

ARTISTIC CRUSADE
FRAMING THE APPLICATION OF PSEUDO-ARABIC SCRIPT IN ITALIAN ART

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ABSTRACT

Within recent decades, scholarship on the Italian Renaissance has evolved to more closely examine the impact that increased globalization -- a result of the Crusades and established trade networks to the East -- had on the art produced during the Italian Renaissance. Many prominent artists across the Italian Peninsula made use of uniquely designed pseudoscripts in their art that were heavily reliant on forms native to Arabic calligraphy. This thesis aims to examine this phenomenon of Arabic pseudoscript as its use became commonplace during the Quattrocento period on the Italian Peninsula, framing its placement in Italian painting as a continuation of Crusader ideology; celebrating and further affirming the triumph and holiness of Latin Christianity while also decrying the use of the Arabic language and script within an Islamic context. Through the analysis of specific bodies of evidence that show the script used in various contexts, I argue that through the demonization of the script's use by the Muslim other and its subsequent reappropriation into a Christian context, the Italians effectively reclaim a language thought to have been stolen by Muslim invaders, forming in some sense an artistic Crusade.

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INTRODUCTION

As discourse on globalization and cultural exchange enjoys a heightened importance with greater access to world travel due to the technological advancements of the twenty-first century, there arises an equal interest in how travel and cultural interest has manifested itself in the visual culture of past civilizations. The emergence of cultural exchange that arose after the medieval period presents some of the more unique displays of cross-cultural interaction; a result of a large increase in trade spurred both by the travels of merchants such as Marco Polo in the thirteenth century as well as conflicts such as the Crusades, launched in the eleventh century. Of specific prominence at this time is the Italian Peninsula, which came to serve as the bank of Europe due to its highly developed mercantile enterprise; a result of its key geographic proximity to the Mediterranean which provided numerous seaward trade routes to the East (figs. 1, 2).¹ The bolstered economy that as a result arose around the twelfth century also ignited one of Italy's most well-known artistic periods: the Italian Renaissance.

Recent scholarly interest in the relationships between the Italian peninsula during the Renaissance and the Islamic world -- which at the time possessed around three-quarters of the Mediterranean's shores -- has brought to attention the particularly large role that Italian trade along both the Silk Road and the Mediterranean had played in the creation of art during the Renaissance. Exhibitions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797" and "Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800" have explored these connections, noting a special artistic relationship produced as a result of artistic and mercantilist travel to far off lands culminating in the illustration of various foreign art objects

¹ In the maps below, note the concentration of larger cities on the Italian peninsula that arose by 1212 CE, as well as their crucial geographic location, allowing them to easily trade with the most populous cities shown on the map: Constantinople, Baghdad and Cairo.

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and textiles in painting as well as the creation of a pseudoscript which held stylistic qualities inherent to Arabic, and in some cases other foreign, script (fig. 3).

This presence of pseudo-Arabic script is noted in many works of Italian art, with a particular prevalence in the later half of the fourteenth into the fifteenth centuries, before it lost its popularity in the beginning of the Cinquecento. The script is almost entirely unique to each artist, almost able to serve as an additional artistic signature (figs. 4, 6). The application of pseudo-Arabic script presents many important questions in regards to the Italian relationship to and representation of the Islamic world, which possessed both close geographic proximity to the peninsula as well as a heavy significance to late medieval Christianity as Christendom's primary adversary during the Crusades. Little is known as to why exactly the Italians included such a foreign script -- especially one associated with such a major enemy to the religion -- in paintings with heavy religious significance. Even less is known about what purpose the script might have served to the Italian viewer. These questions are difficult to address, as no Italian Renaissance scholar makes mention of the script, leaving their answers almost entirely up to modern interpretation.

Contemporary scholarship on the subject of pseudo-Arabic script has, in spite of this difficulty, yielded some conclusions as to why exactly the Italians chose to incorporate a foreign pseudoscript into religious art, however, many take the form of proposals that require more research in order to confirm or deny their veracity. Alexander Nagel in his article, "Twenty-Five Notes on Pseudoscript in Italian Art,"² provides an extensive exploration into why Italians felt compelled to include the script in such an evocation of religious sanctity, noting several explanations ranging from attributing the use of the script as additive of a communicative

² Alexander Nagel, "Twenty-five Notes on Pseudoscript in Italian Art," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 59/60 (Spring/Autumn 2011), 228-48.

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context, to a way of placing the scene within a Biblically authentic setting, to a method of further removing the sacred past from the present. Nagel also suggests that the creation of a pseudoscript could have been the result of a wish to create a language outside of the known linguistic sphere -- thus placing this theory in conjunction with the former describing the inclusion of the script as a method of communication -- or simply a way for artists to avoid unwittingly aligning themselves with heretical speech via the direct transcription of Arabic calligraphy. Further discussion on the subject is granted by Rosamond Mack in her book *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300 to 1600*,³ in which she traces a possible linkage of the use of the script to an incorrect assumption that the script possessed a Biblical provenance. The large amount of possible theories that can be introduced when discussing the use of pseudoscript certainly merit a deeper examination into why exactly this practice became so popularized in Trecento and Quattrocento Italy.

These conclusions in conjunction with one another allow for even more exploration into the minds of Italians as new relationships between the Italian Peninsula and the Islamic World were formed along with the development of the Crusades and the greater European accessibility to the Middle East brought with the establishment of the Crusader States -- as well as the loss of accessibility that came with the loss of these territories. The aim of this thesis is to examine the ways in which new trade connections and Italian interest in Islamic visual culture were displayed through the use of pseudo-Arabic script in works of Italian origin, with a focus on how it was able to function as a continuation of the assertion of Christendom's dominance via the philosophy of the Crusaders -- that is, the reclamation of things considered to be integral to the history of Christianity from Muslim invaders. In this respect, the script could be used both as an

³ Rosamund Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

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aide-memoire, allowing those who viewed the paintings to reflect on the victories of Christianity in recapturing what they considered to be the 'Holy Land', as well as a method of reclamation via the rejection of the language when used within an Islamic context. Opposite to this, when used within a Christian context, the language could be used to further separate the most holy figures from the present, placing them within a sacred past with a language illegible to contemporary Italians. Moreover, the use of pseudo-Arabic in this context further affirms the holiness of these figures, representing the reclamation of a language thought to have possessed Biblical provenance -- and 'stolen' by Muslim invaders for use in a heretical context -- back into the Christian orthodoxy.

In the following pages I will first lay out the ways in which the city-states on the Italian peninsula rose to prominence during the late medieval period, becoming centers of international commerce and art patronage. This first chapter will examine the emergence of trade partnerships between these city-states and the Islamic world, as well as how cultural interest in the artistic output of the Islamic world permeated the visual culture of the Italian peninsula. I will then describe how pseudo-Arabic script came to prominence during the Renaissance, noting the large influence that Humanism and Byzantine visual culture played on its development, while also acknowledging recent scholarly discourse on the subject, and what it has yielded so far in terms of reasoning behind the prevalence of the pseudoscript into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. I will utilize recent scholarship on the appearance of pseudo-Arabic in the architectural program of Christian churches constructed by the Byzantines in an attempt to draw a parallel between the ways in which the script was used by the Byzantines and the impetus that also led the Italians to make use of the script.

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Finally, in chapters three and four, I will examine the various connotations that the script could hold, based on the context in which it was placed. This analysis will further describe the many methods in which the script could be employed by the Italians in order to, much like their earlier Byzantine counterparts, use the script as a way to recall Christian victory. Departing from Byzantine tradition, and reflective of the Crusades, the Italians also used the script in a way that, similar to illuminated Crusader accounts, attempts to decry the Islamic religion as one of heresy. This thereby frames the use of the language within an Islamic context as negative and heretical. At the same time, the Italians were appropriating the language into a Christian context in such a way that further separated the sacred past from the present, thus further affirming the Christian orthodoxy. This appropriation mirrors Crusader philosophy, based upon the idea that the Islamic ‘invaders’ had stolen a language that was falsely considered to possess an early Christian provenance. Like the images of the ‘evil’ and ‘angry’ Muslims defending cities with Biblical significance in the East, images in which the script is placed within an Islamic context place a negative light on the script by using it to denote heretical doctrine, thus portraying its use by Islam as heretical. Italians also use the script in highly religious images depicting Biblical events and personages, simultaneously using it in such a way that further affirms the sacredness of Biblical figures and effectively ‘re’ appropriating it back to serve Christianity, mirroring the reclamation of cities like Jerusalem, which possessed heavy religious significance.

CHAPTER ONE: EYES TO THE EAST

The Italian Peninsula during the Late Middle Ages was largely agricultural, however, it was marked by the development of fortified cities which later influenced a regional power shift that was characterized by an immense growth in the wealth of merchants and artisans. This, in turn, shifted monetary control from the medieval feudal lords in the countryside to various guilds of literate, educated citizens established to rule the cities, concentrating large amounts of wealth within their walls.¹ This new concentration of wealth was strengthened by the migration of rural elites, who felt a new sense of security within city walls thereby changing their way of life into one of newfound access to city government, art, and other imported items.² This shift in power fundamentally changed the economy of Italy³ by creating a new market for luxury goods, spurred by the acquisition of wealth and conspicuous consumption. As a result of the new power vested in merchants on the Italian peninsula, the Italian economy became largely reliant on the business of imports and their domestic imitations, which strengthened the city-states' interests in foreign pursuits and travel.

Residents of the Italian peninsula held immense pride for the city in which they were born, and identified themselves as its children. This pride manifested itself in the development of these walled cities, as well as their surrounding smaller villages and farmlands, as centers of political and social order, innovation, protection, and production. Most notable in cities situated in the northern region of the peninsula, construction of places of public gathering and worship, guild facilities, and governmental buildings sustained the demand for art to fill them, meant to

¹ John T. Paoletti and Gary M. Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy* (London: Prentice Hall, 2012), 48.

² Richard A. Goldthwaite. "The Economy of Renaissance Italy: The Preconditions for Luxury Consumption," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 2, (1987): 27.

³ My use of the term Italy here and after is not to be confused with modern-day Italy as a whole and unified country. At this time, 'Italy' refers to the complex mosaic of states which held control over the Italian Peninsula.

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impress the public and show off the city's prosperity.⁴ The newfound wealth of the mercantile class, as well as the migration of rural elites into cities brought with it funds to support the city's artistic and architectural ventures, marking Italy's early modern period as a time of immense creative and economic growth. Prior to the spread of the Bubonic Plague in 1348, the northern Italian Peninsula was home to four of Europe's five largest cities (Venice, Milan, Genoa, and Florence), each with its own artistic tradition, language dialect, and unique political organization as, prior to the thirteenth century, each city's growth was markedly distinct from the rest.⁵

Italy's role as a trade power in Europe was unique in these aspects, as each city-state had its own trading partners independent from the rest. Where Venice established its close relationship with the Ottoman Turks in Constantinople, and the Mamluks in Egypt and the Levant, Milan instead looked north, to its French neighbors. The peninsula possessed a unique geographic location, jutting out into the central Mediterranean Sea, which afforded many opportunities for seaward trade with other nations along its shores. At this time, close to three-quarters of Mediterranean shores at the time were ruled by Islamic nations; the Italian peninsula's close proximity to these foreign influences allowed Italy to function as a sort of gate into European markets, thus assuring each northern city-state's dominance in European trade.⁶ This trade dominance allowed the influence of Islamic art to permeate the entire peninsula, rather than remaining exclusive only to city-states that had forged relations with their Islamic neighbors.

The Crusades also played a heavy hand in the dissemination of Islamic art objects across the peninsula, as well as further north into Europe. These holy wars began in 1095, when Pope

⁴ Paoletti and Radke, *Renaissance Italy*, 47.

⁵ John M. Najemy, "Introduction: Italy and the Renaissance," in *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance : 1300-1550*, ed. John M. Najemy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.

⁶ Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 1.

Urban II announced an expedition meant to reclaim the Holy Land for Christendom.⁷ The idea of righteous violence in the name of God was not a new one, as there had been many past endeavors in the Middle Ages which saw Christians attempting to defend the order that God had placed on the world from non-Christian opponents. Many who participated in the First Crusade of 1095 as well as others in the years that followed thought of the reclamation as a new way to achieve salvation, thus providing an immense impetus for its participants only furthered by a large number of local sermons encouraging participation and donation.⁸ The Crusades functioned as an attack by all of Latin Christendom, and it established multiple Crusader States that were thought to be property of Christianity as a whole, rather than the unique possession of the nation that claimed victory in the state.⁹

During the Late Middle Ages, territories held by Muslim rulers were vast, and covered much of the territory from North Africa and the Middle East to Central Asia. Most prominent were the Abbasids, who held a large part of the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, Egypt, the Levant and parts of Central Asia until around 1250, and the Mamluks, who overtook Egypt, parts of the Arabian Peninsula, and the Levant after the fall of the Abbasids. The Nasrid dynasty held parts of Andalusia from around 1232 to 1492, and the Ottoman Turks overtook much of the territory held by the Byzantines in 1453 (fig. 7). Prior to this, the Byzantines of eastern Europe and Anatolia were also considered to be part of Latin Christianity, meaning they were also considered as having partial stewardship over the established Crusader States.¹⁰

The establishment of important outposts for trade across the conquered lands of North Africa and the Near East, which remained in operation even after the Muslims had reconquered

⁷ Andrew Jotischky, *Crusading and the Crusader States*, (Oxfordshire; New York: Routledge, 2014), 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹ Malcolm Barber, *The Crusader States*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

the territory, allowed for an immense increase in the trade of art objects into Europe. The effects of the Italian Peninsula's prominent geographic location on trade, the Italian economy, and its accumulation of great wealth are also visible in the establishment of an Italian monopoly on trade with the East, as a new interest in the import of oriental luxury goods became commonplace among the European wealthy class in both Italy as well as its counterparts in Northern Europe. This monopoly was also expanded with the development of Italy's industrial sector, responsible for the manufacture of imitations of foreign goods for export into Europe.¹¹

The term 'oriental' as it is used above is not to be confused with the idea of Orientalism as it is proposed in Edward Saïd's 1978 text, which refers to orientalism as a fabricated representation of the Orient as a European invention and a place of exotic, sexually lascivious, and uncouth peoples. Rather, the role of the non-Western figure in the Renaissance mind was a complex one. On one hand, they held a somewhat neutral position as acknowledged residents of the area during Biblical times, thus forming a key part of the setting of Biblical events.¹² On the other, they could play the role of the 'evil' and 'unjust' Muslim invaders who stole the Holy Land from Christianity, keeping important relics captive from their Christian origin.

It is important to note that the Crusades functioned as an integral turning point in the history of trade between the Italian peninsula and the East. With the creation of important trading bases such as Antioch, Jerusalem, and Tripoli, in which Latin Christians were allowed to live and set up mercantile enterprise, along with the allowance of trade within other conquered cities, a highly efficient trade network was created.¹³ This allowed for immense quantities of foreign goods to be imported to Italy which, in conjunction with a widespread public interest in the

¹¹ Goldthwaite. "The Economy of Renaissance Italy," 19.

¹² Stefano Carboni, "Moments of Vision," in *Venice and the Islamic World 828-1797*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 26.

¹³ Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 15.

beauty and quality of these goods -- often more sophisticated and technically greater than those created in Medieval Europe -- allowed for the development of a new kind of wealthy class in Italian society, whose wealth contributed greatly to Italian interest in Islamic goods, as they were able to both import and distribute as well as purchase these objects of luxury. This established a large market for foreign *objets d'art*, such as textiles and other small portable ceramics and metal objects, as early as the late thirteenth century as families with growing wealth sought to establish their social standing among the wealthy class via conspicuous consumption.

The portability of these objects meant that they easily arrived in large quantities and were able to be widely distributed, thus creating a sense of familiarity within the educated eye, as a large distribution network provided much exposure to these foreign creations. To the up-and-coming urban bourgeoisie of Renaissance Italy, the quality of these objects reflected wealth in a way similar to that which was popularized across the Islamic world by the Abbasids of ninth century Baghdad, in which a new elite culture of opulence and decadence in everyday life was popularized and thus normalized for the wealthy class.¹⁴ The post-Crusades import of these luxury items, like the textile worn by Leonello d'Este in his portrait by Pisanello (fig. 8) -- featuring foliate ornamentation similar to that which is found on many Islamic textiles -- came to symbolize the ability of the Italian urban elite to afford such opulence, representing their wealth in a way that others, especially those of the same class, would be able to understand. The artistic organizations were also extremely familiar, as the art of both cultures was built upon the foundation of Greco-Roman and Byzantine artistic practice.¹⁵ Moreover, the aniconic tendency of Islamic art facilitated an easy fusion of the objects into the Italian visual culture, with no overtly Islamic forms that could have been discernable to a well-traveled or educated Christian

¹⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵ Ibid.

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viewer familiar with Islam. This intermingling is notable in the placement of Islamic *bacini*, or small, richly colored ceramic bowls into the architecture of church towers and facades.¹⁶ Giorgio Vasari, a Florentine artist and writer, advanced the notion that these items were welcomed into Italian society, commenting that the patterns on imported metal work seemed “Levantine”, thus drawing a connection to the Holy Land which made these objects even more attractive to Italian artistic discourse as it began to shift to idealize the high importance of the Church in connection to the State.¹⁷

As stated previously, the market for imported goods also led to the development of workshops dedicated to the local production of goods that mimicked Islamic craftsmanship. The market for these local copies was especially great in Venice, whose unique relationship with Byzantine Constantinople -- later conquered by the Ottomans -- and other Islamic lands inspired technological, philosophical, and artistic dialogue which resulted in the development of a glass production industry in the late thirteenth century, considered by many to be one of the first examples of Italian artisans utilizing the techniques of their Islamic counterparts in domestic production.¹⁸

While there is certainly evidence of there being a solid industry of Venetian glass blowing prior to the crusades, Islamic artisans had remained at the forefront of the industry, employing a certain technique of firing colorless glass and then painting it with enamel or gilding, in a Syrian technique that had been developed around a century prior.¹⁹ The import of these objects largely predated the development of domestic industry, evidenced in the slow development of the

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Carboni, “Moments of Vision,” 22.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Venetian glass trade -- a result of the steady flow of glass items from still-prominent Egyptian and Syrian industries -- until a technological stalemate, the result of regional conflict, halted the industry's development in Damascus. In the years following, industrial production in Venice enjoyed rapid development, elevating it to global prominence and establishing a culture of the Italian city-states as exporters of fine goods that ran parallel to their culture of importing foreign luxury items and distributing them across Europe.²⁰

The expansion of other forms of Italian domestic production was largely limited to the north of the peninsula, where a large industry of textile production developed with a focus on improving the competitive advantage of local industrial pursuits in domestic markets.²¹ In comparison to their southern counterparts in order to retain power the matter of profit and successful industry was inescapable in the northern republics of Venice, Florence, and Genoa, as they neither had the backing of a large Spanish monarchy, as was the case in Naples and Milan, nor the backing of the papacy -- and with it access to the coffers of churches around Europe -- as in Rome.²²

By the end of the fifteenth century, the Italian industries responsible for the manufacture of oriental imitation items in media such as glass, ceramics, and silk had grown so large that there is little record of large quantities of imported goods making their way into Italy past this time.²³ While trade was still essential to the accrual of raw materials that were otherwise unattainable on the Italian Peninsula, such as gemstones, spices, and perfumes, production in Italy had evolved to almost fully account for the European demand for luxury goods, a necessary industry to account for the loss of Crusader States in the Near East, making travel to these areas

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Goldthwaite, "The Economy of Renaissance Italy," 19.

²² Paoletti and Radke, *Renaissance Italy*, 55.

²³ Goldthwaite, "The Economy of Renaissance Italy," 21.

expensive and dangerous. Italy's export of these goods to Europe as well as the East, along with its continued import of objects which remained outside of Italian industrial production in spite of increased risk -- such as carpets from the East and tapestries from the North -- only served to increase their trade prowess and bolster their economy. As economic power grew, so too did the development of art as more money could be allotted for the purchase of fine goods, thus spurring a great increase in artistic practice.²⁴ By this time, it was commonplace for the elite class to commission works which reflected their interest in the art and textiles of the Near East, culminating in the display of patterns, textiles, and script inspired by the art of the Islamic World. It was also equally of interest of the Church to commission works which explored the ways in which Eastern imagery could be used to affirm the power of Christianity, especially necessary as Christendom was faced with the loss of the Holy Land once again to Muslim conquerors. Specifically of interest was the use of Arabic in a pseudoscript form, which was able to play many roles within a work of art depending on the context in which it was placed.

²⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO: ARTISTIC INTERACTION WITH EASTERN FORMS

The mercantilist exchange between the Italian Peninsula and the Islamic World allowed for an intricate network of cultural exchange across the Italian Peninsula punctuated by the diplomatic ties and foreign exchange between Ottoman Constantinople and other Italian city-states such as Rimini, Naples, and Florence.¹ The vested interest that the wealthy upper-class held in Islamic luxury goods allowed for a culture that promoted these goods as elite, thus encouraging the placement of these objects into paintings with religious significance in order to highlight both the wealth of the patron and the elevated status of the Holy Family. In other examples, these objects were able to take on a symbolic meaning of their own outside of the realm of conspicuous consumption. The expanding industry of Italian-made copies of these goods meant that artisans and artists would have thus been in constant contact with and familiar with the imitation of Eastern patterns, forms, and, in the specific case of depictions of objects that contained Arabic calligraphy. It is here in which we see the emergence of a new connection between the Italian painter's hand and the creation of scripts meant to mimic those of foreign lands.

The many examples of pseudoscripts in the art of Renaissance Italy are, of course, not the first examples of their kind of depictions of transcultural interactions seen in the history of art. Notable especially, and most important to the study of Italian scripts, are representations of pseudoscripts clearly meant to imitate Arabic letterforms found in various objects dating to the Byzantine Empire. Byzantium, part of whose territory once covered that of Ancient Greece and part of the Italian Peninsula, was of a key curiosity to the Italians as a growing interest in the

¹ Gülru Necipoğlu, "Visual Cosmopolitanism and Creative Translation: Artistic Conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II's Constantinople," *Muqarnas* 29, (2012): 1.

Humanist movement, one of the chief intellectual movements of the Renaissance, provoked a new study of classical literature, art, and language, as well any connections between the ancients and early Christianity.

Humanism had, prior to the work of Petrarch, largely been a philosophy borne out of a desire to separate the culture of the Italian Peninsula from what was considered to be the brutality and darkness of the Middle Ages. The movement's philosophical goals sought to enlighten Italy by reorienting its culture towards the eloquence and knowledge of the ancients, and had largely remained unconcerned with the connections between the Greeks, Romans and Early Christianity.² Francesco Petrarca, referred to in English as Petrarch, was an Italian philosopher and poet born in Arezzo in 1304. His philosophical work explored new ways in which Christianity could be related to the wisdom of ancient philosophers, which encouraged new Humanist curiosity towards the ways in which the wisdom of the ancients and the earliest Christians was useful to modern Christianity.³ Copious attention was thus paid to the art of Byzantium and the scientific teachings of Aristotle, chiefly his proposal on the movement of the universe from right to left, based upon his observations on the daily movement of the sun and stars from east to west.⁴

Nagel (2011) in his discussion of pseudoscience in Italian art brings to specific attention the connections between Aristotle's theories and the idea of the "orient" as it would have been acknowledged by the Italians during the Renaissance:

The word "orient" comes from the present participle *oriens* of the Latin *orior*, to rise. It is related to the Greek verb *orino*, to rouse or move, which is not far from the Sanskrit [sp.]

² Ronald Witt, "Petrarch, Creator of the Christian Humanist," in *Petrarch and Boccaccio: The Unity of Knowledge in the Pre-modern World*, ed. by Candido Igor, (Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 65.

³ Several scholars make reference to Petrarch's immense importance to both the Christianization of humanism and the philosophy of humanism itself, see Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 18. and Witt, "Petrarch," 65.

⁴ Nagel, "Twenty-five Notes," 234. For evidence of particular attention granted to Aristotle, see Leonardo Bruni's 1430 biography, *Vita Aristotelis*.

aruh, to set in motion, suggesting a common indo-European root associating the word with rising or moving and making move. *Oriens* is thus not a place but rather a direction and a principle of movement; it is where things come from. *Orior* is the root of both orient and origin.⁵

Nagel further notes the appearance of the Magi in the Vulgate Latin translation of the Bible as arriving *ab oriente*, and thus embodiments of the principle of the “orient” came to represent a sort of rising that originated in the East.⁶ The appearance of the term within a Biblical translation that would have been read by the literate Christian population of Italy outlines a clear Biblical connection between the Holy Land, Byzantium, and other territories further east and a sentiment of origination which would have directly associated these regions as possessive of a foundational role in contemporary Italian culture. These sentiments thus provide an impetus for Christians to look immediately east of the Italian Peninsula for additional symbolism relevant to the Christian orthodoxy.

In order to illustrate artists’ interaction with and understanding of this “oriental” dynamic in works of their own, Nagel utilizes Venetian artist Andrea Mantegna’s *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 9) and its depiction of the Magi with noticeably different ages and ethnicities. The most aged appearance belongs to the king of the furthest east, holding what looks to be Ming porcelain and sporting a beard commonly seen on male subjects of contemporary Chinese portraiture.⁷ In contrast, the youngest appears to have a complexion which identifies him as being of African descent. The king of middle age appears to be of Middle Eastern filiation, thus locating all three kings in accordance with Aristotle’s dogma.⁸ These connections show that it would not have been a foreign concept for artists, and by association, patrons, to align themselves with the philosophies of humanists, thus looking towards not only the Holy Land, but also the immediate

⁵ Ibid., 233-234.

⁶ Ibid., 234.

⁷ See portraits of Ming Dynasty emperors Hongwu and Chongzen for examples of this type of facial hair.

⁸ Nagel, “Twenty-five Notes,” 234.

and further East for evidence of early Christian activity. These connections are also demonstrative of an Italian ability to understand these references and place them in a correct geographic location, aiding illiterate viewers in denoting where exactly these figures came from. This also expands on the idea that the use of the script could have been used in order to give the painting a legitimate Biblical authenticity with the addition of a correct location marker, another of the theories behind the use of the script proposed by Nagel (2012).

Paolo Veronese's later depiction of the arrival of the Magi also features similar themes (fig. 10). He, like Mantegna, strays from the tradition of three men with the same aged appearance found in various other illustrations of the arrival of the Magi, instead opting to include three men of distinctly different ages and ethnicities in a work dated to 1573. The youngest mirrors the dark complexion of his equal in Mantegna's work, meant to symbolize the African, and the middle-aged man's shorter, dark beard and tanned complexion seems to mirror the common features associated with a person of Middle Eastern lineage. The ethnicity of the oldest is the most ambiguous. A distinction is clearly drawn between the skin tones of the other Magi, compared to whom he is notably paler with an extensive beard, much like his most aged counterpart in the work of Mantegna. It also seems that there was at least some effort made by Veronese to mark a distinction between the eldest Magi and the Virgin Mary and Christ child (fig. 11). Where the Virgin and Christ have noticeably pink undertones, the Magi seems to be portrayed with a different palette; the Virgin's shaded areas hold a rich red-brown tone, the Magi's are composed of a duller, more yellow-brown⁹. In a discussion of portrayed differences in heredity, attention could also be drawn to the smaller eye of the Magi as a demonstration of

⁹ It is possible here to attribute these tonal differences wholly to a disparity in the light placed upon the subject matters, however, it is important to note that the eldest Magi is the only figure who seems to lack red undertones, as even the values found in the complexions of background figures feature some sort of red tint. This furthers the validity of the assumption that the Magi are of entirely different ethnicities to the rest of the personages in the work, as clear effort was made by Veronese to mark distinctions which locate each of the figures as foreign to the Italian Peninsula.

stereotypical features of inhabitants of the Far East, however, the use of a singular facial feature as evidence of an entire ethnicity is inconclusive at best, and thus must be considered along with the complexion and beard as part of a broader theme of ethnic divergence.

The depiction of people of Oriental derivation in one of the most recurrently painted scenes in the life of Christ delineates a close mental association between the civilizations of the East and their early connections to Christianity. This philosophy, at a time in which artistic power grew with promotion of the linkage of church and state, thus provided further reason for artists to look to and include imitations of Islamic and Byzantine forms -- such as arabesque motifs, floriation, calligraphy, as well as the iconographic nature of the latter -- within works of religious importance, perhaps in an effort to place the work within a sacred biblical context. Further interest in the artistic other was spurred by the summoning of Greek artists to cities like Florence by its leaders, who sought to revive the “lost” art of painting in the city, according to the contemporary account of Giorgio Vasari.¹⁰ Artists’ interaction with current philosophical and religious movements including the search for parallels between Christianity and the teachings of humanism as well as its relations to the East illustrates a complex interplay between global trade and religious artistic activity in Italy, providing a unique circumstance in which artists were able to employ their own interpretations of traditionally Near Eastern artistic conventions. The inspiration from the Middle East is also present in one of the most recognizable and recurrent subject matters of the Italian Renaissance: the depiction of the Madonna enthroned.

The Byzantine influence

The Byzantine tradition of the creation of icons dates to the sixth-century CE, in which painted wooden panels were meant to be representative of people and events important to the Christian orthodoxy as well as the human connection and appropriation of the divine world

¹⁰ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 1998), 7.

created by God.¹¹ The icon was a private devotional object believed to possess immense magical properties as a connection between material, life, and the divine.¹² As such, its veneration was of high importance to the Orthodox Christianity of the Byzantine Empire, an importance adopted by the Italians as stories of the miraculous power of the portable icon, specifically the image of the Virgin enthroned, spread throughout Italy.¹³ As a result of the growing demand, the role of the icon as an object of at-home devotion began to shift to one of both public and private use within Italy as churches turned to panel painting, rather than fresco, to depict biblical events. At this time, the selective appropriation of these forms on wooden panels by Italian artists for churches around Italy became commonplace.¹⁴ The appropriation of characteristically Byzantine styles of religious art is reminiscent of the Humanist tradition of a return to antiquity, especially that of ancient Christianity. It also exhibits a specific Italian interest in the art of Byzantium, which also held unique relations with the Islamic world.

The Byzantine Empire possessed close geographic proximity to the Islamic world, and as a result was in constant contact, whether diplomatic or conflicting, with the Umayyads of Spain and the Fatimids of Egypt, thus creating a consistent flow of Islamic goods around the Mediterranean region.¹⁵ These trade relations fostered an immense interest in the artistic style of the Islamic world, already slightly familiar to the Byzantines as it possessed the same Greco-Roman stylistic roots.¹⁶ Most notable to the development of the art of Byzantium, however, were Islamic textiles featuring calligraphic embellishments found on *tiraz* textiles.

¹¹ Margaret E. Kenna "Icons in Theory and Practice: An Orthodox Christian Example," *History of Religions* 24, no.4 (1985): 348.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Michele Bacci, "Devotional Panels as Sites of Intercultural Exchange," in *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy*, ed. by Corry Maya, Faini Marco, and Meneghin Alessia, (Boston: Brill, 2019): 283.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Alicia Walker, "Meaningful Mingling: Classicizing Imagery and Islamicizing Script in a Byzantine Bowl," *The Art Bulletin* 90, no.1 (2008): 35.

¹⁶ Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 15.

These textiles sometimes featured figural, floral, or geometric imagery, and further subsets carried a band of running Arabic calligraphy carefully interwoven in gold. These luxury textiles would be worn by the highest elite, and the inscriptions often were used to proclaim the name or status of the Caliph who commissioned the garment.¹⁷ The appropriation of these scripts by both Byzantines and Italians relayed the prestigious nature of these inscriptions, albeit within a Christian context, and served as part of a distinct architectural program for the construction of Christian churches within the territory of the Byzantine Empire (fig. 12).

Following the conquest of Constantinople during the Venetian led Fourth Crusade in 1204, many items of religious and cultural value were looted and thus brought back to Venice as artifacts of Early Christianity, prompting the dissemination of a Byzantine-esque visual culture across the Italian Peninsula, notable in the rise in paintings of icons, as well as portable ceramics and other items both of Byzantine and Islamic origin. One of which, the Byzantine San Marco bowl -- named for the church in whose treasury it was placed -- provided Italians with what was perhaps thought to be an Early Christian application of pseudo-Arabic writing as well as a history of Christian appropriation of the language not otherwise seen.¹⁸ The bowl features a visual program of both Classical Greek and Islamic inspired imagery, with a pseudo-Arabic, more specifically pseudo-Kufic, inscription as it closely resembles the form of Kufic calligraphy, inscription around the lip of the bowl. It is, however, unlikely that the bowl served a Christian purpose to the Byzantines, who likely incorporated the script due to its connections to divination practice.¹⁹ The popularity of European Christian pilgrimage to Constantinople and the Holy Land, described in detail by the accounts of travellers like Sir John Mandeville, meant that

¹⁷ Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 50.

¹⁸ The item's placement in the treasury of the Church of San Marco among other sacred relics suggests a heavily assumed Early Christian status associated with the piece (Walker 2008).

¹⁹ For more extensive discussion on the bowl's symbolism as an allusion to the occult, see Walker (2008).

Christians would have also been exposed to Byzantine incorporations of pseudo-Arabic as part of the architectural program of many early churches across Greece and in Constantinople.²⁰

Further travel to Jerusalem would also see them make contact with legible versions of the script used in architecture, textile, and ceramics as part of the Islamic visual culture. This meant that travellers along the pilgrimage route would have been in constant contact with the script in both legible and illegible forms, thus providing an impetus for the assumption that the script played a role in Early Christianity. It is not a far estimate, in this case, to consider the use of pseudo-Arabic as yet another characteristic of Byzantine art, like the icon, that was adapted to fit within the visual culture of the Italian peninsula.

Inscriptions

It was a common occurrence to see Latin inscriptions in the form of commemorations and exclamations in Italian works both prior to and during the Renaissance.²¹ It was also common for an artist to include inscriptions of Greek and Hebrew where theologically or historically appropriate, as both are considered main languages of the Bible, in their paintings, despite limited public knowledge of either language.²² Inscriptions consequently evolved to function as an accessory to the image only to be recognized as a foreign text, rather than a legible clue to its meaning. As the import of Islamic goods reached its height and pseudo-Arabic calligraphy began to be considered as part of an Early Christian visual program, artists began to incorporate versions of the script within their paintings. Occasionally, actual character combinations would be copied, though it is not clear if, in including real characters, there is any intention as to the script's legibility. Cimabue's *Maestà of Santa Maria dei Servi* c. 1280-1285 offers an example of

²⁰ Silvia Pedone and Valentina Cantone, "The pseudo-kufic ornament and the problem of cross-cultural relationships between Byzantium and Islam," *Opuscula Historiae Artium* 62, (2013): 122.

²¹ Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 51.

²² Ibid.

this with the repetition of the *lam* and *alif*, both characters found in legible Arabic script (fig. 14). The *lam* often takes a form similar to the English J (ل, ﺝ), whereas the *alif* can be described as a straight line (ا, ﺇ). Use of these two characters forms the phrase “لا إله إلا الله” or *la ilaha illa-llah* (there is no god but God), known as the *tahlil* and found almost everywhere in the Islamic world as a testimony of faith.²³ As an early contributor to the use of pseudo-Arabic in Italian art, Cimabue’s use of actual characters could perhaps be ascribed to a lack of familiarity with the inclusion and creation of a completely foreign script, resulting in the reliance upon a few familiar characters found across the Islamic world to ensure the script remains authentically Arabesque in form. As the practice became more commonplace into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, fewer examples of actual Arabic characters are observed. The lack of widespread public understanding of the script granted artists considerably more personal freedom in the creation of their own form, allowing for the chance to form a completely individualistic and improvisational style outside of the jurisdiction and demands of ecclesiastical authorities and patrons.²⁴

It is in this sense that Nagel (2011) presents the idea that these scripts were unique enough in their creations to function as a sort of artistic signature.²⁵ This inference is only affirmed by stylistic analyses of individual artistic ventures into the pseudo-Arabic form. Giotto di Bondone, a Florentine pupil of Cimabue in the late thirteenth century, was known for his unique blend of Arabic and ‘Phags-pa, native to Mongolia (figs. 16, 17).²⁶ Though the causation behind Giotto’s inclusion of ‘Phags-pa is unclear, this could perhaps make reference to the “oriental” dynamic presented earlier within this chapter. Perhaps Giotto felt inspired by the teachings of humanists, and sought to look further east in order to further remove his images

²³ Stephanie Yep, conversation with the author, March 4, 2021.

²⁴ Nagel, “Twenty-five Notes,” 230.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 52.

from the present and place them within an unreachable sacred past. Just after the death of Giotto in 1337, Tommaso di Ser Giovanni di Simone came to artistic prominence in Florence as Massacio. Unlike his predecessor, whose script is characterized by thin, curvilinear lines and more reminiscent of *naskh*²⁷ calligraphy, Massacio's script is better defined as *kufesque*, due to its blocky appearance and emphasis on straight lines (figs. 20, 21). Though the repetition of the character *ayn* (ع) can be noted, however, its use denotes Massacio's misunderstanding of the language as it is almost never found in its isolated form, except in examples of *thuluth* and *naskh* calligraphy.²⁸ A few years after Massacio rose to Florentine prominence, Andrea Mantegna began his career in Mantua around 1448, rising to prominence as an expert emulator of script. Of the artists presented above, Mantegna is the hardest to pin as a result of his varied exploration into Semitic languages and *thuluth*²⁹ Arabic calligraphy.³⁰ A likely recreation of a Syriac -- a dialect of Aramaic -- manuscript in *Ecce Homo* c. 1500 and his inclusion of *thuluthesque* script in the *San Luca Polyptych* c. 1453-1454 demonstrated this versatility and marks his interest in the separate recreations of ancient languages, rather than a concern with blending them into one script like his predecessors (figs. 23, 25). These examples exhibit the highly individualistic and improvisational nature of each artist's written form, possibly influenced by individual travel and exposure to various foreign visual cultures both inside and outside of the Italian peninsula. The travels of each artist around the peninsula and abroad are mentioned in great detail in Giorgio Vasari's collection of contemporary biographies *The Lives of the Artists*. It is perhaps this travel

²⁷ *Naskh* calligraphy can be characterized by long, swooping tails and an angled bend. The letters do not often interlace (fig. 18). (Blair 2008)

²⁸ Stephanie Yep, conversation with the author, March 4, 2021.

²⁹ *Thuluth* calligraphy is also characterized by a leftward bend, however, these characters are often interlaced. As two of the more popular of the Six Pens, both *naskh* and *thuluth* script could be found all over the Islamic world, though significant developments occurred under the Ottomans. (Blair 2008)

³⁰ Nagel, "Twenty-five Notes," 230-231.

that allowed for the exposure to a diverse collection of artistic creation, thus inspiring diversity within each artist's own work.³¹

The development of this form of artistic expression, unique to each artist, meant that there was no one formula to guide the artist in the development of their own script. One's linguistic familiarity with, and thus his ability to develop a script which is stylistically, Arabic depended entirely on one's travel, personal interests, education, and exposure to the language in its true and legible form. Looking both to textiles and other works of Near Eastern origin displaying the script in its legible form, as well as artistic examples from their early Christian past like the San Marco bowl, artists were able to see the intricate calligraphy found in Islamic art and elite textiles appropriated in a way that could be easily adjusted to fit a new Christian narrative. This, along with the noticeable prominence of the language in the architectural programs of Byzantium and the Holy Land, as well as the large amount of territories around the Mediterranean relevant to Biblical scenes held by Islamic courts, also allows at least some reason as to why Arabic featured so prominently in Italian pseudowriting, taking precedence over other Hebrew and Greek, despite their possession of similar ties to the Bible. Barasch (1989) notes that the distinctive nature of Near Eastern form in Italian painting was meant to lend the scene an "oriental air," and thus with it, a biblical authenticity.³²

The application of pseudo-script

Perhaps, however, the use of the script also lends itself to deeper interpretations. Because they had no legible meaning, in order to draw conclusions that reach further than their presence as simple ornamentation, it is necessary to analyze the appearance of the script as a symbol in

³¹ Further discourse on the impact of artistic travel on creation can be found in David Young Kim's *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance: Geography Mobility and Style*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, (2014).

³² Mosche Barasch, "Some Oriental Pseudo-Inscriptions in Renaissance Art," *Visible Languages* 23, no. 2/3, (Spring/Summer 1989): 182.

itself. In order to gain a better analysis of the script as more than simple ornamentation, it is necessary to examine the role that it has played in other Christian cultures, such as those found in churches in the Byzantine Empire. Walker (2012) offers a unique perspective on why the Byzantine's might have utilized versions of the script within their own visual culture, writing that the script may have taken on a particular meaning as a mark of Christianity's triumph over Islam, after defeating their Muslim adversaries in a number of territorial battles.³³ The Italians, looking to the Byzantine visual culture, could have caught on to this, and thus adapted the idea to fit within their own artistic ventures. This inference would not be a far reach, as the Crusades, a crucial battle of Christianity vs. Islam, remained a contemporary topic even at the time in which the script is first seen in the middle of the thirteenth century. Walker (2012) also notes that in the eleventh century, Byzantine usage of the script was potentially altered in order to evoke both the Holy Land itself and the need to liberate it from its Muslim invaders.³⁴ Because the script had already been used to evoke the Crusades by the Byzantines, perhaps Italians on pilgrimages through Byzantium were also able to grasp this meaning and alter it to suit their own purpose. Florentines specifically would not have had to travel far in order to see this assertion of power at play. The 1438 arrival of the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos at the Council of Florence in order to discuss the union of the Greek and Latin church saw him wearing a *tiraz* textile as a garment, visible in the sketchbook of Pisanello, who was tasked with creating a portrait medal of the emperor (fig. 26).³⁵ This garment is relevant to the second purpose of the Council: a discussion on ways to deal with the threat of the Ottomans, who were closing in on

³³ Alicia Walker, "Pseudo-Arabic 'Inscriptions' and the Pilgrim's Path at Hosios Loukas," in *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World*, ed. Anthony Eastmond, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 108.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁵ Keith Christiansen and Stefan Veppelmann, *The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini* (New York: The Museum of Metropolitan Art, 2011), 197.

Byzantine territory.³⁶ In wearing a garment with direct relations to John VIII Palaiologos' Muslim adversaries to a conference on ways in which the threat of the Ottomans would be dissolved, perhaps the emperor sought to, like his predecessors, use the language to affirm his power and assert his dominance over the Muslim Ottomans. This inference also shows that the appropriation of the language as an affirmation of Christian power lasted into the fifteenth century, even as the Crusades were concluding.

If this is to be the case, it is necessary to analyze what exactly the Italians knew about the language, and how this knowledge could have been used to advance the notion of the inferiority of Islam 'as demonstrated by the enslavement and reification of its script', according to Papalexandrou (2003).³⁷ It seems that the Italians of the Early Renaissance had little understanding of the arrival of the written Arabic language as having happened after Biblical times. This idea is further supported by Mack (2009), who notes that the Italians mistakenly associated the contemporary script with that of the earlier Nabatean Aramaic, which both resembled the written form of Arabic and was, at the time, used to write Arabic as it was limited to spoken word.³⁸ Her description of Saint Jerome, heralded as a Doctor of the Church and often portrayed writing and translating pseudo-Arabic, shows that there was clear confusion as to the roots of the language in the Holy Land and its written form, as he is cited for his knowledge of Arabic and translations of the Books of Daniel and Job; the former from what is now inferred to be Aramaic and the latter from "Arabic".³⁹ This misinterpretation offers a pointed explanation for the precedence of Arabic over Hebrew, an equally native language to the Holy Land and spoken by Biblical contemporaries, however, it is difficult to imagine that educated Italians were entirely

³⁶ Ibid., 199.

³⁷ Amy Papalexandrou, "Memory Tattered and Torn: Spolia in the Heartland of Byzantine Hellenism," in *Archaeologies of Memory*, eds. Ruth M. Van Dyke and Susan E. Alcock, (Oxford, 2003), 72.

³⁸ Rosamund E. Mack and Mohamed Zakariya, "The Pseudo-Arabic on Andrea del Verrocchio's David" *Artibus et Historiae* 30, no. 60 (2009): 168.

³⁹ Ibid.

ignorant to the history of the language as it relates to the Holy Land, especially at a time in which ancient languages were gaining the attention of humanist scholars.

Perhaps the Italians were also choosing to evoke the Holy Land with the use of a pseudo-Arabic script, as well as recalling their Early Christian roots in the Byzantine Near East by following the example of pseudo-Arabic writing found in Byzantine churches as well as Byzantine art imported to Italy. Further explanation is also granted by the noticeably elite nature that the script held on *tiraz* textiles worn only by Muslim Caliphs, those to whom he granted the fabric, and those wealthy enough to purchase it. Seeking to convey the exalted nature of the Holy subjects, the artists opted to instead reappropriate a script with known ties to Islam in order to evoke similar ideas of elitism and holiness within Italian culture without the need for garnered knowledge, thus using the script to affirm the power of Christianity.

Artistic purpose

The question remains, however, of the purpose behind the creation of each artist's own pseudo-version of the script, and why there was no one conventional script used by all. In order to answer this, it is first necessary to consider the knowledge and skill of the artist, gained from both his travels abroad and the heavy influx of Islamic *objets d'art*, which allowed him to familiarize himself with the form of the Arabic language as well as Islamic decorative arts. Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* notes that a great many of the Italian Renaissance's most familiar names made journeys outside of their home cities. Even if not able to travel, he was certainly in heavy contact with these objects; a result of the close proximity of artists and the elites who would have both owned these objects and requested their presence in commissioned works.

This is evidenced by the common appearance of Eastern patterns in Italian painting. The skill of the artist in imitation and appropriation is proven via the many surviving examples of

Islamic textiles that exist today and their near exact replication in Italian painting. One of the most striking examples of textile replication is Gentile da Fabriano's 1423 work *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 27). The work is remarkable in its illustrations of a wide variety of textiles, both in material and pattern. Gentile uses multiple techniques in order to realize the fabrics, showing his expertise in and commitment to portraying the textiles in their most realistic form.⁴⁰ The elaborate details almost exceed those found in a surviving Persian lampas silk fragment from the 14th century (fig. 28). Though this specific silk cloth was not represented within the painting, the comparison of the two materials offers insight into the ability of the artist to recreate materiality and common forms of geometric and vegetal ornament. Attention was also given to corporeal elements found depicted within these ornamentations. In Giovanni del Biondo's *St. Zenobius Enthroned with Saints Eugenius and Crescentius*, he chooses to highlight the forms of the birds rather than imitate a complete pattern.⁴¹ These forms are remarkably similar to those found on a late 13th century lampas silk fragment from Persia, thus showing that it was standard for the Italian hand to be entirely capable of exact imitation of traditional Islamic forms. Pisanello's sketchbook furthers this assumption, as he devotes nearly half of a page to the direct transcription of Arabic calligraphy in its true form (fig. 26). This legible copy also lends itself to the notion that the reason behind the creation of a pseudoscript was not due to the artist's own lack of ability, but was rather a choice.

As shown in the elaborate replication of advanced geometric and vegetal motifs found on textiles, as well as exact transcriptions of legible Arabic calligraphy, it would have been well within the capabilities of Italian artists to form exact copies of the script in its legible form, and thus the creation of a pseudo-script was not a poor attempt at the replication of Arabic, but rather

⁴⁰ Lisa Monnas, *Merchants, Princes, and Painters: Silk Fabrics in Italian and Northern Paintings 1300-1550*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 104.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

a completely new script of their own. This new script also recalls Byzantine efforts to assert Christianity's power over Islam through the appropriation of the script into a Christian context. It is necessary then to analyze the varied applications of both the script itself as well as other imagery associated with the Middle East and Islam in order to gain an understanding of what sentiments the Italians themselves held towards the inhabitants of the Islamic world. This understanding will lend itself to understanding exactly what the script was meant to mean to Italians, and if they were indeed attempting their own assertion of Christian dominance much like their Byzantine counterparts.

CHAPTER THREE: NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF ARABIC PSEUDOSCRIP

The development of the pseudoscript form, as previously mentioned, was a unique process entirely dependent on the artist, a realm of creation outside of the jurisdiction of patrons. Further reflective of this unique quality are the varied connotations that the script could possess, dependent upon the context in which it was placed. The adaptability of other imagery associated with the Middle East mirrors this versatility, illustrative of larger Italian sentiments towards figures associated with Islam and those not, who were therefore eligible to assume a place within a Christian context without possessing a negative connotation. In an Islamic context, pseudoscript serves as a substitution for real Arabic, illustrating the language's use as part of heretical doctrine. Perhaps in doing this the Italians intend to decry its use within an Islamic context, illustrating their false assumption that a once Biblical language had been appropriated by Muslims. In this sense, it thus mirrors the negative attitudes towards Muslims displayed in Crusader art, continuing the same philosophies against Islam that were used to encourage action against the Muslim invaders of the Christian Holy Land.

In "Twenty-five Notes," Nagel (2012) introduces the idea that in creating a pseudoscript, the artist is attempting to avoid implicating himself in an act of heresy which could potentially arise from placing an expression of particular religious value within a Christian image. This idea holds special value, especially when considering the history of relations between Christendom and one of the primary languages used by Islam as an aspect of a larger common mutual hostility between cultures. Notable here is the story of the ceremony of the Feast of the Presentation of the Christ Child held in Constantinople in 1279, during which a bronze platter inscribed with ornamental letters -- thought to be of Egyptian provenance -- was presented to the Byzantine

emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos.¹ The platter was later found to have contained a message meant to “praise the ‘loathsome name’ of Mohammed,” according to Byzantine witnesses of the event, and the offending patriarch who had presented the object later fell from grace as a result of the mistake.² This incident shows a sentiment of wariness towards objects which contained potential challenges to the Christian doctrine -- especially when direct references to Mohammed, the founder of Islam, are made. This also indicates a hesitance to directly copy Arabic letterforms. It is unclear whether news of this incident reached the Italian peninsula; however, it is worth noting that not many examples of real Arabic letters appear in Italian art after those seen in paintings by Cimabue and his other contemporaries after the turn of the thirteenth century.

The placement of pseudowriting was largely limited to a few locations within painted scenes, all of which are conspicuous enough to draw the attention of the viewer in a relatively easy manner, such as the edge of sleeves and necklines, as well as along the hem of cloaks. Peeking out from under a cloak in a conspicuous manner, these locations served as points of direct contact between the object on which they were placed and the outside world, placed in areas which would have been granted direct attention from viewers. On the sleeves, the viewer's eye is drawn to the flash of color and gilding separate from the darker color of the cloak that largely covers the figure. Elsewhere, just under the main focal point -- the face -- gilded lettering along the neckline commands attention, as well as equally prominent gilded halos -- with a similar proximity to the face -- featuring the script in a rounded format reminiscent of Mamluk brassware and, in exceptional cases, scripts which border the work as a whole (though this application is largely limited to the work of Giotto, and leaves little clues in terms of why exactly it was done.³) The placement of the script in such a manner, drawing the attention of the viewer,

¹ Nagel, “Twenty-five Notes,” 237.

² Ibid.

³ Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 69.

further the assumption that the script symbolized more than simple ornamentation. Perhaps Italian artists, in begging the viewer's direct attention, were able to utilize the script as a method of affirming the Christian faith. The pseudoscript also appears in painted books and tablets, in which it was able to serve as both a substitute for real Arabic as well as a symbol of a further removed sacred language spoken by holy figures. In the former context, it often serves as a method of decrying the Islamic faith.

The defeat of Averroes as metaphor for Italian sentiments towards Islam

As it appears in books and tablets found in paintings, pseudowriting follows the traditional format, organized into lines that, if in Latin, would have been legible to the literate Italian population. In some applications, the use of pseudo-Arabic script here takes on the role of real Arabic where it would have been theologically correct, such as depictions of the triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas over the Spanish-Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd, known to Europeans as Averroes. Born in the territory of Spain under the Almohad Dynasty of North Africa and the Southern Iberian Peninsula during the twelfth century, Abu al-Walid Muhammed Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rushd al-Hafid (Averroes), rose to prominence through his serious studies of the ideas of Greek philosophers, primarily Aristotle.⁴ When brought to the court of the Almohad ruler, Abu Ya'qub Yusuf, Averroes successfully clarified the works of Aristotle within a context that fit the teachings of the Qur'an, and thus, his first book *Middle Commentaries* was commissioned. Much of Averroes' work focused on his reflections on both Aristotelian philosophy and Arabic thinkers such as al-Farabi and Avicenna, among others.⁵

So revered were Averroes' philosophies of transforming Aristotle's terse conclusions through extensive commentary that his works were widely translated and distributed as

⁴ Averroes, Richard C. Taylor, and Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Introduction." In *Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) xv.

⁵ Ibid, xvi.

foundational guides of Aristotelian thought until the Age of the Enlightenment.⁶ Averroes and his reflections on Aristotelian thought became so eminent in the West that the Church found it necessary to refute those which were misaligned with Christian orthodoxy, and thus commissioned paintings began to appear celebrating the figurative triumph of Latin philosophy over that of Averroes.⁷ These images specifically celebrated St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) as a great Latin philosopher and his figurative denouncement of “heretical” doctrines, typically personified by the defeated and prostrate form of Averroes at his feet. In these images, Thomas Aquinas is often pictured receiving the divine word of God and imparting it to his followers, thus demonstrating the veritability of his philosophical commentaries as those which come directly from God, rendering therefore indisputable in the eyes of the Latin West. The application of pseudo-Arabic script plays a key role in the iconographic formula of the victory of the doctrine of Thomistic Aristotelianism over Averroes.

One of the most published depictions of this phenomenon, Lippo Memmi’s *The Triumph of Saint Thomas over Averroes*, c. 1344, shows Saint Thomas Aquinas in the center of the image as the largest figure holding several books in the center of the frame, some of which are directly connected via gilded rays to God, Moses, Saint Paul, and the Evangelists; all of whom hold texts with legible Latin (fig. 29).⁸ Flanked by Aristotle and Plato, both of whom are granted titles above their heads and to which Thomas Aquinas also connected, he is the only figure in the image to make direct contact with the viewer, holding the Bible open to the reader above two other texts, all written in legible Latin. The Bible also makes contact with the congregation gathered below him with the same golden rays, offering a visible metaphor of the passing of

⁶ Paul J.J.M. Bakker, "Introduction." In *Averroes' Natural Philosophy and Its Reception in the Latin West*, ed. by Paul J.J.M. Bakker, (Leuven (Belgium): Leuven University Press, 2015) vii.

⁷ Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 54.

⁸ Joseph Polzer, "The "Triumph of Thomas" Panel in Santa Caterina, Pisa. Meaning and Date." *Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 37, no. 1 (1993): 29.

knowledge throughout the painting. Notably left disconnected from the gilded lines and covered almost fully by Latin texts, however, are books containing an illegible pseudoscript, a pseudo-Arabic reference to the writing of Averroes, who lies, like his books, named beneath the Italian Thomas Aquinas and looking to the ground in dejection at the portrayed defeat (figs. 30, 31). His much smaller scale further denotes his lesser status, and another book lies downturned at his side, which seems to have been dropped, landing in a haphazard manner.

Memmi's *Triumph* denotes yet another facet to the complex sentiments of the Italian Christian population towards Islam, one of negativity almost directly stated by the verse written in the most prominent of the three Latin texts in the hands of Thomas Aquinas. It quotes Proverbs 8:7, reading "Veritatem meditabitur guttur meum et labia mea detestabuntur impium," translated to say "My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness."⁹ It is undoubtable that the "wickedness" to which this verse refers is that of the teachings of Averroes, evidenced by the subordinate nature of both him and his philosophies. Below the largest text are representations of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, and below them still lie the metaphoric philosophies of Averroes, denoted by Arabic pseudoscript. His books, containing a pseudo-Arabic script symbolic of real Arabic, purposefully excluded from the dissemination of knowledge provided by the golden rays, are the wickedness, left untouched by the metaphorical word of God and placed in a subordinate position below the philosophies of Thomas Aquinas. These are not the only examples of pseudo-script that appear within the work. Writing also suggestive of an oriental script can be located inside of the books held by Aristotle and Plato, however, it is difficult to decipher an exact provenance.¹⁰

⁹ Prov. 8:7 NIV.

¹⁰ Polzer, "The Triumph of Thomas," 41.

The appearance of a different pseudoscript held in the hands of Aristotle and Plato and, though not touched by the rays of God, making direct contact with the head of Thomas Aquinas -- thus placing them hierarchically above the books of Averroes, which are not allowed any contact -- makes clear that it was only the philosophies, and by association the language, of Averroes with which Christians associated a negative connotation in images of this event. This shows that the Christian church was able to correctly associate Arabic with the teachings of Islam, making the choice to include a similarly modified version of the Arabic language within other depictions of Christian events seem even more peculiar.

A painting of the exact same subject by Benozzo Gozzoli depicts texts with pseudo-Greek held in the hands of Aristotle and Plato, which, along with Giorgio Vasari's identification of the texts within Memmi's work as Aristotle's *Ethics* and Plato's *Timaeus*, allows for the placement of the pseudowriting held by the philosophers as having a Greek origin (fig. 32).¹¹ The correct geographic placement of the pseudoscripts in depictions of this event makes apparent the idea that at least some Italians were aware of vernacular locations, and were thus able to apply this knowledge in order to associate certain figures with their correct geographic locations according to language, enabling them to place such personages in religious imagery with the addition of a legitimate location marker. In contemplating this, it may provide a legitimate reason for Italian artists to provide a pseudo-Arabic script in other Biblical scenes. However, correct geographical association is not consistent across all works produced, as some artists may have been wrong or simply unconcerned with the accurate connection of Biblical figures with location.¹² Regardless of intention, evidence of attention to and knowledge of the correspondence of location and language is notable; perhaps a reflection of a growing interest in

¹¹ Vasari-Milanesi, Vol. III, 50.

¹² Nagel, "Twenty-five Notes," 231.

foreign language -- especially those relevant to Early Christianity -- spurred both by a growing Humanist movement as well as an increasingly large market for global trade. This furthers the argument that pseudo-Arabic could be used to give the painting Biblical authenticity via the correct association of place and language, however, in the case of paintings depicting Thomas Aquinas and Averroes, it seems that the use of a pseudoscript form of the language is rather meant to recall religion, and not location.

Pseudo-Arabic script is also used in association with religion as part of the iconographic formula for Giovanni di Paolo's image of the triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas over Averroes, titled *Saint Thomas Aquinas Confounding Averroes* (c. 1445-1450) (fig. 33). The setting of this scene is notably different from other depictions of this event, lacking the large number of people commonly shown as witnesses to Thomas Aquinas' triumph. Notably absent are the Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato, along with God and other notable ecclesiastical figures, replaced by unnamed Christian scholars discussing the seemingly unconscious Averroes at their feet. This collegiate setting feels more intimate, as if the viewer is made privy to the scholarly defeat of Averroes, rather than assuming the role of a spectator to a more theatrical and religiously charged event. Thomas Aquinas, however, maintains his contact with the viewer, immersing them within his lecture.

Where the other paintings herald the victory of religion, the word of God descending down and verifying the philosophies of Thomas Aquinas to the cult of Christianity over those of Averroes, this painting, lacking any direct religious imagery aside from the halo over the head of Thomas Aquinas, feels more of a triumph of the mind. This idea is furthered by a simple scholastic setting in which Aquinas confounds Averroes without the direct help of God, making Averroes' loss seem much more related to the content of his studies and his personal inaptitude.

Averroes sleeps, defeated, at the feet of the other scholars as they speak, unable to properly refute the teachings of Thomas Aquinas as his book remains open in his hand (fig. 34). The pseudo-script found within is highly reminiscent of the slim lines of simple handwriting and marks a stark contrast from the highly developed, ornamented pseudo-Arabic seen in other Italian works, perhaps even furthering the idea that his studies are informal and underdeveloped; deemed unworthy when presented in front of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas (fig. 35). Furthering the concept of the victory of Christian philosophies over those associated with Islam is the large and highly developed nature of the Latin in Memmi's depiction of the triumph. The book itself is large and central, commanding attention with bold text neatly written which, when contrasted with Giovanni di Paolo's illustration of the much smaller, much less formal work of Averroes, solidifies the hierarchical placement of Christianity over Islam via written language. This triumphant nature echoes that of the appropriation of Arabic used by the Byzantines in the architectural programs of Christian churches, also alluding to the triumph of Christendom, albeit in military fashion.

Though lacking any clear examples of a pseudoscript, Andrea di Bonaiuto's fresco titled *Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas* (c. 1365-69) drives the negativity associated with Islam even further (fig. 36). Averroes, similar to the previous images, rests in the middle, appearing morose and defeated. A notable difference occurs here, however, as Averroes is not alone in his dejection. Instead, he is placed in the middle of Arius, on the left, and Sabellius, on the right, both recognized Christian heretics.¹³ In placing Averroes as hierarchically equal to two heretics, his own heresy, and thus that of Islam, is exposed. This idea is furthered by Jagot (2018)'s discussion of Averroes' heterodoxy as well as its relation to Dante's discussion of Christian

¹³ Shazia Jagot, "Averroes, Islam, and Heterodoxy in the Spanish Chapel 'Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas'", *Interfaces: A Journal of Medieval European Literatures*, no. 6 (December 2019), 10.

heresy in *Paradiso* 13 and Islamic heresy in *Inferno* 28, which concludes that the company of Averroes precisely indicates his own heresy as his adherence to Islam.¹⁴

Depictions of the triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas over Averroes are only part of a vast and widely-circulated trope of veritable visual examples of the attitude of the Christian orthodoxy towards Islam during the Renaissance, reflecting the demonization of Islam that played a large part in gathering support for the Crusades.¹⁵ The iconographic formula common across almost all depictions of the event portrayed Averroes' Aristotelian commentary, as well as his adherence to Islam, as hierarchically less than that of the Christian Thomas Aquinas, and equitable to heresy. The prevalence of this imagery reflects a negative perception of Islam in the eyes of Italians, both those literate and those not, as both classes would have at least been able to view the works and know, via the stereotypical turban and beard, that the defeated figure was indeed a Muslim who had contradicted the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, who spoke directly from the word of God. The use of pseudo-Arabic script in this context functions as a legitimate vernacular reflection of Averroes and his commentaries. More importantly, its presence denotes an Italian understanding of the Arabic language's association with Islam, thereby signaling a larger narrative enforcing a negative perception of the language when utilized within a Muslim context.

The changing role of the Middle Eastern figure in Renaissance paintings

The absence of pseudoscript in Bonaiuto's *Triumph* allows the viewer to focus wholly on the perception of the Muslim figure within a Christian context. Averroes' appearance alongside

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Many images exist depicting the Prophet Muhammad as being dragged into hell. Like Averroes, in these cases the Prophet is used as a primary foil for Islam. In writing, Muhammad is described as a trickster who hoodwinked a large swath of people into following him (Tolan 45). In all cases, Islam is decried, representative of a larger narrative of hostility towards Islam that would have been distributed throughout the Italian Peninsula, perhaps in an effort to further affirm Christian theology in the face of other religions, as well as garner support for Crusade-like efforts against Muslims.

Arius and Sabellius denotes the association of the Muslim figure with heresy, while his hierarchical placement under Thomas Aquinas in other depictions of Aquinas' triumph shows the negative perception of the Muslim held by Italians, who viewed him as a lesser being, untouched by the words of God. When placed within a Christian image in association with Islamic theology, the Middle Eastern man assumes the role of the wicked.

This depiction of Muslims in a negative light is not a convention new to Italian art during the Renaissance. During the Crusades, Italians would have been familiar with the presence of a Muslim assuming the subordinate or evil role within works of art which herald the triumph of Christianity. Published and spoken sermons encouraged Christendom's support of the recapture of the Holy Land, illuminated with imagery that served to both qualify the mission of the Crusaders while simultaneously vilifying their Muslim counterparts. These sermons were popularized in the twelfth century, and relied heavily on intense rhetorical means in order to invigorate the public, which would thus encourage their participation, or, if unable to participate, their monetary support.¹⁶ Narrative Crusade accounts played a similar role, stressing the Muslims' intense emotions of anger and savagery as a way to cast their opponents in a negative light and increase the urgency of recapturing the Holy Land for the 'just' Christians.¹⁷ These accounts would also be illuminated with imagery denoting this same savagery and anger, inciting the calumination of the Muslim population by both the literate and illiterate Italian population.

A panel miniature of the Crusaders attacking the city of Antioch found in the chronicles of William of Tyre relays a correlative message (fig. 37). Depicted are the Crusaders in the midst of an attack on the city while covered completely in armor. The audience's inability to see their

¹⁶ Christoph T. Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology: Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 34.

¹⁷ Stephen J. Spencer, "Emotions and the 'Other': Emotional Characterizations of Muslim Protagonists in Narratives of the Crusades (1095–1192)." In *Literature of the Crusades*, ed. by Simon Thomas Parsons and Linda M. Paterson, (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2018), 42.

faces enables the viewer to imagine the expression, and thus the emotion, of the Crusaders, who sit in a seemingly calm, ready manner upon their horses as they approach the city. The Muslims, on the other hand, denoted by their beards and turbans, are rushed and uncovered, their lack of modern armor thus indicating a dearth of civility. This is further indicated in the color of their shields. Where the Crusader's shield is painted gold, perhaps in an effort to depict the expensive metal, the shields of the Muslims are green and brown, possibly symbolizing bronze -- a lesser metal -- or painted wood. Their lack of formality is otherwise noted by the intense expressions of anger on their faces, a quality mirrored in textual accounts which further prove their savagery and thus the need for the 'good' and 'just' Christians to reclaim their Holy Land from 'evil'. Other examples of illuminated manuscripts require far less in terms of explanation, as the imagery speaks for itself in the portrayal of the Muslim as evil and unjust. This convention continued into the early Renaissance period as the Crusader States began to lose their hold in the Near East.

It is important here to separate the role of the Muslim from the role of the Middle Easterner in Italian works of this time period. In images that obviously denote the Islamic religion of the individual of Arab descent¹⁸, he is often shown in a lesser position, either defeated and subordinate, as is the case of Averroes, or savage and uncivilized, such as that which is shown in a large number of Crusader manuscripts. The Middle Easterner that is placed within a Christian context, however, often takes on positive connotation, vastly different from his Muslim counterparts. This phenomenon is most commonly seen in paintings of the Adoration of the

¹⁸ The depiction of one singular 'Arab' descent denoted by the use of the Arabic language functions as part of a larger narrative of the Italian universalization of the 'Other', thus effectively tying many different ethnicities and languages -- i.e. Turkish, Persian, and Arabic -- into one symbol. Arabic came to function as the lingua franca of the Middle East through its adoption by many Muslim philosophers of Persian and Turkish descent, which in turn allowed Christian perceptions of the entire Middle East, as well as all of Islam, to fall under the representation of one singular language.

Magi, in which many depictions of the same event feature figures of both European and Eastern descent converging to celebrate the birth of Christ.

Approaching on horseback and leading camels, the Adoration's attendees of Middle Eastern descent in Filippino Lippi's *Adoration of the Magi* are assigned this neutral connotation (fig. 40). Notably different about their appearance, visible in other paintings of the same event and contrasting greatly with other illustrations of Arab peoples with associations to Islam, is their positivity. Lippi utilizes the same symbols seen in illuminated Crusader manuscripts and paintings of Averroes, denoting the ethnicity of the figures with a turban, tanned skin, hooked nose, and a beard; iconography typically intended to symbolize a Middle Eastern provenance. Here, however, their presence is not negative, and can even be interpreted as positive as they rush in to view the Christ Child leading horses and camels laden with exotic gifts. In the foreground, men with similar iconography denoting an Eastern provenance lament the birth of Christ with clasped hands along with those in traditionally European dress (fig. 40). Similar examples of this same harmony between European and Eastern spectators are seen in works depicting the Adoration by such artists as Lorenzo di Ottavi Costa, Domenico Ghirlandaio, and Bernardino Pinturicchio, among others.

The adaptability of the Eastern figure is also notable within the smaller category of illustrations of the Adoration. In both of the depictions of the visitation of the Magi discussed in the second chapter of this thesis -- the earlier by Andrea Mantegna and the later by Paolo Veronese -- the three kings, main characters in the story of the visitation of the Magi, are composed of African, Middle Eastern, and Far Eastern figures, offering gifts to Mary and the Christ child. By noting their more direct participation in one of the most heavily represented events in the Bible, both Veronese and Mantegna, like Lippi and others, assign a positive role to

the oriental figures; a far cry from the savagery and subordination of portrayals of the same ethnicity when placed within an Islamic context. Where some painters have followed the same theme as Mantegna, placing these personages as main characters in the foreground directly participating in the event, others instead place them in the background, not immediately part of the action but in attendance nonetheless.

The changing role of figures of Middle Eastern descent illustrates the sentiments of Italians towards their present counterparts in the East, both those associated with Islam and those not. This changing attitude marks a contrast between how Italians viewed Muslims -- supporting a larger narrative exemplifying the belief that the Italians associated Islam with heresy -- and how they viewed residents of the East that were not outrightly associated with Islam. In this way, the association of these figures with the theological heterodoxy known to be followed by many Arab peoples, the Italians are able to separate the heresy of the people who contemporarily inhabited the 'Holy Land' -- like the 'evil' Muslims found in Crusader manuscripts -- from those who resided there in Biblical times, thus granting them the ability to use these figures to apply a Biblical authenticity to Christian art without fear of conjuring heretical doctrine. Applying this same belief to their associated language, it is reasonable to infer that when used for Islam, their perception of Arabic was negative -- exhibited in illustrations of the philosophy of Averroes -- thus deeming it reasonable that they would have shied away from using the language directly for fear of copying something with a religious, "heretical" meaning.

The continuation of the Crusader mindset

The presence of other textual and symbolic examples indicating the similar adaptability of imagery associated with the Islamic world point to a larger conclusion surrounding the sentiments of the Italians towards their counterparts to the East, their religion, and their

language. The adaptability of this imagery and its subsequent appropriation to serve a Christian context while also using it to outline the heresy of Islam thus serves as a continuation of the Crusades, albeit on a less physical plane. Visible here is the same reclamation of assumed Early Christian identity, able to function as a visual metaphor of the philosophy that inspired support for the 'Holy Wars'. Like the images of the 'angry' Muslim invaders defending cities that possessed artifacts and locations related to the Bible, Christendom's belief that the language associated with all of Islam once held Biblical significance provided another way in which they could subsequently assert their dominance over Islam, without the expense of money and human life that came with the Crusades themselves. Rather than land, the creation of a pseudoscript heavily reliant on the form of Arabic marks an Italian interest in reclaiming a language thought to have been used in Biblical times that had been 'stolen' and 'appropriated' into a Muslim -- and therefore heretical -- context. In denoting the negativity of imagery associated with the East when correlated with Islam, these works function to depose Islam in the eyes of the viewer in the same way as earlier imagery seen in Crusader manuscripts, meant to inspire participation in the reclamation of the Holy Land. Though not directly inspiring participation in physical wars -- the Crusades are largely over and the Crusader States have been lost -- the appropriation of these images shows a continued fight for Christianity, as well as a continued assertion of Christendom's dominance over Islam. In the same way as imagery associated with the Middle East, by establishing its present heretical use and outlining how, when used for Muslim purpose, use of the language was considered to carry negative connotation, Italians were thus able to place it within sacred imagery of the past without fear of association with theological heterodoxy. Without Islam, the language was able to take a positive meaning; one that was able to serve as way to evoke the sacred Biblical past via the languages assumed provenance. By placing it in

sacred imagery, the Christians thus re-established the vernacular's own Biblical sanctity while also evoking the sanctity of the Holy Land -- completely lost once again to Muslim invaders in the beginning of the fourteenth century.

CHAPTER FOUR: APPROPRIATION AS ARTISTIC CRUSADE

Like the depictions of Eastern imagery discussed in the previous chapter, the application of the pseudo-Arabic script was highly adaptable and able to suit a variety of purposes. As outlined by this thesis; whether meant to signify a denouncement of Islam through the use of a language that would have been contemporarily associated with the religion, or a nod to its assumed --yet incorrect-- provenance as a Biblical language, the script's adaptability within these two contexts suggests that Italians were indeed concerned with the use of the language by the Muslim hand. The language's true provenance, however, reveals that it was in fact Muslims who developed the language to its contemporary significance to the Holy Land around the seventh century CE, centuries after the death of Christ. If Italians knew that the language was not present in the Middle East during the life of Christ, and rose to prominence over their primary adversaries, the subsequent placement of an altered version within a Christian context would have been nonsensical and purely based on aesthetics, as it would have served no purpose for the Christian orthodoxy within the religious work. Instead, its appropriation, as well as its prominence over other vernaculars truly native to the Holy Land, reveals both a historical misunderstanding as well as -- and more importantly -- a need to reclaim what was thought to have been lost, signifying a movement parallel to that of the Crusades, albeit artistic.

Meaning through Placement

Likely the most common application of pseudo-Arabic script across the Italian peninsula was that of its placement on the robes of prominent Biblical figures, evoking the *tiraz* textiles of the Islamic territories on which Arabic calligraphy could be found. While it is possible that Italian artists were simply copying the textiles in placing the script, using the same or similar

areas that would have been used on the fabrics in their original form (i.e. hemlines and sleeves), there is much evidence of intentionality behind locational alterations. These adjustments, resulting in increased scriptural visibility, allow the bands of pseudoscript to peek out from below the large cloak, drawing the viewer's eye to a flash of gold at the edge of the sleeve or on the neckline of a garment. It is important to note that on *tiraz*, the embroidered bands would have rarely been placed on the edge of the sleeve, and thus would have been invisible to the viewer within an Italian work, covered by a cloak. The placement of these bands of text is visible on an Islamic illumination of John the Baptist as he baptizes Jesus (fig. 41), where the band of embroidery is placed on the arm, just below the shoulder. Elsewhere, bands of embroidery can be found on the hem of the garment, as well as on one's turban, as seen in a different Islamic illumination in the *Maqamat* (fig. 42). While pseudo-Arabic text is commonly found on the hem of the Virgin's outer cloak, the placement of the script at the edge of the sleeve and on the neckline indicates a purposeful adjustment revealing the artist's desire for these inscriptions to be visible.

This increased visibility lends itself to Nagel (2012)'s conclusion referring to the placement of the scripts as a symbol of verbal expression. According to him, the specific placement of these scripts in areas that peek out from beneath the wearer's cloak lends them a communicative nature, establishing a point of direct contact with the viewer and thus allowing for interpretations that reach far beyond those which have initially been concluded on the subject. This nature advances the idea that pseudoscripts hold a deeper meaning outside of simple expressions of ornamentation, one which also signifies more than a simple attempt to avoid inadvertently writing heretical doctrines. Here, they assume the form of a message, evoking sacred speech comprehensible to the holy figures within the work itself. As Nagel

(2012) writes, the creation of this script is the creation of a sacred language reminiscent of glossolalia which separates the holy and sacred past from the present, thus further establishing the power of Christian figures as suggestive of a dialogue incomprehensible to the viewer. The appropriation of Arabic script into a tool which affirms the power of Christendom -- while simultaneously demeaning its value when placed within an Islamic context and used by Muslim figures -- is suggestive of a larger narrative that illustrates a continued need for the reaffirmation of Christianity within contemporary global conversation.

Many of these paintings would be placed within the church as part of a plethora of imagery meant to greet the worshipper upon arrival. As one entered the church, one was also met with chanting, music, and ritual behavior in a unique experience of worship meant to facilitate divine connection. In some cases, members of the congregation were drawn to specific works of art, which could elicit immense emotional reactions from the viewer.¹ This ability is noted in fifteenth-century writings attributed to the Florentine Arlotto Mainieri, who noted one story of a woman "...heaving deep sighs and saying her prayers devotedly before an image of Saint Nicholas of Tolentino. She had been praying and gesticulating in that manner for perhaps one hour and she seemed spellbound."² In this manner, the woman's emotional reaction is evocative of glossolalia, a spoken language also known as speaking in tongues, representative of a language beyond those understood in which the speaker is led outside of their speaking ability through divine influence.³ A widely held belief suggested that prayer at the image of the icon was able to enact miracles in the place of the icon itself, marking it evident that this type of worship possibly invoked a similar mystical experience.⁴ Nagel (2012)'s theory of the

¹ Evelyn Welch, *Art and Society in Italy 1350-1500*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 207.

² Ibid, 207.

³ Nagel, "Twenty Five Notes," 238.

⁴ For discussion of miraculous images, see *Saints, Miracles, and the Image: Healing Saints and Miraculous Images in the Renaissance*, ed. by Sandra Cardarelli and Laura Fenelli, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017).

pseudoscript as communicative and equivalent to this sort of holy babbling, evident of a divine inspiration, shares this evidence. The idea of the script as a language that reaches beyond all known languages is furthered by its appearance within multiple depictions of the Annunciation written as text in Mary's Book of Hours.

Perhaps some of the most notable manuscript illuminations of the medieval period come from Books of Hours, as they provide one of the more larger bodies of evidence for scholarship to examine. These books functioned as personal prayer books, to be read aloud, dating back to ancient Roman times with roots in scheduled public worship known as the Divine Office.⁵ This service would involve specific chanting of select Psalms carried out at the traditional canonical hours of prayer -- Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline -- on the days of feasts. These services were eventually condensed into a smaller version meant to satisfy the needs of less formal worship, and thus the Book of Hours, with a devotional emphasis on speech, was created.⁶

Neri di Bicci's 1464 painting of the Annunciation offers an excellent example of the inclusion of pseudo-Arabic as text in Mary's Book of Hours, which sits on her lap, open to the viewer (fig. 44). The script is almost identical to the *thuluthesque* script most visible on the hem of the vestments worn by the angel Gabriel. In placing the script within a book meant to be read by Mary, the artist implies that the text, illegible to humans, would have been readable -- and more importantly spoken -- by Mary herself, lending the script a communicative quality. In addition, the inclusion of this pseudo-Arabic form bears no ill connotation as a language worn -- it is visible also along the hem of both her and the angel Gabriel's garment -- and spoken by such

⁵ Margaret M. Manion, "Beginnings and Endings: The Shaping of the Book of Hours." In *Antipodean Early Modern: European Art in Australian Collections, C. 1200-1600*, edited by Anne Dunlop, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 111.

⁶ Ibid., 112.

notable Biblical figures as Mary and Gabriel (fig. 45). Here, rather than placing it in association with a Muslim figure that is hierarchically lower than a Christian and considered to be a heretic, the script plays a primary role in a Biblical story as a language read and worn by Mary and Gabriel. Here, the script further affirms the power of the Christian doctrine by aiding in the image's removal from the present and placement within a sacred Biblical past, an idea supported by the belief that the language was spoken during Biblical times. The use of a pseudo version of the language not only prevents the unwitting inclusion of heretical doctrine in a sacred piece, but also prevents any legibility, which even further disconnects the present from a past so sacred that its vernacular is without comprehension. In this context, Arabic script holds a positive meaning within the Christian orthodoxy, a notion opposite to that which is suggested in depictions of Averroes and Thomas Aquinas. This, in turn, shows that the script, like other symbolism associated with a Middle Eastern provenance, is only considered to be negative when used by Muslims such as Averroes within an Islamic context, marking a demonification of both the Muslim other and their religion. Here, art echoes the sermons meant to inspire support for the Crusades.

The presence of Arabic pseudoscript in the Virgin's Book of Hours in the painting by Neri di Bicci is also symbolic of the script's ability to serve as a replacement of Latin, evidenced further in the placement of the text within the haloes of certain figures in other works of art. Prior to the adoption of pseudoscript into the Italian artistic vocabulary, Latin was utilized in haloes to serve an acclamative purpose, able to express holy evocations as well as announce the names of the saints on which they were placed. Two panels from Gentile da Fabriano's *Quatresi Altarpiece* show this concept (fig. 46). Here, the haloes read "SANTUS JOHNNIS BAPTIST" and "SANTUS GEORGIUS MARTIS", directly naming Saints John the Baptist and George. In other

examples, such as Giovanni di Paolo's 1427 *Branchini Madonna*, the script offers an appeal, reading, "I painted this for you. Virgin, protect this man."⁷ Masaccio's representation of the Virgin's halo in *The Virgin and Child (Pisa Polyptych)* replaces this Latin script with pseudo-Arabic (fig. 48). In including this text within haloes, Mack (2009) notes the evocation of contemporary Mamluk brassware in form, in which imitation writing assumes the role of principal decoration within the halo, marking still more artistic influence originating from Muslim lands. This proclamative purpose also recalls the nature of the *tiraz* textiles from which textile calligraphic inspiration is drawn. It is notable that the same enunciative context carried by the halos is applicable to inscriptions along the hem, as was the traditional purpose of *tiraz* (note Latin writing along the hem of the garment worn by the angel Gabriel in fig. 50). It seems that the script here is able to be used in the affirmation of holiness and power of the wearer -- in these cases sacred figures -- which in turn asserts the power of the religion as a whole.

The ability of pseudo-Arabic script to take the place of Latin writing is also telling of the sentiments of the Italian population in the acknowledgement of the equal roles that the two vernaculars were able to share, thus elevating the Arabic language into one able to possess a role, however small, within the Christian orthodoxy. The ability of the Italians to place pseudo-Arabic within a context where Latin would have typically been expected allows the language to assume this equal status, almost completely opposite to that which the language takes when placed within an Islamic context. The adaptability of the script -- similarly to examples found on the vestiges of holy figures and within the Book of Hours -- thus mirrors the adaptability of nuances that both imagery and peoples associated with the Near East could hold. This places the power to change the narrative that the use of the language would provide within Italian art in the hands of

⁷ "Branchini Madonna," Norton Simon Museum, <https://www.nortonsimon.org/art/detail/F.1978.01.P>.

the Christians, allowing them to reappropriate a language used for a 'heretical' orthodoxy into one that would serve a purpose within Christian art.

This idea can also forward the conclusion that the true provenance of the language was unknown to the Italians, as a language known to have been introduced to the region by Muslim invaders would have, as the paintings of the defeated Averroes denote, been only associated with heresy and thus unable to take on a positive nuance within a Christian work. If the language was thought to have possessed some type of early Christian provenance, its reappropriation is thus justified: there is meaning to be gained from its appearance in a painting. The almost omnipresence of clearly evidenced intentionality in placement within depictions of the Virgin and other sacred figures suggests that these scripts did indeed hold a communicative meaning, refuting prior conclusions that allude to interest in visual qualities as the sole reasoning behind the use of this pseudoscript.

Simulative Imagery

As a large number of Italians were illiterate, the need for images to communicate Biblical lessons was immense, and thus, the image was able to function as a Bible for those unable to read the scripture itself: a form of education comprehensible by all. It was not uncommon for pseudoscript to reflect this purpose, as there is much evidence of artists' correct application of pseudo-Arabic writing on the vestments of saints according to their geographical origin in the East. This is notable in the previously mentioned depictions of Averroes, a Spanish-Muslim philosopher associated with works written in Arabic (though here the writing is pseudo-Arabic, rather than legible Arabic), as well as images such as Filippino Lippi's *St. Benedict and St. Apollonia* (fig. 51). In the panel, St. Benedict, born on the Italian peninsula, lacks any sort of script on his garments, while the garb of St. Apollonia of Alexandria features the script along the

hem (fig. 52). This same attention to locational detail is present in many depictions of the Adoration of the Magi. While not common across all images, the placement of the script as a correct location marker alluding to a figures origin in some paintings is notable for its ability to function as a symbol of geographic place, a facet of meaning that lends itself to a conclusion that the script was able to function as a vessel of Holy Land recollection to both the literate and illiterate population by serving as a legitimate location marker .

Noted as part of the communicative context that pseudoscript could hold, should the image itself be able to inspire glossolalia, it is then possible that the text itself thus functioned as some sort of translator, able to incite divine communication within its viewer thereby rendering them able to directly interface with the holy figures within the paintings. The use of foreign words in the most sacred evocations of Christianity is not a strange concept. Nagel (2012) notes the use of the untranslated Hebrew words Hallelujah, Osannah, and Amen as prayerful exaltations in liturgical moments. In surpassing the boundaries of one's native language in liturgical chant, one enters into a holy realm reminiscent of God's glory, which is said to have transcended all language.⁸ Thus, the ability of this text to inspire such holy speech is indicative of the text as possessive of an immense power to Christianity. This ability may have stemmed from a presumed early Christian provenance, as its holy use mirrors that of -- and holds similar religious importance as -- Hebrew, a language known to have been present in the Holy Land during Biblical times.

The communicative context introduced at the start of this chapter allows for further probing into the reasons as to why pseudowriting was employed in depictions of religious figures and events, as well as what meaning it was meant to hold. As use of the script developed into a

⁸ St. Aurelius Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms (vols. 1-3)* ed. by John Rotelle, Maria Boulding and Michael Fiedrowicz, (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2000), 53.

common feature of Quattrocento Italian art, its representation of a language outside of the traditional parameters of known vernaculars legible only to sacred figures suggests immense importance to a Christian orthodoxy. The ability of sacred figures to speak this language in painting furthers the conclusion that the language's true provenance was unknown, and that it was wrongfully assumed to have been present in the Holy Land prior to Muslim conquest. This false idea of original 'ownership' of the language by the Christian orthodoxy, however, provides reason for Christianity to reclaim the language, now known to be associated with such a 'heresy' as Islam. In invalidating the use of the language within Islamic contexts through image, by way of educating illiterate masses Christian art establishes a narrative of the Islamic use of Arabic, a language thought to possess the power to communicate with sacred figures, as wrongful, and thus these images mirror both sermons meant to inspire support for the Crusades as well as function as a Crusade -- a reclamation of early Christian symbolism for Christianity -- in themselves.

Reappropriation for Recollection

These images were not alone in their recollection of Crusader ideology. As the liturgical proceedings were a vessel of commemoration, celebration, and memorialization, painting, as a valuable form of public and private worship, possessed the ability to continue this philosophy. With the victory of Christendom in Jerusalem, new commemorative events were added to the liturgical calendar, and hymns and poems were created to sanctify the event, celebrated across the Latin West. When the city was surrendered to Saladin in 1187, the news came as such a shock that Pope Urban III in Rome perished, and no time was wasted in both the call for reaction as well as the declarations of new prayers to be read as part of special liturgies in support of the

liberation of the city from Muslim invaders.⁹ Several more Crusades were launched against the Holy City; however, none were successful. These assaults, as well as prayer and commemoration of both the initial victory and eventual defeat continued well into the thirteenth century and beyond into the fourteenth, paralleling the adoption of pseudo-Arabic script in Italian art.

Notable in timing, the illumination of William of Tyre's Crusader account *History of Outremer* came after the fall of Jerusalem to the Khwarismian Turks in 1244, despite its accounts of the previous victories of the First Crusade.¹⁰ Folda (2012) proposes that this belated commemoration is purposeful, functioning as both a lamentation of loss as well as a symbol of the living dream to retake the city. With the development of various other art forms designed to memorialize within the reader or listener the victories and defeats suffered by Christendom in the Holy Land, it would not be a bizarre assumption to conclude that symbolism within the realm of visual arts was also able to take this same meaning, albeit in a more allusionary form.

Imagery as allegory is able to evoke these same sentiments and provide discourse on a variety of subtle and ambiguous issues that often cannot be expressed in words, notable in the inclusion of pseudo-Arabic script as evocative of a variety of meanings. The placement of a script with direct connections to both the geographical Holy Land and Islam suggests that its placement was designed to continue the Crusader narrative of the demonification of Islam as well as lament the loss of the Holy Land, as even the simplest interpretations of the script's presence in Italian art allude to the idea that the inclusion of the script is the artist's attempt at situating the painting within a Biblical setting. With this, the artist evokes the land lost to Islam, which, when placed in conjunction with images of the triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas --

⁹ Jaroslav Folda, "Commemorating the Fall of Jerusalem: Remembering the First Crusade in Text, Liturgy and Image," in *Remembering the Crusades : Myth, Image, and Identity*, ed. by Nicholas Paul and Suzanne Yeager, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 128.

¹⁰ Ibid., 138.

discrediting the teachings of Islam as wickedness -- relays a parallel message to the poetry and song that directly reference the Crusades, such as William of Tyre's *History of Outremer*.

CONCLUSION

Much traditional scholarship on the Italian Renaissance has overlooked the variety of symbolism that pseudowriting could hold within Italian art produced during this period. The inclusion of the script, however, leaves much room for interpretation of Italian sentiments towards their Muslim neighbors, providing a complex narrative of assertion of Christian power within its diminutive, yet highly significant placement. The power of the painting and the symbolism that it held in this era, material, and location cannot be understated, with much of the illiterate population reliant on the placement of these images in public settings for visual education on common Biblical stories. This reliance placed the power to change the narrative of global contact into one which benefited Christendom, continuing the ideology of a Latin movement of reclamation and memorialization even after the last Crusade had been launched.

As global cultural contact between the Italian peninsula increased following the establishment of numerous trading outposts -- the result of mercantilist travel, Christian pilgrimage, and the Crusades themselves -- so too did the understanding of cultures and languages outside of the Latin West, specifically those which bordered Europe to the immediate east. The Italian humanists also spurred a new interest in the production and philosophies of Ancient Greece and Rome, as well as those of the Byzantine Empire, ultimately inspiring a renewed curiosity in the roots of Christianity as art grew to seek ways in which it could affirm the power of both Church and City-State as one.

With a large influx of Eastern luxury goods making their way through Italy as the primary point of entry into European markets came a number of published and illuminated accounts of pilgrimages and Crusades, fostering a large public interest in the Orient as both a

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producer of fine goods and the site on which the roots of Christianity took hold. Here, contact with the Arabic language, in both its legible and imitational forms, is made, presumed to have been a vernacular present during Biblical times now adopted by Islam. The language played a key role in architectural and artistic decoration, appearing in its true legible form on many structures and objects found across the Holy Land. Byzantine interest in the form of pseudowriting on early Christian churches likely further contributed to an often mistaken Biblical provenance associated with the language. While it is obvious that many Italians knew that Arabic was the primary language utilized in Islamic lands, it is less so that they were aware that the language had been developed in the Holy Land around the seventh century CE, thus resulting in the assumption of a false history of early Christian meaning associated with the vernacular.

This assumed history allowed for the adoption of Arabic in its pseudo form -- likely a cognizant choice by artists made in order to avoid the spread of potentially heretical speech -- in an effort to 're' appropriate the language for Christian purposes while simultaneously denouncing its use within an Islamic context. This thus reinforced the validity of the Christian orthodoxy over Islam through visual symbolism, a medium understandable by the general population without the need for literacy. This tradition had been followed for centuries prior, with the Crusades providing a key narrative of the need for just Christians to retake the Holy Land from the wicked and unjust Muslims. Illuminated images in firsthand accounts of the Crusades provided this initial visual symbolism, relying heavily on illustrations of violent and angry Muslims in struggles against level-headed and well-outfitted Christians, gaining the support of much of the Latin West in a quest for the reclamation of Biblical artifacts and the Holy Land in which they could be found.

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Renaissance images symbolic of Christian victory, however, were far less reliant on literal imagery, instead incorporating small details such as script and stereotypical illustrations to convey the denunciation of Islam. In this context, the use of pseudo-script was able to take on a nuanced negativity, reflecting the heresy of Islam. Similarly, Middle Eastern figures were able to possess this same negative connotation when associated with Islam, as seen in the illuminations of many Crusader manuscripts, as well as in the equation of Averroes to two known Christian heretics. Here, the artists make direct links between Islam and heresy, thus denouncing the use of the script within Islamic contexts. This denouncement is parallel to that which is found in sermons meant to inspire support for the Crusades, thus framing the use of the script for this purpose as a continuation of Crusade narrative.

Furthermore, the script was also able to possess a variety of meanings within a Christian context, reinforcing the idea that the language was mistakenly assumed to have meaning to early Christianity. Had the Italians known that it possessed few historical connections to Christendom -- and was relatively nonexistent in the time of Christ -- it would have been far more unlikely that there would have been attempts to situate the language within a highly sacred scene, as it would have served little purpose outside of being a visual reminder of heretical doctrine.¹ Had the Christians been solely concerned with evoking the Holy Land or early Christianity, it would have been a far easier option to use Hebrew, rather than Arabic, as the primary language of Biblical evocation. As a language with a known provenance equal to that which Arabic was assumed to have, and a heavy significance to early Christianity as the original language of the Old Testament, Hebrew could have served the same purpose without the need for a pseudo form, as there would have been little risk of spreading the doctrine of Latin Christianity's main

¹ Knowing the language was not around during the life of Christ, Italian artists may have still decided to utilize the language as an evocation of the Holy Land, adding further religious significance to a work.

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adversaries in the East.² Instead, the choice to mirror the Crusades in the reclamation of language is evident; the Christians, in their appropriation of Arabic script, were attempting to reclaim a language thought to have been lost to Islam.

The ability of Italian artists to adapt imagery and people into both positive and negative contexts dependant on the narrative reinforces the power of Christianity, a reinforcement felt to be needed by the Latin West as they began to lose their territorial hold on the Holy Land with the fall of the last Crusader States Tripoli and Acre in 1289 and 1291, respectively. From here grew a desire to both memorialize what was lost as well as reassert the power of Christendom in the holy realm. In incorporating the Arabic language into highly sacred Christian contexts, the Italians thus reclaim the language for Christendom, aligning with Crusade narratives in such a way that frames the use of the pseudo-Arabic script into an artistic Crusade of its own.

² This is not to say that the creation of a largely pseudo-Hebrew script would not have occurred at all, but rather that there would have been no external need for the creation of a new script, as there would have been little risk of spreading text which contradicted Christian orthodoxy.

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