

Language and Gender in the Early Modern Mediterranean

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The early modern Mediterranean was a space of expansive linguistic mixing, and multilingual discourse was a common response to the exigencies of communication within this context. There is a growing body of scholarship on male multilingualism; however, women have been largely overlooked. This article argues that far from marginalized outsiders, as they were often depicted, women were active participants in the Mediterranean linguistic ecology. They developed communication strategies and techniques to navigate language difference in trade, travel, work, diplomatic, and domestic settings. The numerous and varied spaces that they occupied were not barriers but doorways to their participation in the multilingual Mediterranean.

INTRODUCTION

ON 8 MAY 1553, two Venetian patricians, Zuan Battista Giustinian and Antonio Diedo, set out for the eastern shore of Venice's *mare nostrum*, the Adriatic Sea. The previous month the Senate had elected them to the highly respected office of *sindici, proveditori et avogadori*, or colonial inspectors of all Venice's possessions in the gulf. Over the course of the next six months they traveled throughout the region gathering information on "nearly all aspects of local life."¹ Upon their return, Giustinian presented an oral *relazione*, or report, to the Senate, which was only published in 1877 with the simple title *Itinerario* (Itinerary). Much more than a travel itinerary, however, the *Itinerario* is one of the most valuable sources on sixteenth-century Dalmatia.²

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¹ Arbel, 151. See also Eufe, 17–18; Dudan, 73.

² Alujević.

In his report, Giustinian treats numerous aspects of life in Venice's Adriatic outposts, including military affairs, relations with the Ottomans, social structures, commerce, religious life, agriculture, and foodways. He also comments on language so extensively that one scholar described the text as "the most detailed description of the linguistic situation in the cities and on the islands of Dalmatia in the Cinquecento."³ In the coastal town of Sebenico (Šibenik), for instance, Giustinian reports that the language and customs were "Slavic," but "almost all the men also speak Italian." As for the city's women, however, "almost none knows how to speak Italian."⁴ The Slavic spoken in the important trading center of Spalato (Split) was "sweet and dreamy," and like the Florentine dialect in Italy, it was considered "the most noble" in all Dalmatia. Giustinian notes that all the men of that city "speak Italian" too, but once again underscores that "the women do not speak anything but their maternal tongue."⁵ In other parts of the region, such as the island of Liesena (Hvar), where "the men universally speak Italian with great faculty," he overlooks women entirely.⁶

In these passing references Giustinian offers a brief but suggestive glimpse into an elusive aspect of the ecology of language in the early modern Mediterranean: the relationship of gender to language and communication. Because of its striking linguistic pluralism, the Mediterranean has occupied a central position in a growing body of research on premodern language.⁷ This work has shown that the linguistic world of the Mediterranean's composite states was much richer and more complex than reductive modern and nationalist monolingual models permit.⁸ It was a space of linguistic mixing in which language boundaries were "multiple, plural, shifting, and eclectic."⁹ Linguistic heterodoxy was a fundamental element of the early modern Mediterranean and largely did not operate as a barrier between the sea's diverse range of peoples. Although intermediaries played an important role in navigating this highly variegated linguistic environment, functional multilingualism and other strategies of interaction were widespread and common, and essential to the sort of everyday communication necessary to get things done.

³ Metzeltin, 556.

⁴ Ljubić, 1877, 205.

⁵ Ljubić, 1877, 215.

⁶ Ljubić, 1877, 197, 218, 222 (quotation).

⁷ See Dursteler, 2012 and 2014.

⁸ See Braunmüller and Ferraresi, 1; Billig, 35–36; Schwartz; Trotter, 2; Richter, 77.

⁹ Blackledge and Creese, 25–32, 66 (quotation on 25). See also Braunmüller and Ferraresi, 2–4; Burke, 5–7.

While there is a rich body of research on certain aspects of women's linguistic lives, including some discussion of the intersection of domestic space and language acquisition in other contexts,¹⁰ to this point the focus of studies on language in the Mediterranean has been almost entirely centered on men—male merchants, diplomats, soldiers, travelers, religious, adventurers—to the almost complete exclusion of women.¹¹ The aim of this article is to redress to some degree this imbalance through an examination of the ways that women navigated and participated in the Mediterranean linguistic landscape, and to consider how gender may enrich and alter our understanding of communication and interaction in the early modern sea. Far from being disengaged or marginalized outsiders, women were active participants in the Mediterranean linguistic ecology, something Giustinian (and others) missed badly in his generalizations about Dalmatian women and language.

Any attempt to study oral communication inevitably runs up against the issues of evanescence and erasure. This is an inescapable byproduct of the elusive character of quotidian dialogue. Infiltrating the communicative environment of the early modern era is inherently difficult because of the ephemeral and impressionistic nature of the spoken word: speech acts are fleeting and words are slippery witnesses—they are uttered and immediately evaporate, rarely leaving even a faint archival residue. What remains, if anything, are the relics and remains of past speech acts. Unearthing these vestiges is even more problematic in the case of women, whose lives and discourses were systematically “obliterated” in contemporary historical records.¹² What remains is a constellation of isolated clues sequestered in unexpected corners, with the occasional infinitesimally larger concentration of suggestive, though maddeningly fragmentary, details. It will require speculation and leaps of faith to fill the voids.

QUERELLE DES FEMMES

The view of a gendered monolingualism that Giustinian describes was not uncommon in his age. Many early modern observers contended that this was, in fact, a woman's natural state. As the English writer and courtier Sir John Harington (1560–1612) opined in an infamous epigram composed around 1600, entitled “Of Women Learned in the Tongues,”

You wish me to [have] a wife, fair, right and young,
That had the Latin, French and Spanish tongue.

¹⁰ M. Cohen, 83–84; Tosi, 83, 98.

¹¹ Mullen, 26n88.

¹² Colley, 2002, 291. See also Scott, 5.

I thanked, and told you I desired non such,
 And said, One language may be tongue too much.
 Then love I not the learned? Yes, as my life;
 A learned mistress, not a learned wife.¹³

This satirical jab is ironic given that Harington maintained a “polyglot household” and retained a multilingual tutor for his daughter.¹⁴ His is a facile entry in the *querelle des femmes*, the centuries-long debate on the advisability and capacity of women to be educated, an important subset of which centered on language. Many contemporaries had serious doubts about the utility of women studying languages, and even their intellectual capacity to learn them.¹⁵ Some considered female multilingualism solely “ornamental.”¹⁶

The Venetian man of letters Lodovico Dolce (1510–68) saw no point in teaching women Latin, since they had “no public role to fulfill” and, rather, needed only to instruct their children.¹⁷ In his 1584 treatise on Christian education, considered among the most influential pedagogical texts of the era, the humanist cardinal Silvio Antoniano (1540–1603) similarly argued against aristocratic girls being taught languages.¹⁸ Thomas Salter warned that linguistic knowledge would give women access to “dangerous” and “lascivious” knowledge that would injure their morals and make them into “bold disputers” who might dare to undercut male privilege.¹⁹ Latin was specially singled out as “morally dangerous” and a potential “path to perdition” for women who studied it, because of the “lascivious fables” and “lubricious suggestions” that it would open to them.²⁰ “A woman who speaks Latin,” a French proverb bluntly warned, “will come to a bad end.”²¹ In the case of a polyglot woman such as Queen Christina of Sweden (1626–89), who spoke fluent Latin and knew ten other languages, while her multilingualism was admired, it was also a key component of the judgment among contemporaries that she possessed “none of the woman but the sex.”²² A linguistically expert woman, in other words, was more male than female, because multilingualism was a characteristic of men, not women.

¹³ Charlton, 24.

¹⁴ Gallagher, 17–18.

¹⁵ Moncrief and McPherson, 13–14.

¹⁶ M. Cohen, 65.

¹⁷ Sanson, 2011, 31–32.

¹⁸ Frize, 14; Bell, 184.

¹⁹ Saunders, 250.

²⁰ Waquet, 250–51.

²¹ Mr. N. C., 27–28.

²² Åkerman, 104.

To be sure there were dissenters, but these were often solitary voices. Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540) was mildly favorable to women learning languages. There also existed a limited number of grammars directed to women, though these began to increase in the eighteenth century.²³ Bathsua Reginald Makin (1600–75), in her 1673 work *An essay to revive the ancient education of gentlewomen, in religion, manners, arts & tongues*, argued for the education of elite women in classical languages, just as was enjoyed by men, and others made similar demands.²⁴ One interesting byproduct of these attitudes was the robust early modern market for translations, which was seen as the most appropriate means for women to access classical texts. As John Florio (1552–1625) put it, “all translations are reputed femalls,”²⁵ and, in fact, in addition to being major consumers, women also played a key role in their production.²⁶ A major form of women’s literary output in the period was preparing translations for women who might otherwise not be able to access works in classical or contemporary languages.²⁷ The *querelle* also influenced the production of early dictionaries, such as Robert Cawdrey’s (1538–1604) *A table alphabeticall, conteyning and teaching the true writing, and understanding of hard usuall English words* (1604), which was intended “for the benefit & helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or other unskillful persons,” and Thomas Blount’s (1618–79) *Glossographia* (1656), directed at “more-knowing Women and less-knowing Men.”²⁸

In the Mediterranean, there are numerous manifestations in the day’s literature of these types of gendered views of language. In Benedetto Ramberti’s (1503–46) highly influential *Libri tre delle cose de Turchi* (Three books on the affairs of the Turks, 1539), which was based on his 1534 visit to the Ottoman capital as secretary to the Venetian ambassador Daniele de Ludovisi,²⁹ he notes that in Ragusa (Dubrovnik), “almost everyone uses the Slavic language,” while only men were bilingual and spoke Italian.³⁰ This identical distinction resurfaces several decades later in the travel narrative of the young Venetian patrician Alessandro Magno (b. 1539),³¹ an anonymous report on Ragusa,³² and in Francesco Sansovino’s (1521–86) *Del governo et*

²³ Sanson, 2014b; Gallagher, 119–22.

²⁴ Saunders, 247.

²⁵ D. Clarke, 171–72; Sanders, 104; H. Smith, 67–68.

²⁶ Belle; Hosington and Fournier; D. Clarke.

²⁷ R. Smith, 185. See also Sanson, 2011, 42–43; Murphy, 2020, 141–42.

²⁸ H. Smith, 181. See also Russell, 37–44.

²⁹ Yerasimos, 22; Rakova, 65; Brummett, 2015, 56–57.

³⁰ Ramberti, 4^v.

³¹ Folger Shakespeare Library, V.a. 259, c. 77^v.

³² Ljubić, 1880, 73–74.

amministracione di diversi regni et republiche, cosi antiche come moderne (On the government and administration of various kingdoms and republics, both ancient and modern, 1578). “Among themselves,” Sansovino reports, Ragusan women “only use their own maternal tongue,” while “ordinarily every young man knows the Italian language.” Women, he writes, “cannot understand, since they do not know the language.”³³

To contextualize these views, it is necessary to revisit Giustinian. Discussing the small Dalmatian coastal town of Trau (Trogir), he provides additional insight into the nature of women’s monolingualism: “everyone speaks Italian, but in their homes they speak the Slavic language out of respect for the women, because few of them understand the Italian language, and even if some woman understands it, she does not want to speak anything but her maternal language.”³⁴ As this more detailed gloss suggests, in contrast to Dalmatian men, whose political, economic, and social activities, according to Giustinian, exposed them to “the continual presence of foreigners, who dock their ships that sail in the Levant and the Ponente,” women’s linguistic limitations were a byproduct, at least in part, of their domesticity.³⁵ Women represented both the incarnation and the repository of the *lingua materna*, the local language, the language of the womb.³⁶ This notion was not limited to Dalmatia: Giustinian’s contemporary, the Sienese humanist Alessandro Piccolomini (1508–79), wrote in 1551 that it was not “the custom in Italy to teach [women] a language other than that which they learn from their caregivers.”³⁷ Twenty years earlier, Giovan Giorgio Trissino (1478–1550) similarly claimed that “the purity of their regional speech” rested in women because “they do not travel about, or have contact with foreigners.”³⁸ This is an idea that dates back at least to Dante, who in his *De vulgari eloquentia* (On eloquence in the vernacular) describes the *lingua materna*, or vernacular, as the language “which we learn . . . by imitating our nurses.”³⁹ Even when speaking their birth tongue, women’s language was often depicted as being more conservative, even archaic or passé, because they had “less contact with the outside world.”⁴⁰

The familiar gendered construct of a male/public–female/private dichotomy that is at the heart of these views of women’s linguistic limitations has sustained

³³ Sansovino, 121^v. Also Vianello, 68n17.

³⁴ Ljubić, 1877, 208.

³⁵ Ljubić, 1877, 197, 222 (quotation).

³⁶ Sanson, 2007, 148–50.

³⁷ Piccolomini, n.p.

³⁸ Sanson, 2007, 154.

³⁹ Dante Alighieri, 3.

⁴⁰ Sanson, 2014a, 402–03.

significant criticism from generations of scholars,⁴¹ who have shown a more complex reality that was much more blurred than prescriptive theories and texts allow.⁴² Far from being timeless or universal, this contrast must also be historicized and culturally localized. It obscures divergences both within and between categories, as well as ignoring their intense interconnectedness and interpenetration.⁴³ Because of these problems, some scholars have advocated abandoning the notion altogether as overly imprecise and lacking meaningful analytical value. Others, while acknowledging that drawing precise boundaries between the public and private is tricky, have been more reluctant in jettisoning it entirely, believing instead that there is still value in a sophisticated application and reading of how these spaces were “constructed, applied and challenged in the past.”⁴⁴

Whatever its composition and confines, the domestic sphere and other cloistered spaces and contexts are essential to understanding Mediterranean multilingualism among both women and men. Men undoubtedly did experience the multilingual Mediterranean in certain political, religious, military, and economic settings, and their wives, sisters, mothers, and daughters also did so in a rich and diverse range of settings important in their lives: homes, public baths, marital beds, nurseries, markets, workshops, slave emporia, convents, palaces, infirmaries, embassies, brothels, and networks of correspondence. The diverse spaces that women inhabited enabled rather than obstructed their engagement in the richly varied linguistic ecology of the early modern Mediterranean. These served as arenas in which women were exposed to and acquired linguistic varieties and communication skills, and in which “women educat[ed] other women.”⁴⁵ While men may have more commonly experienced Mediterranean multilingualism in certain types of public spaces, these were not inaccessible to women, and, conversely, private spaces were essential to men’s experiences in ways both similar to and different from women’s. What is required, in short, is a reconceptualization of views of the interplay of space, gender, and language.

My thinking on this has been informed by the work of sociolinguists who, over the past decades, have engaged in their own *querelle des femmes* on the issue of gender and language within the contemporary context. Initially, linguists’ explanations for what they perceived as the linguistic limitations of women ranged from the deficit model, which characterized women as a “muted

⁴¹ Pateman, 118–40; Kerber; Vickery.

⁴² See Abrams and Harvey, 17–19.

⁴³ McElhinny, 111–12.

⁴⁴ See Abrams and Harvey, 17–19.

⁴⁵ See Churchill et al., 1, 7 (quotation).

group” and “inferior language users” because of their subordinate social status, to the dominance model, which attributed women’s deficiency to “male domination and female oppression” in social discourse.⁴⁶ A more nuanced model emerged from this dialectic and rejected the essentialist and decontextualized structuralist notions of earlier schemas, instead seeing language as a set of socially and historically constructed resources that circulate unequally in discursive spaces, with a range and variety of experiences available to both men and women.

This broader linguistic debate also has informed discussions of gender and multilingualism. Initially, in an argument that paralleled Giustinian and the *querelle des femmes*, it was contended that in contrast to men who acquire additional language skills in work settings outside the home, women remain largely monolingual because of their role in preserving and safeguarding the maternal culture and language within the confines of cloistered, domestic spaces.⁴⁷ More recently, scholars have found almost exactly the opposite is, in fact, true: it is often women who instigate “language shift” within their communities.⁴⁸ Because of the role that they often fulfill as cultural brokers through mixed marriages, friendship, child-rearing, household service, and other forms of labor, women may in fact be both more sensitive to and aware of the demands of the linguistic marketplace, and thus more exposed to and accomplished at multilingual communication than men.⁴⁹ Rather than serve as a vessel in which the maternal tongue is protected and preserved, in some contemporary contexts women have been found to embrace the dominant language in an effort to improve opportunities for their children.⁵⁰ Similarly, it is common for women, particularly younger women, to embrace a new language “more than men,” in hopes of greater social mobility through improved professional opportunities or favorable marriages.⁵¹ Linguists have in recent years identified “multilingual couple talk” and “cross-linguistic intimacy” as important catalysts for women’s language acquisition.⁵² Ultimately, as two of the leading scholars of gender and multilingualism, Ingrid Piller and Aneta Pavlenko, conclude, the question of whether men or women are more adept at using multiple varieties is less interesting than exploring their respective historically and culturally contingent linguistic practices and resources.⁵³

⁴⁶ Piller and Pavlenko, 2004, 490; Takahashi, 2012, 420–21; Sadiqi, 7.

⁴⁷ Papaconstantinou, 14.

⁴⁸ Piller and Pavlenko, 2004, 491.

⁴⁹ Piller and Pavlenko, 2001, 1–4.

⁵⁰ Piller and Pavlenko, 2004, 494.

⁵¹ Papaconstantinou, 14.

⁵² Takahashi, 2010; Takahashi, 2012, 426; Piller, 341–49.

⁵³ Piller and Pavlenko, 2004, 491–92.

HAREMS, HAMMAMS, AND HOUSEHOLDS

This contemporary research suggests useful ways of thinking about gender and language in the early modern Mediterranean. One of the most striking examples of the ways that private space functioned as an incubator for women's multilingualism is evident in an entirely nonnormative household, the Ottoman imperial harem. This profoundly cloistered space represents in many ways the quintessential private sphere. As Leslie Peirce has shown in her now classic study *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, instead of marginalizing its inhabitants, their enclosure provided the women of the harem direct and regular access to the sultan and elevated them to positions of great power and influence.⁵⁴ In his popular early seventeenth-century "Descrizione del serraglio del Gransignore" (Description of the seraglio of the Great Lord), the Venetian ambassador Ottaviano Bon (1552–1623) described the rich cultural world of the harem:⁵⁵ "Those who are held in the place of the beauties are all maids of foreign nations, having been taken or stolen . . . [and] the number grows every day. . . . They have their places to retire for lessons, to learn to read and speak Turkish."⁵⁶

Women entered the harem from highly diverse backgrounds and were usually old enough that they retained a recollection of their birth cultures and languages. As part of their education, all were instructed in Turkish, as well as in the palace sign language, which was developed to ensure silence and decorum in the sultans' presence.⁵⁷ This training did not, however, efface memories of their past and, indeed, letters by harem women often contained errors characteristic of individuals writing in a language that was not their own.⁵⁸ Thus, many languages could be heard in the harem, and its inhabitants, including the sultans, were by necessity multilingual.⁵⁹ Mehmed II (1432–81) was held to speak as many as five languages,⁶⁰ while Selim II was said to be "lord of three languages . . . Greek, Slavonic, and Turkish."⁶¹ This resulted from their imperial duties, but even more from exposure to the

⁵⁴ Peirce, 1993, 219–28; Tucker, 395; Nashat, 70–71. See also Meriwether and Tucker, 3–4; Thys-Şenocak, 55–65.

⁵⁵ Dursteler, 2018; Pasdera, 11:421–24.

⁵⁶ R. C. Davis, 2009, 234.

⁵⁷ Miles, 115–34; Peirce, 1993, 176.

⁵⁸ Shefer-Mossensohn, 89–90.

⁵⁹ "Relazione di Antonio Foscarini," in Firpo, 1965, 646; "Sommario della Relazione di Germania di Vincenzo Tron," in Firpo, 1970, 497, 502; "Relazione di Zuan Michiel e Lunardo Donato," in Firpo, 1970, 520–22; Braunmüller and Ferraresi, 2.

⁶⁰ Patrinelis; Babinger, 111–12.

⁶¹ Du Fresne-Canaye, 147.

polyglot women of the harem. Multilingual harems were not necessarily limited to Muslim men either: Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici (1511–35) was reported to possess in his house in Rome “a true serraglio,” which included “Numidian, Tartar, Ethiopian, Indian, [and] Turkish” slaves, who “together spoke more than twenty languages.”⁶²

Linguistically blended households on a more modest scale than the Ottoman imperial harem were common in the highly mobile early modern era, nowhere more so than the Mediterranean.⁶³ The island of Malta provides a telling example. After the arrival of the Knights Hospitaller from Rhodes in 1530, the island experienced significant demographic growth. A “multitude of foreign men” settled on the island and began intermarrying with local women.⁶⁴ There is good evidence, for example, of numerous mixed marriages by both Greek sailors⁶⁵ and members of the Spanish expatriate community.⁶⁶ Non-Maltese women, particularly Italians but also Greeks, also married men from Malta and elsewhere.⁶⁷ This mingling of locals with immigrants had a profound linguistic impact, especially in the harbor areas. Maltese began to be mixed with “the Italic vernacular” in a local form of lingua franca, and Italian became the dominant cultural and administrative “language of convenience” among the multilingual elite.⁶⁸ Among Maltese townswomen, one observer noted, “almost all speak Italian, in a Genoese singsong, mixed with the occasional barbarian (Maltese) word.”⁶⁹ This gave rise to very common situations such as that of the Maltese woman, Minichella de Patti, who had to use Italian to communicate with her French husband, Antonio Gontier.⁷⁰

The Balkan borderlands of the Venetian Empire were another incubator of these sorts of mixed relationships. Many of Venice's famed Greek *stradioti* soldiers settled in Dalmatia and intermarried with local women. These couples were bilingual and submitted petitions in both of the languages used by them. In one divorce case in Zara (Zadar), a young Dalmatian woman complained that her older husband, a former *stradioto*, forced her to speak

⁶² Fiume, 44.

⁶³ Kaplan, 258–93; Donia and Fine, 67–68; McKee, 103–05; Laiou; Wickersham; Kooi.

⁶⁴ Cassar, 2001, 262; Cassar, 1988, 51–52.

⁶⁵ Cathedral Archives, Mdina, Archivium Inquisitionis Melitensia (hereafter AIM), Processi e denunzie, b. 17, 6 Nov. 1598, cc. 266^r–268^v; AIM, Processi e denunzie, b. 16A, 28 Aug. 1598, cc. 55^r–75^v.

⁶⁶ Mercieca, 44–45.

⁶⁷ Grech, 47.

⁶⁸ Cassar, 2001, 260–66.

⁶⁹ Mallia-Milanes, 57.

⁷⁰ Cassar, 2001, 262.

Greek with him despite it not being her mother tongue.⁷¹ In Venice proper, a “multitude” of both “foreign wives and mistresses” were brought to the city by arsenal workers returning from service abroad.⁷² Elite Venetian officials might also enter into long-term mixed relationships with subject women from the *stato da mar*. This was the case with Giovanni Bembo (1473–1545), who, while posted to Corfu, shared a multilingual relationship with his Greek servant, Chiara (d. 1536), who was herself the product of a culturally mixed marriage, and whom Bembo married after years of cohabitation and the birth of numerous children.⁷³

Cross-linguistic intimacy served as both multilingual stimulus and incubator in the case of Haim, who was born in Istanbul to a Greek Christian slave woman from Bosnia. She was raised by her mother’s owner “as her daughter,” then betrothed at age fifteen to an Ottoman official, who moved with her to Tripoli, where they eventually divorced and she married a local ship captain.⁷⁴ As a result she was fluent in Arabic, Turkish and Maltese, and likely knew some Greek and perhaps Slavic as well. Mobility and exogamy similarly gave rise to intimate linguistic exigencies during the two-year Ottoman occupation of Otranto in the late fifteenth century, when, as one chronicler reported, “many girls . . . easily learned the barbarians’ religion and language,” implying romantic liaisons between the two groups.⁷⁵

Related to these private settings, the hammam was a cloistered public space central to “female sociability,” and one in which women of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds intermingled.⁷⁶ The culture of communal bathing is pan-Mediterranean with roots in antiquity. Hammams existed throughout the region: in early modern Istanbul there were over 150 baths, about half as many in Cairo, and even much smaller Tripoli had ten. Istanbul’s baths served many thousands of customers daily and employed thousands of attendants.⁷⁷ Beyond bathing, hammams served multiple roles in women’s life cycles: match-makers plied their trade there, brides were prepared for their weddings by women from both families, and mothers and their young babies were ritually

⁷¹ Archivio dell’Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, B. Chiesa, 3, Arcidiocesi di Filadelfia, b. 4b, fasc. 8, cc. 12/1^r–19/1^v. I am grateful to Katerina Korrè for this reference.

⁷² R. C. Davis, 1991, 115.

⁷³ Maglaque, 64–84.

⁷⁴ Cathedral Archives, Mdina, AIM, Processi e denunzie, b. 16A, case 35, 20 Jan. 1599, cc. 251^r–263^r.

⁷⁵ Ricci, 40.

⁷⁶ Özkoçak, 970–71, 975.

⁷⁷ Ergin, 2011b, 144; Raymond, 129, 142; Hoblos, 162–65.

washed forty days after birth.⁷⁸ Women often attended the hammam weekly, and might spend the entire day there. Food was an essential element of the experience, musical and theatrical performances were held in the dressing room, “female herbalists and medical practitioners set up there,” and business transactions were often carried out between women.⁷⁹ The cosmopolitan English traveler and writer, Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), famously described the hammam as “the women’s coffee house, where all the news of the town is told, scandal invented, &c.,” and also described a halting exchange with a woman in a bath she visited.⁸⁰

The hammam was a “multi-ethnic and multi-religious space”⁸¹ that has been described as an “incendiary site” because of the intimate social and cultural mixing among diverse populations that occurred within its tiled walls.⁸² Cultural and legal barriers were erected to prevent “mixed confessional bathing,” particularly in the eighteenth century as boundary drawing intensified in the Ottoman Empire, including scheduling separate times for Muslim, Christian, and Jewish women to use the facilities.⁸³ As these recurring attempts and other evidence suggest, efforts at religious segregation were minimally effectual.⁸⁴ Even among Ottoman women of the same faith, however, there was significant cultural and linguistic diversity, as was also the case among the servants and slaves who accompanied them to the bath,⁸⁵ and the female hammam staff who attended to them there.⁸⁶

SLAVES AND THEIR MISTRESSES

Slavery was widespread throughout the early modern Mediterranean and was another important vector in women’s multilingualism.⁸⁷ From 1500 to 1800 between three and five million people were enslaved in the region, with a 2:1 ratio of Christians to Muslims, and the same of men to women. Both Christian and Muslim women slaves were disproportionately earmarked for household service—as wet-nurses, laundresses, maids, and cooks—which put them in intimate positions in relation to their Christian, Jewish, or Muslim owners.

⁷⁸ Boyar and Fleet, 256–57; F. Davis, 37.

⁷⁹ Hunt, 304.

⁸⁰ Montagu, 58–59.

⁸¹ Boyar and Fleet, 249.

⁸² Semerdjian, 2013, 659.

⁸³ Semerdjian, 2016, 254, 262, 265–66; Semerdjian, 2013.

⁸⁴ Boyar and Fleet, 258–59; Cuffel, 179; Meier, 185–86.

⁸⁵ Fleet, 123; de Busbecq, 82.

⁸⁶ Ergin, 2011a, 234; Ergin, 2015.

⁸⁷ Colley, 2002, 13; Vitkus, 4.

Thus, it was common for them to be closely integrated into the household—“swallowed up by the families of their owners,” as Giovanna Fiume describes it—which heightened both their exposure and need to learn the language of their masters and mistresses.⁸⁸ In Antonio de Sosa’s (1538–87) famous early seventeenth-century report on Algiers, he notes that “speaking Frankish is so common that there is no house where it is not used. There is no Turk nor Moor, neither big nor small, man nor woman, even the children, that more or less (and the majority of them very well), does not speak it.”⁸⁹ As de Sosa suggests, the use of *lingua franca* was not limited to the public spaces that have generally attracted the attention of scholars and that were primarily occupied by men, such as galleys, slave bagnios, ports, and public-works sites. It was also essential for domestic communication between women, men, children, and their predominantly female household slaves.⁹⁰ Because both slaves and owners “often failed to understand each other, they tried to make their orders and responses plain” in the *lingua franca*, or one of their native languages.⁹¹ This was the case with Captain John Smith (1580–1631), who, well before his time in Virginia, was captured in battle and sold as a slave in Istanbul. His owner’s wife “could speake Italian,” as did Smith, and would regularly skip visits to the bath and other activities to remain at home and converse with him about his life and adventures. In addition to Italian, she also appears to have had some command of “English, French, [and] Dutch,” or at least been able to communicate with speakers of those languages, perhaps with Italian or some other bridge or vehicular language.⁹²

The Portuguese slave João Macarenhas’s (b. 1589) early seventeenth-century narrative provides an illustrative anecdote of slave multilingualism. A Spanish slave named Catterina fled Algiers with a lover and went to live among Arab tribes in the interior. Both spoke Arabic “very well, especially the woman,” which was, he reports, “a common thing among all the Christian women captives.” The reason for this was that “their mistresses . . . learn the Spanish language from them . . . in the same way that the Christian women very easily learn the Moorish language from their mistresses.”⁹³ Sometimes this language acquisition was intentional rather than accidental: Jewish slave owners in Istanbul sometimes trained their slaves in the “Turkish language, singing, playing of

⁸⁸ Fiume, 49, 51; Phillips, 80, 148; White, 105; Angiolini, 1996, 114.

⁸⁹ Whinnom, 12–13. On de Sosa’s report, see Garcés, 70–72.

⁹⁰ Dakhliya, 71–78.

⁹¹ R. C. Davis, 2009, 42.

⁹² Brummett, 2016, 18.

⁹³ De Carvalho Mascarenhas, 122–23.

musical instruments, dancing, and other necessary skills,” which added value to them and prestige to their owners.⁹⁴

The incredible case of the Dutch woman Maria ter Meetelen (1704–51), who was a slave in Morocco for twelve years, is another example of the ways in which slavery and multilingual communication intersected. A cosmopolitan and well-traveled adventurer, including a stint dressed as a man when she enlisted in a Spanish military regiment, Maria was captured in the western Mediterranean, near Cape St. Vincent, in 1731. She kept a diary of her years of captivity, which was spent primarily in the royal palace in Meknès during a time of great upheaval when Sultan Moulay Abdallah ben Ismail (1694–1757) grappled with several rivals for control of the throne.⁹⁵ In addition to Dutch, Maria spoke and read Spanish fluently, and she initially used this to communicate in the palace. Informal gesture also played an important role in her interactions with the sultan, officials, and other women in the palace.⁹⁶ Over time, she learned Arabic, in part through instruction by a dragoman appointed to teach her. She was also assigned both an Irish renegade woman and a Muslim woman born in Spain as her interpreters, and she makes an intriguing reference to a “mistress of languages,” perhaps a female dragoman, who assisted her in negotiating the release of several French slaves.⁹⁷ During the early years of her captivity, she used a dragoman during the many hours she spent talking to the sultan “about all sorts of rare plants and all sorts of products that came from foreign lands and . . . all the landscapes, kingdoms, and towns that I knew very well because of my travels.” Eventually, however, Maria dismissed her interpreter, since by then, as she wrote, “I already knew the Turkish [Arabic] language well, so that I could manage very well without her.”⁹⁸

The link between slavery and language was not limited to the predominantly Islamicate regions of the Mediterranean. Although initially the experiences of Muslim slaves of Christian masters were almost entirely ignored, recent scholarship has shown that “captive-taking and slave-making” were a decidedly pan-Mediterranean phenomenon, and “never exclusively a Muslim one.”⁹⁹ While outnumbered by enslaved men, Muslim women throughout the region were nonetheless regular victims of Christian corsair raids on land and sea.¹⁰⁰ Muslim slavery in Europe has been especially well documented in the Iberian

⁹⁴ Ben-Naeh, 331–32.

⁹⁵ Bekkaoui, 62–63; van den Broek and Jacobs, 50–65.

⁹⁶ Stone and Johnson, 54, 64–67, 119.

⁹⁷ Stone and Johnson, 71.

⁹⁸ Stone and Johnson, 92, 94–95, 99.

⁹⁹ Colley, 2002, 46. See also Bono, 82; Angiolini, 1997, 71–73.

¹⁰⁰ Bekkaoui, 6–9; Belhamissi; Angiolini, 1996, 104.

Peninsula: Dalenda Larguèche has found that many Muslim slaves from North Africa were captured as young girls (ages six to twelve), sold into slavery in Spain, and ended up in domestic settings where by necessity they quickly learned the languages of their owners.¹⁰¹ In Valencia owners ensured that their slaves learned Catalan in order to communicate in their households and communities,¹⁰² and some girls received instruction in the houses of elderly women they cared for.¹⁰³ Slaves of African origin who learned the language were known as *ladinos*, those who did not were called *bozales*, and were the target of mockery for their pronunciation.¹⁰⁴ Knowledge of the local language made slave women both more valuable on the marketplace and more expensive to ransom.¹⁰⁵

In the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, Maria, the daughter of exiles from Granada resident in Crete, lived as a crypto-Muslim for eleven years before being captured by the galleys of the Order of Saint Stephen, taken to Livorno, and sold into slavery to a “catholic and pious” family in Montecatini, just outside Pistoia. Maria lived and worked in great intimacy with the family, who “reared her in the Christian customs of Jesus Christ” for six years. By the time she appeared before the Inquisition in Florence to abjure Islam in 1616, she was able to give her testimony “in a good Italian.”¹⁰⁶ A parallel to domestic slavery was household service, where girls and women predominated. In 1668, Raosava, a Ragusan noble’s Slavic servant, testified in Italian in a case before the archbishop’s court; a year later another woman testified in the same tribunal, once again in Italian.¹⁰⁷ (In another legal context, a Greek widow on the island of Cephalonia [Kéfalonia] testified in Italian, but had the complex probate language of the relevant documentation “interpreted for her in Greek so she could better understand it.”¹⁰⁸) In another setting, a young German servant girl to an Austrian military officer on the Ottoman-Habsburg front, functioned as linguistic intermediary with an Ottoman slave through a combination of German, broken Wallachian, and gestures.¹⁰⁹ Language skills could make female servants more employable, in part because they could provide

¹⁰¹ Larguèche, 81.

¹⁰² Blumenthal, 141.

¹⁰³ Martín-Casares and Delaigue, 219.

¹⁰⁴ Phillips, 73, 150.

¹⁰⁵ Martín-Casares, 232; Ressel, 533.

¹⁰⁶ Archivio arcivescovile di Firenze, Tribunale dell’inquisizione, b. 5, 22 Dec. 1616, cc. 444^r–446^r.

¹⁰⁷ Arhiv Dubrovačke Biskupije, Processus civilium et criminalium, Signature 1, r. 1, 11 Oct. 1668, 27 Aug. 1669.

¹⁰⁸ Genika Archeia tou Kratous, Archeia Nomou Kefallinias, Reggimento di Cefalonia, series 1, subseries 24, b. 142, binder 2-8A, 1 March 1768, cc. 2^v–3^r.

¹⁰⁹ Hitzel, 42–43.

instruction and practice for family members or be useful in negotiating multilingual exigencies.¹¹⁰

There were other largely female settings in which linguistic mixing among women took place. In Malta, an elderly Greek widow from Rhodes worked at “predicting things to come [and] as a healer.” She reported to the Inquisition that she had learned her art from an Italian woman, and had also learned “lingua franca,” though she spoke it somewhat haltingly. She may have known some Maltese by necessity because of her work with women who spoke these languages.¹¹¹ Another diviner from Sicily taught Maltese girls actions and words to gain insight into their romantic relationships.¹¹² A Maltese healer, *Vincentia*, hosted slaves from throughout the Mediterranean who came to her home for treatment, while *Margarita Bertone* provided recipes against love magic with ingredients expressed to her clientele in both Maltese and Italian.¹¹³ Eighty-year-old *Betta Caloiro* recounted a lengthy curing incantation that was a garbled amalgam of Italian, Castilian, and Latin, all languages that were widely used in Malta’s port areas.¹¹⁴ The line between healer and witch was paper-thin in the seventeenth century, and in Malta many foreigners, in particular Muslim slaves, were prosecuted for sorcery.¹¹⁵ Simple knowledge of foreign languages was widely considered a sign of diabolic possession.¹¹⁶

SACRED AND PROFANE SPACES

Another important multilingual context to consider is the sex trade. Contemporary scholarship has illustrated the nexus of sex work and language for women (and men), and there are parallels in the early modern Mediterranean.¹¹⁷ Rome has been particularly well researched: its population in 1600 numbered over 100,000 inhabitants, many of whom were “*forestieri e stranieri*,” migrants and foreigners who together constituted “an abiding feature” of early modern Roman society.¹¹⁸ In a description that seems apt

¹¹⁰ Gallagher, 18–19.

¹¹¹ Cathedral Archives, Mdina, AIM, *Processi e denunzie*, b. 16A, 19 May 1599, cc. 464^{F-V}; AIM, *Processi e denunzie*, b. 16A, 21 May 1599, c. 471^V.

¹¹² Cassar, 1993, 324.

¹¹³ Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (hereafter HMML), Cathedral Archives, Mdina, *Archivium Inquisitionis Melitensia, Processi e denunzie*, 147 A, cc. 139^{F-V}, 11 Sept 1599 (HMML project number AIMPR 00006 Box A); Cassar, 2001, 272.

¹¹⁴ Cassar, 1996, 43–44.

¹¹⁵ Knutsen, 185–86; Cassar, 1996, 12, 16.

¹¹⁶ Foa, 53.

¹¹⁷ Piller and Takahashi, 546.

¹¹⁸ Fosi, 172–73.

for the Mediterranean as a whole, Elizabeth Cohen describes Rome as a city “full of strangers where people improvised alliances and networks with compatriots, co-workers, and neighbors to solve the problems of everyday living that in a less fluid society might more usually have fallen to family.”¹¹⁹ This intense mixing had significant linguistic implications.¹²⁰ Rome was “the most male of European cities”: male clerics, soldiers, servants, artisans, traders, diplomats, and laborers all combined to produce a “sharply skewed sex ratio” of almost a third less women than men.¹²¹ While the estimate that one in five women in Rome were involved in the sex trade is seriously overinflated, there is no question that there were significant numbers of women who sold sex at various moments in their lives, and the distinction between a *donna onesta* and a *meretrice* could be quite fluid and “murky” depending on changing circumstances. Most prostitutes did not ply their trade walking the streets, but rather were women who “entertained men, socially as well as sexually,” not in clear-cut red-light districts, but rather in their own houses located in typical working-class neighborhoods in which they were both integrated and marginalized.¹²²

By its very nature, prostitution in Rome was characterized by intense intercultural mixing, with both prostitutes and their clients coming from throughout Europe, the Mediterranean, and beyond. A character in Francisco Delicado’s (1480–1535) *El retrato de la Loçana Andaluza* (The Portrait of Lozana the Andalusian, 1528) declares that Rome’s prostitutes come from “all nations,” and then reels off a list of nearly seventy cities, regions, and countries from which the women hailed. Italians dominate, followed by Spanish and French, but the list also includes “English, Flemish, Germans, Slavonians and Albanians, Cretans, Bohemians, Hungarians, Poles . . . and Greeks.”¹²³ Aretino gives a similarly international list in his *Ragionamenti* (Dialogues, 1534–36).¹²⁴ Recent studies support this loosely fictionalized snapshot; one estimates that 70 percent of Roman prostitutes from 1590 to 1630 came from outside the Papal States, with 7 percent coming from beyond Italy: thirty-seven from France, twenty-seven from Spain, and smaller numbers from England, Greece, Germany, Malta, and Flanders.¹²⁵ Legal records of the day provide a glimpse of the city’s richly diverse neighborhoods and their

¹¹⁹ E. Cohen, 2008, 297.

¹²⁰ Trifone, 48–54.

¹²¹ Varriano, 119; E. Cohen, 2008, 297.

¹²² E. Cohen, 2007, 99. See also Storey, 116–26; E. Cohen, 1998, 407–08; E. Cohen, 2008, 302–03, 310.

¹²³ Delicado, 107–08.

¹²⁴ Aretino, 356–58.

¹²⁵ Storey, 125–27, 252–55. Also, Gnoli, 185–216.

female social networks and households, such as that of a Greek noblewoman, Despina q. Nicolai Basaraba, who lived on the Corso. She had servants from several different parts of Italy, a friend from Istanbul who lived with her, French and Portuguese neighbors, an absentee French husband and a Roman lover, and she spoke and wrote at a minimum Greek and Italian.¹²⁶ The network of Lucrezia, another Greek courtesan, one of whose clients was Cardinal Lorenzo Strozzi (1513–71), included two Siense women who lived in her home; women from Padua, Tuscany, Naples, France, and Greece; and a widow from Lombardy whose husband was Spanish. All except for the latter plied her same trade.¹²⁷ Other records mention Roman and Dutch prostitutes living together,¹²⁸ as well as multilingual, German-speaking Swiss.¹²⁹

The men who frequented these women were a similarly diverse group: Jews, conversos, Moors, Moriscos, Christians, Romans, travelers, churchmen, soldiers, laborers, and slaves arrived in the Eternal City from all points of the compass. The locales of these encounters were, as Natalie Zemon Davis describes them, spaces in which “foods, spices, information, gossip, sex, textiles, remedies, money, jewels, and garments” were all exchanged.¹³⁰ Beyond simple sexual transactions, women often “dined with their clients,” and provided “conversation, games, even music or poetry,” almost always in the company of other men and women.¹³¹ Within these ever-changing, culturally diverse settings, communication was essential and presented challenges similar to those in other multilingual milieus. Lozana, the well-traveled protagonist of Delicado’s picaresque novel, declared that there were not as many languages in Babylon¹³² in order to communicate with her highly varied clientele, coworkers, and neighbors, it was necessary to “tailor . . . my speech to the sound of my ears.” The “sexualized interlinguistic communication”¹³³ of these exchanges and transactions was not accomplished in a “perfect Castilian,” Lozana reports, but rather “a mixed speech,” a hybrid language, a type of prostitute patois or lingua franca that incorporated “Spanish phrases, Catalan, Portuguese, Italian, even an Arab word once in a while.”¹³⁴ Two

¹²⁶ Archivio di stato di Roma, Tribunale criminale del Governatore—Processi, b. 26, 24 May 1603–30 June 1603, cc. 617^r–666^v.

¹²⁷ Cohen and Cohen, 46, 189–95.

¹²⁸ Archivio di stato di Roma, Tribunale criminale del Governatore—Processi, b. 312, 16 Oct 1597, c. 634^v.

¹²⁹ Tosi, 157–58.

¹³⁰ N. Z. Davis, 210.

¹³¹ E. Cohen, 1991, 206.

¹³² Delicado, 228.

¹³³ P. Cohen, 422.

¹³⁴ N. Z. Davis, 210.

examples from other contexts include the fictional tale of the Czech woman Courage, which offers a parallel account of a multilingual prostitute whose linguistic skills play a decisive role in her adventurous life,¹³⁵ and the practice of both prostitutes and clients in Paris to seek out and offer French language training as a precursor to sex.¹³⁶

Though less well documented, prostitution in Istanbul and other Ottoman urban centers, such as Cairo, seems to have had a similarly diverse mix of clients, with both slave and free female and male prostitutes, who came from a cross-section of the Mediterranean's religions and cultures.¹³⁷ An eighteenth-century traveler made the undoubtedly exaggerated claim that there were forty thousand prostitutes in Istanbul; another reported that a brothel in Istanbul housed hundreds of women, including Georgians, Jews, Maronites, Greeks, Italians, Circassians, and Armenians.¹³⁸ The extensive Venetian sex trade historically had a similarly diverse clientele and mix of sex workers:¹³⁹ Greek and Slav prostitutes congregated in the area near the Arsenale,¹⁴⁰ and both young girls and married women were seduced and trafficked from the mainland and as far away as Istria, then tricked or forced into prostitution.¹⁴¹ As a result, Venetian courtesans "specialized in speaking a number of different languages."¹⁴² Evidence from Livorno, Mantua, Florence, Ferrara, and Naples suggests a similarly cosmopolitan makeup of prostitutes and patrons, and an attendant linguistically rich environment.¹⁴³ Even in the minor Dalmatian coastal town of Nona (Nin), a Greek woman named La Silvestrina was one of two courtesans noted as living in the community.¹⁴⁴

The situation was similar in Malta, where women came from across the Mediterranean. Nicolas de Nicolay noted in his influential sixteenth-century travel narrative that the most noteworthy sight in the main town of Borgo was its "great number of Greek, Italian, Spanish, Moorish and Maltese courtesans," and their scant clothing, which was reproduced in a suggestive woodcut.¹⁴⁵ One of these was Vittoria, the nineteen-year-old "daughter of a

¹³⁵ Grimmshausen, 27–29.

¹³⁶ P. Cohen, 409, 415–16.

¹³⁷ Sariyanis; Winter, 224–25; Zarinebaf, 2010, 26, 87–93; Fiume, 45–46.

¹³⁸ Oddens, 189; Angelomatis-Tsougarakis, 348.

¹³⁹ P. Clarke, 423–24, 434–35, 448–49; Davidson, 68–69; Horodowich, 175, 186–87.

¹⁴⁰ R. C. Davis, 1991, 106.

¹⁴¹ Ruggiero, 41–42; Labalme, 237.

¹⁴² Tosi, 157.

¹⁴³ Archivio storico diocesano di Pisa, Tribunale dell'inquisizione, f. 5, 17 Nov 1610, c. 22^r; Cummins, 49–50; Grimmshausen, 111; Mazzi, 107–35.

¹⁴⁴ Arhiv Zadarske Nadbiskupije, Sudski spisi, k. 2, 14 July 1708.

¹⁴⁵ De Nicolay, 35. Also, Cassar, 2009, 15.

Moorish slave,” who participated in the neighborhood networks of gossip in the intensely multilingual world of early modern Valletta.¹⁴⁶

In counterpoint to the profane locales of prostitution, convents were often multilingual sacred spaces that housed women from diverse backgrounds, such as the thirty-seven exiled English Bridgettine nuns who were transferred from Rouen to a convent in Portugal during the final stages of the French Wars of Religion.¹⁴⁷ Since they generally did not speak Latin, it is intriguing to speculate about the ways in which English, French, and Portuguese nuns may have communicated.¹⁴⁸ Emilie Murphy’s work on the exiled English convents in France and the Low Countries provides some sense of how this might have looked. While there was occasionally resistance from certain ecclesiastical authorities to nuns learning local languages,¹⁴⁹ more often multilingual nuns were sought after to act as interpreters among the sisters, for monolingual confessors and patrons, and with merchants, suppliers, laborers, and others from the surrounding communities. Within the convent walls, nuns taught each other their respective languages, petitioned to be given language instruction, and in some instances were obliged to dedicate a set amount of time daily to language study. Young girls were sent by their parents to convents to learn languages, and promising novices were dispatched to other convents to refine their language skills. Local lay sisters were also part of this linguistic mix: they served as intermediaries to the local communities but also learned English from the nuns. These convents were, in the end, “highly multilingual spaces” and “porous sites of polyglot encounter” in which women interacted regularly and extensively with a range of “foreign-language speakers,” and acquired new languages and “other means to negotiate their language barriers.”¹⁵⁰

There are examples of multilingual religious women in other contexts: in Erfurt, German-speaking nuns learned French in the Ursuline convent there, and Ursulines in North America learned multiple native languages in order to teach students in their convent schools.¹⁵¹ An Italian priest resident for a time in Lyon provided Italian language instruction to the convent’s abbess and pupils.¹⁵² Diasporic religious communities also presented opportunities for nonelite women to acquire new languages,¹⁵³ such as the daughter of a

¹⁴⁶ Cathedral Archives of Mdina, AIM, Processi e denunzie, b. 15A, 20 Dec. 1596, cc. 521^r–527^r; AIM, Processi e denunzie, b. 16A, 16 Nov. 1598–30 June 1599, cc. 329^r–452^v.

¹⁴⁷ Biblioteca Vaticana, Urb. Lat., 1062, c. 407^v; Kelly, 5.

¹⁴⁸ Sanson, 2014a.

¹⁴⁹ Kelly, 12.

¹⁵⁰ Murphy, 2020, 135, 142–59; Murphy, 2019, 125.

¹⁵¹ Evangelisti, 38, 187–88.

¹⁵² P. Cohen, 408.

¹⁵³ R. Smith, 186–87.

Milanese friar and nun who fled to Geneva, where she learned French and worked in a pharmacy.¹⁵⁴ In 1610, three female slaves in Livorno converted and were transferred to live in a convent,¹⁵⁵ while two Ottoman slave girls from Hungary and Transylvania, captured during the early stages of the so-called Great Turkish War, were educated in a convent before joining their noble mistress at court in Vienna.¹⁵⁶ Along the Dalmatian coast, Mihale Šatoroviće, a young Muslim woman who fled her parents' home in the Ottoman fortress of Clissa (Klis), spent five years in the Venetian Casa delle Zitelle, where she added Italian to her native Slavic and Turkish,¹⁵⁷ and she was followed a few years later by another Muslim woman from Clissa, who entered a Venetian convent and eventually took vows.¹⁵⁸

Women sometimes served as interpreters for other women who struggled to understand sermons in languages with which they were less familiar. On the island of Gozo near Malta, Isabetta Caravana functioned as a sort of linguistic intermediary for the women of her neighborhood who struggled to understand the homily during Mass. She “recited to them in our language [Maltese] what the preacher said” in Italian.¹⁵⁹ This was not an uncommon occurrence: when a Jesuit preacher in Ragusa attempted to preach in Italian, the devout women of Ragusa requested that he “deliver his commentaries on the Gospel in Croatian,” rather than Italian, so that they could understand.¹⁶⁰ The issue may not have been entirely linguistic: there is evidence of individuals explaining the meaning of concepts during sermons that were presented in their mother tongue.¹⁶¹

TRAVELERS AND AMBASSADRESSES

As this survey of domestic and other types of circumscribed settings suggests, early modern women in the Mediterranean were not confined to private spaces—on the contrary, they often moved about quite freely.¹⁶² Many, perhaps most, were engaged in a wide variety of public economic activities, often in support of their families.¹⁶³ In the Ottoman Empire, for example, women filled an

¹⁵⁴ P. Cohen, 413.

¹⁵⁵ Nadalo, 298, 320n91.

¹⁵⁶ Hitzel, 133–35.

¹⁵⁷ Dursteler, 2011, 73.

¹⁵⁸ Rothman, 377.

¹⁵⁹ HMML, Cathedral Archives, Mdina, Archivium Inquisitionis Melitensia, Processi e denunzie, 147 A, cc. 52^{r-v}, 4 May 1599 (HMML project number AIMPR 00006 Box A).

¹⁶⁰ Harris, 248.

¹⁶¹ Del Col, 70.

¹⁶² Von Tippelskirch and Villani, 5.

¹⁶³ E. Cohen, 2008, 307–08; Brown; R. C. Davis, 1998, 31–37; Ben-Naeh, 331.

“active role” in both the rural and urban economies.¹⁶⁴ Kate Fleet has identified what she calls “a women-to-women market” in which women publicly participated in a wide range of economic activities directed at or primarily dealing with and producing goods for other women.¹⁶⁵ Similar to male merchants and artisans, these pursuits regularly placed women in diverse language contexts and had a significant impact on their linguistic capacity.

In his treatise on travel, Jerome Turler (1550–1602) noted that Dutch women “traveil also unto ye furthermost partes of the world to trafacque and occupy Merchandize.”¹⁶⁶ A French soldier and former slave recounted the story of a Jewish woman who “traffick’d in Jewels in the best houses of Constantinople,” and among visitors to the city: “Her access was the more easie, because she spake Spanish perfectly well, which, . . . is at this day a language common to all the Jews in Greece.”¹⁶⁷ In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France, Spanish immigrant women were more actively involved in commerce than Portuguese women in part because of their superior command of their new French language, which in turn made them less reliant on interpreters.¹⁶⁸ Writing about the small Ottoman island of Milos in the Aegean Sea, Bernard Randolph (b. 1643) and Francesco Piacenza (1637–87) both reported that the majority of the women both spoke and instructed their children “in the Italian language,” and sometimes even Turkish, because of the island’s extensive trading linkages throughout the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁶⁹ Many slave women, if not in service, “were spinners and embroiderers, produced foodstuffs, labored in artisan workshops, [and] in the fields,” where they were compelled to navigate plurilingual circumstances.¹⁷⁰ Women with artisanal knowledge were also in demand: both Catherine (1519–89) and Marie de’ Medici (1575–1642) actively sought young Ottoman women skilled in embroidery as slaves and servants, and Marie even established an embroidery workshop in the Louvre staffed by several such women.¹⁷¹

Boccaccio’s story of Gostanza from the fifth day of *The Decameron* seems relevant here. Mad with desperation over a lost love, Gostanza casts herself into a small boat from her island home of Lipari, north of Sicily, and is eventually washed ashore in Tunisia. There she is found by a woman from Trapani

¹⁶⁴ Zarinebaf, 2001, 141.

¹⁶⁵ Fleet, 122–23.

¹⁶⁶ Turler, 8–9.

¹⁶⁷ De Guillatiere, 66.

¹⁶⁸ Brunelle, 160.

¹⁶⁹ Piacenza, 273–74; Randolph, 32–34.

¹⁷⁰ Fiume, 52–53.

¹⁷¹ Duverdier, 331; Mansel, 109; Vaughan, 132.

who initially speaks to her in Latin and then introduces her to an Arab woman, who takes Gostanza into her household. The young woman lives there for a time with “several other women, without any men, and all worked with their hands at various crafts, making items of silk, palm-fiber, and leather.” Working alongside these older women, Gostanza soon learned all these skills, and “with them teaching her,” Boccaccio writes, “she quickly learned their language.”¹⁷² The potential of women to provide language instruction was also noted in other global contexts of linguistic encounter.¹⁷³

While sometimes viewed as immobile Penelopes who faithfully remained at home while men ventured abroad, women have been “always on the move,” and thus need to be reintegrated into a “more dynamic” history of women and travel.¹⁷⁴ The early modern era was an age of female mobility, and this was particularly accentuated in the Mediterranean, where women regularly and in growing numbers moved across the region, both voluntarily and involuntarily; this mobility had significant linguistic implications for women.¹⁷⁵ For instance, the Portuguese friar Pantaleão de Aveiro, who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1565, described “a chance encounter” at Shiloah pool outside Jerusalem, where a broad cross-section of women gathered to do their laundry and bathe. He and several other religious tried to explore a bathhouse adjacent to the pool, but were driven from the building by a group of women shouting at them in Arabic. One of the women, seeing they were foreigners and Christians, spoke to them in a mix of Spanish and Italian. When de Aveiro replied in Castilian, they “fell into a friendly conversation.” The woman was Jewish and from Rosetta, Egypt, though her family was originally from Toledo.¹⁷⁶ Such multilingualism among Jewish women was common: Christian Spaniards described encountering Sephardim throughout the Mediterranean who “continued to employ a Spanish vernacular that was ‘as good or better than their own,’”¹⁷⁷ and among the small Jewish community in Trent, some women were bi- or trilingual.¹⁷⁸

Mobility “characterized the way of life and the habitus” of elite European women during the early modern era, though this has been understudied, in part because scholars have privileged published men’s travel narratives over

¹⁷² Boccaccio, 614. Also, Heffernan, 38–40.

¹⁷³ Karttunen, 216, 226.

¹⁷⁴ Winn, 124; Rogers and Thébaud, 7.

¹⁷⁵ Von Tippelskirch and Villani, 10, 13; Campbell and Larsen, 4.

¹⁷⁶ Ray, 139.

¹⁷⁷ Ray, 139. See also Ben-Naeh, 413.

¹⁷⁸ Hsia, 16, 115.

women's memoirs and letters.¹⁷⁹ Just as it was for men, language acquisition was an important element of women's travel motivations and experiences. For example, in 1691 the French noblewoman and noted writer Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, Baroness d'Aulnoy (1651–1705), composed an engaging account of her travels in Spain, which enjoyed a “lasting success” and is considered one of the most important early modern accounts of the Iberian peninsula.¹⁸⁰ She was quite interested in language, and reported that “I have learnt several Languages, or at least understand the first Rudiments of them.” One of her chief objectives during her travels was “endeavouring to make some Progress” with her Spanish. In one conversation d'Aulnoy told an Iberian woman that she “spoke Spanish ill enough, but [she] had a great mind to learn to speak it well.” Over time, her Spanish improved to the point that she began including translations in her letters to friends in France. Of Spanish she wrote, “It pleases me extremely, it is expressive, noble, and grave. Love finds it commodious for its work, and can play the fool prettily enough in it.”¹⁸¹ Other “female language-learning travelers” include Helen Britton, who traveled to St. Omer to visit a cousin and “to see these countries & learn French,” and the Best sisters whose father sent them to Antwerp to “live in these parts . . . to learn the language.” As one eighteenth-century observer noted, the English “send their daughters every day to France, to learn the language.”¹⁸²

In 1616, the Roman adventurer Pietro della Valle (1586–1652) married an eighteen-year-old Syrian Nestorian Christian woman in Baghdad, Sitti Maani Joerida (1598–1621). Despite her youth, Maani was already well traveled and, in della Valle's words, “extraordinarily intelligent.” She became his companion and advisor in travels across Persia and India, including observing the Battle of Sufyan in 1618 with Shah Abbas I (1571–1609). Maani died following a miscarriage in 1620, and della Valle had her embalmed and carried her body with him for several years, until returning to Rome where he buried her.¹⁸³ He describes his polyglot wife's abilities with great admiration. There was “no language, no matter how foreign, that [she] could not learn in a very short time,” he claimed in her funeral oration. Her birth tongue was Arabic, but she also spoke Turkish, which was the language they spoke with each other, since as della Valle admitted, “to this point I knew little Arabic.” In addition, she

¹⁷⁹ Nolde, 60–61.

¹⁸⁰ Defourneaux, 230. The debate on whether d'Aulnoy ever traveled to Spain now seems largely resolved in the affirmative. On this, see Guenther; M. Palmer; Courteault.

¹⁸¹ Madame d'Aulnoy, 116–17, 193.

¹⁸² Murphy, 2020, 148–49.

¹⁸³ Bianconi, xxii–xxiii (quotation), xxix–xxx; Rubiés, 355n9; Bonello, 27, 30; Cardini, 20–22.

learned Persian, Chaldean, Kurdish, Armenian, Georgian, Italian, Portuguese, Latin, and “Indian.”¹⁸⁴ While few could measure up to this level of linguistic virtuosity, other noted examples include Elizabeth Hartley Clarke, the Venetian adventurer Nicolò Manuzzi’s (1638–1720) polyglot English-Portuguese wife, about whom very little is known;¹⁸⁵ and Elizabeth Marsh (1735–85), about whom a great deal is known thanks to Linda Colley’s excellent biography, who, in addition to her native English, spoke French and Catalan.¹⁸⁶

Another form of women’s extended experience abroad was that of the wives of ambassadors and other diplomats—particularly French, English, and Dutch—who regularly accompanied their husbands to Mediterranean postings and who became immersed in the linguistic ecology of these lands.¹⁸⁷ Mary Wortley Montagu, the polyglot twenty-seven-year-old wife of the English ambassador to the Porte, is the most well known.¹⁸⁸ She devoted every Wednesday to “studying the Turkish language,” and declared herself “already very learned” in it; she eventually became proficient enough to be able to converse at length with women in the harems that she visited.¹⁸⁹ There were many other women in the Levant, however, who were more linguistically skilled and had a much more profound impact. Clarissa Catherine de Hochepped (1736–66), daughter of the Dutch ambassador to the Porte, in 1755 married James Porter (1710–86), the English ambassador to Istanbul, and resided in the capital at length. In addition to Dutch, which she considered “my language,” she spoke French, English, and German.¹⁹⁰ A contemporary who knew her well reported that that she also “understand[s] and speak[s] the Greek language excellently,” and it is quite likely that she spoke Turkish too.¹⁹¹ Her socio-diplomatic network extended broadly as well, reaching all the way to Moldavia, where she met with a Greek friend from Istanbul who was married to a local official.¹⁹²

Clarissa’s great grandmother, Clara Catharina de Hochepped (1662–1733), was the daughter of another Dutch ambassador in Istanbul, Justinus Colyer (1624–82), and the wife of the Dutch consul in Smirne (Izmir) and founder of a Levantine family dynasty,¹⁹³ Daniël Jan de Hochepped (1727–96), with

¹⁸⁴ Rocchi, 119–20. See also della Valle, 399–400.

¹⁸⁵ See Shulman’s foreword in Subrahmanyam, ix.

¹⁸⁶ Colley, 2007, 27, 55.

¹⁸⁷ Winn; Dursteler, 2006, 93.

¹⁸⁸ Tosi, 251.

¹⁸⁹ Montagu, 75, 103 (quotations), 119; Faroqhi, 125.

¹⁹⁰ Porter, 382, 385, 390 (quotation), 396–97.

¹⁹¹ Boscovich, 26. See also, Hill, 73–75.

¹⁹² Boscovich, 107.

¹⁹³ De Groot, 39, 51.

whom she had a staggering eighteen children. The French traveler Jean Dumont (1667–1727) met Clara in Smirne and described her as “the honor of the European nation because of her beauty, her bearing, her noble honorable manners, and above all, her spirit, which is altogether out of the ordinary.” He made particular note of her incredible linguistic skills: “she possesses seven languages [another observer claimed ten¹⁹⁴] among the most difficult and exacting in the world. Dutch is her natural language, French, Italian, Greek, Russian, Turkish, and Arabic.” If she were to learn Latin and Hebrew, Dumont opined, “she will be able to instruct the most capable language professors that we have in Europe.”¹⁹⁵

Despite the widespread view among contemporaries that “women were a serious liability in diplomacy” and were fit only to manage the household and organize entertainments, these women did not simply function as ambassadorial ornaments.¹⁹⁶ Rather, like other early modern women they engaged in a sort of vernacular diplomacy:¹⁹⁷ they served as non-institutional, informal actors who played critical roles as intermediaries, patrons, negotiators, alliance builders, and information brokers.¹⁹⁸ Drawing on family and social networks, their gender allowed these Mediterranean women to operate beneath “the radar of surveillance” as they utilized “secondary patronage activities,” including “formal visiting rituals”; informal encounters; “hospitality, and gift-giving”; and multilingual webs of correspondence, all of which provided them with unique and valuable sources of information and power that were inaccessible to men.¹⁹⁹ Rather than a barrier, their sex and status served as a form of passport that granted them access and influence.²⁰⁰

This is evident in the case of Clara Catharina de Hochepeid. In his 1698 narrative *Reizen van Cornelis de Bruyn door de vermaardste Deelen van Klein Asia* (The travels of Cornelis de Bruyn through the most famous parts of Asia Minor), the Dutch artist and traveler Cornelis de Bruijn (1652–1727) described watching an Ottoman procession with the young Clara and her ambassador father. As they returned home, a disagreement arose between the ambassador’s servants and those of an Ottoman official. When the confrontation began to escalate, he wrote, Clara, “who understands the Turkish language very well and was dressed in the Turkish way,” intervened with “amicable

¹⁹⁴ Myller, 461.

¹⁹⁵ Dumont, 2:366–67.

¹⁹⁶ Berridge, 2011, 132–33. See also Do Paço, 1–5.

¹⁹⁷ Radway, 33–36.

¹⁹⁸ James and Sluga, 1.

¹⁹⁹ Daybell, 101–02, 114; Peirce, 1992, 44; James and Sluga, 3.

²⁰⁰ McCarthy and Southern, 20.

words” and effectively defused the tense situation.²⁰¹ Several years later, when her brother, Jacobus Colyer (1657–1725), succeeded their father as ambassador, she visited him in Edirne and had “a most remarkable meeting” with Mustafa II’s (1664–1703) mother, Valide Gülnüş Sultan (1642–1715), and his first wife, the Hasseki Sultan. Clara Catherina encountered the imperial women while they were riding in a coach, and the Valide Sultan had Clara Catherina draw her coach “nearer to theirs, and [they] had a long conversation with her.” Colyer reported that when the Ottoman women departed, “my sister and her company were presented with exquisitely embroidered handkerchiefs (in one of these a large number of Moorish ducats was hidden) . . . it is an event never heard of before, and the most signal honour ever shown to anyone in this country: for these Empresses never appear in public, let alone that they would talk to anyone.”²⁰² These connections in the imperial harem later proved useful when Clara obtained a firman to build a church in Pera, in place of the provisional one that had been used for years. This was a significant accomplishment, as Ottoman law strictly forbade the construction of any new Christian houses of worship in the capital, and some existing churches had previously been transformed into mosques.²⁰³

In Smirne, Clara Catherina was known as the Madame of Holland, as Angelicus Maria Myller, a Bohemian cleric who visited Smirne in late 1726, reported.²⁰⁴ She was, he wrote, “an old woman of shrewd intelligence and Amazonian heroism” who had “acquired tremendous renown among Christians and Turks alike, particularly because she is completely proficient and well versed in ten languages, and wisely assists any and all with word and deed. She is thus universally spoken of with respect and dignity not just here in Smirne, but also in Constantinople.”²⁰⁵ She also handled correspondence in her husband’s absence, arranged for valuable imperial privileges to be awarded to members of her retinue, intervened to help save a troubled Franciscan mission on Chios, and when her ambassador brother died she was heavily involved in the settlement of his estate, to the point that the grand vizier ordered her not to leave Istanbul because of disputes over her handling of certain valuable assets.²⁰⁶

Clara Rigo provides another example of the ways that multilingual women functioned as important diplomatic players in eighteenth-century Istanbul.

²⁰¹ De Bruyn, 150–51.

²⁰² Erdbrink, 37. See also Heylen, 26.

²⁰³ Van Droffelaar, 109.

²⁰⁴ Schur, 151.

²⁰⁵ Myller, 461.

²⁰⁶ Chen, 82n41; Erdbrink, 83–85, 203; Baars, 166; Heylen, 27; Cornelissen, 732–34.

Clara was the daughter of a dragoman and granddaughter of a Dutch consul and his elite Latin-rite Ottoman wife; in 1723 she married Jean-Louis Rigo (ca. 1686–1756), the Levantine secretary to the Dutch mission in Istanbul. This was a good marriage, as his wife brought to their marriage “a highly prized extended news network.”²⁰⁷ Clara Rigo traveled freely throughout the international suburb of Galata and in Istanbul where she was a regular visitor to the harems of high Ottoman officials and socialized with influential Ottoman women during boat trips on the Bosphorus. These were not simple social calls; rather, she functioned as “an unofficial envoy who conveyed news from the Dutch embassy to Ottoman ministers.” She also acted as “an unofficial news gatherer” who extracted information, rumors, and gossip from her discussions of political affairs with both high Ottoman officials and the women of their households and reported these back to the Dutch delegation. Although she was not an official member of the diplomatic staff, “unofficially she was one of the Dutch ambassador’s major sources of information.” Clara Rigo also used her connections to assist Dutch officials in private matters, including personally conducting real estate negotiations with Ottoman men. Far from remaining in the background as an “invisible woman,” because of her linguistic and cultural skills, and her extensive network of both male and female associations, Clara Rigo became a key asset for the Dutch embassy.²⁰⁸

These activities were not limited to the Dutch mission. In March 1736, the *kapudanpasha* (admiral of the Ottoman fleet) dropped by the French embassy unexpectedly, and while waiting for Ambassador Louis-Sauveur de Villeneuve (1675–1745) to arrive, was received by his wife, Anne de Bausset (ca. 1680–1766), “alone and without a dragoman.” They conversed, apparently in Italian, which the Ottoman spoke brokenly and had likely learned during his days as a corsair, and she presented him with several gifts, including a watch. Afterward he declared that his “principle objective [had been] to make her acquaintance,” and that “the reception of the ambassadress was worth much more than that of the ambassador.”²⁰⁹ Mary Wortley Montagu paid visits to the harems of a number of Ottoman officials, with and without interpreters. Such visits were commonplace: stretching back to the first decade of the seventeenth century, English ambassadors’ wives (and sometimes children) often accompanied their husbands to the Porte, and regularly had private audiences with influential Ottoman court women and received visits from other women from the community in their embassy homes.²¹⁰ For instance, in an attempt to

²⁰⁷ Baars, 155.

²⁰⁸ Baars, 157–58, 170. See also Slot, 14.

²⁰⁹ Vandal, 251–52.

²¹⁰ Berridge, 2009, 36–37.

repair a strained relationship with the grand vizier, Thomas Glover sent his wife, Anne Lambe (d. 1608), to call on the official's wife at her home with rich gifts.²¹¹ These sorts of "female network[s]" were of particular importance in the Ottoman Empire where women diplomats had unique access to harems and other restricted areas that men could never hope to visit.²¹²

There is evidence of similar situations in other contexts: in the British Isles multilingual women performed similar roles as interpreters and informal representatives because of their linguistic abilities, which were in some instances superior to those of the official male diplomats they accompanied.²¹³ One woman, for instance, who was in the entourage of the Spanish ambassador to England, was suspected of serving in some secret diplomatic capacity because "she can speak as good Spanish as if she had been born in Spain; [and] good Irish and English."²¹⁴ In a similar vein, Anne Fanshawe (1625–80), wife of the English ambassador to Spain in the mid-seventeenth century, "manipulated contemporary gender prejudices" and employed "female networks of sociability," correspondence, conversation, formal visits, and gift exchange to advance the embassy's diplomatic objectives.²¹⁵ And finally, the bride of Charles IX (1550–74), Elisabeth of Austria (1554–92), was accompanied by Margaret de la Marck (1527–99), who was selected by Emperor Maximilian II (1527–76) because of her linguistic abilities and "intimate knowledge of France and its 'morals,'" in addition to her "international network of friends and family."²¹⁶

CONCLUSIONS

As this broad range of impressionistic evidence makes clear, the early modern Mediterranean was a dynamic and culturally complex space of linguistic mixing in which language boundaries were unfixed, overlapping, and fluid. This situation was a product of both the sea's location at the intersection of three continents and three major religious traditions, but also its intensely connected and intertwined nature. The Mediterranean "contact zone" was a linguistic "community of practice," and one of its chief characteristics was the "instrumental use of the language."²¹⁷ In such a space multilingual discourse was a widespread result of and response to the immediate exigencies of communication.

²¹¹ De Gontaut Biron, 143; de Mun, 49. On another ambassador's wife, Katherine Trumbell, see Ghobrial, 119–20.

²¹² Kühnel, 140, 142 (quotation).

²¹³ Laurence, 25–26.

²¹⁴ W. Palmer, 703–04.

²¹⁵ James and Sluga, 4.

²¹⁶ Marini, 52, 47.

²¹⁷ Tagliaferri, 165.

While situations such as Maria ter Meetelen's first audiences with the sultan required a linguistically and culturally fluent intermediary, these sorts of high-stakes, formal scenarios were exceptional. The more mundane reality in this "intensely plurilingual" environment was that people were accustomed to encountering substantial linguistic diversity on a daily basis, and it was considered neither insurmountable nor disorienting. Women and men unable to pass a modern language exam developed a set of both verbal and nonverbal communication strategies and techniques to bridge these linguistic fissures well enough to achieve their primary objective, "effective communication."²¹⁸ In these commonplace settings, necessity was the mother of all communication: language functioned as "a tool for getting . . . things done,"²¹⁹ and communicative competence, rather than "linguistic virtuosity," was the order of the day.²²⁰ Sociolinguists characterize this as ordinary language, the nonstandard, everyday sort of speech that does not meet official norms and often happens outside of institutional settings such as courts, churches, and schools, where more formal, institutional languages are required.²²¹ This is the type of speech characterized by a French woman that Madame d'Aulnoy met, who had long lived in Castille, and had evolved her own hybrid that "mixe[d] Italian, English, and Spanish with her own Natural Language."²²²

The view of Mary Wortley Montagu may serve as a counterpoint to the observations of Giustinian on the intersection of language and gender with which this article began. Over the course of her two-year residency in Istanbul, she wrote a series of letters describing in vivid detail her experiences and impressions of the Ottoman world. These represent one of the most fascinating accounts of Ottoman society and culture, not only because they provide a rare woman's perspective, but also because of the perspicacity of her observations. Upon her arrival in the Ottoman capital, she took up residence at the English embassy in Galata, and in a letter described the mad composition of her household: "I live in a place that very well represents the Tower of Babel; in Pera they speak Turkish, Greek, Hebrew, Armenian, Arabic, Persian, Russian, Slavonian, Wallachian, German, Dutch, French, English, Italian, Hungarian; and what is worse, there is ten of those languages spoke in my own [household]. My grooms are Arabs, my footmen French, English and Germans, my nurse an Armenian, my housemaids Russians, half a dozen other servants Greeks, my

²¹⁸ P. Cohen, 393–97 ("intensely plurilingual" quotation on 393); Braunmüller and Ferraresi, 3.

²¹⁹ Kramersch, 2002, 2. See also Wansbrough, 16.

²²⁰ Pavlenko, 15. See also Crystal, 374; Kramersch, 2006, 249–52.

²²¹ McElhinny, 110.

²²² Madame d'Aulnoy, 135.

steward an Italian, my janissaries Turks.” This “medley of sounds,” as she described it, had an “extraordinary effect upon the people that are born here.” Both men and women learned “all these languages at the same time and without knowing any of them well enough to write or read in it.”²²³

In the final analysis, it seems clear that, at least in terms of women in the Mediterranean, Wortley Montagu was the more astute observer, not the least because of her access to female spaces unavailable or uninteresting to her more numerous male counterparts. Whereas Giustinian found women’s inhabitation of gendered domestic spaces inherently isolating and restricting, Wortley Montagu knew from her own direct experiences learning Turkish in Istanbul and interacting with Ottoman women that the numerous and varied spaces that they occupied, including but not limited to the private realm, were not barriers but doorways to their participation in the multilingual Mediterranean. As the evidence presented suggests, women engaged this linguistic world in an abundant and diverse range of situations and practices: there was certainly no uniform or normative woman’s experience.²²⁴ These experiences may have mirrored those of men in certain circumstances, and been quite different in others. Some women developed communicative competency in order to navigate trade and travel; for others it was necessary to manage everyday realities associated with their domestic or work settings. What is clear is that in the multilingual Mediterranean of the early modern era, women could speak languages.

²²³ Montagu, 122–23.

²²⁴ Piller and Pavlenko, 2001, 1; Sadiqi, xv.

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