
A Mamluk-Venetian Memorandum on Asian Trade,

AD 1503



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Abstract

This article presents and discusses a source of unique importance for our knowledge of early modern global exchanges. Produced in 1503 by the Egyptian administration and found among the records of a Venetian company with global commercial interests, the document records hitherto unknown connections between the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia, followed by cargo figures. By sending the Memorandum to the head office in Venice, the Company's agents in Egypt were labouring to solve the most important concern of Venice's information network, that of coordinating Indian with Mediterranean trading seasons. By analysing the document's context, namely, a company involved in the export of central European metals to Asia, this article focuses on the capacity of its agents to gather information through collaboration, networking and ultimately, friendship with Muslim partners and informers. The story of the 1503 Memorandum and its transmission raises questions about the mixed networks underpinning global exchanges, the role of information and the drive of the late Mamluk sultanate into the world of the Indian Ocean.

Keywords: Venice; Mamluk Egypt; Indian Ocean; Southeast Asia; cross-cultural trade; spices; globalisation

One morning in late spring 1503, Michele Foscarelli, a Venetian nobleman, had his daily post opened and read. An active businessman and deeply involved in the city's politics, Foscarelli was briefed by a secretary about most of his commercial correspondence; quick abstracts can be found in the envelopes beside the address. On this day, the letters included a commercial missive from his agent in Alexandria, Marco Zorzi. Inside the envelope, an attached document accompanied Zorzi's last Egyptian letter. This was an unusual practice in the correspondence between the two men; moreover, the attached document differed in content from the cursory, routine succession of commercial news provided by Zorzi and by the other agents in their regular mail. The document in question was a memorandum on the 1503 spice trade season (*questo corso delle spezie*), and, allegedly, was intended to satisfy

Foscari's curiosity about a series of topics, in particular whether all Indian spices reaching the Arab countries were later conducted to Christian Europe.¹

In the following pages, I will investigate the origins of this uncommon source of information (that I publish and translate into English in Appendices I and II respectively), and will try to clarify its nature, trace its origins back to the Muslim administration in Cairo and in the Red Sea ports, and explain in summary its unique economic and historical contents. Yet my interest goes beyond the mere presentation of a new historical source. Unlike their early modern colleagues, medieval merchants bridging the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean did not operate under the umbrella of cosmopolitan colonial empires and were forced to face the perils of divergent legal systems, fragmentary information and the risk of striking deals without effective enforcement. In the absence of the protection afforded by a world empire, historians of medieval trade see long-distance exchanges as a privileged scenario within which to study cross-cultural contact, and the tendency is to pay attention to particular groups, such as the so-called diasporas, as necessary mediators across these boundaries. In my investigation of the memorandum and of the men that smuggled it out of Egypt, I adopt a somewhat different approach. Much of the memorandum's significance, I will argue, relies on *how* information was gathered in premodern long-distance trade, particularly in a context where people from different cultural and religious backgrounds were involved.

Whilst interest in Venice is gaining momentum among scholars of communication,² who present the Rialto as the social and urban space conceived for the transfer of knowledge, this article addresses one of the most important aspects of Venice's information network: namely, the city's role in coordinating Indian with Mediterranean trading seasons. By shifting the focus from Rialto to the riverine district of Cairo, Būlāq, my aim is to capture the inclusion of Renaissance Venice in a much broader Eurasian reality, in which Venetian agents were embedded. Zorzi's memorandum, I will argue, is material proof that East-West trade, as it was practised before European hegemony, was sustained by a kind of communication that penetrated linguistic and religious boundaries, the result of mutual collaboration, networking and ultimately, friendship, rather than the labour of networks based on an exclusive religious or cultural belonging.

In the first section that follows I will briefly sketch Foscari's business activities, his staff and the global conjuncture that affected his firm. In a second section, based on Foscari's books of account, I will describe Foscari's global network of business partners and particularly the Muslim merchants linking Alexandria with India and Southeast Asia. The memorandum itself is described in section three. The article closes with a few words on the crucial role of Foscari's petty agents in gathering information about global trade.

A company in dire circumstances

Marco Zorzi had arrived in Alexandria a few weeks before, probably in early March. The end of Ramadan was still twenty days away, and there was little or no activity in the

¹Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Procuratori di San Marco, Misti* (hereinafter ASV, PSM, M), busta 43, fascicolo XXIII. When last consulted in October 2015, the Memorandum was placed as the final document in the file.

²E. Dursteler, 'Power and Information: The Venetian Postal System in the Mediterranean, 1573-1645', in *From Florence to the Mediterranean: Studies in Honor of Anthony Molho*, (eds.) D. R. Curto, et al. (Florence, 2009), pp. 601-25; R. Cossar, F. de Vivo and Ch. Neilson, 'Shared Spaces and Knowledge Transactions in the Italian Renaissance City: Introduction', *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 19, 1 (2016), pp. 5-22.

spice market. He found the city “orphaned” of spices.³ Far from being a pleasant interlude, the market inactivity was alarming news for Zorzi. The Venetian galleys had set sail long before and were already in Crete. The convoy was expected to arrive in Alexandria in less than ten days. According to Zorzi, spice merchants had not arrived yet from Cairo, and rumour had it they would not be arriving until the end of Ramadan (29 March 1503). Keystone of the Venetian economy, the galley season aimed at concentrating the bulk of commercial operations within a few days after the galleys’ arrival, and it was crucial they arrived—and departed on—time.⁴

Zorzi, together with the Venetian consul, tried to counter this worrisome delay of Muslim merchants, sending letters to the dragoman, to the *merchant of the sultan* as well as to other Muslim ‘friends’, and recommending his fellow merchants to act similarly, so that “the moors may speed up their coming to Alexandria with the spices... so that they would meet the galley season”.⁵ There was other news: the sultan, Zorzi added, was considering limiting the sale of spices to Egypt, thus preventing their export to Damascus and to other Syrian cities that year.⁶ These and other considerations, mainly news about the amount of spices coming from Cairo, constituted the bulk of Zorzi’s letter. With his letters already sealed, a porter arrived from Cairo in the late evening. He was carrying an Arabic document; an official memorandum requested by Marco to another of his friends—a clerk in the Mamluk administration in Cairo. Marco reopened the seals, translated the memorandum’s contents into vernacular Venetian and attached it to his last letter to Michele Foscarelli. The memorandum was already on its way to Venice. It provided the reader with a list of the ships that had travelled to the Red Sea during the year, arranged by a geographical order. The document covered localities on the Arabian Peninsula, the western coast of the Indian subcontinent and some Southeast Asian harbours, followed by cargo sums.

The Foscarelli Company operated in the most consolidated sectors of Venice’s commercial economy. In light of the extant accounts, the company’s core business was the export of considerable quantities of metals, mainly central European copper, but also silver ingots, minted gold coins, tin and quicksilver to the Egyptian market, and the subsequent import of spices, drugs, precious stones and high value textiles.⁷ Early modern China and India were hungry for bullion to fuel their thriving economies, and Venice played a significant part in channelling metals from Bohemia and Tirol eastwards.⁸ Besides this core activity,

³ *Qua in Alexandria ritrovada lattera orfana de spezie ett /o/ marchadanti non I era zontto ett senon I era per vegnir fin fatto el suo romadan che manchava zorni 20*, ASV PSM M 43, 21 March 1503.

⁴ A key period for Venetian history, the events of the 1502–3 trading season have been reconstructed by Jean Aubin in his posthumous work *Le Latin et l’astrolabe [III]. Études inédites sur le règne de D. Manuel (1495-1521)* (Paris, 2006), pp. 429–463. Aubin relies on reports by the Venetian consul Alvise Arimondo, who was also a correspondent of the firm.

⁵ *tuutti a nui avemo scritto in una forma denotando chele galie de Alexandria son in candia ett que la sera de qua fin zorni 10 [...] ett questo avemo scritto achoche mori simettano in fuga de vignir zuxo ett chondur le sue spezie in tempo de galie*, ASV PSM M 43, 21 March 1503. Aubin, *Le Latin et l’Astrolabe*, pp. 434–437.

⁶ Aubin, *Le Latin et l’Astrolabe*, p. 436.

⁷ P. Braunstein, *Les Allemands à Venise (1380-1520)* (Rome, 2016), pp. 573–596.

⁸ R. C. Mueller, *The Venetian money market : banks, panics, and the public debt, 1200-1500* (Baltimore, 1997); P. Braunstein, ‘Le marché du cuivre à Venise à la fin du Moyen Âge’, in *Schwerpunkte der Kupferproduktion und des Kupferhandels in Europa : 1500-1650*, (ed.) H. Kellenbenz (Köln and Wien, 1977); F. Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne : Le deuxième Etat mamelouk et le commerce des épices (1382-1517)* (Barcelona, 2009); Braunstein, *Les Allemands à Venise*, pp. 519–571.

the company was heavily involved in dealings of Cretan wine and sold many other European commodities in Egypt, ranging from olive oil to furs and soap. Venice was the traditional outlet for Central European metals and by the time that the memorandum was written, large importers such as the Fuggers were present in the Rialto as they were seeking to market their own copper and silver directly in the Levant.⁹

Foscari was a veteran of trade with Germany and soon entered into partnerships with the Fuggers, first with the *von der Lilie* minor branch of the family and then with Jacob ‘the Rich’ (1459–1525). As Jacob Fugger consolidated himself as Archduke Maximilian’s main banker, he was granted a privileged position as leaseholder of the Habsburg silver and copper mines. By 1502 Fugger’s loans granted him monopoly over Habsburg copper production and marketing in Italy, secured through his partnership with Foscari. The Indian spices acquired in Egypt were subsequently redirected by Foscari to the northern European markets, to Germany and most notably to Flanders where Venice had traditionally marketed Mediterranean goods. By the turn of the century, the Venetian economy was more dependent than ever on this ship-to-caravan trade, the city was in large measure reliant on the Levantine imports and the number of galleys dispatched to the Eastern Mediterranean reached all-time highs (three to five yearly convoys).¹⁰ Among other factors, the need for spices was motivated by the increasing military expenditure due to the Venetian-Ottoman war.

Lastly, Foscari’s kinship relations impinged on the conduct of the family firm. He had no male heirs, but had fathered an illegitimate daughter, Pellegrina. Concerned with assuring his own posterity, he endowed Pellegrina with a conspicuous estate and married her off to a promising patrician, Alvise Mocenigo. Foscari’s son-in-law would deserve a biography for himself; he developed a career as a diplomat, through which he met the Holy Roman Emperor, the Pope and the Ottoman sultan Selim (1470–1520).¹¹ Mocenigo played an important role as a business associate; he was close to Maximilian I, and, as we will see, took advantage of a diplomatic mission to Habsburg Flanders to monitor the arrival of the Portuguese spices to Antwerp. When Mocenigo was knighted by Maximilian in 1502, Jacob Fugger was receiving 750 tons of Habsburg copper every year, of which a good share was channelled to Venice almost without competition. According to Philippe Braunstein 1,500 tons of Habsburg copper were exported to the Middle East through his partnership with Foscari in only eight years. In 1502, 525 out of the total 575 tons loaded on board the Alexandria galleys corresponded to copper purchases sent to Fugger by Foscari.¹²

A dominant, resilient narrative presents the Mamluk sultans as mere trade monopolists who were without respect for property rights. According to this narrow vision, the Mamluks did not manage to secure themselves a steady influx of copper from abroad, and were forced

⁹M. Häberlein, *The Fuggers of Augsburg: Pursuing Wealth and Honor in Renaissance Germany* (Charlottesville, 2012); Mueller, *The Venetian money market*, p. 142.

¹⁰B. Doumerc and D. Stockly, ‘L’évolution du capitalisme marchand à Venise: Le financement des galères de mercato à la fin du XV^e siècle’, *Annales HSS* 50–1 (1995), pp. 133–157; C. Judde, *Naviguer, commercer, gouverner: économie maritime et pouvoirs à Venise (XV^e-XVII^e siècles)* (Leiden and Boston, 2008), p. 63.

¹¹Known as Mocenigo dalle Zogie, E. A. Cicogna, *Delle iscrizioni veneziane*, II (Venice, 1827), pp. 154–156; P. Litta, *Famiglie celebri di Italia*, XIV (Venice, 1819–33), p. 134.

¹²Braunstein, *Les Allemands à Venise*, pp. 354–355, 587.

to beg their European and Ottoman rivals for it.¹³ Nonetheless, under the Circassian dynasty (1382–1517), the Mamluks had indeed set up sophisticated economic mechanisms to deal with the bullion-for-spices trade. The most important of these devices consisted in the marketing of spice stocks to the Venetians not through regular market exchanges, but through institutional methods. After many failed attempts during the first half of the fifteenth century, the sultans managed to set up a regular exchange pattern with the Venetians, the so-called ‘stock system’. The Mamluks sought gold, silver and eventually copper to pay for their professional army, who would threaten rebellion without payment, and the Venetians agreed to exchange their bullion against the sultan’s spice stocks. The “sultan’s spices” and the “merchants of the sultan” appear often in letters written by Foscari’s agents, who had to cope with the system when both its advantages and shortcomings were at their height. Foscari’s agents spent a good deal of time negotiating with, and sometimes befriending, the sultan’s merchants, called *Khawājā* in the Arabic sources and *coxa* in the company’s letters and accounts. The *Khawājās* were private entrepreneurs entrusted with the marketing of the sultan’s spices and with other operations of government interest. In 1501, the new sultan al-Ashraf Qansūh al-Ghawrī (1501–1516) rose to power and desperately needed Venetian bullion, in order to pay for the troops’ traditional ‘welcoming gift’. During the years that the Foscari Company was operating in Alexandria, between the early 1480s and 1506, a substantial amount of the total volume of spices, and particularly of pepper, was marketed by the sultan’s agents. This was good news for Foscari and other Venetian investors who were guaranteed a yearly supply. But the system exhibited serious pitfalls: the Venetians never paid in full the huge sums owed to the sultans for the spices that they received. Sultan Qansūh al-Ghawrī was forced to accept payment in copper and started considering a general reorganisation of the stock system.¹⁴ The Mamluks were hungry for metals, yet Arab sources are not forthcoming about the amount of silver and copper that transited the sultanate bound for the East. al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442) mentions the drain of copper by Indian merchants, and both Venetians and Germans seem to have been aware that copper was exchanged for spices in India.¹⁵ Coppo mentions how a whole cargo of European copper plates had been reshipped to India in August 1501.¹⁶

For their transactions with the Levant, the company made extensive use of the state galleys—endowed with the monopoly of spice transportation—even though it owned private ships. Due most probably to Foscari’s involvement with metal exports, the company’s ships were suspected of indulging in illegal trade with the infidels, since trade in weapons and some items were banned by the popes.¹⁷ Most importantly, the Company also relied on a network of professional correspondents on Foscari’s payroll. Along with Marco Zorzi—who personally sent the memorandum—the most noticeable correspondent in

¹³Such an approach demonstrates the limitations of relying solely on Arab sources; A. Fuess, ‘How to Cope with the Scarcity of Commodities? The Mamluks’ Quest for Metal’ in *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History*, (eds.) R. Amitai and S. Conermann (Göttingen, 2019), pp. 61–75.

¹⁴Generally, for the stock system, see F. Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*, pp. 115–145. For copper imports, *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹⁵al-Maqrīzī, Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī (1364–1442), *Kitāb al-sulūk li-ma’rifat duwal al-mulūk*, 4/II, (ed.) S. ‘Ashour (Cairo, 1970–73), pp. 929, 943; Braunstein: ‘Le marché du cuivre à Venise à la fin du Moyen Age’, p. 91.

¹⁶ASV PSM M 43, 12 August 1501.

¹⁷M. Sanudo, *I diarii di Marino Sanuto, Vol. V* (Bologna, 1969), p. 163.

Alexandria was Daniele Coppo. Coppo took on his brother Antonio, who died in Alexandria in the company's service, and worked for Foscari for more than two decades. As contemporaries of the first Portuguese voyages, Foscari's employees seem to have held a more sophisticated knowledge of the Indian Ocean, its geography, and the sultan's commercial policies than was available in Lisbon during the same years. In a missive dated 1503, for instance, Coppo describes in great detail the opportunities for business that the Portuguese might encounter if they were to navigate their fleet beyond Calicut and as far south as Ceylon. What makes Foscari's records unique is the first-hand insight that they provide into these dramatic, ongoing world developments: while Alexandrian employees such as Coppo or Zorzi reported news about the 'Portuguese caravels' and the subsequent reaction of the Indian powers, Foscari's son-in-law Mocenigo testified, from Antwerp, to the arrival of the first 'Portuguese' spices in northern Europe. Although these men were conscious that the spice trade was experiencing dramatic changes, their letters relativise the impact on Europe and suggest the resilience of the Arab, Indian, and Southeast Asian actors traditionally involved in the old commercial routes. Speaking about the uncertain conditions of northern-European spice markets—now facing two different streams—Mocenigo expresses his views on the problem in this manner: "if the Red Sea route closes, spices would remain imprisoned, and I believe these spices shall not cost them [i.e. the Portuguese] less than we pay for them, but [will be a] bigger nuisance and expenditure".¹⁸ In the same fashion, we see Mocenigo arguing with Portuguese representatives in Antwerp about their claims that the Crown would be able to prevent Muslim traffic between Calicut and the Arabian Peninsula. In Venice he opposed the anti-Ottoman warmongering party at the Senate.¹⁹

Coppo and Zorzi constantly gathered information from among Muslim merchants, and indeed both quote rumours, conversations and commercial letters from Cairo. Moreover, we know that the consulate had informants in Cairo and their own postmen connecting the embassies in Alexandria and Damascus.²⁰ As for the memorandum, Zorzi's source was an informant inside the Mamluk Administration, a clerk attached to the bureau of the Nāzīr al-Khāṣṣ, a department in charge of the sultan's private (*khāṣṣ*) income, mostly commercial revenues from the Red Sea and Alexandria. Since early Mamluk times, the Dīwān had jurisdiction over the Indian merchants (the Dīwān, for instance, taxed the estates of deceased traders). In the fifteenth century, the department rose to prominence as the sultanate extracted more and more resources from commerce. Most importantly, the Dīwān ran its own communication system, gathering news about the Red Sea traffic and centralising information in Cairo. For this purpose, unlike in early Mamluk times, the Dīwān did not set a regular postal service but relied instead on the Bedouins of the Sharqiyya province. Little is known about late Mamluk information services; most commercial dispatches were transported by these Bedouin drivers (*hajjān*) who rode fast camels. News from the harbour of

¹⁸*spero tamen in dio che chi non se metera in fuga non sera tanto malle perche sel fusse serrà la via del mar rosso le specie staria imprixion et so certo queste specie non licosta meno dele nostre, ma piui grande disturbo et ruina.* ASV PSM M 42, letter from Alvise Mocenigo, from Yprès, 14 October 1403.

¹⁹Cicogna, *Delle iscrizioni veneziane*, 155, ASV PSM M 42, a letter from Antwerp, 7 February 1502, mentions the Portuguese plans to block the Bāb al-Mandab: *i soi abi impedir el transitio amori per do anni ad minus non pasi da colout al çideni cosa che non volgio creder*; Aubin, *Le latin et l'Astrolabe*, p. 448.

²⁰Consular messengers are mentioned in a letter from Alexandria to Damascus, ASV, *Carte di Benedetto Soranzo, arcivescovo di Cipro*, B. 5A, fascicolo B, n. 18, 28 June 1414, letter to Donà Soranzo.

Alexandria was posted to Cairo by pigeon. Money transfers were commonly managed by Khawājā merchants.²¹ Zorzi's man at the Dīwān was clearly handling figures on Indian navigation as well as detailed information about the ships' cargo, and, as we will see, the Mamluks probably disposed of estimates about the amount of Indian goods exported out of Egypt. Lastly, the memorandum leaked to Zorzi by his scribe friend in April was not an isolated event. In March, Zorzi confessed to having received a 'note' from the Dīwān containing detailed information on both the sultan's and "private" spices.²² The April memorandum seems therefore to have been just an update.

By the time the memorandum reached Foscari's hands, the situation was dramatic. The company was the victim of a worrying global conjuncture, its destiny depended on drastic investment choices, and, last but not least, was in the hands of a crucial political decision by the sultan. The Fugger-Foscari partnership was handling more copper than it could market. Portuguese activities had been disrupting the traffic in the Ocean and seriously threatening Muslim navigation. The years 1502-3 witnessed the second voyage of Vasco da Gama, the fourth of the government-led expeditions to India. When the memorandum was being produced, da Gama was on his way back from Cannanore to Mozambique.²³ Indeed, in late September 1502, da Gama had captured a large ship carrying pilgrims and a number of important Muslim merchants, setting it afire and killing more than two hundred.²⁴ Secondly, the Company, backed financially by the Fugger, had invested a hitherto unseen amount of money in the *copper-for-spices* business.²⁵ According to a missive from Antwerp sent on 26 April, that is, ten days after the memorandum, Foscari had bought as much copper as was available in the northern European market, thus trying to outrun his competitors.²⁶ Foscari was probably the victim of an oversupply in copper from the new mines now operating in Hungary, that had forced Fugger to sponsor a guild in 1498—the *Societas Cupri*—in order to regulate the market.²⁷ In February 1503, Foscari placed some unsold stocks on board of the Alexandria galleys (520 tons), followed by another 320 tons later in the year.²⁸ In Alexandria, Coppo protested at having to sell a quantity of copper "the country could not absorb".²⁹

²¹ Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*, pp. 100–101; al-Sahmāwī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 868/1464), *al-Thaḡhr al-bāsim fī šināʿat al-kātib wa-al-kātim : al-maʿrūf bi-ism al-Maqṣad al-raḡīʿ al-maṣhā al-hādī li-dīwān al-inshā lil-Khālidī*, (eds.) A. M. Anas and H. Naṣṣār, 2 vols. (Cairo, 2009), pp. 336–337, describes the replacement of the previous postal system, the *barīd* with a recourse to individual messengers and Bedouin camel drivers. For the early Mamluk postal system, see J. Sauvaget, *La poste aux chevaux dans l'empire de mamelouks* (Paris, 1941).

²² *zenzeri garofali e canele queste son per conto del signor soldan. In man de mori son schibe 3000 in suzo de puo sette spezie ett queste sette spezie o abudo in notta per via del Nadarchas, queste son stado dado in notta*, ASV PSM M 43, 21 March 1503.

²³ A thorough discussion of da Gama's second voyage can be found in S. Subrahmanyam, *The career and legend of Vasco da Gama* (Cambridge and New York, 1997), pp. 195–234.

²⁴ G. B. Ramusio, *Primo volume delle navigationi et viaggi* (Venice, Giunti, 1550), pp. 147–148.

²⁵ *Priego la divina magnificencia mi face veder bona lettere di Vostra Magnificencia di le cose nostre et che le galie sia zonte e deschargate e comenza a dar via le specie et maxime per el debito sa cum i Focher tegno chel precio sara mior zonte legalie*, ASV PSM M 42, letter from Alvise Mocenigo, from Yprès, 10 September 1503, Braunstein, *Les Allemands à Venise*, pp. 583–584.

²⁶ ASV PSM M 42, fasc. XXI, letter from Alvise Mocenigo, from Antwerp, 26 April 1503.

²⁷ Braunstein, *Les Allemands à Venise*, pp. 353–354.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 590.

²⁹ *Vostra Magnificencia memanda gran suma con la nave e questo chexe sopra le galie xe gran quantittà che elpaexe non porta*, ASV PSM MI 43, from Pola, 1 February 1502, *mipar chosa nova chel paexe deba consumar puii rami de quello el suo chonsuetto*, ASV PSM M 43 1502, from Pola, 20 January 1502.

Third, and more worryingly, the sultan was considering cutting the flow of Indian spices to Syria, artificially concentrating exchanges in Alexandria to his own fiscal advantages. The sultan had been experiencing difficulties in marketing his own spices in Syria, where the Venetians incurred the most significant debts, and had been considering this measure for a long time.³⁰ The firm's correspondent in Antwerp issued a supplementary warning: if the Syrian merchants could not travel to Egypt that year, the demand for Foscari's copper would be significantly smaller and the company risked losing everything.³¹

With the uncertainty provoked by Vasco da Gama's whereabouts, Ramadan threatening the success of the March galley season, and the threat of losing their Syrian investment, the company risked being left with copper worth more than 120,000 ducats. According to Mocenigo, Foscari was handling this quantity of copper when he decided to purchase a supplementary stock.³² The 1503 spice campaign in Egypt became the battlefield where the company's survival was decided. At such a critical global conjuncture, the memorandum was a unique piece of information, if only because it might help Foscari work out what the market supply would be in the following months. The memorandum was a sophisticated piece of information of a unique commercial utility, and reached the head of a global company, as the result of collaboration between the firm's skilled employees and Mamluk secretaries, at a critical moment.

A good deal of the Company's records has come down to us. They are preserved in five boxes in the Venetian State Archives, under the signature *Procuratori di San Marco, Misti*, numbers 41, 42, 43, 44 and 44a. The Procuratori di San Marco was a financial and welfare institution, which, among other attributions, acted as testamentary executors.³³ Three powerful reasons lie behind Foscari's decision to entrust these officials with his own legacy: he was heirless, or at least had no legitimate sons, he was on bad terms with his own family, and he was one of the Procuratori himself. When Foscari died unexpectedly in 1506 he left an astonishing personal fortune of 70,000 ducats.³⁴ His afore-mentioned illegitimate daughter benefitted from his last will; with the Foscari family excluded from the inheritance (a decision that stirred up some gossip), the procurators guaranteed Foscari that his daughter would be taken care of and regularly paid her pension. Most probably Foscari saw the Procuratori as the only authority able to counter eventual claims on his fortune by the almighty Foscari clan. Be that as it may, the procurators took over Foscari's affairs by seizing whatever documents could be relevant for the task: the five boxes contain commercial correspondence, accounts, contracts, notes of cargo and expenses as well as some judicial records. Incidentally, the collection's highlight was a missive, now lost, with news about India which arrived via Flanders that was smuggled out of the archives sometime before 1983.³⁵

³⁰Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*, pp. 226–227.

³¹ASV PSM M 42, fasc. XXI, letter from Alvise Mocenigo, from Antwerp, 26 April 1503.

³²*Chel signor dio da chi prociede ogno bene ne vol aiutar piu del nostro desegno perche si le vero che marchadanti damaschini sara in alexandria I levana i rami per i do viagi et vostra magnificientia ara fato da sapientissimo avendo tolto el resto de rami per quello poso comprender perche aspetando tanta suma per ducati 120M tegno abiati levato altri rami acio non vadino in man daltri*, ASV PSM M 42, fasc. XXI, letter from Alvise Mocenigo, from Antwerp, 26 April 1503.

³³R. C. Mueller, 'The Procurators of San Marco in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; a study of the office as a financial and trust institution', *Studi Veneziani* XIII (1971), pp. 105–220.

³⁴Sanudo, *Diarii*, VI, pp. 454, 498.

³⁵Originally located in ASV PSM M 42.

Foscari's global network

The Venetian archives have recently yielded well-researched studies on the late medieval spice trade, based on the records left by Levant traders. Yet all too often, the nature of the sources has conspired to lead medievalists to a kind of economic history-writing insensitive to cross-confessional relations, where Franks seemed to have been striking deals only with other Franks and not with the local merchants. The Foscari Company, however, has preserved a good array of 'notes of account', produced in Alexandria by the Coppo brothers, Marco Zorzi and other agents. Encoded in these registers, several decades of mixed business relations can be tracked. This circumstance makes the collection unique as, in Venice, accountings in general have rarely been preserved, thus depriving us from her privileged viewpoint on the daily transactions with Muslims.

From the analysis of these accounts, covering a twenty-year time span, there emerges a mixed business *milieu*, hosted in Alexandria but reflecting the many global connections of the Mamluk economy. The most obvious of these connections is with the Mamluk protectorate in the Red Sea. John Meloy distinguishes two kinds of entrepreneurs in Mecca's mercantile community: state-sponsored, licensed businessmen such as the Khawājās (hailing, mainly, from Syria and the Persian lands) as well as Indian Ocean venturing shipowners and merchants.³⁶ In the accounts, some well-known Khawājās appear in business deals with Foscari's agents, most often bartering their southeast Asian spices for copper, silver or tin. Foscari's agents also dealt with the emir of Alexandria and other Mamluk officials, and some Turkish names can also be found. One eunuch Khushqadam al-Ṭawāshī, appointed as the sultan's representative in Mecca in 1486, exchanged pepper for the firm's oil in 1494.³⁷ More importantly, Foscari's agents in Alexandria dealt not only with Muslim but also with Christian and Jewish partners. Mentions of Jewish merchants are particularly relevant as their role has been somewhat obscured by the chronicles and biographic dictionaries of the period, which exhibited a clear bias towards Muslims. Christians and Jews mentioned in the accounts often bear Arabic first names, such as the *Muxe zudeo*, *Isach zudeo* and *Daut zudeo* that exchanged spices for copper worth 2,000 ducats in 1501.³⁸ When recording the expenses incurred for each operation, the factors mentioned camel drivers, civil clerks, Jewish courtiers, Muslim notaries and the Eastern Christian scribes associated with the customs' offices. Apart from this local yet heterogeneous business milieu that I will define as 'Mamluk', many Maghrebi traders are cited, confirming the importance attributed to Alexandria by recent studies on the Maghrebi diaspora in Egypt.³⁹

Although Alexandrian houses are mentioned in the accounts, the firm operated in a trading network that was not simply Egyptian. Foscari's agents in Alexandria dealt with Syrians from both Damascus and Aleppo. In the first case they are easily recognisable as they are

³⁶J. L. Meloy, 'Mecca Entangled', in *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History*, (eds.) R. Amitai and S. Conermann (Göttingen 2019), pp. 466–470; R. T. Mortel, 'The Mercantile Community of Mecca during the Late Mamluk Period', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 4, 1 (1994), pp. 15–35.

³⁷ASV PSM M 44A, accounts of 1493, f. 9b.; 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn Fahd (1447–1516), *Bulūgh al-Qurā bi-Dhayl Itḥāf al-Warā bi-Akḥbār Umm al-Qurā*, (ed.) S. Ibrāhīm, A. Abū al-Khayr, and U. al-Majlabdī (Cairo, 2005), pp. 454, 463.

³⁸ASV PSM M 44, accounts of 1501, f. 3a.

³⁹H. 'Abd al-Mu'īf, *al-'Ā'ilah wa-al-tharwah: al-buyūt al-tijāriyah al-Maghribiyah fi Miṣr al-'Uthmāniyah* (Cairo, 2008).

qualified as *Siāmi* (*al-shāmī*, the Damascene), and as *Alepin* in the second. Yet it remains equally difficult to qualify many of these associates as simply Syrian. According to the Arab authors such as Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī (1427–97) or ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn Fahd (1447–1516), who lived in the Ḥijāz, most of these merchant families, in spite of their Syrian origins, set up shop in Mecca during the fifteenth century. Foscari’s local partners were mostly Arabs, often second or third generation members of well-connected merchant clans. Based on Mamluk chronicles such as Ibn Fahd’s *Bulūgh*, a closer examination of their trajectories reflects the increasing importance of the Mecca-Damascus-Aleppo axis. Moreover, Foscari operated in a sector vital for the Mamluk political economy, namely the import of raw metals, at a time when copper was being accepted as a means of payment for the sultan’s spices. The strategic character of bullion imports secured the firm a privileged access to the businessmen close to the Mamluk administration. At some point in their careers, a good deal of Foscari’s Arab partners enjoyed the designation of Khawājā. Written in vernacular Italian, we may recognise in the accounts the names of the Khawājās Ibn Shams, Ibn ‘Ulayba,⁴⁰ Ibn al-Mulqī,⁴¹ Ibn al-Khabbāza or the Khawājā ‘Ali b. Ṣadaqa al-Ḥalabī al-Makkī.⁴² An unidentified Ḥasan Sembrali—probably al-Shabzawārī—who was “fired” as Khawājā in 1503, together with Sha‘bān Ibn Kubba, purchased Foscari’s quicksilver.⁴³ Marco Zorzi welcomes the appointment of “his friend” Aḥmad Ibn Abī Bakr as the next Khawājā, who, by the way, was a relative of the emir of Alexandria.⁴⁴

The accounts include many names and not all of them can be traced back to the original Arabic form, but a good example is provided by the al-Qarrī business clan, mentioned time and again in the books.⁴⁵ This family achieved great influence in Damascus up to the late 1480s, where the patriarch, Khawājā ‘Isā al-Qarrī was entrusted with the marketing of the sultan’s spices. He was perceived as one of the sultan’s men in the Syrian economic capital at a time when most spices were sold there.⁴⁶ Muḥammad and Aḥmad al-Qarrī, probably ‘Isā’s son and grandson, bought Foscari’s metals against pepper and clove. According to Ibn Fahd, the al-Qarrī family company had relatives settled in Khambhat in the Gujarat.⁴⁷ Although Portuguese and other sources vaguely refer to Arab merchants as part of the thriving business community of Calicut, the Meccan Ibn Fahd notes some individual names in these family networks extending from Damascus to Malabar, and Foscari’s accounts prove their connections with European merchants. Similarly, Ibn Fahd reports the case of the

⁴⁰For Ibn ‘Ulayba (*benefiliba*) ASV PSM M 44A, accounts of 1493, f. 2b, 3b, 4b.

⁴¹For Ibn al-Mulqī (*nasardin benemurḥī*), ASV PSM M 44A, accounts 1485–91, f. 8a–b.; Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*, pp. 110, 217.

⁴²Among many other examples, ASV PSM M 44, accounts of 1501, f. 1, mentioning purchases of copper by *benchabeza*, *benesamese*, *umar magrabin*, *mamett elchari*, and *E3a*, *ametto elchari*, *mamett alepin rosso*. Similar mentions can be found in the accounts of 1500, f. 1b. For Ibn al-Khabbāza, *Ibn Fahd, Bulūgh*, 2053, for Ibn Shams, a merchant from Aleppo, of Cairene origins, whose father settled in Mecca, Shams ad-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (1427–97), *al-Dāw’ al-lāmi’ li ahl al-qam al-Tāsi’*, vol. IX (Cairo 1934–6), p. 458.

⁴³March 1503; Sanudo, *Diarii*, V, p. 34; Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*, p. 108; ASV PSM M accounts 1494–1501, accounts 2 August 1494, f. 4r, accounts 1497, f. 5r; Ibn Fahd, *Bulūgh*, p. 628.

⁴⁴Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*, p. 217; Muḥammad Ibn Iyās (1448–ca.1524), *Badā’i’ al-Zuhūr fī Waqā’i’ al-Duhūr*, vol. IV (ed.) M. Muṣṭafā, 5 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1960–75) p. 424.

⁴⁵ASV PSM M 44, see, among others, the accounts of 1501 by Antonio Coppo, f. 1a, *mamett elchari* appears in a copper deal.

⁴⁶Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*, pp. 140–141.

⁴⁷Ibn Fahd, *Bulūgh*, p. 1194.

Khawājā al-Hawrānī, a Syrian settled in Mecca with a brother operating from Calicut.⁴⁸ The references to these overseas networks suggest that only the merchants with a direct access to Malabar, Ceylon or the Malay sultanates were able to place spices such as pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg or clove. This, incidentally, makes all more intriguing the presence of Jewish merchants among Foscari's providers of spices, since ventures of Jewish merchants across the ocean are something unheard of after Geniza's times.

An episode narrated by Ibn Fahd sheds light on the networks woven by these merchant families who sold spices to the Company in Alexandria. Two of them, Muḥammad Ibn Kursūn (*benecharson* in the Foscari accounts) and Aḥmad Ibn Ṣadaqa (*benesadecha*), the latter of Syrian origin, survived a shipwreck in 1492. They had embarked on "the ships of Ibn al-Zaman that were bound for Calicut", where Ibn Kursūn eventually settled. Tracking Foscari's Arab associates one gets the impression that Arab merchants were predominantly Syrian, 'settled' at some point in Mecca and either travelled regularly to India or relied on family members established in Calicut or Khambhat. The Ibn al-Zaman to whom the ships belonged were themselves Syrians of Meccan origin and perceived as the sultan's men in the Ḥijāz. Appointed Khawājā in 1503, Aḥmad Ibn Abū Bakr (Zorzi's friend) himself had relatives in India and freighted whole ships for his own cargo. In 1501 this Khawājā had been sent to India as a Mamluk representative.⁴⁹ The 1492 shipwreck episode narrated by Ibn Fahd seems to confirm that 'Mamluk' merchants owned or freighted 'Indian' ships—either junks or large dhows—entrusted to 'Gujarati' captains, called *nākhudās* (two of them were in charge of Ibn al-Zaman's vessels), and that they freighted cargo and offered passage to other merchants and Khawājās.⁵⁰ Foscari's agents, in sum, were not just dealing with Egyptians but with long-distance Muslim entrepreneurs who closed deals in India and imported spices from the subcontinent and as far as Southeast Asia. While from a Mediterranean viewpoint they could be considered as 'Mamluk' merchants, an East Asian observer may well have used parallel definitions such as *Pardeshi*, to refer to these 'foreign' Muslim entrepreneurs. They seem clearly to correspond with the 'Mouros de Meca' mentioned in the accounts of the Portuguese voyages, that is, Arab Muslims involved in long-distance trade.⁵¹

The Mamluk memorandum

Data on Asian trade included in the memorandum looks genuine, complete and accurate. Yet the original Arabic record has not survived, and one may reasonably suspect that the document inserted in the envelope by Marco slightly differed from the one produced by the Dīwān al-Khāṣṣ. The resulting translation by Zorzi is divided into three sections. The first one is entirely his own. In it, Zorzi describes the document and sketches how it

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

⁴⁹ Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*, p. 217.

⁵⁰ For a recent discussion on the *Nākhudās*, see S. D. Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India traders of the middle ages: documents from the Cairo Geniza: India book* (Leiden and Boston, 2008), pp. 121–153.

⁵¹ For Ibn Kursūn (*benecharson* in the accounts) ASV PSM M 44A, accounts of 1493, f.11a. For the shipwreck incident: Ibn Fahd, *Bulūgh*, pp. 763–764, and Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī, *Wajīz al-kalām fī al-dhayl 'alā Duwal al-Islām*, vol. III, (eds.) B. Ma'rūf, I. Ḥarastānī, and A. Khuṭaymī, 4 vols. (Beirut, 1995), pp. 1248–1250. Aḥmad Ibn Ṣadaqa was a Khawājā and father of ' (*Alī benesadecha*), one of Foscari's closest business partners, ASV PSM M 44A, accounts of 1485–91, f.3.

ended up in his hands. According to Marco, the document describes “the flow of spices” that year (*questo corso delle spezie*) and provides figures for total imports (*li sume dele spezie*). The phrase “course of spices” refers to the record of ships arriving at the Red Sea terminus of Indian navigation, namely the harbour of Jedda in today’s Saudi Arabia. In all probability, “this year” refers to the northeast monsoon season of 1503, whose winds carried Asian ships westwards in the cool spring months. The northeast monsoon also governed winds in the Red Sea, carrying vessels from the straits of Bāb al-Mandab as far north as Jedda, usually from March to May.⁵² The memorandum provides a total figure of 53 ships, referring most probably to those vessels which had arrived up to 16 April, and certainly constituted the gross of the navigation season. Nonetheless the figure is not conclusive as Ibn Fahd still mentions a few arrivals after April 1503.

Accordingly, the memorandum’s second section is divided into six headings, detailing the number of ships arriving to Jedda from, respectively, al-Shiḥr in Southern Yemen (two small ships), seven from Dabhol, eight from Khambhat in the Gujarat, twenty-two from Calicut in the coast of Malabar, four from Sri Lanka, two from of Pidië in north Sumatra and finally, nine vessels from the Malay sultanate of Melaka. Under each heading, each section lists the total imports of spices from every one of these places. The data is divided into three columns. The first indicates the commodity and its amounts, expressed in Indian Ocean measures of transportation and packaging. Most spices travelled in *schibe*, or sacks (*zakība*). The second column seems to record the tithe (*al-’ushūr*) or tax paid upon arrival by merchants according to Islamic law.⁵³ This fiscal regime, generally respected, with some adjustments, in Mamluk times, foresaw the payment of two and a half per cent of the value in the case of foreign Muslims and five per cent in that of Jews and Christians under Islamic rule. Finally, a third column expresses Venetian measures of weight, as *colli* for most spices and *cafizi* for mace, and it is clearly an addition by Zorzi. The places mentioned by the memorandum, ranging from Yemen to Malaysia, follow a geographical eastward order. As an only exception to this rule, Dabhol is mentioned second in order, although it lies 715 km south of Khambhat and for this reason it should have been mentioned in third place.

The data for Yemen concerns al-Shiḥr, the main port of Ḥaḍramawt. Had the memorandum been drawn up a century earlier, the importance of Aden would certainly have come up; yet the document reflects the Mamluk hegemony over the Red Sea, attained with the takeover of Mecca and Jedda in the mid-1420s. In this scenario, the Yemenite kingdom no longer captured commercial traffic, something aggravated by the fact that Indian captains (*nākhudās*) referred to as ‘interlopers’ by Mamluk chronicles, had since 1421 managed to gain direct passage from the Indian Ocean through Bāb al-Mandab, thus bypassing Aden.⁵⁴ The memorandum offers a unique glimpse into the importance of frankincense, providing the most relevant figures of its production since at least the times of Marco

⁵²J. L. Meloy, *Imperial power and maritime trade: Mecca and Cairo in the later Middle Ages* (Chicago, 2010), p. 61.

⁵³P. G. Forand, ‘Notes on ’uṣr and maks’, in *Arabica* XIII, 2 (1966); M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian trade and European influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630* (The Hague, 1962), pp. 43–44, mentions similar custom duties for Arab vessels in Melaka.

⁵⁴Meloy, *Mecca Entangled*, pp. 467–470; Meloy, *Imperial power*, pp. 75–76.; R. B. Serjeant, ‘Fifteenth Century ‘Interlopers’ on the Coast of Rasulid Yemen’, in *Res Orientales VI: Itinéraires d’Orient, Hommages a Claude Cahen*, (eds.) Raoul Curjel and Rika Gyselen (Paris, 1994), pp. 83–91.

Polo. The two small ships (*navili picholi*) mentioned carry what seems to be Arabian commodities, such as dragon's blood, probably from Socotra, turpeth, bitter *costus* and tamarind. Among these Yemenite exports, hepatic aloë "of Sumatra" can be found, though products' names often referred to a given quality and not necessarily to its place of origin. Nonetheless, the cargo list for Yemen includes a remarkable stock of nutmeg, indigenous to the Moluccas and what strongly suggests al-Shiḥr's role in transit trade. According to Duarte Barbosa (d. 1521), al-Shiḥr was important for the ships that missed the monsoon, providing an alternative marketplace for Indian goods, as well as Arabian horses and frankincense for the outbound trip.⁵⁵ For Afonso de Albuquerque, however, vessels from al-Shiḥr ventured as far as Melaka, where they may have procured the spice for themselves.⁵⁶ For *navili picholi* Zorzi is most probably translating the word *jilāb*, consistently used by Arab writers to refer to light vessels traversing the Red sea, the Yemen, and as far east as Hormuz, as a contraposition to *markab*, meaning large Indian vessels.⁵⁷

The memorandum also captures the commercial activity of Dabhol in the trade with the Mamluks, six years before its destruction by the Portuguese. Contemporary travellers noted the city's strong links with the Arab Middle East.⁵⁸ Dabhol features as the only exporter of textiles in the memorandum, such as the striped cloth for turbans called by Arabic texts *shāshāt* and the Indian textiles named *sese* or *lixari* in Venice (*tele over sese lixari fazuoli et peze dettele*).⁵⁹ A passage by Duarte Barbosa confirms this, as he mentions the city's importance as a redistribution centre for local fabrics.⁶⁰ Indian glass beads (*verisseli nerī*) are documented in Africa as far as the Western Sahel.⁶¹

With eight vessels, Khambhat is also pictured at its height, before its harbour silted up later in the century. It is worth noting that the place name is rendered in the vernacular, instead of the more common 'Cambay' or 'Cambaya' used both in European travel narratives and by the Meccan Arabic sources. The city's main commodity, the Khambhat lac (*lache conbetti*) was, as it will be mentioned in the document's third section, of common use in the Maghreb, probably for dyeing cotton cloth. This is confirmed by cargo notes for the Venetian galley line joining Egypt with Barbary, and it also explains why so many Maghrebis are mentioned in late-Mamluk Alexandrian sources.⁶² Dabhol also appears to be the main outlet for Tibetan borax, required by the Venetian glass industry since the times of Marco Polo. The memorandum reflects the geographical world of the powerful Gujarati ship-owning merchant. The Gujarati network had a chief trading partner in Melaka, the memorandum eastern terminus, with a colony of 1,000 merchants and strong maritime connections with

⁵⁵D. Barbosa, *Livro em que dá relação de que viu e ouviu no Oriente Duarte Barbosa* (Lisbon, 1946), pp. 45–46.; Jār Allāh Ibn Fahd (1486–1547), *Kitāb Nayl al-Munā bi-Dhayl Bulūgh al-Qurā li-Takmilat Itḥāf al-Warā (Tārīkh Makkah al-Mukarramah min Sanat 922 H ilā 946 H)*, (ed.) M. al-Hilāh, 2 vols. (Beirut, 2000), p. 215.

⁵⁶Afonso de Albuquerque, *The commentaries of the great Afonso Dalboquerque, second viceroy of India*, vol. III (London, 1875), p. 85.

⁵⁷Meloy, *Imperial power*, p. 62.

⁵⁸The memorandum clearly refers to the city on the northern bank of the Vashishti River, and not to Daybūl in Sindh, near today's Karachi.

⁵⁹They were part of the gift from Malik Ayas of Gujarat: Ibn Fahd, *Bulūgh*, p. 1513. For the Italian terms, see also Appendix I.

⁶⁰Barbosa, *Livro em que dá relação de que viu e ouviu no Oriente Duarte Barbosa*, pp. 86–87.

⁶¹P. Beaujard, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean: A Global History*, vol. II (Cambridge, 2019), p. 246.

⁶²ASV PSM Citra 197, *inserto C*, 12 June 1487 and 14 June 1488, exports by Piero Morosini & Co.

Khambhat/Cambay. Gujarat, on the other hand, was increasingly related to West Asia, as the foundation of a 'Kanbā'iyah' *madrasa* by Sultan Maḥmūd Shāh (1458–1511) in Mecca may suggest.

The document goes on to mention Calicut, the major pepper producer and the main strategic partner of the Mamluks. Twenty-two inbound ships, which we might assume were large vessels, account for the strong ties binding Calicut with Cairo. The city had been at odds with the first two Portuguese missions and was in fact embargoing the Portuguese allies of Cochin. Tension escalated into overt conflict during the 1502–3 expedition, led again by Vasco da Gama. Calicut's ruler assembled a flotilla to chase da Gama during his trip back to Europe, that is, in spring 1503 when the memorandum was being written. Previously, while chasing the 'ships of Mecca' bound for the Kerala coast, in September 1502, da Gama sunk a large vessel with hundreds of pilgrims on board. Its captain bore a name traditionally given to eunuchs and servants—Jawhar—and was in all probability a *nākhudhā*, a pilot native to the Indian Ocean.⁶³ Under these circumstances, the figure of twenty-two ships is impressive and accounts for the city's response to the European challenge, even if the number might have been higher in previous years. In his letters to Foscari, Coppo evaluates the deterring effect provoked by the Portuguese arrival to the Ocean: "As for the Caravels of Portugal still in those Indian seas and sailing in those places, none of their ocean-going ships dare to sail for fear of being captured".⁶⁴ We do not know the extent of Calicut's involvement in trade with China, but in any case it had to be much less than that of other places listed in the memorandum, such as Pidië/Pider in Sumatra or Melaka in the Straits, whose ships could reach China in a single monsoon but needed two seasons to get to Jedda.

Calicut's dependence on pepper exports to the West must, therefore, have been crucial. By the time the memorandum was produced, the Indian ruler had a monopoly on pepper, whilst the sultan's supply was guaranteed, and for some years it was the only pepper available in Egypt. The sultan himself had correspondents in Calicut, such as Jawhar, killed during the 1502 incident, or Khāwajā Ibn Abī Bakr, Zorzi's friend.⁶⁵ Moreover and as we have seen, the thriving Muslim business community in Calicut included members of Egyptian and Syrian families who brokered spice deals throughout the year.⁶⁶ Religious tolerance and protection of foreign merchants, shipbuilding and the monsoon regime all account for Calicut's strategic alliance with the Mamluks and equally explain the uncomfortable position of the Hindu polity vis-à-vis the Portuguese visitors. Incidentally, the city was rightly perceived by Daniele Coppo as dominated in practice by Muslim and Jewish elites.⁶⁷

⁶³He was possibly the same *nākhudhā* Jawhar at the service of Ibn al-Zaman mentioned by Ibn Fahd in the abovementioned shipwreck incident, Ibn Fahd, *Bulūgh*, pp. 763–764; Subrahmanyam, *The career and legend of Vasco da Gama*, pp. 204–208.

⁶⁴*respecto al charavele de Portugal chestano in quelli mari dindia e shore in ttantti quelli logi ni un di lor navili de mari non se mettere al mar per dubitto deser prexi. Ttandem il di pasadi fo detto per mori publicamente che le charavele avea prexo Cholocho e ttaliato a pezi de gran zenite de quel locho.*, ASV PSM M 43, 11 March 1504, letter from Daniel Coppo.

⁶⁵Beaujard, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean: a Global History*, vol. II, pp. 490–491; Sanudo, *diarii*, IV, 169.

⁶⁶J. Aubin, 'Marchands de Mer Rouge et du Golfe Persique au tournant des 15e et 16e siècles', in *Marchands et Hommes d'affaires asiatiques dans l'Océan Indien et la Mer de Chine, 13e - 20e siècles*, (eds.) D. Lombard and J. Aubin (Paris, 1988). Beaujard, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean: a Global History*, vol. II, p. 490.

⁶⁷*seveni pocho chomtto che quele charavele posi intrar piui in Cholocho per eser stado chambiado signoria in quel locho ettaliato a pezi ttutti quei populi chera prima chera Judei chera ttutti xe mori echovermasi per el signor de chombutt*, ASV PSM M 43, unsigned letter, dated solely by the year, 1501.

The memorandum is also the only document attesting Mamluk relations with Sri Lanka after the 1283 embassy by king Bhuvanaikabahu I.⁶⁸ Although it only reports exports of cinnamon and lacquer, the mention of four ships is noteworthy: Sinhalese shipbuilding was known as and indeed constituted one of the island's assets for the Portuguese. Although the island played a prominent role as a maritime stopover for Southeast Asian vessels, the memorandum just seems to be referring here to direct trade—mostly in cinnamon—probably carried on board Ceylon's own ships. As in Calicut, Ceylon's rulers were not Muslims, yet they could rely on a vernacular Muslim commercial *milieu*—the Māppiḷa—without which trade with Mecca would have been technically very difficult. As shown by Jorge Flores, Portuguese information gathering about Ceylon was very intense in the years before the first direct contact in 1506, as it was functional to the appropriation of the newly 'discovered' lands. Yet in their letters Foscari's agents exhibit a much superior geographic and political knowledge of Ceylon than the one being gathered in Lisbon. According to Coppo, if Vasco da Gama had proceeded further south for five days (which he did not) he would have had access to true cinnamon and to other varieties in the minor islands, together with a unique source of gems and rubies.⁶⁹ Contrary to Calicut, which gathered forces and copied European technology to resist the Portuguese, Coppo claimed, the Sinhalese kingdom of Kotte was harmless and would present no resistance to the Portuguese artillery.⁷⁰

Lastly, the memorandum reflects the growing importance of Pedir/Pidië, called Pider by Zorzi and other Italian sources, one of the cities that would join the emerging sultanate of Aceh in 1521. This harbour in northern Sumatra is mentioned as the point of departure for two ships, carrying 850 Venetian *colli* of pepper and a cargo of ginger packaged in "Bengali boxes". Pidië is mentioned by the traveller Ludovico Varthema as being acquainted with shipbuilding, and we know that Sumatra was increasingly focused on pepper cultivation. If Varthema's information is correct, the region was only scarcely involved in trade with the West, as between eighteen and twenty ships were dispatched every year to China from Pidië.⁷¹ Again these faraway places seem to have been known to the experienced Venetian correspondents. This can be inferred from the way the name Pidië is transcribed by Zorzi: Pider. There is no equivalent for the sound *p* in Arabic, furthermore, there is no way to transcribe both *p* and *e* in Arabic script (*p* is invariably rendered as *b*). Therefore Zorzi or whoever acted as translator that evening had notions on how to pronounce the term. Either the Dīwān's clerks wrote the word by using a Persian transcription (which is unlikely) or Zorzi knew how to read it properly. Be that as it may, Sumatra was known not only to the Dīwān clerks, but most probably to Foscari's employees as well.

⁶⁸J. Flores, *Os portugueses e o Mar de Ceilão : trato, diplomacia e guerra (1498-1543)* (Lisbon, 1998), pp. 60–62; Beaujard, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean*, vol. II, p. 240.

⁶⁹*Arrivando loro alixora de Zilan chexe in chamin avanti el suo andar in cholochutt in quella ixola laverà tutte lechanele fine e potrà aver le grose e salvatiche per eser doaltre ixole aquel chonfin unitte insieme ettraxera dequesta ixola de Zilan Jolie asai per eser rocha derubini alttro non ttrazerano*, ASV PSM M 43, unsigned letter, dated solely by the year, 1501.

⁷⁰*dinove che per mori ezontte de qui mie amixi liqual vien de cholochutt ett quelli dixeno che in colochutt son fatto forte ett ano parattado daomini 6000 armadi con archi ett bonbarde asai fatte al muodo nostro per aver viste quele che ando con le Caravele ett stano aspettar cheli vaga per itaiarli apezi ett dubito siquesto ze son bona nuova perche isera senza piper ezenzari e canele elipual ttrar perche lilargo de la Zorni 5 in un luogo nominado Silan enon ano de far difesa*, ASV PSM M 43, 21 March 1503.

⁷¹L. Varthema, *Itinerario de Ludouico de Varthema Bolognese nello Egitto, nella Soria, nella Arabia deserta, & felice, nella Persia, nella India, & nela Ethyopia* (Venice, 1535), p. 157.

The memorandum provides us with the first—and unique—mention of direct connections with Southeast Asia as well as crucial data on its trade with the West. By using figures provided by the customs, the Dīwān clerks came to handle sophisticated geographical data, a knowledge surpassing that of most Red Sea traders and scholars. ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn Fahd, one of a distinguished family of merchant-writers, does not seem to be very aware of Southeast Asian topography. He reports how news about incoming Indian vessels arrived at Jeddah in 1501–3. According to Ibn Fahd, dispatches (*waraqā, kitāb*) were delivered by the ships containing information about new vessels to come. He reports which ones originate from Khambhat or Calicut, yet he refers to Southeast Asian ships as coming “from beyond” (*min fawqihī*).⁷² Al-Sakhawī wrote many biographies of merchants and scholars who travelled to the Gujarat, Calicut or Malwa but his interest in the ocean seems to have stopped at the west coast of the Indian subcontinent. In his biography of Ibn al-Zaman, whose ships sailed across the ocean waters, al-Sakhawī mentions the former’s journeys to faraway places, such as Turkey and *Samandra*, which he locates somewhere in the “country of the Franks”, while he is in all probability confusing it with Samudera Pasai or Sumatra itself.⁷³ In his survey of the diplomatic partners of the Mamluks at around the late 1440s, al-Sahmawī does not go beyond the sultanate of Bengal. Of course, Meccan authors knew of the existence of lands beyond the Bay of Bengal, but they referred to these territories, at best, as the “land below the winds”. This vague term was probably borrowed from Persian and Malay traders, an expression that refers to the Malay sultanates and the Bay of Bengal. Mentions of Southeast Asia in the memorandum warn us about the line of demarcation separating the sphere of the religious learned and other forms of knowledge. Although the *ulama* had little knowledge about the regions beyond the Indian subcontinent, the Mamluk realm knew of and was connected to faraway Malay sultanates.⁷⁴

The last three headings—referring to Ceylon, Pidiē and Melaka—are coherent with what we know about South Asian trade and yet, paradoxically, exhibit the most puzzling aspects of the memorandum. Ceylon exports all cinnamon, Sumatra rightly emerges as a pepper exporter, whilst the nine ships from Melaka carry all sorts of spices and drugs from the Moluccas (cloves, nutmeg, mace, brazilwood, camphor, cubeb, white sandalwood, red sandalwood, galangal, aloewood and benzoin). However, by presenting such an unexpected scenario of direct, trans-global links between Mamluk-dominated Ḥijāz and Southeast Asia, the memorandum seems to minimise the weight of middle-range networks and interlopers in the Indian Ocean, such as the Gujaratis or the *Māppiḷa* of Malabar, operating in a more articulated commercial geography.⁷⁵ Except for Yemen, with exports of Indonesian nutmeg and what probably is Sumatran aloe, the reader is left with the impression that most important commodities were carried westwards without the intervention of collaborative networks and intermediate hubs.

⁷²Ibn Fahd, *Bulūgh*, p. 1123, where a ship loaded with rice is mentioned, and pp. 1214–1215.

⁷³al-Sakhawī, *al-Dāw’ al-lāmi’*, vol. VIII, p. 260, n. 703.

⁷⁴M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam have recently reassessed the Red Sea–Gujarat relations in the light of Mecca’s chronicles. See their ‘A View from Mecca: Notes on Gujarat, the Red Sea, and the Ottomans, 1517–39/923–946 H’, *Modern Asian Studies* 51, 2 (2017), pp. 268–318; P. J. Rivers, ‘Negeri below and above the wind: Malacca and Cathay’, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 78 (2005), pp. 1–32.

⁷⁵K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: an Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge and New York, 1985), pp. 48–49.

We know that Mamluk and Meccan authors, such as al-Maqrīzī and al-Fāṣī (1373–1429) concerned themselves with a category of navigators named *mujawwirūn*, a word translated by the great historian Robert B. Serjeant as the Anglo-Indian term of “interlopers”.⁷⁶ Originating in places such as the Yemen, Gujarat and Sumatra, Arab sources present the *mujawwirūn* as operating in long distance trade, trying to gain access to the Red Sea, bypassing the control of Aden and evading custom duties. The best known of these interlopers, the Nakhūdhā Ibrāhīm from Calicut managed to bypass Yemenite control and open a route to Jedda in 1422. Quickly followed by other shipowners, his example brought about the end of the Rasulid control over spice trade. Rather than smugglers, the *mujawwirūn* applied for protection and security from Mamluk rulers and attempted to access licensed trade in more hospitable places to do business.⁷⁷

By enhancing the importance of interstate, direct trade links, the memorandum is not only listing the commercial partners of the Mamluks in 1503. The document, I conjecture, is rather mapping the existence of agreements with Muslim polities, such as the Malay sultanates, as well as with port cities hosting large communities of Gujaratis and other Muslim merchants. In other words, the memorandum refers to the very world of *licensed*, tolerated or officially sponsored trade with the Mamluks, into which fifteenth-century *mujawwirūn* had tried to integrate themselves. Such agreements may have taken place in a context where the most important trades saw the participation of the sultans. Forms of state participation are known for Calicut and Melaka, and, it has been suggested, for Sumatra as well. Malay Sultans had direct access to newly Islamised rulers in small producer islands in the Moluccas. The richest merchant in Melaka enjoyed a monopoly in nutmeg from Banda and clove from the Moluccas and had eight junks sent there every year.⁷⁸ Ceylon kings had trade agreements with the Mamluks in the thirteenth century and with the Rasulids of Yemen at least since the fourteenth.⁷⁹ In any case, the memorandum portrays the economic consequences accompanying the process defined by Jean Aubin as the “second expansion of Islam” in the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.

Finally, a third section provides some estimates for the amounts of spices consumed locally and those re-exported to the traditional Mamluk markets, that is, Turkey, the Maghreb and Europe. Here the summary, bureaucratic tone of the memorandum leaves room for Zorzi’s own speculations written in first person. The authorship of these last paragraphs remains confusing, so that it cannot be determined to what extent it is still a translation of a Mamluk internal memorandum on spice consumption and distribution, an elaboration by Zorzi of

⁷⁶Serjeant, *Fifteenth Century ‘Interlopers’*, p. 83.

⁷⁷Meloy, *Mecca Entangled*, pp. 466–470.

⁷⁸J. M. dos Santos Alves, ‘The Foreign Traders’ Management in the Sultanates of the Straits of Malacca (The Cases of Malacca, Samudera-Pasai and Aceh, 15th and 16th Centuries)’, in *From the Mediterranean to the China Sea: Miscellaneous Notes*, (eds.) C. Guillot, D. Lombard and R. Ptak (Harrassowitz, 1998), pp. 131–142; R. M. Eaton, ‘Multiple Lenses: Differing perspectives of Fifteenth-Century Calicut’, in *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (ed.) R. M. Eaton (New Delhi, 2000), pp. 76–93; L. F. Thomaz, ‘Malaka et ses communautés marchandes au tournant du 16e siècle’, in *Marchands et Hommes d’affaires asiatiques dans l’Océan Indien et la Mer de Chine, 13e - 20e siècles*, (eds.) D. Lombard and J. Aubin (Paris, 1998), pp. 31–49. For the Moluccas, see D. Bulbeck et al., *Southeast Asian exports since the 14th century : cloves, pepper, coffee, and sugar* (Singapore, Leiden and Canberra, 1998), p. 17.

⁷⁹Arab authors also mention a later Singhalese diplomatic mission to the Rasulids of Yemen in 1398, M. Aḥmad, *Banū Rasūl wa-Banū Ṭāhir wa-‘alāqāt al-Yaman al-khārijyah fi ‘ahdihimā*, 628–923 H /1231–1517 M (al-Iskandarīyah, 1989), p. 437.

some Mamluk data, or simply a personal speculation. It may seem, however, that Zorzi's friend in Cairo has provided him with some data, particularly figures of the consumption of Indian spices by Egypt, Turkey and the Maghreb, which Zorzi is trying to summarise. According to Zorzi, domestic Egyptian consumption amounts to one fourth of the total consumption, although in the next paragraph this figure is expressed in vaguer terms as constituting the "majority" of Indian spices. In the same confusing tone, Zorzi goes on to assert that exports to Turkey and the Maghreb reach one third of the total. The *Dīwān al-Khaṣṣ* obviously gathered and centralised figures for the import of Indian products, and probably they also recorded data for the outbound flow of spices. While the assessment of these data goes beyond the scope of this article, it is clear that these crucial figures will provide grounds for a serious re-evaluation of Europe's weight in East-West trade, and for a fruitful comparison with that of China. However, a first glance suggests that most attempts to build a quantitative approach to South Asian exports will need to be revised, such as those presented by Bulbeck, Reid, Tan, and Wu in 1998, since the memorandum shows greater production and commercialisation of spices.⁸⁰

The friends of Marco Zorzi

Historians of communication have focused on whether artefacts such as this memorandum influenced the ability of the addressee actually to make decisions. Other discussions have focused on Venice's diplomatic reports, or the role of Venetian missives as the forerunner of modern newsletters or printed artefacts. The letters of Venetian merchants have traditionally been seen as the means to scrutinise market conditions and to convey political news about non-European powers. Throughout the fifteenth century, Levant traders offered their own insight on important developments taking place in the ocean's waters. Venetian records have already yielded a better understanding of the nature and evolution of intriguing economic groups such as the medieval *Kārim*. They were equally crucial to explain the opening of new routes for spices in the 1410s, when they started to travel northwards with the pilgrimage caravan.⁸¹ Cairo and its fluvial port *Būlāq* were frequented by Venetians hoping to solve the problem faced by Zorzi and described at the beginning of this article: that of coordinating the Alexandrian galley season, which lasted barely a week, with the maximum flow of Indian spices.

Either in the form of rumours or letters, Coppo and Zorzi gathered news about the Indian Ocean; but how did they know they were reliable? Ibn Fahd reports that often the news regarding the arrival of ships from India and "from beyond" was false, probably forged with the intention of altering market conditions. On the other hand, Venetian companies tried to undermine rival activities by exploiting gaps in each other's communications. Zorzi was seriously disconcerted when rival Venetians informed him that his senior colleague Daniele Coppo had died; the claim was false but he had no means to verify it. Therefore, unlike what is often assumed, religious affiliation did not represent a guarantee of

⁸⁰Bulbeck et al., *Southeast Asian exports*.

⁸¹Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance*, pp. 76–78; E. Vallet, 'Le marché des épices d'Alexandrie et les mutations du grande commerce de la mer Rouge (XIVe–XVe siècle)', in *Alexandrie Médiévale 4*, (ed.) C. Décobert (Alexandria, 2011), pp. 213–228.

reliability. Zorzi dispensed his Venetian rivals a rhetoric traditionally reserved for Muslims, qualifying Venetian competitors as “dogs” and “liars”.⁸² His Muslim informants, vice-versa, proved reliable since they counted among his “friends”, his “old friends” or even “dear friends”. When trying to determine the volume of spices arriving to Red Sea ports as Sawā-kin, al-Ṭūr or Jedda, Zorzi supported his estimations by saying “these are not just words, as I have spoken with the Maghrebis, who are my friends and come from these places”.⁸³ The memorandum’s contents will certainly nourish ongoing debates on the origins of globalisation, and on the Indian Ocean’s resilience when confronted with European aggression. Yet in spite of these exceptional features, Foscari’s archives display the recourse to a rhetoric of friendship between Muslims and Christians as a basis for information gathering, a rhetoric that is difficult to find in scholarship.

As Shylock the Jew suggests in Act I of the *Merchant of Venice*, news was brought to the Rialto by people who may not have prayed together but who bought, sold, walked and talked together despite their religious differences. The Mamluk memorandum has come down to us to remind us of the relative weight of western Europe in the Early Modern world economy, of its relatively peripheral position in the circuits of information, and that knowledge of each other and global interconnections were deeper than often thought. Foscari died rich, the news that saved his 1503 commercial campaign first transited Būlāq before reaching the Rialto. The document’s very existence reminds us that long-distance ‘cross-cultural’ trade was not necessarily a risky business between strangers, separated by cultural and religious barriers, but, most often, the work of friends who shared news and struck business deals together.

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Appendix I. The Mamluk-Venetian memorandum⁸⁴

Per la magnificentia de miser Michel Fuschari in Alexandria

Magnifico et gentile domino de puo scritto le mie lettere ett serade in questa sera è zontto una mia littera de alchaiero rabesca de man de uno scrivano del nadarchas mio caro amigo al qual pio mie lettere li o scritto de questo corso delle spezie è zonte de qua in questo ano de India ett li sume dele spezie come qua sotto o scritto a vostra Magnificentia che in son seritto vostra Magnificentia avera piaxer aver tal avixo

⁸²ASV PSM M 43, 21 March 1503.

⁸³For instance, on Calicut, *dinove che per mori e zontte de qui mie amixi liqual vi de cholochutt ett quelì dixeno che in colochutt son fatto forti ett ano parattado da omini 6000 armadi con archi ett bombarde asai*. On the sultan’s spices, *Ett archordo a vostra magnificentia che ultra le spezie quele o scritto de supra quiste zontte al chaiero ett si spetta anchora de Altor e de Suachin de schibe 2000 in suxo de piu forte spezie ett queste non son parole perche ho parlato con margarbini mie amixi liqual me aditto el tutto perche eli vien de quele bande ett me ano fermado seritto.*, ASV PSM M 43, 21 March 1503.

⁸⁴I have separated the words, followed modern patterns of capitalisation and punctuation, and developed abbreviations. With the exception of my accent marks on the third person of verb *essere* (as in *è* or *zè*), I have respected the grammatical peculiarities of the Venetian text as well as Zorzi’s orthographic incoherencies. As for most commodities and measures of packaging, transportation and weight, I refer to the recent and exhaustive work on the Venetian merchant handbooks (*tariffe*) by A. Sopracasa, *Venezia e l’Egitto alla fine del Medioevo: le tariffe di Alessandria* (Alexandria, 2013).

[...] ⁸⁵ locho nominado Sar dela è zonto al Zidde 2 navili picholi ett porttano

inzenzi	schibe ⁸⁶	300 son	a	1000	colli ⁸⁷	80
alove patticho sumottri	urdri ⁸⁸	1300	a	1000		
sangue de dargo	patt ⁸⁹	18	a	30		
tturbitti ⁹⁰	schibe	30	a	80		
noxe muschade ⁹¹	schibe	400	a	1300	colli	110
costo amaro ⁹²	schibe	4	a	...		
tamarid	fardi ⁹³	240	a	400		

In Debul è zonto navili 7 è zonto [sic] al Zidde

lache zerbi	schibe	230	a	800	colli	70
endegi	zurli	400	a			
alove patticho	urdri	200				
tele cioe sese lixari fazuoli et peze de ttele ⁹⁴		230				
veriseli nergri	schibe	9	a	32		

Chonbett navili 8 è zonto al Zidde

lache conbett	schibe	300	a	1100	colli	100
endegi	zurli	250	a			
ttuzia ⁹⁵	fardi	6	a	90		
buraxo ⁹⁶	patte	32	a	80		
enbeze in siropo mexani			a	130		
armoniago	in pani ⁹⁷	260	a	40		
zenzeri verdi ⁹⁸	marttapani ⁹⁹	80	a	200		

⁸⁵Word of uncertain reading.

⁸⁶Sopracasa, *Venezia e l'Egitto*, 750.

⁸⁷The document refers indistinctly to *collo* (C^o) and *colli* (Cⁱ), a known Venetian weight unity for spices, see *ibid.*, pp. 244–251, p. 748.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 751.

⁸⁹Stands probably for *pattine* or *piatine*, *Ibid.*, p. 750.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 713.

⁹¹Rendered in abbreviation.

⁹²*Ibid.*, p. 674.

⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 749.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 683, p. 707, p. 712.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 713.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 668.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 749.

⁹⁸Rendered in abbreviation.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 749.

In Cholocut nave 22 è zontte al Zidde

piper	schibe	4800	a	15400	colli	1500
zenzeri ¹⁰⁰	schibe	7400	a	24200	colli	2400 pio presto po che ma[n]cho
zenzeli ¹⁰¹	schibe	300	a	1950	collo	100
endegi	zurli	300	a			
lache chelechut	schibe	300	a	700	collo	60
anbizi in risopo ¹⁰²			a	260		
cebuli sechi ¹⁰³	schibe	60	a	180		
indi ¹⁰⁴	schibe	32	a	..		
beleresi sittrini ¹⁰⁵		100	a	..		
seduaria	schibe	30	a	80	colli	6

Silan navili 4 è zonto al Zidde

chanele	fardi	800	a
lache	schibe	160	a

Pider 2 navili è zontto al Zidde

piper	schibe	2800	a	7100	colli	850
zenzeri verdi ¹⁰⁶	In marttapani bengeli	220	a	400		

Malecha navili 9 è zontto al Zidde

garofali	schibe	800	a	2000	colli	220
noxé	schibe	1300	a	4000	colli	360
masis	surlì	400	a	260	cafizi ¹⁰⁷	70
verzi ¹⁰⁸			a	1600	colli	150
canfira			a	160		
cubebe			a	30		
sandoli bianchi			a	260		
sandoli rusi			a	500		
galanga ¹⁰⁹	schibe	80	a	300		
ligo alove ¹¹⁰			a	200		
benzui			a	300		

¹⁰⁰Rendered in abbreviation.¹⁰¹*Ziziphus jujuba*, italian *giuggiole*, rendered in abbreviation.¹⁰²Almost certainly *emblici* myrobalans, *Ibid.*, p. 689.¹⁰³*Ibid.*, p. 689.¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 689.¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, p. 714.¹⁰⁶Rendered in abbreviation.¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 738.¹⁰⁸Rendered in abbreviation.¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p. 680.¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 685.

De tutte quise sortte spezie son qua scritte el paexe chonsuma el 1/4 de ditte ett la Turchia asai che vano per ttera ett el la Barbaria asaisime ett navi de forestier alevavano asai in fa al ano la Magnificentia del consolo de cattelani aspetta 3 sue navi de Franza de di in di.

El paexe consuma el forzo de ditte spezie menude et spezie grose asai.

La Turchia piper ett garofali endegi verzi asai e noxe muschada¹¹¹ inzenzi.

La Barbaria lache endegi et spezie menude asai da che ttegnno che un terzo di dite spezie se malteze in ditti luogi ett questo arichordo a vostra magnificentia che non pensa che ttutte vegna in paexe de scristiani altro non me achade per ora in deo con vui me rachomando a vostra magnificentia.

A di 16 aprile 1503 el di di paschua io marco de Zorzi.

La lettera che zè qua denttro vostra Magnificentia la mandi a chaxa de Nicolo [...] ¹¹² a San Lio.

Appendix 2. English translation

To the Magnificent Sir Michele Foscari in Alexandria.

Magnificent and kind Sir, after having written and sealed my letters, an Arabic one from Cairo has arrived, by the hand of one of the Nāzīr al-Khaṣṣ' scribes, a dear friend of mine, whom I have questioned in my letters about the course of spices [that have] arrived here in the present year from India, together with the sum of the spices, as I have reported to your Magnificence below, as I am certain your Magnificence will be pleased to receive such a dispatch.

[From a first] place called al-Shih̄r, two small ships have arrived in Jedda and they carry

frankincense	schibe	300 make	a	1000	colli	80
hepatic aloe of Sumatra	urdri	1300	a	1000		
dragon's blood	patt	18	a	30		
turpeth	schibe	30	a	80		
nutmeg	schibe	400	a	1300	colli	110
bitter costus	schibe	4	a	...		
tamarind	fardi	240	a	400		

from Dabhol have arrived 7 ships have arrived in Jedda

zerbi Lacquer	schibe	230	a	800	colli	70
indigo	zurli	400	a			
hepatic aloe	urdri	200				
cloth this is <i>shāshāt</i> , <i>lixari</i> , kerchiefs and striped cloth		230				
black glass beads	schibe	9	a	32		

¹¹¹*muschada* rendered in abbreviation.

¹¹²Word of uncertain reading, probably a surname.

Khambhat 8 ships have arrived in Jedda

Khambhat lac	schibe	300	a	1100	colli	100
indigo	zurli	250	a			
tuchia	fardi	6	a	90		
borax	patte	32	a	80		
emblic myrobalans, preserved in syrup, medium size			a	130		
ammonia	in pani	260	a	40		
green ginger	martapani	80	a	200		

From Calicut 22 ships have arrived in Jedda

pepper	schibe	4800	a	15400	colli	1500
ginger	schibe	7400	a	24200	colli	2400 rather more than less
Chinese dates	schibe	300	a	1950	collo	100
indigo	zurli	300	a			
Calicut Lac	schibe	300	a	700	collo	60
emblic myrobalans, preserved in syrop			a	260		
chebulic myrobalans, dried	schibe	60	a	180		
indi myrobalans	schibe	32	a	..		
chebulic myrobalans, dark	schibe	100	a	..		
zedoary	schibe	30	a	80	colli	6

Ceylon 4 ships have arrived in Jedda

cinnamon	fardi			800		a
lac	schibe			160		a

Pidië 2 ships have arrived in Jedda

pepper	schibe	2800	a	7100	colli	850
green ginger	in Bengali Marttapani	220	a	400		

Malecha 9 ships have arrived in Jedda

cloves	schibe	800	a	2000	colli	220
nutmeg	schibe	1300	a	4000	colli	360
mace	surlu	400	a	260	cafizi	70
brazilwood			a	1600	colli	150
camphor			a	160		
cubeb			a	30		
white sandalwood			a	260		
red sandalwood			a	500		
galangal	schibe	80	a	300		
aloewood			a	200		
benzoin			a	300		

Of all the various spices described above, one-fourth is consumed by the country, and Turkey [consumes] a lot that go overland, and Barbary much more, and foreign ships will lift a good deal during the year and the magnificent Catalan consul is awaiting three of his ships arriving from France any day.

The country consumes the bulk of the mentioned small spices and a good deal of the big ones, Turkey [consumes] pepper and cloves, indigo, a lot of brazilwood, as well as nutmeg [and] frankincense.

Barbary [consumes] lacquer, indigo as well as a good deal of the small spices so that [as] I have it one-third of these spices sell out in these places, and this I recall to your Magnificence who does not think that all [these spices] are conducted to the country of Christians. Nothing else by now, the lord be with you, I commit to your magnificence.

April 16th 1503 Easter day I, Marco de Zorzi.

May your Magnificence send the letter inside [this envelope] to the house of Nicolo [...] in San Lio