http://www.nytheatre.com/Review/heather-lee-rogers-8132013-bellini-and-th. On the display of the portrait in Istanbul upon Turkey's acceptance for admission to the European Union, see Rodini, "The Sultan's True Face?" 35.

8. Franz Babinger, "Vier Bauvorschläge Leonardo da Vinci's an Sultan Bajezid II (1502/3)," *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften (Phil.-hist. Kl) Göttingen* 1 (1952): 1–13. On the Ottoman patronage of these artists for engineering projects, see Gülru Necipoğlu, "Süleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal Rivalry," *Art Bulletin* 71 (1989): 424–25.

9. Meyer zur Capellen, *Gentile Bellini*, doc. 14a, 109: "El Signor Turco recerca la Signoria per so letter, presentade da un zudio vegnudo a posta, che la ghe mandi un bon depentor che sapia retrazer: e per gratificarlo è stà pagà la spese del viazo."

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praise" for the works executed in the sultan's service.[10] Writ large, such statements participate in a larger body of early modern discourse that would appreciate naturalistic and lively portraiture not merely for its faithful rendition of a sitter. The court artist demonstrates *ingenium*, or acute intellectual skill, a quality setting the manual act of painting apart from craft and equating it instead with a humanist pursuit of studying and representing nature.[11]

This line of thinking necessarily restricts the reception of Gentile's work in Istanbul to reports gauging the response of his primary patron there, Sultan Mehmet II, all too often likened exclusively to a patron fashioning himself after Western aristocratic commissioners of art. This perspective is in and of itself a matter of concern, given that it supports the long-standing notion, perpetuated by Vasari and Lodovico Dolce, among others, that Ottoman and Islamic viewers had primitive standards for artistic taste and were all too easily awed, even overwhelmed, by the performance of naturalistic depiction.[12] Scholars such as Gülru Necipoğlu, Julian Raby, and Emine Fetvaci have made notable contributions to the field by exploring the reception of the Bellini portrait in Ottoman histories, imperial genealogies, and physiognomic treatises.[13] And as Elizabeth Rodini has claimed, Gentile's naturalistic style itself was complex, depending as it was on the expectations of the portrait's audiences and maker: for Mehmet II, the portrait may have provided a site to contemplate the possibilities of mimetic portraiture; for the artist, a demonstration of his professional obligations; and for the Venetian public, a transcription of the Ottoman ruler's appearance.[14] On these views, Gentile's work signals an interest in a painter's imitation of nature undertaken for its own sake as well as a protoethnographic fascination in foreign dress and facial features.

10. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori: Nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi (Florence, 1966), 3:436–37.

11. On the concept of *ingenium* in art historical scholarship, see Patricia A. Emison, *Creating the "Divine" Artist: From Dante to Michelangelo* (Leiden, 2004), 321–48.

12. Note Vasari's description of Filippo Lippi's ability to escape his Islamic kidnappers by drawing a portrait. See Vasari, *Le vite*, 3:329–30. On Dolce's statement regarding the supposed Islamic prohibition of images, see Mark W. Roskill, ed. and trans., *Lodovico Dolce's "L'Aretino" and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (Toronto, 2000), 116–17.

13. Julian Raby, "Pride and Prejudice: Mehmed the Conqueror and the Italian Portrait Medal," *Studies in the History of Art* 21 (1987): 171–94; Gülru Necipoğlu, "Visual Cosmopolitanism and Creative Translation: Artistic Conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II's Constantinople," *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World* 29 (2012): 1–81; Emine Fetvaci, "From Print to Trace: An Ottoman Imperial Portrait Book and Its Western European Models," *Art Bulletin* 95 (2013): 243–68.

14. Rodini, "The Sultan's True Face?" 21–40.

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SIGNATURE AS VERSE

A preliminary piece of evidence concerning the reception of Gentile's stay at the Ottoman court is the artist's pithy signature that accompanies his series of paintings decorating the Sala del Maggior Consiglio in the Ducal Palace. Although the cycle was destroyed in the fires that ravaged the Ducal Palace in 1574 and again in 1577, a passage in Francesco Sansovino's *Venetia città nobilissima* (1581) provides a description of the lost paintings and their accompanying inscriptions, including Gentile's signature. Upon returning to Venice, Gentile resumed work on the cycle of paintings in the Great Council Hall that illustrated Doge Sebastiano Ziani's intervention in a conflict between Pope Alexander III and Emperor Frederick Barbarossa in 1177.[15] Accompanying the paintings was a series of inscriptions elaborating on the iconography of the cycle's narrative.[16] Gentile's signature was located beneath the episode in which Doge Ziani sent ambassadors to the emperor to broker peace with the pope.[17] Located on the north wall of the Great Council Hall, the inscription described the event as follows:

> PRO PACE TRACTANDA MITTUNTUR AD IMPE[-]
> RATOREM TUM IN APULIA RESIDENTEM, SOLEN[-]
> NES AMBASCIATORES [C]UM LIT[T]ERIS DUCALI-
> BUS[QUAS] PAPA MANDAT PER DUCEM MUNIRI
> BULLA PLUMBEA CUM FIGURA S. MARCI [A]TQUE
> DUCE.

15. Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare, descritta in XIIII. libri da M. Francesco Sansovino* (Venice, 1581), fol. 127v. An edition of Sansovino's earlier guidebook entitled *Delle cose notabili che sono in Venetia, quale con ogni verità fidelmente si descrive* was published in 1570. As recounted in a sixteenth-century *Historia di Papa Alessandro III*, the pope, wary of the emperor's military excursions into Italy, escaped to Venice, "believing that the great worries he held in his heart would be extinguished by mercy of the generous and humble Venetians." The pope gave the doge gifts, including a white candle, lead seals, a sword, a ring, an umbrella, eight banners and silver trumpets, each of which played a role in the narrative recounting the conflict with the emperor. On the manuscript sources for this chronicle and further discussion, see Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, NJ, 1981), 103–18. On the cycle's visual rendition of this subject matter, see David Rosand, *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto* (Cambridge, 1997), 2–5, 177–78. Gentile had been working on the paintings for five years when he was summoned by Mehmet II in 1479. A deliberation held in the Great Council on August 29, 1479, however, stipulated that "our faithful citizen Gentile Bellini the painter" complete the Great Council paintings once back in Venice (see Meyer zur Capellen, *Gentile Bellini*, 110). Gentile's brother, Giovanni Bellini, undertook work in the Great Council Hall during Gentile's absence.

16. Attributed by Pietro Dolfin to Petrarch, the inscriptions accompanying Gentile's paintings were composed by Sabellico. See Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (New Haven, CT, 1988), 82.

17. Ibid., 272–79.

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[To negotiate peace, official Ambassadors are sent to the Emperor then residing in Apulia, with ducal letters, which the Pope orders through [the agency of] the Doge to be furnished with a Lead Seal with the image of St. Mark and the Doge.][18]

The doge's diplomatic correspondence was most often sealed with wax, yet the pope declared that he wished the letters to be sealed with lead stamped with the insignia of St. Mark.[19] The privilege to employ lead seals was significant. Unlike other Italian political entities whose chancelleries employed wax, Venice was permitted to use lead seals, a practice followed by the Byzantine elite, Italian dukes, and Norman princes.[20]

It was under this inscription affirming Venice's diplomatic standing via a distinguished secretarial practice that Gentile signed his name: "Gentilis patriae dedit haec monumenta Belinus, / Othomano accitus, munere factus Eques" (Gentile Bellini has given these monuments to the fatherland, / Having been summoned by the Ottoman and made a Knight as a reward).[21] That a signature would do anything other than identify an artist, and in some cases his patron, seems anomalous at first. In the case of fifteenth-century Venetian painting, signatures often functioned as trademarks, serving to standardize painting in terms of commercial business practice.[22] Other markers of authorship, such as "Giottus Fiorentinus" or "Sebastianus

18. Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare*, fol. 127v. The Latin in this inscription is problematic, in particular the lines after "dum" (which later editions give as "cum," which makes for a more coherent reading). For instance, "ambasciatores" instead of "legati"; "mandat" + passive infinitive instead of "ut" + subjunctive, "mandat ut muniatur"; "per ducem" instead of "a duce." The final UTQUE should be read as ATQUE. The translation therefore is only a suggestion and has been made according to the context of Pope Alexander's gifts to the doge. For other poems on the donation of lead seals, see Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, 104 n.3.

19. O. Zenatti, "Il poemetto di Pietro De' Natali sulla pace di Venezia tra Alessandro III e Federico Barbarossa," *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano* 26 (1905): 194: "Io voio che questa letera sia bollada con bolla de plombo, sula qual sia da un ladi misier san Marcho e lo doxe apresso, e dal'oltro ladi sia scrito el nome del doxe; cossì como vien bollade le mie letere con bolla de plumbo e con misier sen Pietro entro." Cited in Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, 104 n. 3. On seals as indicators of social status, see Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, "Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept," *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 1489–1533.

20. Note, however, that Byzantine emperors customarily used golden seals that were affixed to significant documents of state, especially those pertaining to diplomatic communication. See Philip Grierson, "Byzantine Gold Bullae, with a Catalogue of Those at Dumbarton Oaks," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 239–53. The earliest lead seal known in Venice dates from the reign of Doge Pietro Palani (1130–48). See Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, 113.

21. Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare*, fol. 127v.

22. Notable recent contributions to the study of Renaissance artists' signatures include Karin Gludovatz, *Fährten legen—Spuren lesen: Die Künstlersignatur als poietische Referenz* (Paderborn, 2011); Debra Pincus, "Giovanni Bellini's Humanist Signature: Pietro Bembo, Aldus Manutius and

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Venetus," could also assert the maker's regional identity, particularly in the case of works destined for export to a foreign market or of an artist working abroad. Gentile's signature, however, goes beyond the standard "Bellinus fecit" that signals authorship and workshop standards. These two verses suggest how, in both form and content, an artist's acceptance of work for a patron far removed serves the fatherland and bolsters his own standing. The double-line format and primarily dactylic meter, for example, suggest parallels to elegiac couplets.[23] In addition, the format "Gentilis . . . Bellinus" is a variety of *hyperbaton*, the rhetorical technique of separating words usually belonging together. Such similarities with poetic verse associate Gentile's diplomatic and artistic accomplishments, however concisely expressed, with the genre of classicizing poetry. Fittingly, Gentile's paintings are not mere illustrations but "monuments," works akin to grand built structures such as a tomb or statue that commemorate historical episodes significant to a community of viewers.[24] And Gentile, as will be discussed below, leaves Venice as an artist and returns as a knight.[25]

Humanism in Early Sixteenth-Century Venice," *Artibus et historiae* 29 (2008): 89–119; Patricia Lee Rubin, "Signposts of Invention: Artists' Signatures in Italian Renaissance Art," *Art History* 29 (2006): 563–99; Albert Dietl, "Epigraphik und räumliche Mobilität: Das Beispiel italienischer Künstler des Hochmittelalters und ihrer Signaturen," in *Geschichte "in die Hand genommen": Die Geschichtlichen Hilfswissenschaften zwischen historischer Grundlagenforschung und methodischen Herausforderungen*, ed. Georg Vogeler (Munich, 2005), 153–80; Rona Goffen, "Signatures: Inscribing Identity in Italian Renaissance Art," *Viator* 32 (2001): 303–70; Louisa Chevalier Matthew, "The Painter's Presence: Signatures in Venetian Renaissance Pictures," *Art Bulletin* 80 (1994): 616–48.

23. Although it should be noted that the couplet does not scan entirely as a conventional distich. For instance, "dedit" is short-long when in fact it should scan short-short.

24. In classical Latin, "monumentum" usually denotes a statue, trophy, or building erected to commemorate a past event. The word appears in Cicero's *In Verrem* (4.75): "quod imperator monumentum victoriae populi esse voluisset." In the *Vocabolario della Crusca*, s.v. "monumento," the term denotes a sepulcher, as a passage in the *Esposizione de' Vangeli* demonstrates: "Le sepulture son detti monumenti, cioè per ammonire gli huomini a pensar, che deon morire." It makes perfect sense that Gentile employs the term "monumenta," for his paintings indeed commemorate the donation of Pope Alexander III. The term also aggrandizes the importance of his painting, inserting it into the Albertian hierarchy of images in which history paintings commanded the most prestige. In 1493 Sanudo referred to the cycle as "*historia* on the canvases of the Roman Pope, Alessandro III, and of the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa" (see Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, 32).

25. The subject matter of the painting itself also bears associations with the signature. Although Gentile's work does not survive, its replacement executed by Benedetto and Carletto Caliari in 1589 offers a visual rendering of the scene. The Caliaris' version engages with the inscription by designating the ambassadors as well as the doge as the composition's principal characters. While it would be specious to assume any visual parallels between this painting and that by Gentile, it seems reasonable to suggest that Gentile's composition would have also followed the inscription's demands for prominently representing the ambassadors and doge. This episode may have also resonated with the historical circumstance in which Gentile was dispatched in a diplomatic contingent to Mehmet II during the months after the peace treaty between Venice and the Ottoman Empire. See Luciana Crosato, "Per Carletto Caliari," *Arte veneta* 21 (1968): 108–24. Brown has suggested that fifteenth-century Venetians, notably Marin Sanudo,

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As a testament to the enduring memory of his travel more than a century after the fact, Sansovino's commentary correlates Gentile's painting with his journey: "Et perciochè il ditto Gentile era ritornato da Costantinopoli, dove haveva fatto il ritratto del Turco, dal quale era stato creato Cavaliero (si come hò veduto nel suo privilegio) con molti ricchi doni, scrisse sotto al predetto quadro i seguenti versi" (And because the said Gentile had returned from Constantinople, where he had executed a portrait of the Turk, by whom he had been made a Knight with many rich gifts (as I have seen in his privilege), he wrote beneath the said painting the following verses).[26] Sansovino's "Et perciochè" affirms the causal link between Gentile's travel to the Ottoman court and his decision to place his signature under this particular painting. These connections between the painting and inscription suggest that Gentile's decision to locate his signature where he did was far from arbitrary. As stated in the Maggior Consiglio's resolution on August 28, 1479, granting Gentile permission to travel, the artist was participating in a mission "ad serviendum nostro Dominio"—on behalf of the doge and the republic; the signature, therefore, inserts a note of allusion to the real event of travel within a larger field of painting depicting legendary events.[27]

THE RED AND THE BLACK

The portrait of Gentile in *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria* (1507) also broaches the issue of the artist's diplomatic service. While fifteenth- and sixteenth-century representations of confraternities tend to de-emphasize individual distinction in favor of a sense of collectivity, this painting depicts Gentile standing out from his fellow confraternity members. Dressed in a brilliant red costume, Gentile appears strikingly conspicuous among the more sober garments immediately surrounding him (fig. 2). Due to the richness of Gentile's dress and his prominence among his fellow confraternity members, Patricia Fortini Brown has suggested that Gentile's portrait is an assertion of artistic individualism, making "transparently clear to his contemporaries his pre-eminent status in Venetian society, his rank in the confraternity, and his devotion to the cult of St. Mark."[28] In another vein, Alan

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may have viewed the political conflicts depicted in the painting cycle in terms of Venice's contemporary, and often tense, relationship with the Ottoman Empire. Sanudo writes, "And he [Alexander III] returned to his seat in Rome with the help of the Venetians, who have always fought for the faith of Christ against all comers—especially Turks—who had prolonged the war such a long time": Marin Sanudo, *De origine, situ et magistratibus urbis Venetae, ovvero, la città di Venetia (1493–1530)*, ed. Angela Caracciolo Aricò (Milan, 1980), 34–35; cited in Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, 10.

26. Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare*, fol. 127v.

27. Meyer zur Capellen, *Gentile Bellini*, doc. 16, 110.

28. Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, 233.

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Figure 2. Gentile Bellini, *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria*, detail, 1504–7. Oil on canvas. (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan; Scala/Art Resource, New York.)

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Chong has observed that condition reports and infrared reflectographs indicate that Gentile's portrait lacks the underdrawing seen on this canvas and in his other works. Giovanni Bellini may have, therefore, inserted Gentile's portrait at a later stage in the painting process in commemoration of his elder brother who had passed away before the painting's completion.[29] Yet another possibility relates to the fact that Gentile offered his services as a painter to the confraternity of St. Mark with limited financial obligation on the latter's part. His portrait, therefore, may function as a portrait of a donor, a visual homage distinct, however, from more traditional kneeling donor portraits in supplication to saintly or divine protectors.[30]

While consensus regarding the authorship of Gentile's portrait has yet to be reached, this image of the artist certainly fulfills the function of portraiture, as Alberti put it, to keep alive the "faces of the dead."[31] We might attend even more closely to the culture of memory informing Gentile's portrait by indicating how his costume bears a range of social connotations, specifically in respect to the garment's color, silhouette, and ornamentation.[32] The artist's scarlet toga, pronounced sleeves, and golden chain form a matrix of associations that collectively call attention to Gentile's status as an artist who performed a diplomatic service on behalf of the Venetian Republic. Rather than neatly matching a certain style of dress with a fixed position in Venetian hierarchy, however, I am more interested in the irregularities in the system of clothing, namely, how dress can also shape and twist the very relation between identity and class. Performance of the self via dress pertains to more than just the circumscribed notion of local context; it can

29. Alan Chong, "Gentile Bellini in Istanbul: Myths and Misunderstandings," in Campbell and Chong, *Bellini and the East*, 116. Compare Peter Humfrey who also claims that Giovanni Bellini conceived the figures in the foreground: Peter Humfrey, *La pittura veneta del Rinascimento a Brera* (Florence, 1990), 88–94. Cited in Rodini, "The Sultan's True Face?" 37 n. 54. See also Katherine T. Brown, *The Painter's Reflection: Self-Portraiture in Renaissance Venice, 1458–1625* (Florence, 2000), 61–63.

30. See doc. 65 in Meyer zur Capellen, *Gentile Bellini*, 118: "E se per j ditj chusik eletj dito teler fuse extimado solum j ditj duchatj duxento jn questo chaxo se habia de j ditj a sbater e disfalchar duchatj zinquanta chel dito messer Zentil liberamente dona a dita schuola nostra." While the literature on the origins and functions of donor portraits is enormous, see esp. Hugo van der Velden, *The Donor's Image: Gerard Loyet and the Votive Portraits of Charles the Bold* (Turnhout, 2000).

31. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and on Sculpture*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London, 1972), 61.

32. Among the most famous anecdotes concerning artists' dress and social status is Vespasiano da Bisticci's anecdote concerning Donatello's refusal to wear the red mantle, cowl, and cloak bestowed on him by Cosimo (Il Vecchio) de' Medici. See Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le vite*, ed. Aulo Greco (Florence, 1970), 2:194. By contrast, Pliny in his *Natural History* (35:62–63) reports that Zeuxis possessed an elaborate wardrobe. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, bks. 33–35, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA, 1952), 306–8: "opes quoque tantas adquisivit, ut in ostentatione earum Olympiae aureis litteris in palliorum tesseris intextum nomen suum ostentaret" (also he acquired such great wealth that he advertised it at Olympia by displaying his own name embroidered in gold lettering on the checked pattern of his robes).

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also refer to the key event of displacement and the achievement of successful return. Color and cut can bear narrative dimensions.

In Venetian painting of the late quattrocento, we so frequently encounter figures dressed in red gowns similar to that worn by Gentile that we might mistake it to be standard dress. Yet at least one contemporary source suggests otherwise. In his *La città di Venetia*, after identifying the city's three classes of male inhabitants, "patricians—who govern the state and the Republic . . . citizens, and artisans or lesser people," Sanudo then explains how patricians and citizens dress "quasi a un modo" (almost in the same way).[33] Stella Mary Newton has described this costume as the "uniform of the adult male Venetian." It consisted of a *veste*, a long black gown tied at the neck with puffed sleeves; a *bareta*, a black hat; and a *becheta*, a piece of black wool or velvet draped over the shoulder.[34] As Paul Hills has observed, this uniform affirmed the "dignified uniformity or *mediocritas* of the patrician and citizen groups."[35]

An exception to the standard black toga was the dress "di color," most often worn by patricians serving as "senators of the magistrate" during their term of office. The term "di color" referred to a fabric's hue as well as the type of material, usually cloths of gold, velvet, or silk. One of the more standard costumes di color were togas dyed red, the shades and hues of which seem to have been a specialty of the Venetian dyers' guild. Fifteenth-century Venetian manuals on dyeing contain a vast range of recipes for variations on red, far surpassing recipes for other colors, such as blacks and greens.[36] Moreover, the term "red" does not encompass the rich lexicon of terms employed to designate the many gradations of this color. *Cremesino* was the most prestigious color next to cloths of gold and was the appropriate dye for official gowns made of velvet, damask, and silk.[37] The word

33. Sanudo, *De origine, situ et magistratibus urbis Venetae*, 22: "Sono tre generation di habitanti: zentilhomeni—che governano il stato, et la Republica—le caxade delli quali di sotto si farà mentione, cittadini, et artesani overo populo menudo. Li zentilhomeni da' cittadini in habito non sono conosciuti perchè tutti vanno vestiti quasi a un modo, eccetto li senatori delli magistrate mentre sono in officio—come dirò al luoco suo—che vanno vestiti di color, per lezze. Li altre portano sempre quasi veste negre longe fino a terra, con maneghe a comedo, barretta negra in testa, et becheta de panno negro, et anco di veluta; et zà si portava capuzzi molto grandi, la qual forza fu buttata zoso."

34. Stella Mary Newton, *The Dress of the Venetians, 1495–1525* (Aldershot, 1988), xx.

35. Paul Hills, *Venetian Colour: Marble, Mosaic, Painting and Glass, 1250–1550* (New Haven, CT, 1999), 173.

36. One hundred nine of the 159 chapters in a fifteenth-century Venetian manual on dyeing treat the process of dyeing reds. In Giovanventura Rosetti's *Plictho*, published in 1548, the thirty-five recipes for red far outnumber those for other colors. Hills, *Venetian Colour*, 174.

37. Newton, *Dress of the Venetians*, 18. The term derived from the principal ingredient used to produce the dye, the dried bodies of the insect kermes, or the Scarlet Grain insect (the pregnant female of *Coccus Ilicis*).

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scarlatto denoted a heavy cloth, usually wool, dyed a bright red. Less costly was *verzino*, made from brazilwood imported from India and *robbia*, or madder. Listing the prices of these shades of red, Sanudo in his *La città di Venetia* notes that a length of velvet crimson cloth was worth 90 ducats, crimson damask 45 ducats, and scarlet cloth 26 ducats.[38]

It would be difficult to declare with utter certainty whether Gentile's garment might be a gown of *cremesino* velvet or *scarlatto* silk. More important is to recognize the fact that Gentile's costume does not conform to Sanudo's description of Venetian inhabitants. According to this scheme, defining and visually recognizing the three types of Venetians depend on the color of dress—generally black for patricians and citizens and red, or "di color," for patricians serving in the Senate. Assuming Sanudo to be correct, Gentile's toga becomes somewhat of an anomaly. The Bellini family were *cittadini*, not patricians, and therefore Gentile Bellini would not have occupied a patrician office permitting dress di color.[39] There were, of course, exceptions. A law passed in 1486, for instance, permitted citizens working as secretaries to the Chancery to wear a red toga. Thus, the chronicle of the *cittadino* Freschi family shows the Chancery secretary Zaccaria in robes indistinguishable from patrician garb.[40] However, although his nephew Alvise di Giovanni, the son of Giovanni Bellini, served in the Chancery, no documents have shown that Gentile himself held this office.[41] Furthermore, Gentile's costume is all the more atypical when compared to other portraits of Venetian artists. For instance, in the *Miracle of the Relic of the Holy Cross in Campo S. Lio* (ca. 1494), Giovanni Mansueti depicts himself wearing a noticeably modest gown of mostly black cloth with red sleeves.[42]

What, then, might account for Gentile in red? One possibility is that Gentile's red toga takes on the type of dress usually reserved for Venetian ambassadors. The act of adoption and transference inherent in this claim is critical, as I view this portrait as evidence that Gentile was represented dressing *like* an ambassador rather than understanding the image as evidence that the artist held the office of

38. Sanudo, *De origine, situ et magistratibus urbis Venetae*, 58; as cited in Newton, *Dress of the Venetians*, 175.

39. On the basis of the status of their profession, we might even think that the Bellini were part of the "populo menudo," or the artisan class. Gentile's father was himself an artist, and his grandfather was a tinsmith. See Rona Goffen, *Giovanni Bellini* (New Haven, CT, 1989), 3–4.

40. Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, 5.

41. From 1305 *cittadini originari* were required to register themselves and from 1486 had to prove legitimacy by reporting births with the Avogaria di Comun. See Goffen, *Giovanni Bellini*, 4, 294 n. 14.

42. Giovanni Mansueti holds a cartellino that identifies him: "Opus Joannis de Mansuetis Veneti recte sentientium Bellini discipli." See Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, 233.

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ambassador. The difference between the two claims is significant, the first being metaphorical, the second official. To begin uncovering, then, the metaphorical import of Gentile's red dress, a number of visual sources offer examples of the role of red dress in diplomatic ceremony. One prominent instance is the *Reception of the Venetian Ambassadors in Damascus* (1511) attributed to a follower of Gentile Bellini.[43] The painting depicts the Mamluk viceroy of the Damascus receiving a visit from a Venetian contingent.[44] Several Venetians, perhaps merchants, wear the standard dress of black gowns and caps, while their representative, the *bailo* or consul, wears the official ambassadorial dress: a red toga, a stole draped over his shoulder, and a black cap (fig. 3).[45] Contemporary written sources also indicate that togas in either crimson or scarlet fabric comprised one of the possible costumes acceptable for ambassadorial missions.[46] In his *Diario*, Sanudo consistently describes those Venetian ambassadors as wearing some sort of dress in crimson or scarlet. For instance, he reports that Tomà Contarini, the ambassador to the Ottoman court, arrived in Venice wearing a costume of crimson velvet and delivered a letter that, unusually, bore a seal with the sultan's portrait.[47] Furthermore, when the podestà to Brescia, Zuane Badoer, returned to Venice to

43. Other examples of Venetian ambassadorial dress could be cited, such as the figures in Carpaccio's *Disputation of St. Stephen* (1514) or the Venetian ambassadors depicted among Borso d'Este's courtiers in the frescoes in the Palazzo Schifanoia.

44. It should be noted that while the *bailo*, or resident consul, often carried out diplomatic tasks, the two offices were in fact separate. The consul was mainly responsible for representing his compatriots and their mercantile interests to the foreign state. See Donald E. Queller, *The Office of Ambassador in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 1967); Eric Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, 2006).

45. To be sure, the *bailo*'s dress is not an exact match to Gentile's red costume. The *bailo* seems to wear a darker and heavier fabric, most likely a crimson velvet gown, while Gentile wears a brighter fabric, perhaps of silk. Gentile does not wear a stole and his sleeves, while displaying a lining, do not seem as elongated as that of the *bailo*. This comparison does demonstrate, however, that a variety of red costume was worn during diplomatic occasions. Caroline Campbell, "The Reception of the Venetian Ambassadors in Damascus," in Campbell and Chong, *Bellini and the East*, 22–23. Queller observes that "a crimson robe seems to have been customary for an ambassador, but in the three paintings of Carpaccio's St. Ursula cycle, considerable variety of dress is indicated": Donald E. Queller, "The Development of Ambassadorial Relazioni," in *Renaissance Venice*, ed. John Rigby Hale (London, 1973), 191 n. 37.

46. Ambassadors sometimes claimed expenses for fabrics and other plumes. See Queller, *Office of the Ambassador*, 191.

47. Marin Sanudo, *I diarii di Marino Sanuto (MCCCCXCVI–MDXXXIII) dall'autografo Marciano ital. cl. VII codd. CDXIX–CDLXXVII*, ed. Rinaldo Fulin, Federico Stefani, Nicolò Barozzi, Guglielmo Berchet, and Marco Allegri (Venice, 1879–1903), 49:182: "Venne ser Toma Contarini, venuto orator dal Signor Turco, vestito di velluto chermisi alto e basso, e portò la letter che'l Signor Turco scrive alla Signoria nostra, molto larga, in un sacchetto di panno d'oro, alla turchesca, bollata col la testa del Signor, e uno saibacco d'oro con uno rubinetto in cima, cosa insolita a far da altri Gran Turchi; ma questo l'usa farlo; e io vidi il sacchetto e bolla jeri, a casa del prefato ser Tomà Contarini."

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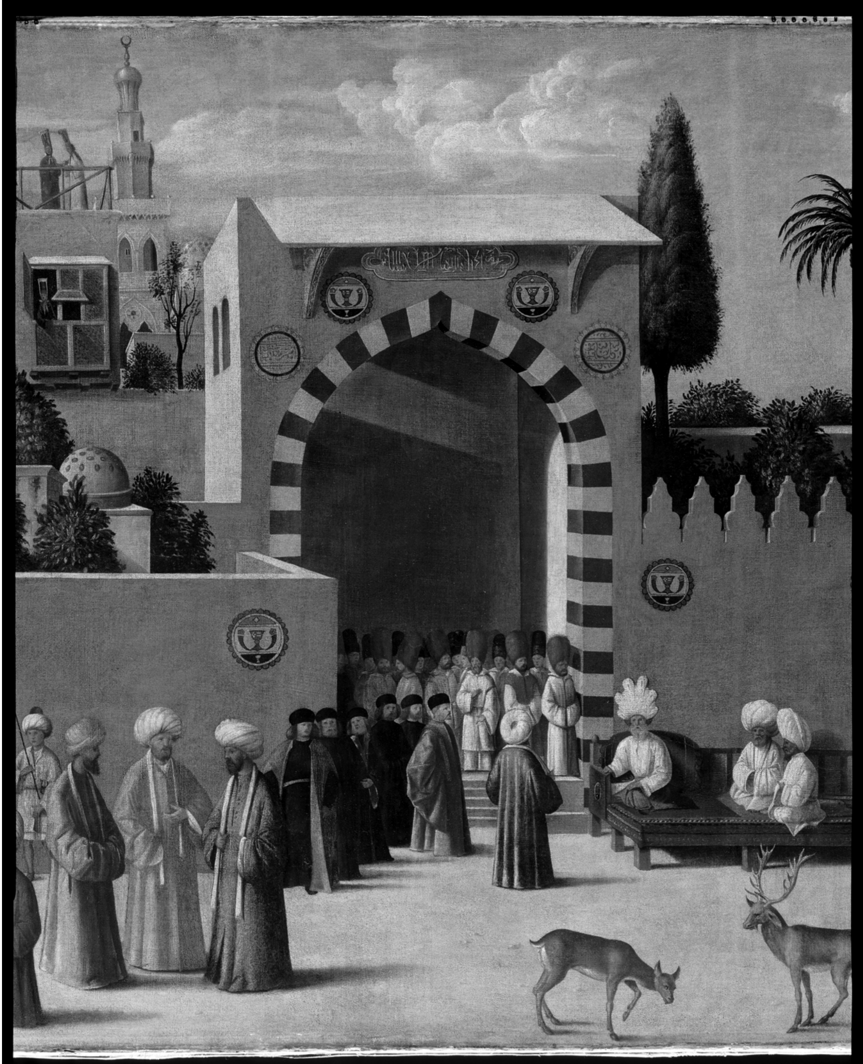

Figure 3. Follower of Gentile Bellini, *Reception of the Venetian Ambassadors in Damascus*, detail, 1513–16. Oil on canvas; 175 × 210 cm. (Louvre; © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, New York. Photo: Thierry Le Mage.) Color version available as an online enhancement.

deliver his *relazione*, or diplomatic account of recent events, he was observed to be wearing a gown of crimson damask.[48]

48. Ibid., 27:444: "La matina vene in Colegio sier Zuane Badoer dotor e cavalier, ritornato podestà di Brexa, vestito damaschin cremesin, et fe' la sua relatione, et lo steti dentro a udirla." Later that year, after having served as ambassador to France, Badoer appeared in Venice wearing the mantle of the

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Dress di color, in fact, was such a part of diplomatic protocol that contemporary Venetian observers took note of its absence. For instance, Sanudo recorded that in March 1504 the Ottoman ambassador arrived in Venice. Due to heavy rainfall, only ten patricians came to welcome the Ottoman delegation. Even worse, only one patrician, Francesco Morosini, was wearing scarlet, a breach in diplomatic etiquette, which, when reported, displeased the signoria.[49] While the wearing of scarlet or crimson costume demonstrated the importance of Ottoman ambassadorial visits, these same colors were also worn to celebrate this adversary's misfortune. In October 1520, for example, news arrived that the Ottoman sultan, Selim I, had just died in Edirne. Due to this "most wonderful news," the members of the Venetian government immediately changed into scarlet.[50]

Red cloth also served as a Venetian ambassadorial gift. The French ambassador Philippe de Commynes noted that during a procession in the Piazza San Marco several of the foreign ambassadors were "in crimson velvet gowns, which the Signoria had presented to them, at least to the Germans."[51] The giving and receipt of crimson cloth occurred not only in Venice proper but also in the republic's ambassadorial dealings abroad. The Venetian representative in the Morea, Bartolomeo Minio, recounted in several letters the handling of a border dispute with the Ottomans in 1482. Minio complained that before handing over the treaty document, the representatives of the sultan were satisfied with no less than twelve *braccie* of scarlet cloth, 97 ducats, sweetmeats, and other gifts.[52]

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knight of the republic, a garment made of crimson velvet, open to the right-hand side and decorated with large buttons. Ibid., 28:46. Also dressed extravagantly in red was the Venetian delegation sent to celebrate the election of Pope Adrian VI in April 1523. The head envoy Marco Dandolo wore a gown with a crimson silk lining along with a crimson mantle with ten golden buttons. His companions, including Alvise Mocenigo, wore similar crimson mantles. Ibid., 34:215.

49. Ibid., 5:981: "In questo zorno e con pioza, vene l'orator dil Turcho. Vi andò pochi zenthilomeni contra con li piati, *solum* 10, tra i qual sier Francesco Morexini el cavalier solo vestito di scarlato. Sichè, inteso questo de la Signoria, si ave molto a mal." A Venetian law of 1284 stated that four *ambaxatores* should greet any foreign *legatus* arriving in Venice. See Donald E. Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate: Reality versus Myth* (Urbana, IL, 1986), 149.

50. Sanudo, *I diarii*, 29:303: "da poi disnar fo Gran Consejo e tutti li Consieri veneno vestiti di scarlato per tal optima nova."

51. Philippe de Commynes, *Mémoires*, ed. Joël Blanchard (Geneva, 2007), 1:603: "Et après la messe, que chanta l'ambassadeur du Pape, qui a tout homme donna absolution du peyne et de coulpe qui seroit a la publication, ilz allerent en procession par ledict chemin, la Seigneurie et ambassadeurs, tous bien vestus; et plusieurs avoient robes de veloux cramoisi que la Seigneurie avoit donnee, au moins les Almans, et a tous leurs serviteurs robbe neufves (mais elles esoient bien courtes)." Commynes also describes how upon arriving in Venice he was greeted by twenty-five gentlemen, all wearing crimson robes. Along the Grand Canal, he was transported in boats bedecked with crimson satin and tapestries.

52. Diana Galilland Wright, "After the Serenissima and the Grand Turk Made Love: The Boundary Commissions of 1480 and 1482," in *550th Anniversary of the Istanbul University International*

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The border dispute recounted by Minio also raises another explanation for Gentile's puzzling dress. According to Francesco Negro, Gentile left Istanbul "adorned with a Phrygian mantle, a headdress, high boots and a gold collar."[53] Although this account may be more laudatory rhetoric than reportage, we might speculate that Gentile received some sort of cloth as a gift upon taking leave from Mehmet II. Indeed, a common gift bestowed on departing ambassadors was reams of cloth. In 1510 Nicolò Giustiniani informed the republic that the Ottoman sultan presented the Sudanese ambassador several cloth stuffs in addition to thirty slaves and 300,000 aspers.[54] The gift of cloth was so familiar that it was often just mentioned in passing. Reporting on Andrea Zancani's mission to Istanbul in 1499, Sanudo remarked that the ambassador said nothing about the gifts from the Sultan, which included "two robes, cloths of gold, etc."[55] Despite the ambassador's silence about the cloths, their presence in Sanudo's entry evokes the visual image of the golden fabrics physically displayed for all to see. We might discount the possibility that Gentile was given a gift of cloth, as he was not the official ambassador in Istanbul but only part of a larger diplomatic contingent. However, it seems that gifts of cloth were presented not only to the ambassador but also to the members of the ambassadorial party. Upon leaving his post in Cairo in 1512, the Venetian ambassador, his son, and the consul in Alexandria received several pieces of cloth. The ambassador's secretary and the *dragoman*, or translator, received a less valuable cloth befitting their lower status.[56]

In light of these examples, it seems reasonable to raise the possibility that Gentile's red toga alludes to his participation in diplomatic affairs. Also significant to translating the social code of Gentile's costume are his wide, bell-shaped sleeves. As Elisabetta Gonzaga remarks in *The Courtier*, this variety of sleeve was particular to the Venetians, just as rolled hoods were to the Florentines.[57] Visitors to Venice also mused on the prominence sleeves held in Venetian dress. Arnold von Harff, a knight from Cologne stopping in Venice en route to the Holy

Byzantine and Ottoman Symposium (XVth Century) 30–31 May 2003, ed. Sümer Atasoy (Istanbul, 2004), 207 n. 46.

53. For a possible link between Gentile's gifts and Enrico Dandolo's armor, see Julian Raby, "*El Gran Turco*: Mehmed the Conqueror as a Patron of the Arts of Christendom" (PhD diss., Oxford University, 1980), 111ff.

54. Sanudo, *I diarii*, 10:22: "Chome l'orator dil soldan havia tolto licentia dal Signor turcho, et auto 30 shiavi, alcune gambelli, 300 milia aspri et altri doni *ut in litteris*."

55. Ibid., 2:702: "nulla disse dei presenti dati, né quelli have che fo do veste, cazache d'oro etc. Le qual poi le presentò a la Signoria."

56. Charles Henri Auguste Schéfer, *Le voyage d'outremer; suivi de la relation de l'ambassade de Domenico Trevisan auprès du soudan d'Égypte, 1512* (Paris, 1884), 206.

57. See Newton, *Dress of the Venetians*, 9.

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Land, quipped that sleeves worn by the Venetians were "like a sack, just as we make clothes for jesters in our country."[58] Although amusing for von Harff, such sleeves bore a range of significant connotations in Venetian society. A member of the *cittadino* class would have been expected to wear sleeves *a comeo*, a type of sleeve hung to form a puffed bell shape at the lower arm and closed at the wrist. Contrary to his social standing, Gentile's portrait depicts him raising his arm to his side to display *maniche dogali*, a sleeve that was open at the wrist and displayed a cloth lining, often of silk or fur. Suggesting the importance of exhibiting such sleeves is the gesture of a figure to Gentile's left, conspicuously pulling his toga to the side to reveal his own *maniche dogali* (see fig. 2). Sanudo refers to the prestige associated with *maniche dogali* with an ironic comment about slothful members of the Venetian government: "there are those who would like to occupy the office of Censor, in order to receive ten ducats a month, do nothing, and wear *manege dogal*."[59]

Originally restricted to the doge, *maniche dogali* toward the turn of the fifteenth century were also permitted to procurators and doctors of medicine. In addition, the right to wear *maniche dogali* was also conceded to ambassadors and captains who had served with distinction during a commission. Sanudo reports that in 1500 a captain returning from service abroad appeared to the Collegio in dress similar to Gentile in his portrait: a crimson robe and *maniche dogali*.[60] Although a man in his position was not usually allowed to combine the red toga with ducal sleeves, it seems that when announcing a triumphant mission to the Collegio, these regulations were waived. For instance, in March 1511 Stefano Contarini recaptured Padua for the republic and was received in the Collegio wearing a crimson robe with "manege dogale."[61] From this evidence, we could speculate

58. Arnold von Harff, *Die Pilgerfahrt des Ritters Arnold von Harff von Cöln durch Italien, Syrien, Aegypten, Arabien, Aethiopien, Nubien, Palästina, die Türkei, Frankreich und Spanien*, ed. Eberhard von Groote (Cologne, 1860), 45: "dan die seuenhundert die degelichs so rayed gaynt sijnt ydeliche senteloman, dat sijnt edellude, alles schone menner koestlich lanck gekleyt vss off die voesse, die hueffder all gar geschoren dar off eyn kleyn bonetgen ind tragen gemeynlich alle grijse berde. Sij gurden sich gemeynlich off die roeck. Dar zoe sijnt die armen van der rocken vur off der hant enge ind hinden hengt it aeff wayl eynre elen wijdt wye eyn sack, as man die gecks rock in dessen landen maicht, as die sentelomen sulche rocke dragen moissen ind gaynt in deser gestalt" (cf. Newton, *Dress of the Venetians*, 11).

59. Sanudo, *I diarii*, 24:347: "Fo *etiam* posto, per li Cai di X, una parte in dito Consejo, che non si portasse manege dogal per la terra niun excepto quelli sono in li magistrate; actualmente et vanno acompagnar la Signoria; et non fu presa di poche balote."

60. Newton, *Dress of the Venetians*, 23.

61. Ibid., 87.

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that Gentile's engagement in diplomatic activity granted him the license to wear *maniche dogali*, otherwise inconsistent with his social standing.[62]

One further aspect of Gentile's costume that bears consideration is his gold chain and medallion. Believed to have been given by Mehmet II, the golden chain has been predominantly characterized in the secondary literature as an acknowledgment of Gentile's artistic talents.[63] More generally, Warnke conceives the golden chain given by sovereigns to artists as a mark of honor and duty for future service and loyalty.[64] Later in the sixteenth century, artists self-portraits' in which they depict themselves wearing golden chains have been taken as evidence for the rise of the artist from artisan to gentleman such as we witness in self-portraits of Titian and Federico Zuccaro.[65] Yet also worthy of mention is fifteenth- and sixteenth-century diplomatic protocol in which golden chains played a prominent role in ceremonies commemorating departure and repatriation. As Maulde-La-Clavière stated in his classic work *La diplomatie au temps de Machiavel*, the golden chain was the "l'objet classique" to present to departing ambassadors, although to be sure this gift was bestowed in general on those who carried out services to a ruler. A treasury document dated December 20, 1509, for example, indicates that Jacques d'Albion, the ambassador of the King of Aragon, received a golden chain valued at 563 livres.[66] Pope Julius II presented the Venetian am-

62. If Gentile's sleeves were not appropriate, it would be strange indeed if his portrait depicted him *in perpetua* wearing them. Such was the social import of *maniche dogali* that Venetians were criticized for wearing them without good reason. One such instance involved Nicolò Aurelio, a Grand Chancellor accused of corruption. Aurelio appeared before the Collegio wearing *maniche dogali*. The investigatory committee immediately ordered him to return and wear a robe "other than in *maniche dogali*." The next day, wearing a black robe with the more modest sleeves *a comeo*, Aurelio was charged and banished to Treviso in exile. There seems to have been a certain degree of regulation on *maniche dogali*, not only by the Venetian government but by the Venetians themselves, at least by rowdy adolescents. One day a certain Marin Grimani was overtaken by a group of patrician youths for wearing *maniche dogali*. Having never served the *Pregadi*, Grimani did not have the right to wear the ducal sleeves, apparently known to the youths, who harassed the vain Grimani and demanded ten ducats from him, lest they cut the sleeves off. Sanudo, *I diarii*, 36:421–22, 29:630–31. Cited in Newton, *Dress of the Venetians*, 24.

63. For Vasari, the chain was one of the many gifts demonstrating the sultan's appreciation of Gentile's skill in portraiture. Vasari, *Le vite*, 3:437: "perciò Maometto gli fece fare una lettera di favore molto calda, e sopra quella gli diede molti onorati doni, et appresso lo fece cavaliere con molti previlegi e li pose al collo una catena lavorata alla turchesca, di peso di scudi 250 d'oro—la quale ancora si trova appresso agli eredi suoi in Venezia—, e di più gli concesse immunità per tutt'i luoghi del suo imperio."

64. Martin Warnke, *The Court Artist: On the Ancestry of the Modern Artist*, trans. David McLintock (Cambridge, 1993), 139.

65. Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (New Haven, CT, 1998), 159–68, 170–86.

66. Maulde-La-Clavière, *La Diplomatie au Temps de Machiavel* (Paris, 1892), 3:370 n. 5.

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bassador Antonio Giustiniani a golden chain worth 200 ducats.[67] The Venetian ambassador to France, Zuan Badoer, attended a mass in San Marco wearing a costume of crimson velvet and a heavy golden chain given to him by the French king.[68] Finally, offering a visual example of this practice is Carpaccio's *Return of the Ambassadors* (ca. 1499) in which the ambassadors, all wearing golden chains, kneel in the presence of the sovereign.

However, while secondary literature at times represents the sultan's gift of the golden chain and knighthood, as well as Gentile's travel to Constantinople in general, with a fascination verging on orientalism, delving into Venetian ambassadorial legislation suggests that what is more remarkable is the republic's concession to Gentile to retain these honors. As early as 1268, Venetian ambassadorial legislation constrained all ambassadors to "give and consign upon their return all gifts and provisions that shall have been made to them . . . in those embassies and legations except for food . . . and eleven *soldi* worth in addition."[69] A decree in the Senate in 1400 reinforced this policy toward ambassadorial gifts. Gifts received from foreign sovereigns—including reams of cloth and golden chains—were to be relinquished and sold at public auction, and moreover, ambassadors were forbidden to buy back those gifts at these auctions.[70] Venice's policy toward her own ambassadors thus made a distinction between receiving honors from a foreign sovereign on one hand and, on the other, having the right to retain those honors upon returning to the republic. Given this legislation, the letter declaring Gentile's knighthood and describing the golden chain and medallion could be understood as an appeal for the artist to retain the honors upon returning to Venice. More generally, Gentile's portrait medal proudly exhibiting both the golden chain and declaring his knighthood emphasizes Venice's acknowledgment of his honors received abroad. An episode in Vasari's *Le vite* of Dello Delli, a Florentine painter of humble origins, epitomizes artists' aspirations to retain privileges received at foreign courts. After having worked for the Spanish court, Dello returned to Florence, "only to show his friends how from so much poverty that had once tormented him he rose to such grand riches." When the legitimacy of these honors,

67. Ibid.

68. Sanudo, *I diarii*, 28:46. Cited in Newton, *Dress of the Venetians*, 81.

69. Donald E. Queller, *Early Venetian Legislation on Ambassadors* (Geneva, 1966), 41.

70. Ibid., 113–14: "In reversione mea, siqua recepissem dona ad aliquo domino, Illa in termino trium dierum tenebor presentare Officio Rationum novarum, et officiales teneantur et debeant dare mihi iusiurandum . . . Que dona vendantur per officiales ad publicum Incantum." There were exceptions to the prohibition of ambassador's buying back gifts. See Sanudo, *I diarii*, 28:46: "era sier Zuan Badoer doctor e cavalier con uno manto di veludo cremexin aperto su la spalla e campanoni e con una grossa cadena d'oro al collo, che fo quella li donò el re di Franza; qual La comprò de la Signoria."

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which included a knighthood, were questioned, the artist "wrote immediately to the Spanish king, complaining of this insult, and the King wrote the [Florentine] Signoria in warm support of him, that he was given without resistance that for which he had asked."[71] The mocking of Dello's privileges recalls Andrea Michieli's satiric verses calling Gentile an "ignoramus" and "the arrogant knight of the Golden Spur," suggesting that the elevation of the craftsman to nobleman was not received without derision and contempt.[72]

The network of associations related to Gentile's dress demonstrates that the phenomenon known as the rise or ennoblement of the artist in the early modern era was not only related to artists' engagement with humanism or with the charge to reinforce images of rulership. Gentile's necklace, while no doubt a sign of Mehmet II's appreciation of his artistic talent, was also an honor accorded to ambassadors. The same can be said for Gentile's red toga with the *maniche dogali* sleeves. The act of travel, in Gentile's case diplomatic travel, could endow an artist with honors, thereby elevating his status from its artisanal origins. It is crucial to bear in mind, however, that ambassadorial positions were in theory restricted to the patrician class, and, moreover, the primary sources never refer to Gentile as an ambassador or the more customary title of "orator." And in the documents directly connected with his travel to Istanbul, Gentile is called "fidelis civis noster" and "pictor egregius."[73] It is therefore helpful to make the distinction between Gentile being an ambassador versus Gentile dressing as if he were an ambassador. The first statement suggests an equation between Gentile and the station of an ambassador, an equivalence that is, however, historically untenable. The second statement, more probable, makes a metaphorical link between Gentile and his service to a diplomatic position, with stress placed on the hypothetical circumstances of this appointment. Gentile's dress exemplifies what readers of Bourdieu might describe as a transfer of social currency from a reserve of social capital normally restricted to the Venetian patrician class.[74] An even more apt term for social capital in the context of Renaissance Venice might simply be "honor." As a fluid and intangible value, honor could be lost, as in the case of a woman losing her chastity, or contested, as in the ritual of dueling. Honor, though, could also be gained, either through the acquisition of wealth and sanctity or, in Gentile's case,

71. Vasari, *Le vite*, 3:40.

72. Andrea Michieli's satire declares that "in quattro facultà quatro ignoranti si trova . . . / Ma poi in pittura segue lo arroganti / cavalier spiron d'or Gentil Bellino." Cited in Meyer zur Capellen, *Gentile Bellini*, 121.

73. Ibid., 110.

74. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London, 1986).

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through diplomatic travel, due to his services rendered to the republic through his satisfactory completion of an artistic mission. And far from remaining in the domain of text in the reportage of Sanudo, Malipiero, Angiolello, and others, honor—that intangible quality of esteem and admiration accorded from one person or entity to another—assumes physical shape in Gentile's representation, the portrait of his costumed self in profile.

MEHMET II'S PORTRAIT AS *RELAZIONE*

What was the nature of the ambassadorial service that conferred honor on Gentile? Did the Venetian Republic grant Gentile the privilege to keep the honors received from Mehmet II simply because the artist successfully met the demands of the sultan's commission? Several artists who were dispatched to the Ottoman court returned to Venice before bringing their commissions to completion, dissatisfaction with their work most likely precipitating their prompt return.[75] However, we might also consider whether Gentile performed any specific deed expressly for the Venetian Republic aside from fulfilling Mehmet II's request for "un bon pytor." It is well known, of course, that early modern artists during their employ in a foreign state participated in political negotiations on behalf of their homelands; the existence of the experienced corps of Venetian ambassadors and mercantile representatives, however, makes it highly unlikely that Gentile engaged directly in diplomatic affairs per se.[76]

The most relevant body of evidence that might help clarify the appreciation of Gentile's service is the work executed during his sojourn in Constantinople, chiefly his portrait of the sultan himself (fig. 1). Previous assessments have rightly emphasized the image's aspirations to convey the sultan's appearance for posterity, proclaim his imperial aspirations, and consolidate his lineage.[77] The six crowns, *all'antica* arch, cloth of honor, and inscriptions on the parapet certainly impart Mehmet II's ambitions, and the staging of the ruler beneath an architectural frame

75. This is, as Raby has suggested, the case for the sculptor and collaborator of Donatello Bartolommeo Bellano. In correspondence with the doge dated January 7, 1480, the sultan expressed thanks for Bellano's service but requested another bronze worker "like the one your Excellency sent me before, or even better." See Raby, "Pride and Prejudice," 183–84. On Bellano's mixed reputation and derision by such writers on art as Pomponius Gauricus in his treatise on sculpture (1504), see Sergio Bettini, "Bartolomeo Bellano 'ineptus artifex'?" *Rivista d'arte* 13 (1931): 45–108.

76. On artists as ambassadors, see Francis Ames-Lewis, *The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artist* (New Haven, CT, 2000), 64–65; Molly Bourne, "The Art of Diplomacy: Mantua and the Gonzaga, 1328–1630," in *The Court Cities of Northern Italy*, ed. Charles M. Rosenberg (Cambridge, 2010), 138–95.

77. See nn. 4 and 7 and esp. Fetvaci, "From Print to Trace."

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may even refer to the ceremonial processions practiced at the Ottoman court.[78] Even so, the visual character of the portrait seems less an aggrandizing depiction of the sultan and more a careful study of his facial features. Gentile does not place Mehmet II's face in classicizing profile, as is seen in the portrait medals. Employing a format approaching a three-quarter's view, Gentile executes a meticulous delineation of each of the sultan's attributes, going so far as to register the delicate eyelashes and pursed lips. Gentile's method of rendering the face may not appear to be an absolutely precise likeness, all the more so due to the painting's current condition, an aspect to be discussed below. What is apparent, however, is an interest in individual facial features along with their various characteristics, among them shape, size, and color. If Gentile's style is in any way "naturalistic," it is so insofar as it takes a diagnostic approach to the sultan, breaking the face into constituent parts.

Given this approach to presenting the ruler's face, the question arises as to how such a portrait may have been seen in light of the artist's self-fashioning as a diplomatic figure. The close analogies between Venetian diplomatic reportage of foreign sovereigns' appearance and the portrait's keen presentation of the sultan's facial features calls for a discussion of how verbal and visual representations of a ruler may have functioned.[79] Proposing such an approach raises further questions regarding method: How might portraits be understood not in the context of ruler-artist patronage but as a means to communicate over geographic distance? How can a foreign face be transmitted and what cultural expectations guide its visual form and reception? Ever since Vasari referred to the artist's acquisition of "the principles of *disegno* with care," Gentile's mimetic technique has been understood as meeting the art-theoretical precepts for the imitation of nature.[80] Yet given Gentile's diplomatic status, the artist's naturalistic style complements a very significant task of Venetian ambassadors, namely, describing in detail the appearance of the sovereign, geography, and peoples of the foreign land to

78. Roberto Valturio, a humanist in the employ of Sigismondo Malatesta, commented in a letter to Mehmet II on portraiture as a means to acquire fame and immortality. See Raby, "Pride and Prejudice," 187. On the cloth of honor depicted in paintings, see Johann Konrad Eberlein, *Apparitio regis-revelatio veritatis: Studien zur Darstellung des Vorhangs in der bildenden Kunst von der Spatantike bis zum Ende des Mittelalters* (Wiesbaden, 1982). On the sultan's appearance against the backdrop of framing architectural settings, see Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapi Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1991), 32, 40, 56, 89, 97–98. Cited in Rodini, "The Sultan's True Face?" 37 n. 46.

79. On artists' motivation for naturalistic representation of rulers, see Stephen Perkinson, "Rethinking the Origins of Portraiture," *Gesta* 46 (2007): 135–57.

80. Vasari, *Le vite*, 3:428.

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which they were dispatched. Here the exercise at hand was not the mere empirical rendering of a ruler's face or his possessions but rather communicating the political significance of these details to the citizenry.[81] This distinctly Venetian type of diplomatic writing was commonly termed *relazione*, considered at times as a genre of literary and historical composition in itself.[82] *Relazioni* differed from other Italian diplomatic records such as *rapporti* or *dispacci*, which conveyed the outcome of a specific diplomatic mission or spontaneously recorded day-to-day events. Instead, *relazioni* offered "comprehensive political tableau," an expository essay treating the social, economic, and cultural aspects of the foreign country under scrutiny.[83] *Relazioni* thus served many functions, from guiding the formulation of foreign policy to acting as a textbook of sorts to prepare ambassadors for future diplomatic assignments.[84] Given the sensitive nature of relazioni, ambassadors were required from at least 1401 to release all papers and correspondence related to diplomatic missions within fifteen days of their return to the republic. And although relazioni were ostensibly classified documents, there were instances in which these reports were copied and circulated to the public at large. As Filippo de Vivo has shown, such was the appeal of the restricted information contained within *relazioni* that their contents were sometimes leaked, becoming sought after items in collectors' libraries and finding their way into print.[85]

81. On the important distinction between self-contained and realistic likeness versus intelligibility of the face to a public, see Bronwen Wilson, "The Renaissance Portrait: From Resemblance to Representation," in *The Renaissance World*, ed. John J. Martin (London, 2007), 452–80.

82. The ambassadorial *relazione* dates back to at least 1268, when an act passed in the Great Council required ambassadors to submit in writing any information "ad proficium et honorem Veneciarum" within fifteen days of returning to Venice. A piece of legislation dated July 24, 1296, stated that the ambassador ought to deliver his *relazione* not only to the doge but to the Great Council as well. It seems that some returning ambassadors neglected to produce a written document after the oral delivery of their *relazioni*, for an act of 1425 explicitly demands the submission of the written account of the *relazione*. In the Chancellary there were two books designated for *relazioni*, one for the *relazioni* of rectors and syndics and another for the *relazioni* of *baili* and ambassadors. On ambassadorial protocol in Venice, see Queller, *Early Venetian Legislation on Ambassadors*, 46–49. On *relazioni* constituting a particular variety of literary writing, see Marco Foscarini, *Della letteratura veneziana ed altri scritti intorno ad essa* (Bologna, 1976), 488.

83. Queller points out that the "classic" sixteenth-century *relazione* differ from those of the fifteenth century, which tend to be a mixture of both report and description. A law passed in 1401 required ambassadors to augment their reports with a more general description of the country. See Queller, *Office of Ambassador*, 82 n. 43.

84. "Et lesdiz rapports, beaucoup de foys, sont mis par escript et enregistrez a la chancellerie, et si après quelqun est esleu pour aller a ladicte ambassade, il lit et estudie ledit register et va bien informé et instruit en toutes choses": *Traité du gouvernement de la cité et seigneurie de Venise*, as cited in Paul-Michel Perret, *Relations de la France avec Venise* (Paris, 1896), 2:292.

85. Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford, 2007), 55–70.

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One feature common to almost all *relazioni* was a description of a ruler's physical appearance. On December 2, 1496, Sanudo noted that the ambassador Alvise Sagudino began his *relazione* with an illustration of Sultan Bayezid II: "First, that the Turkish Lord was of 56 years of age, of a yellow and often bruised color, lover of peace, given more to gluttony and other indulgences rather than to war."[86] Delivering his *relazione* in the *Pregadi* on June 9, 1526, Pietro Bragadin also prefaced his account by saying: "To begin with: this most Serene Lord called Suleyman . . . is 32 years of age, pale, colorless, with an aquiline nose, thin, with a long neck."[87] Zaccaria Contarini received an audience with Charles VIII on June 18, 1492, and reported his impression of the king's appearance and mannerisms: "The Majesty of the King of France is twenty-two years of age, small and badly formed in person, ugly of face, with great and white eyes more apt to see little than enough, an aquiline nose similarly large and knobbier than it ought to be, his lips being full, which are continually held open and he has some spasmodic movements of the hand that appear very ugly to watch, and he is extremely slow in speech."[88] Such descriptions break down the whole of the face into parts in order to assess the character and disposition of the entire person. In contrast to the topos of *non so che*, the maxim suggesting that words fail to adequately describe the power of visual phenomena, the verbal portraits in *relazioni* imply that physical appearance can be conveyed and analyzed, with implications for the assessment of character and disposition toward foreign policy.

Among the physical attributes *relazioni* recount, skin color seems to have been of particular interest to diplomatic observers. From exhibiting a "yellow and bruised color," seven years later Bayezid II bore a dark olive-like color, according to Andrea Gritti.[89] In 1553, the ambassador Bernardo Navagero reported that Sultan Süleyman

86. Sanudo, *I diarii*, 1:397: "Primo, che el Signor turcho era de etade de anni 56, de color zalo et più presto livido, amador de paxe, dedito più presto a la golla et altre voluptà che a la guerra."

87. Eugenio Albèri, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, ser. 3, vol. 3 (Florence, 1839), 101: "Dicendo prima: quell Serenissimo Signor chiamato Soliman (al quale baciò la man per due volte solamente e li parlò, una quando entrò bailo, l'altra quando tolse licenzia di partirsi) è di anni 32, pallido, smorto, naso aquilino, magro, collo lungo, di statura, . . . di poca complessione; tamen ha una forte man, e così parve a lui quando gliela baciò, ed è fama tiri più forte un arco di ogni altro. È di natura melanconico, molto libidinoso, liberal, superbo, subito, e tal'ora umilissimo."

88. Ibid., ser. 1, vol. 4, 15: "La maestà del re di Francia è di età di ventidue anni, piccolo e mal composto della persona, brutto di volto; la prima ha gli occhi grossi e bianchi e molto più usi a veder poco che assai, il naso aquilino similmente grande e grosso molto più del dovere, i labbri eziandio grossi, i quali continuamente tien aperti ed ha alcuni movimenti di mano spasmodici che paiono molto brutti a vederli, ed è tardissimo nella locuzione." Compare Queller, "Development of Ambassadorial Relazioni," 177–78.

89. Albèri, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, ser. 3, vol. 3, 20: "ha il viso tinto di color olivastro."

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was of "gloomy color."[90] Gasparo Contarini described Charles V as being of "average height, not very big or small, white, of a color more pale than ruddy."[91] Following the principles of physiognomy, the description of skin color often led the ambassador to speculate on the mixture of humors governing the ruler's character. For instance, in his *relazione* dated June 3, 1534, Daniello de' Ludovisi's description of the Ottoman sultan's skin color quickly elided into a brief diagnosis of personality: "This emperor Suleyman is of great height, thin, with an aquiline nose, of color earthy, healthy, hot-tempered, melancholic, given more to leisure than to deeds, catholic in his faith, and not of sad customs . . . of a mind . . . not very lively, neither in prudence and virtue."[92]

Such comments concerning the relation between a ruler's outward physical characteristics and his "inner" personality have led some scholars to believe that the Venetian ambassadors were "believers in the false science of physiognomy."[93] For instance, in portraying Pope Pius V's appearance, one *relazione* stated that the pontiff had an "aquiline nose that denotes a generous spirit and an ability to rule."[94] This connection drawn between appearance and personality also appears in other regional contexts: Bartolomeo Facio, the renowned humanist in the employ of Alfonso of Aragon in Naples, also indicated that the art of portrait painting required the artist to discern a sitter's character. Here Facio was drawing from the *Imagines* of Philostratus the Younger who argued, "to master the art [of] painting properly, one must . . . be able to distinguish, even when they are silent, the signs of men's character, what is revealed in the state of their cheeks, in the expression of their eyes, in the character of their eyebrows."[95] Some scholars

90. Ibid., ser. 3, vol. 1, 72–73: "Il sultan Solimano, al presente imperatore dell'Oriente, è uomo, per incominciar da questo, di anni circa sessantadue, lungo della persona che eccede la statura mediocre, magro, di color fosco ed ha in faccia una mirabil grandezza insieme con una dolcezza che lo fa amabile a tutti che lo veggono."

91. Giovanni Comisso, *Gli ambasciatori veneti, 1525–1792: Relazioni di viaggio e di missione* (Milan, 1985), 193: "La cesarea Maestà è giovane d'anni venticinque . . . è di statura mediocre, non molto grande, né piccolo, bianco, di colore più presto pallido che rubicondo."

92. The ambassador's statement indicates the belief that a person with too much "earth" would be of a melancholic disposition. Albèri, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, ser. 3, vol. 1, 28: "È questo imperatore Solimano di anni circa quarantaquattro, di statura grande, magro, con naso aquiline, di color terreo, sano, collerico, malinconico, dedito più all'ozio che a facende, cattolico nella fede sua, e di non tristi costumi; d'ingegno poi, per quanto comunemente si ragiona, non molto vivo, nè di quella prudenza e virtù che a tanto principato di converrebbe."

93. Queller, "Development of Ambassadorial Relazioni," 190 n. 30.

94. Pius V was described to have "il naso aquiline che denota animo generoso ed atto a regnare." Albèri, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, ser. 2, vol. 4, 200.

95. Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators* (Oxford, 1971), 102. See also Luke Syson, "Circulating a Likeness? Coin Portraits in Late Fifteenth-Century Italy," in *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson (London, 1998), 113–23.

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have even gone so far as to suggest that judgments of a ruler's personality derived from physiognomic analysis may have constituted a rather important body of political knowledge. In his compilation of Venetian diplomatic sources, the historian of Renaissance politics Franco Gaeta claimed that a sovereign's idiosyncratic personality and habits affected to a large extent his judgments and political engagements. Knowing intimate aspects about a sovereign's person and his entourage could be thus "more useful in substance and more valuable than the pure critical faculties of a politician."[96]

Such "physiognomic" knowledge, however, was just one piece of information out of many on which diplomats assessed the particular stance a foreign ruler held toward the republic. To offer but one example: Andrea Gritti did register for the diplomatic record a description of Bayezid II's olive skin, his melancholic nature, and a way of looking "that demonstrates in his spirit his great gravity of thoughts."[97] Even so, the ambassador prefaced his description of Bayezid II with the important qualification: "I will refer to that which I could understand and conjecture by myself about the nature and wishes of the said Bayezid and his pasha."[98] Gritti's remarks suggest that the task of diplomacy was not mere reportage or the blunt correspondence between outward appearance and inner character. At work was a mode of description that involved reasoned speculation, an assessment made by inferring from variegated particulars.

The inherent visual interests of these verbal portraits, the construction of a ruler's likeness in the reader's mind through the assemblage of choice words and phrases, have long drawn the attention of historians. The German ambassador and man of letters Alfred von Reumont was among the first commentators on these verbal portraits in *Della diplomazia italiana dal secolo XIII al XVI*, his 1857 study of Italian diplomacy. He compared reading the *relazioni*'s descriptions of rulers to entering a picture gallery exhibiting portraits by Titian, Paris Bordone, Paolo Veronese, and Giambattista Moroni.[99] In his monumental survey of Venetian archives published in 1870, Armand Baschet called the *relazioni*'s verbal portraits "témoins oculaires éloquents," offering Venetian senators knowledge of the passions, hidden interests, and individual physiognomy of those who had political

96. Franco Gaeta, *Relations des Ambassadeurs Vénitiens* (Paris, 1969), v.

97. Albèri, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, ser. 3, vol. 3, 20: "È si statura più presto grande che mezzana; ha il viso tinto di color olivastro, con una guardatura che dimostra nell'animo suo gravità grandissima di pensieri; è di natura melanconica."

98. Ibid., ser. 3, vol. 3, 2: "Riferirò anco quelle che ho potuto intender e da me stesso congetturar della natura e volontà del suddetto Baiaxet e delli suoi bassà, dalli quali per il più si ha resoluzioni di negozj importantissimi."

99. Alfred von Reumont, *Della diplomazia italiana dal secolo XIII al XVI* (Florence, 1857), 79.

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affairs in their hands.[100] More recently, Donald Queller has taken a more measured approach to these illustrations, stating that although invaluable, "portraits of princes . . . are not the stuff of most modern historical writing."[101] It is true that these descriptions may not contain hard data for the empirical historian. From the viewpoint of an art historian, however, these verbal portraits in *relazioni* offer the possibility to underscore the function of Renaissance portraiture as a medium to convey diplomatic information.

Venetian ambassadors themselves, in fact, compared the verbal portraits delivered in a *relazione* to an artist's visual representation of a ruler.[102] In 1566, for instance, Giovanni Correr wrote that "using words in the place of a brush, I will attempt to represent to your Serenity a portrait of this Duke of Savoy."[103] Giovanni Michiel, the Venetian ambassador to the English court in 1557, created interweaving analogies between sitters and their painted portraits, mother and daughter, when describing Queen Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon: "she is thin and delicate, completely unlike her father, who was tall and stocky and her mother who, if not large, was, however, full-bodied and well-formed of face, apparent in the features and looks one sees in her portraits."[104] Alvise Mocenigo's *relazione* of 1548 makes a particularly suggestive comparison between verbal and painted portraits: before describing Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, the ambassador prefaced his observations by stating: "I shall try to represent in words . . . a portrait of the body, soul, and disposition of the Emperor as closely as I can, imitating good painters, who, wanting to draw a body from life, study the picture to omit not a single thing that is seen in that body, so that their portraits appear to be more alike [to the original]."[105] In this multilayered analogy, Mocenigo correlates

100. Armand Baschet, *Les archives de Venise: Histoire de la chancellerie secrète* (Paris, 1870), 360–61.

101. Queller, "Development of Ambassadorial Relazioni," 178.

102. The portraits in *relazioni* might also be considered in the context of physiognomies and literature. See Jean-Jacques Courtine and Claudine Haroche, *Histoire du visage: Exprimer et taire ses émotions* (Paris, 1988); Edouard Pommier, *Théories du portrait: De la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Paris, 1998); Alessandro Pontremoli, ed., *Il volto e gli affetti: Fisiognomica ed espressione nelle arti del Rinascimento* (Florence, 2003).

103. Albèri, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, ser. 2, vol. 5, 3: "servendomi delle parole in luogo di pennello, cercherò di rappresentare a Vostra Serenità un ritratto di quell Sig. Duca."

104. Reumont, *Della diplomazia italiana dal secolo XIII al XVI*, 96: "La regina Maria è donna di statura piccolo più presto che mediocre. È di persona magra e delicata, dissimile in tutto dal padre, che fu grande e grosso, e dalla madre che, se non era grande, era però massiccia e ben formata di faccia, per quello che mostrano le fattezze e i lineamenti che si vedono nei ritratti."

105. Joseph Fiedler, ed., *Die Relationen der Botschafter Venedigs über Deutschland und Österreich im siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 1866–67), 12: "et quali si possino gli huomini sauij imaginare et giudicare, che siano li disegni suoi, et come li possi mandare ad effetto, sforzandomi di rapresentare in parole alla presentia di V^{re} Ser^{ta} et di V^{re} Ecc^{me} S.^{ie} uno ritratto del corpo, del animo et delle dispositioni di Cesare quanto piu simile potrò, et imitando in questo li buoni pittori, li quali volendo

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the verbal and painted portrait to the actual "body, soul, and disposition" of the ruler. He also associates the process of creating verbal portraits with their painted counterparts; both require close study from life ("dal naturale") so as not to omit a single thing. Most strikingly, Mocenigo's statement also indicates a correspondence in function. What prompts the analogy between the ambassador and the artist is that a portrait will allow the "wise men" of the *Pregadi* "to imagine and judge what his [Charles V's] designs are, and how he might put them into effect."[106] Portraits, in both word and image, allowed Venetian politicians to envisage and evaluate foreign sovereigns and their appearance, with such recommendations serving as pieces of evidence in their foreign policy appraisals and decisions.

Aside from acknowledging that the immediate function of Gentile's portrait of Mehmet II was to fulfill the sultan's commission, is it possible that the work operated as a conduit of diplomatic information in the Venetian context? This question must be approached by first bearing in mind the many other demands portraits of foreign sovereigns might address. In the case of a likeness of an Ottoman sultan, a potential enemy of the Venetian Republic, the need for an accurate likeness was especially acute. The images of Süleyman executed by Titian and prints of Turks in Paolo Giovio's collection demonstrate not only a general commercial interest in the sultan's appearance but also the demand for trustworthy and authoritative images.[107] Other arguments against considering the portrait as a counterpoint to a *relazione* include the basic yet important fact that it remains unknown when Mehmet II's portrait reached the republic. One possibility often raised in the literature is that Sultan Bayezid II sold his father's paintings at auction soon after his succession to the throne due to his stringent religious observance.[108] Another unsubstantiated claim is that the portrait was sold to a Venetian merchant in Pera after Mehmet II's death.[109] Several copies after the work attributed to Gentile or

ben trazer un corpo dal naturale, studiando nella pittura sua non ommetter cosa, che in quell corpo si veda, accioche'l ritratti suo pari piu simile."

106. Ibid.

107. See Diane Bodart, *Tiziano e Federico il Gonzaga: Storia di un rapporto di committenza* (Rome, 1998), 154, 306–7; T. C. Price Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio: The Historian and the Crisis of Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Princeton, NJ, 1995), 190.

108. Caroline Campbell, "Portrait of Mehmed II, 1480," in Campbell and Chong, *Bellini and the East*, 78. Another objection might be that the triumphal inscription (now damaged) on the parapet would be disconcerting to a Venetian audience. However, the many portrait medals of Mehmet II diffused throughout Italy often bear inscriptions proclaiming Mehmet II's titles. See Susan Elizabeth Spinale, "The Portrait Medals of Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1451–81)" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2003).

109. See Franz Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer und seine Zeit: Weltenstürmer einer Zeitenwende* (Munich, 1953), 417: "Auf diese Weise geriet das berühmte Bildnis Mehmeds II., das laut Beischrift

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his followers attest to its presence in Venice from the late fifteenth to the early decades of the sixteenth century.[110]

JOURNEYS OF THE PORTRAIT

We might also consider the possibility that a replica of Mehmet II's portrait or even the version itself now in the National Gallery, London, was brought back to Venice and elicited the attention of a local viewing public. Admittedly this claim concerning the painting's late fifteenth-century arrival must remain conjectural until further evidence comes to light that documents the work's provenance before Sir Austen Henry Layard acquired the painting in 1865 in Venice.[111] In this regard, it is worth noting that Carlo Ridolfi in his *Le meraviglie dell'arte ovvero delle vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato* (Venice, 1648) locates the portrait in the residence of Pietro Zen and asserts that Gentile transported the painting himself back to Venice.[112] One material piece of evidence in favor of the portrait's fabrication as a portable good is the work's support. Technical investigation of the painting reveals that the principal part of the painting is on a piece of canvas, albeit heavily damaged, with other sections of the painting composed of later additions of canvas and insets.[113] In addition to their use in banners carried in religious processions, festival ephemera, or large-scale wall decoration, linen and canvas due to their lightness provided congenial painting support for works intended for export.[114] The many Flemish paintings on linen and canvas, at times rolled and transported in bundles to Italian courts and collectors throughout the fifteenth and

am 25. November 1480 vollendet ward und einen schwerkranken, vorzeitig gealterten Mann darstellt, in den Besitz eines venedischen Kaufmanns in Pera und späterhin nach Venedig."

110. Among them, a double portrait now in a private collection in Switzerland of Sultan Mehmet II and another male figure, possibly one of his sons, and a version of Gentile's portrait of Mehmet II, now in a private collection in New York. See Campbell and Chong, *Bellini and the East*, 109, 133 n. 24.

111. On Layard's purchase of the painting and its subsequent reception regarding its authenticity, see Alan Crookham, "Art or Document? Layard's Legacy and Bellini's Sultan," *Museum History Journal* 8 (2015): 28–40.

112. Carlo Ridolfi, *Meraviglie dell'arte, ovvero Le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato*, ed. Giuseppe Vedova (Padua, 1999), 77–78: "Riportò eziando Gentile da Costantinopoli il ritratto di Maumetto, ch'è nelle case del signor Pietro Zeno."

113. Caroline Campbell and Rachel Billinge (National Gallery, London), e-mail message to author, July 21, 2014.

114. For instance, Gentile's paintings for the Great Council Hall were done on canvas. Jill Dunkerton et al., *Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery* (London, 1991), 160. For the use of canvas for large-scale wall decoration, see Alison Wright, "Piero de' Medici and the Pollaiuolo," in *Piero de' Medici "Il Gottoso" (1416–1469): Kunst im Dienste der Mediceer*, ed. Andreas Beyer and Bruce Boucher (Berlin, 1993), 129–49.

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sixteenth centuries, testify to this material practice.[115] Artists even commented at times that a painting's ultimate destination could determine the type of support to be employed. On July 6, 1477, Mantegna wrote Ludovico Gonzaga, 2nd Marchese of Mantua, to ask what support he ought to employ for a painting. The artist presented Gonzaga with two choices—on panel or on canvas. "If your Lordship wishes to send the painting far away," Mantegna explained, "it can be done on a fine canvas in order for it to be wrapped around a rod."[116] Remarking on differences in support almost a half century later, Giorgio Vasari noted that "painting on canvas was invented so that paintings could be carried from country to country; canvas weighs little and can be easily transported in any size."[117] Against the background of this commentary, it is worth noting that Gentile's portrait of Mehmet II is on canvas, in contrast to several of his other portraits of prestigious sitters, among them those of Doge Agostino Barbarigo, Doge Giovanni Mocenigo, and Caterina Cornaro as well as a copy of his portrait of Doge Niccolò Marcello, both of which are on wood and executed "locally." What is more, the two copies after Gentile's portrait of the sultan, in all likelihood executed in Venice, are on panel, thus indicating a correlation between place of execution and category of support.[118] Could there have been two versions of the portrait, one that stayed in Constantinople, another accompanying the artist upon his return to Venice? Future contributions might consider the canvas support as a factor in ascertaining whether the London version of the sultan's portrait was executed for the purpose of transport back to Venice.[119]

115. On *panni dipinti*, see Paula Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Painting, 1400–1500* (New Haven, CT, 2004), 187–91.

116. Paul Kristeller, *Andrea Mantegna* (Berlin, 1902), 534: "in tavola o in tela . . . Se la S. vostra li volesse mandare lontano se possono farli suso tela sotile per poterli avoltare suso un bastonzelo." Compare Jill Dunkerton, "Mantegna's Techniques," in *Mantegna and Fifteenth-Century Court Culture*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis and Anka Bednarek (London, 1993), 26–38.

117. Vasari, *Le vite*, 1:137. On the logistics of transporting paintings, see Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, CT, 2005), 84–85; Peter Humfrey, "The Venetian Altarpiece of the Early Renaissance in the Light of Contemporary Business Practice," *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte* 15 (1986): 75–79.

118. Kennedy, "Gentile Bellini," 303–4.

119. In this regard, caution should be taken in addressing the condition of the painting with Gentile's representational precision. Photographic reproduction tends to emphasize the delineation of the sultan's facial features. Observation of the painting in person, however, calls attention to the painterly rendition of the face and turban that verges on sfumato, an impression not least due to the interaction between the pigment and rough canvas support. Moreover, it is not always the case that support corresponds to the mobility, or lack thereof, of a painting. For instance, Emperor Maximilian sent Henry VII of England two portraits of his daughter, Magarethe, on panel and canvas as part of diplomatic discussions concerning marriage. See Warnke, *Court Artist*, 222.

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The diplomat Philippe de Commynes in his *Mémoires* notably refers to a certain portrait of the Ottoman sultan: "I saw him painted, and it certainly seemed that he was a man of great spirit."[120] Commynes does not go on to describe the portrait in detail, instead recounting Mehmet II's conquests in the present-day Balkan Peninsula and his illness caused by "vices of the flesh."[121] Due to Commynes's reticence concerning the painting, Thuasne suggested that Commynes was referring to a portrait other than that executed by Gentile.[122] However, we might also consider that Commynes had seen Gentile's portrait of Mehmet II during his several trips to Venice, the first of which lasted eight months, from October 2, 1494, to May 31, 1495.[123] Commynes described Venice as "the most triumphant city I have ever seen, and one which honors ambassadors and foreigners."[124] He recounts that he toured the principal sites of the city, including the Palazzo Ducale, the doge's private chambers, the treasury of San Marco, and the arsenal. He would have most certainly seen Gentile's frescoes decorating the Great Council Hall, where he was first received, and it is not unreasonable to speculate that he may have seen the other works by Bellini, among them his portrait of Mehmet II. More important, Commynes's comment demonstrates that the work was observed in the context of diplomatic circles.

Granted Commynes's brief comment and other instances in the *relazione* literature that refer to portraits cannot entirely support the claim that Gentile's painting prompted a diplomatic mode of viewing for its Venetian audiences. Even so, these sources point to a larger pattern of using the genre of portraiture as a diplomatic tool. Portraits were exponents in diplomatic transactions in what Luke Syson has called the "circulation of likenesses," the practice of presenting portraits as gifts, souvenirs for relations far removed from home, or documentation

120. Philippe de Commynes, *Mémoires*, ed. Joseph Calmette and Georges Durville (Paris, 1924–25), 2:338: "Je l'ay veü painct, et sembloit bien qu'il fust home de grant esprit." Girolamo Seripando's oration in 1554 before a portrait of Phillip II by Titian offers a later example of a description made before a ruler's image. See Andrea Zezza, "Giovanni Battista Castaldo e la chiesa di Santa Maria del Monte Albino," *Prospettiva* 93–94 (1999): 41 n. 51.

121. Ibid., 339: "Quant aux plaisirs du monde, ce Turc en a prins à coeur saoul et y usé grand partye de son temps. Et eust encores faict plus de maulx qu'il n'a, s'il ne se fust tant occupé au vice de la chair."

122. Thuasne, *Gentile Bellini et Sultan Mohammed II*, 36–37.

123. It should be noted that Commynes's memoir of Louis IX was supposedly finished in 1492–93, before his first trip to Venice. However, the *Mémoires* themselves were not entirely finished until 1498 and not published until 1524, thus raising the possibility that Commynes might have emended the text to include his observations on Venice. Commynes died on October 18, 1511, in Argenton. See the useful biographical sketch in Philippe de Commynes, *Mémoires sur Louis XI: 1464–1483*, ed. Jean Dufournet (Paris, 1979), 531–39.

124. Commynes, *Mémoires*, ed. Calmette and Durville, 3:110.

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in assessing marriage prospects.[125] There are numerous recorded instances in which portraits served for the last of these purposes: especially well known is Jan van Eyck's inclusion in Burgundian diplomatic missions in 1427 and again in 1428 to the Iberian peninsula, where the artist presented portraits of Phillip the Good as well as rendered the likenesses of two prospective brides, Isabella of Urguell and Isabella of Portugal.[126] Such commissions sometimes led to the felicitous union of ruling houses or outright refusal and insult. The absence of a portrait might even arouse suspicion: upon considering marriage with Queen Juana of Naples, King Henry VII of England requested a portrait to be made of his potential bride. When no painting came to be realized, the English monarch informed the Aragonese ambassador that he suspected the queen most likely to be "ugly and not beautiful."[127] The many recorded instances of portraiture as a diplomatic instrument to broker alliances between houses through marriage raises the thorny issue of the conditions under which Gentile's portrait was observed and employed. Do any extant sources indicate that the sultan's image or the likeness of any ruler for that matter was displayed in tandem with the recitation of a *relazione*? As of yet, I have not uncovered any evidence to this effect. The evidence assembled thus far does demonstrate, however, that discourse concerning the ruler's likeness was a key feature in diplomatic reportage, a discourse in which Gentile's painting may have participated. On this view, the traveling artist, portrait, and *relazione* form interlocking parts of a cultural machine that registers and attempts to gain from insights culled from the outside world.

Indeed, contemporary responses to images of the sultan pursue a logic of description that works in tandem with Gentile's mode of painting. Just as the artist carefully assembled the particularities of facial features and expression into a whole, so too do accounts offer detailed, minute, and precise renditions of Mehmet II's face, so much so that they become verbal portraits on paper. One source that indicates the portrait of Mehmet II was understood in terms similar to those employed in Venetian *relazioni* is the 1486 edition of Jacopo Filippo Foresti da Bergamo's *Supplementum chronicarum*, which describes the facial characteristics of the sultan "as is shown by his own portrait." Moreover, the manner in which the

125. See Syson, "Circulating a Likeness?"; Lorne Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries* (New Haven, CT, 1990).

126. Documents pertaining to the account of the embassy to Portugal are published in James Weale, *Hubert and John Van Eyck, Their Life and Work* (London, 1908), lv–lxxii, transcription of Registre 132 of the Chambre des Comptes, fol. clvii–clxvi, Brussels, State Archives.

127. Warnke, *Court Artist*, 222.

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description proceeds is reminiscent of the verbal portraits contained in Venetian *relazioni*:

> His appearance, however, as is shown by his painting, bore the face of a man whose appearance was horrible and fierce: his eyes were ugly, not straight, but turned back in the corners, especially while looking at someone. His brow was high with the back part of his head standing out. His nose was swollen in the middle, and it hooked down over his lips. In fact, his thin face curved in between his jaws and showed itself to be extremely pale. His body was robust in bones and firm in sinews and it slightly exceeded normal human size which from his tender years was accustomed to all kinds of toil and especially in those activities which seemed to prepare him to endure military campaigns: namely, running and riding, wielding both javelin and spear. When he was learning the art of inflicting and avoiding blows, he habitually used for play iron sticks as a sword, which afterwards made a sword seem light and manageable.[128]

Aside from its biographical narrative, this passage employs what we might call a "diplomatic" eye. It renders a detailed description of facial appearance, proceeding from individual parts (eyes, brow, nose, jaw, skin color, and bodily constitution) and from there extrapolates more general assessments concerning character and manner of physical activity. To be sure, this mode of description is hardly unique to diplomatic writing per se; it appears in a wide range of biographical and physiognomic genres. Thus, if there is a "diplomatic" style at all, it is notable not necessarily

128. Jacopo Filippo Foresti da Bergamo, *Supplementum Chronicarum* (Venice, 1486), fol. 290r: "Ejus autem facies, ut ex ejus pictura ostenditur, hominis faciem pre se ferebat. Cujus quidem aspectus horridus et atrox erat: oculi fedi haud recti sed in angulis reflexi, videlicet quum aliquem aspiciebat. Frons alta erat et posterior capitis pars eminens. Nasus in medio tumidus qui supra labrum deferebatur incurvus. Macilenta enim facies intra maxillas concavata et pallidissima ostendebatur. Corpus robustum ossibus ac nervis firmum, quod communem hominis magnitudinem aliquantulum excedebat; quod certe a teneris annis omnibus laboribus assuefecit et maxime in iis que ad tolerandam militiam sufficere videbantur currendo scilicet et equitando, hastas gladiosque tractando. Qui quum artem inferendi vitandique ictus perdisceret, fustum ferreum ad ludum pro gladio uti consuevit, quo gladius ei postea levior et tolerabilior videretur. Denique, quum plurima patris exempla haberet imitanda, relicta benignitate, clementia et liberalitate, vicia, preter justiciam maximam, complexus est. Solamque patris in rebus gerendis animi magnitudinem complecti voluit; quam etiam quadam crudelitate atque militia fedavit. Et licet christiana matre nobili captiva natus fuisset, christiano tamen nomini quoad vixit inimicissimus fuit." Note the parallels with Sallust's description of the activities of young Jugurtha, which employs the same tripartite distinction: "equitare, iaculari; cursu cum aequalibus certare" (*Bellum Jugurthinum*, 6.1: riding, throwing the javelin, competing with his agemates in running). I am grateful to Lydia Spielberg for pointing out this possible historiographical model for the characterization of Mehmet.

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in the approach it takes to describe a face but rather in its effect in mobilizing a characterization across space. This meticulous rendering of the face into words is the handmaiden to the convention of distributing portraits among courts, principalities, and kingdoms. In the particular case of an Ottoman sultan, this approach to looking, describing, and painting becomes especially fraught: How might a potential enemy appear?

Gentile's portrait and diplomatic accounts furthermore constitute not only a touchstone for encounters between prince and patron, East and West, Venetian and Ottoman, as fascinating as those relations are. Painting and *relazioni* place two modes of thinking and representation in tension: first, an authoritative image of the ruler who via attributes such as the arch, cloth of honor, crowns, and inscription embodies the imperial aspirations of the Ottoman empire; second, a face whose distinct features register a specificity singular to an individual. This tension is, to be sure, a characteristic of ruler portraiture with its need for both decorum and distinction.[129] Yet in the case of Gentile's painting, this dialectic also speaks to the capacity of painting to collapse and expand knowledge about otherness. From the particularities of the face, the viewer can discern larger notions about the character and behavior of a foreign ruler, people, and region. Conversely, an entire empire can be collapsed into a few well-composed details. The style of Gentile's portrait and the body of diplomatic writing leads to an unexpected if not paradoxical conclusion: a burgeoning awareness of otherness and geographic breadth is accompanied by representational strategies that focus on the particular, the detailed, and the miniature. As much as we might wish to take Gentile's portrait as an emblem of global encounters, the style of the image itself and its related discourse in the genre of the *relazione* testifies to an impulse to work on a more minute spatial level, to compress distance.

CONCLUSION

Taking the reception of Gentile Bellini's journey to Constantinople into account expands the range of factors that contributed to the "rise of the artist" in early modern Europe. Traveling in the service of the *patria* could accord the artist honors and grant him the license to commemorate his journey in both signature and portrait. The artistic result of this mobility, Gentile's portrait of Mehmet II, not only reflects the noteworthy circumstance of Ottoman patronage of Western artists. His likeness operates as a medium of transmitting information, a foreign ruler's appearance, personal attributes, and disposition that diplomats and paint-

129. Warnke, *Court Artist*, 215–19.

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ers alike attempted to convey. Contemporary responses to images of the sultan pursue a mode of description that works in tandem with Gentile's style: just as the artist carefully assembled the particularities of facial features and expression into a whole, so too did accounts offer detailed renditions of the face, so much so that they become portable portraits on paper. When considered under the condition of travel, Gentile's "diplomatic style" functions not only as a response to the humanist call for the imitation of nature for its own sake or the shaping of historical narrative.[130] His approach to painting becomes a vehicle to channel knowledge of "il Gran Signor." Portraits put a face to a ruler, a name, and in this case, an empire.

130. On the strategies of naturalistic depiction of otherness later in the sixteenth century, see Bronwen Wilson, "Reflecting on the Turk in Sixteenth-Century Venetian Portrait Books," *Word and Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry* 19 (2003): 38–58, and *The World in Venice: Print, the City, and Early Modern Identity* (Toronto, 2005), 142–56.

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