

SUPPLEMENTI

Changing the Enemy, Visualizing the Other:

Contacts between Muslims
and Christians in the Early
Modern Mediterranean Art

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De Aphrodisio expugnato: the siege of Mahdia in the Habsburg imaginary

Cristelle Baskins*

Abstract

In the summer of 1550, Habsburg forces from Genoa, Naples, and Sicily defeated the Ottoman corsair Dragut Rais at Mahdia, the Tunisian city also known as Africa (ancient Aphrodisium). Illustrated pamphlets, letters, and maps immediately began to circulate the news throughout Italy, often associating Mahdia with Charles V's 1535 victory at Tunis. Some published maps include troops that contemporary viewers were likely to have identified as «mori amici». In Palermo, the Viceroy of Sicily commissioned the Porta d'Africa to celebrate his role in the Mahdia campaign. But its relief sculptures, representing two European soldiers and a Turk, invited viewers to forget that allied Arab troops from Tunis and Kairouan had taken part in the battle.

Nell'estate del 1550, truppe degli Asburgo provenienti da Genova, Napoli e dalla Sicilia sconfissero il corsaro ottomano Dragut Rais a Mahdia, la città tunisina chiamata anche

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Africa (l'antica *Aphrodisium*). Opuscoli illustrati, lettere e mappe iniziarono subito a far circolare questa notizia per tutta l'Italia, spesso associando la battaglia di Mahdia con la vittoria di Carlo V a Tunisi nel 1531. Alcune delle mappe pubblicate mostrano delle truppe che gli spettatori contemporanei avrebbero probabilmente identificato come «mori amici». Ma, a Palermo, il viceré della Sicilia commissionò la Porta d'Africa per celebrare il suo ruolo nella campagna militare di Mahdia. Tuttavia questi rilievi, che raffigurano due soldati europei ed un turco, portano gli spettatori a dimenticare che anche le truppe arabe alleate da Tunisi e Kairouan parteciparono alla battaglia.

A well-known engraving by Enea Vico celebrates Habsburg imperial ideology with its triumphal arch, Latin captions, trophies, personifications, and a cameo portrait of Charles V (fig. 1)¹. The figure of Germania, at bottom left, recalls the victory of Mühlberg in 1547, while personified Africa, at right, represents the conquest of Tunis in 1535. When Vico went to Augsburg in 1550, to present this image to the emperor, another North African battle had just been won under the combined efforts of the knights of Malta and military commanders from Genoa, Naples, and Sicily. This coalition of forces drove the Ottomans from Sousse, Monastir, and Mahdia (Arabic: al-Madīya), the city once known as Africa or ancient Aphrodisium². A contemporary viewer was likely to have compared this latest triumph to the victory of 1535 that restored the Hafsid ruler Muley al-Hassan (r. 1526-1550) to the throne. While the Tunis campaign would continue to feature in Habsburg iconography well into the seventeenth century, the short-lived and ambiguous example of Mahdia – site of a mutiny in 1552, destruction at the hands of the Spanish in 1554, and eventual takeover by the Ottomans – led to varying responses among writers of news pamphlets, mapmakers, historians, poets, court humanists, and artists. Hitherto neglected in the copious Mahdia material are the occasional references to *moros de paz*, or *mori amici*, ie. friendly Moors, as well as the association of the embattled city with the demise of Muley al-Hassan.

The siege of 1550 was entangled in the shifting alliances and enmities of several North African cities including Tunis, with its fortress known as Halq al-Wadi or la Goletta that housed garrison troops under the command of a Spanish governor. Kairouan, inland to the southwest, was an independent kingdom and holy city often at war with the regency of Tunis³. Mahdia, located on the coast, had once been the capital of Fatimid Ifriqiya (909-1171 CE),

¹ For an introduction to the vast topic of Charles V in the visual arts, see Burke 1999. Mulcahy 2002 discusses Anton Francesco Doni's essay, *Sopra Effigie di Cesare* (Venice, 1550), which explains the iconography of the Vico print. She argues that Vico abandoned his plan to publish a series of Habsburg triumph prints due to political failures in northern Europe; she overlooks the equally fraught North African campaigns.

² For an overview of events in Mahdia from 1550-1554, see Vilar 1991, pp. 140-147; Mármol Carvajal *et al.* 2007, pp. 114-117; Martínez 2011, 2016, pp. 86-100.

³ See Monchicourt 1939, a volume comprised of articles published over several years in the «Revue tunisienne».

as well as the seat of an early medieval Norman kingdom (1148-1160 CE)⁴. In the sixteenth century it remained a large city of commercial and strategic importance, one that Charles could ill afford to lose to Ottoman expansion⁵. Even so, he had to be convinced by his advisors to order the attack in the summer of 1550. As many scholars have noted, by the end of his reign Charles had largely abandoned the idea of crusade and preferred diplomacy or evasion to open conflict⁶.

An engraved map, published by Paolo Forlani in Venice in 1562, shows the battle for Mahdia with Ottoman galleys led by the corsair Dragut Rais (1485-1565) encroaching on the city (fig. 2)⁷. Juan de Vega, Viceroy of Sicily (1507-1558), Garzia di Toledo, of Naples (1514-1577), and Andrea Doria (1466-1560) coordinated the land and sea combat. Forlani pays careful attention to the massive defensive walls that protected the city, along with the palisades, trenches, and gun placements erected by the invading troops. Looking closely one can see that the walls have been breeched and the city has been overrun. Within the city walls tiny figures representing both defenders and invaders engage in skirmishes; their raised guns emit puffs of smoke that echo the larger explosions emanating from the ships surrounding the isthmus and promontory of Mahdia. Along the bottom of the map, at lower left and right, we see a large number of cavalry wielding lances along with some riders on camels. These troops appear to be Arabs carrying their characteristic *adarga* shields, rather than Ottomans. Since Forlani's map appeared twelve years after the battle, he was not an eyewitness but depended on various texts and images to construct his retrospective map of *Africa olim Aphrodisium*.

The geopolitical complexity of North Africa meant that many leaders had a stake in the outcome of the siege of Mahdia, including Charles V, his viceroys, the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman, and pope Julius III. This essay will focus on the fate of Muley al-Hassan, who had become a Habsburg vassal after Charles V defeated Barbarossa in 1535 and restored the kingdom of Tunis⁸. Within just a few years, however, the king had been usurped and blinded by his own son Amida. In 1548 Muley al-Hassan was described as being, «without crown, without money, and with paltry servants», when he went to seek help from Charles V in Augsburg⁹. After a fruitless audience, the emperor ordered him to

⁴ For medieval Ifriqiya, see Hannezo 1908; Bloom 2007; Hassan 2007; Mármol Carvajal *et al.* 2007, p. 66; Metcalfe, Rosser-Owen 2013.

⁵ Hassan 2007, p. 59.

⁶ See Bunes Ibarra, 1989; García-Arenal, Bunes Ibarra 1992; Alonso Acero 2001, p. 414; Salgado 2001; Martínez 2011, p. 294.

⁷ Vilar 1991, pp. 438-440. Forlani's map was reprinted in the atlas published by Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg, Köln, 1575. For prints of besieged cities in early modern Europe, see Pollak 2000.

⁸ For newly discovered correspondence between Charles V and Muley al-Hassan, see Chachia 2013; Chachia, Temimi 2015.

⁹ According to the seventeenth-century Tunisian historian Ibn Abi Dinar 1845, p. 283, Muley

return to Sicily under the supervision of Andrea Doria and Juan de Vega but, while en route, they were diverted to the siege of Mahdia. Thus the exiled king was caught up in the Habsburg invasion of 1550, albeit as a spectator rather than as a combatant.

Muley al-Hassan appears in a woodcut by Tobias Stimmer in the *Elegies of Famous Men of Arms* by the renowned prelate and historian Paolo Giovio (fig. 3)¹⁰. Across the page from the caption, «Muleasses Tuneti Rex» (Muley Hassan king of Tunis), the bust length portrait is surrounded by a wide Mannerist frame featuring female figures (Athena/War and Venus/Peace), putti, military trophies flanking the head of a captive, wreaths, fruit, flowers, and dragonflies. The king wears a large turban with a veil under the chin, characteristic of North African attire. He turns his head to look to the right as he lifts his right hand and spreads his fingers, perhaps in a gesture that indicates speech. A loop around the middle finger of his left hand alerts the viewer to the presence of a knife hidden underneath the king's sleeve.

The text accompanying the portrait of Muley al-Hassan begins with a reversal of fortune, asking the reader to pity this ruler who was once associated with the imperial victory at Tunis, but who later fell into an ignominious exile. Giovio avidly followed the African campaigns, even noting how he had received booty from the 1535 siege of Tunis, specifically a scepter and a large bowl that once belonged to Muley al-Hassan¹¹. And, although the bishop was not in Rome in 1543 during the exiled king's brief sojourn in the Eternal City, in 1548 the two men met and spoke via interpreters¹². Thus, the historical account printed alongside the woodcut portrait drew on personal knowledge of the king of Tunis as well as the eyewitness testimony of soldiers and others involved in events spanning the years from 1535 to 1550. At the end Giovio's brief biography of *Muleasses Tuneti Rex*, we read that the king died at Mahdia and was taken to Kairouan for burial:

Muley Hassan was present but only heard the din of the battle since he couldn't take part in the conflict. But before the city [Mahdia] could be conquered, he died of an illness... His funeral took place in Kairouan, attended by a big crowd of Tunisians of every rank. The North Africans consider this city sacred and they are accustomed to burying their illustrious kings and the high nobles of Numidia there¹³.

al-Hassan's 1548 trip to the land of the Christians resulted in a quick return voyage to Mahdia. See also Monchicourt 1939, p. 126; Boubaker 2011, pp. 46, 56; Varriale 2014, p. 126.

¹⁰ Giovio 1575, p. 359. See Giovio, 2006, pp. 941-945. The portrait depends on a woodcut broadsheet published by Silvester van Parijs (Antwerp, 1535) that derives from Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen who went to Tunis with Charles V; see Horn 1989, vol. 1, pp. 19-20.

¹¹ For a letter by Alfonso D'Avalos listing these items, see Price Zimmerman 1995, p. 332; Giovio 2006, p. 944.

¹² Giovio 2006, p. 945. Giovio 1560 contains a longer biography of the Tunisian king; see vol. 2, books 33 and 44.

¹³ Giovio 1575, p. 360.

Despite Giovio's familiarity with Muley al-Hassan and his political misfortunes, scholars have cast doubt on his account of the king's demise. Since we know that Tunis and Kairouan were political enemies, how can we accept Giovio's claim that the exiled king was buried there? To make matters more complicated, many later sightings appear to place Muley al-Hassan in Barcelona, Madrid, or Sicily¹⁴. These cases of mistaken identity arise due to highly irregular and inconsistent naming practices, transliteration, and spelling; in each case after 1550 the individual turns out to have been one of Muley al-Hassan's sons, nephews, or other relatives.

Further shoring up the case for Giovio's account of Muley al-Hassan's death at Mahdia and burial at Kairouan is the work of Charles Monchicourt, an official in the French colonial government, who avidly pursued Tunisian history and archeology. He published the ground plan of the mosque and mausoleum of Sidi Abid in Kairouan, indicating the site of Muley al-Hassan's tombstone¹⁵. In addition, he included a drawing of the engraved, stylized turban found on the slab. Monchicourt went on to document the hitherto unexpected alliance between Mohammed Abu Taieb of Kairouan and Muley al-Hassan, despite the historic enmity between the two regencies¹⁶. And he placed this rapprochement in the years 1547-1550. With Monchicourt's meticulous research at hand, Giovio's account starts to sound more plausible. Indeed, it drew from a number of contemporary *avvisi, relazioni*, chronicles, and maps published in the immediate aftermath of the Mahdia campaign¹⁷.

1. *Mahdia in Black and White*

Giovio collected news pamphlets in his search for accurate information. But the large number of publications in several European languages offered conflicting information, depending on the political allegiances of the authors. Two pamphlets published in Bologna in 1550, for example, make no mention of Muley al-Hassan or Kairouan. The published letter from Cardinal Alonso de la Cueva, governor of the Goletta fortress in Tunis, celebrates Andrea Doria,

¹⁴ For example, Alonso Acero 2006, pp. 140-141. Recently Pérez de Tudela, Gschwend 2007, p. 434, mistakenly claim that, «In 1550 the king of Tunis traveled expressly to Genoa, with the intention of bringing Charles V horses, lions, and falcons, in exchange for political favors».

¹⁵ Ibn Abi Dinar 1845, p. 283; Monchicourt 1939, pp. 8, 134-136; Brunschvig 1940-47, vol. 1, p. 372.

¹⁶ Monchicourt 1939 draws much of this information from the *Hystoria de la Guerra y presa d'Africa* by Pedro de Salazar, 1552; see below. Treaties with the king of Kairouan appear in Mariño 1980, pp. 235, 239. But see Sutton 1984, p. 535 and Varriale 2014, p. 132 on the king's conflicted loyalties after the siege of 1550.

¹⁷ For surveys of this material, see Rachel 1879; Bégouën, 1901; Solís de los Santos 2009a; Martínez 2011, 2016, ch. 3.

the Viceroy of Sicily, and Garzia de Toledo while mourning the deaths of other elite soldiers. He observes that while around eight thousand prisoners were taken captive in Mahdia, the sack did not result in much booty¹⁸. The anonymous *Dechiaratione*, also praises Astorre Baglione, along with Giordano Orsini¹⁹. But, in contrast to De la Cueva, this author argues that the soldiers enjoyed an «inestimable» booty of money, jewels, and other goods imported by Jewish merchants from Salonika and Portugal. In addition to taking ten thousand prisoners, mainly women and children, they also took advantage of plentiful foodstuffs like apples, dates, oil, rice, and wheat.

Perhaps Giovio read *La Presa d'Africa* (n.p., n.d.) that features a crude woodcut map on the cover depicting the coastal cities of Sousse, Monastir, and Africa (ie. Mahdia)²⁰. If so he would have found in that text an indication of friendly relations between Habsburg troops and the ruler of Kairouan during the Mahdia campaign, along with a brief mention of Muley al-Hassan's death. The anonymous author begins his doggerel verse with a rather pompous claim, «I will attempt to sing about the immense Glory and eternal honor of Doria and the other great leaders... though no author has known how to do it, nor any artist succeeded in painting it»²¹. A few pages later we learn that in 1550, «... death came to the king of Tunis, the blind king, and his younger son [Bakr] remained by his side since the elder [Amida] usurped the realm»²². The author adds that despite rumors of double-dealing, «The Sherif of Kairouan came in person and spoke often with our troops, wearing long robes like a woman... bringing things to eat and good meat»²³. Likewise, an anonymous Spanish *Romance* explains, «And this king of Kairouan was called Sidi Arfa, the enemy of Dragut, he also sent us provisions»²⁴.

La presa d'Africa looks very humble when compared to another anonymous pamphlet addressed to an unspecified «*Vostro Serenità*». We might imagine Giovio turning to *Il vero et ultimo aviso della presa d'Affrica* (*The True and Latest Report of the Conquest of Africa*), which offers more specific details about the city of Mahdia than any of the pamphlets so far discussed²⁵. The letter is dated September 15, 1550, but it cannot have been produced so quickly after the victory. It must be a later work, a presentation copy for Charles V or for one of the generals who led the campaign. The anonymous author states that the keyed map found on the last page is meant to correct an earlier, faulty version (fig. 4)²⁶. Looking at the map, we see that although the walls appear

¹⁸ Cueva 1550, pp. 1-4.

¹⁹ *Il Vero et Ultimo* 1550, pp. 1-3. Compare *La felicissima victoria* 1550.

²⁰ *La presa d'Africa* s.a., pp. 1-16.

²¹ *Ivi*, p. 1.

²² *Ivi*, p. 4.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ See *Romance y relación* 1550; Sepúlveda 1551, pp. 243 and 247.

²⁵ *Il Vero et Ultimo* 1550.

²⁶ The map on p. 2v appears to reverse the woodcut map of «Africa» published in *Nova copia* 1550. In this earlier map, the mosque is also number 20.

to be intact, flags with Christian crosses flying from the towers signal the final victory. In the interior of the city, a hexagonal building, number 20, indicates the mosque where Garzia de Toledo took two hundred captives, mainly women and children. From other sources we know that many Spanish soldiers who lost their lives at Mahdia were buried in its courtyard²⁷. And before the city was blown up in 1554 by imperial order, prior to being abandoned to the Ottomans, the bodies were exhumed and returned to Palermo for reburial²⁸.

At the same time that these *avvisi* and *relazioni* were being published in Italy, the Antwerp printmaker Hieronymus Cock issued a single sheet etching of the battle of Mahdia; it is signed and dated 1550 (fig. 5)²⁹. The orientation of Cock's map and many of its internal features recall the map from *Il vero et ultimo aviso*, in particular the circular building representing the city's main mosque. Invading troops at right have begun to damage the defensive walls but Ottoman crescent flags still fly from the towers. The European forces are identified by flags with Habsburg double-headed eagles, as shown on two ships in the left foreground and carried by ground troops at the right. At the right margin of the map, cavalry bearing a crescent flag charge an infantry group that carries flags emblazoned with Christian crosses. This vignette may refer to a sortie that Ottoman forces made in the vicinity of the olive groves during the siege of Mahdia. Cock clearly distinguishes Habsburgs from Ottomans whereas Forlani's 1562 map shows unidentified cavalry arrayed in the foreground who approach Mahdia from all sides, whether friend or foe.

While the patronage of these early *avvisi*, *relazioni*, and maps is unknown, Juan Cristóbal Calvete de Estrella, humanist tutor of Philip II, wrote *De Aphrodisio Expugnato* (*On the Destruction of Mahdia*) on the suggestion of the Spanish ambassador Juan Hurtado de Mendoza as a gift for Charles V³⁰. Calvete's woodcut map of Mahdia features captions rather than numbers relating to a key as in the earlier examples (fig. 6). Note the labels for the cardinal directions, for geographical sites such as the «olive grove» at left and «ancient Africa» at right, along with the battle stations and abbreviated names of the military commanders Gaspar de Guzman, Viceroy Juan de Vega, Garzia de Toledo, Fernando de Toledo, Bernardo Solerio, and Fernando Lopez. A text in the center foreground tells the viewer that this battle took place on the feast day of St. James the Apostle, or 25 July 1550. Below this reference to the date,

²⁷ Salazar 1552, p. 79v.

²⁸ Vilar 1991, p. 146; Martínez 2011, p. 300.

²⁹ Serebrennikov 2001, pp. 191-193.

³⁰ Calvete de Estrella's *De Aphrodisio expugnato* was republished in the *Rerum á Carolo V* (Antwerp: Jean Beller, 1554), edited by the Flemish ambassador Cornelis Schepper (Schepper 1554). Calvete's vertically oriented woodcut map in the text, on p. 6r, would be turned ninety degrees and used as a frontispiece in later editions. He also included references to Mahdia in his *Tumulo imperial* (Valladolid, 1559). See Sánchez Molero 2001, pp. xxxii, xxxvi, and xl; Solís de los Santos 2009a, pp. 1327-1331. Regarding Hurtado de Mendoza, see Spivakovsky 1970; Kagan 2009, p. 82.

we see a skirmish between European and Ottoman troops outside the military encampment in the vicinity of the olive grove, likely the same event represented in Cock's map. As we have already seen, the Forlani map of 1562 will turn these figures into an impressive mob of Moorish riders with *adarga* shields and a few camels.

Paolo Giovio died in 1552 just as histories of the conquest of Mahdia by Horatius Nucula (Nocella) of Terni, and by the Spaniards Calvete de Estrella, and Pedro de Salazar were going into print. Each of these authors describes the Arab cavalry that came to assist Habsburg troops in the siege. Calvete echoes the anonymous *La presa d'Africa* when he says, «About two thousand five hundred Arabs from Tunis and allies of the king of Kairouan came to our camp, bringing with them sheep and other provisions for us»³¹. Nucula, a cleric and chronicler who accompanied Viceroy Juan de Vega to North Africa, reports the arrival of some Arabs on the very day that Muley al-Hassan's ship landed at Mahdia; in due course they received reinforcements from local armed Arab horsemen³².

Calvete and Nucula each confirm Giovio's account of Muley al-Hassan's death and his eventual resting place. Calvete says, «...the king of Tunis, fell ill and died, Vega sent his remains to be buried in the tomb of Sidi Arfa in Kairouan with royal pomp and so that he could be laid to rest in his homeland»³³. Nucula echoes Giovio even more closely when he describes how Muley al-Hassan's

...son, Bakr, in accordance with custom rather than due to any sort of piety, turned his attention to his father's African body, which had to be laid in a coffin immediately, and carried to Kairouan – where there is a very beautiful shrine of Mohammed, and which city is held sacrosanct in its very name among the barbarian kings, there where men renowned throughout the whole of the African region are buried – through Numidia, as it is there that burial services are carried out with honor³⁴.

Another account of Muley al-Hassan's death at Mahdia comes from the historian and novelist, Pedro de Salazar, who probably wrote the *History of the War and Conquest of Africa* on commission from the Viceroy of Naples³⁵. The text includes three bird's eye view maps; in the first woodcut (p. 32) we see the city before the siege with its imposing rows of defensive towers protecting the isthmus. Two additional maps track the progress of the battle (p. 78, see fig. 7), and the eventual conquest (p. 152). Even though the text describes in detail

³¹ Calvete de Estrella 1551, p. 23v.; Serebrennikov 2001, p. 193.

³² Nucula 1552, p. 107. A schematic woodcut map of the North African coast and part of southern Sicily appears on pp. 8-9. For Nucula's eyewitness experience of Mahdia, see De Angelis 2014.

³³ Calvete de Estrella 1551, p. 24r. Monchicourt 1939, p. 136 explains that Muley al-Hassan was buried in the Kairouan shrine of Sidi Abid rather than the mausoleum of Sidi Arfa.

³⁴ Nucula 1551, pp. 141-142.

³⁵ Salazar 1552, 2015; Milburn 2003, p. 12; Solís de los Santos 2009b, pp. 220-222; Federici 2013, 2016.

the role of local Moorish allies against the Ottomans, none of the maps shows Arab cavalry as found in the Forlani map. The soldiers represented in the maps carry lances but they hold round European shields. Like Calvete and Nucula, Salazar records the death and burial of Muley al-Hassan: «...the king having died at this time, his remains were carried off to Kairouan for burial by order of the Viceroy [Juan de Vega]; the corpse was taken by the Caid Mahmud, with other Moors in his company, to a small house in Monastir where he was much mourned by his sons and by the Sherif [of Kairouan] and other Moors who loved him well, those who were not loyal to Amida»³⁶.

Given the anonymous *La presa d'Africa* and the texts by Calvete, Nucula, and Salazar, along with echoes by several later historians, including Fr. Tommaso Fazello, O.P., Diego Fuentes, Mármol de Carvajal, and Prudencio Sandoval, some viewers might have identified the lance wielding cavalymen shown at the bottom of the 1562 Forlani map as Arab soldiers who came to aid the Spanish and Neapolitan troops³⁷. These «mori amici» allied with the Europeans to ward off their common enemy, the Ottomans³⁸. But since the map lacks any captions, this aspect of its reception history has been lost over time. As politics hardened in Spain under Philip II after the second Revolt of the Alpujarras (1568-1571) and the eventual expulsion of the Moriscos in 1609, such tactical alliances between Christians and Muslims no longer served official Habsburg rhetoric. After the late sixteenth century most viewers have probably assumed that Forlani's map of *Africa olim Aphrodisium* shows hostile troops rather than welcome reinforcements.

2. Mahdia in Gold and Stone

Let us shift from representations of Mahdia in news pamphlets and maps to the luxury arts. Just as Nucula accompanied Juan de Vega to Mahdia, so too the Neapolitan poet Luigi Tansillo went to the siege with his patron Garzia de Toledo. After their triumphant return, the Viceroy of Naples Pedro de Toledo is thought to have commissioned Tansillo's *Sonnets for the Siege of Africa. And the Design for a Golden Necklace Bestowed on Don Garzia of Toledo by Naples* (Naples: Mattia Cancer, 1551)³⁹. In the text, Tansillo explains that three local goldsmiths, Marco Andrea Dancora, Annibale Dancora, and Lorenzo de

³⁶ Salazar 1552, p. 100.

³⁷ Fazello 1560, p. 643; Fuentes 1570, p. 15; Mármol de Carvajal 1573, pp. 273v-274r; and Sandoval 1681, vol. 2, p. 504.

³⁸ Contemporary poems about Mahdia, unlike the news pamphlets and chronicles, tend to portray Muslims in a negative light; see Paris Mantovano Fortunato in Beer, Ivaldi 1988, pp. 728-732; and Arcangelo da Lonigo in Beer, Ivaldi 1988, pp. 734-742.

³⁹ See Pestarino 2011; Milburn 2003, pp. 12, 73-84.

Lorenzi, asked him to provide the program for the necklace to be offered to Garzia the «Africano». He gives instructions for fourteen pendants, comprised of paired historical and allegorical images, along with a portrait of Don Garzia. The histories range from the departure of the ships from Naples, arrival on the shores of Africa, the attack on Monastir, the victory at Mahdia over the Ottoman Dragut Reis, landing at Messina, and the victorious return to Naples with booty and slaves. Tansillo focuses on the Ottoman enemy rather than on the ambiguous Habsburg ally, Muley al-Hassan. The exiled king of Tunis makes no appearance on the pendant representing Mahdia nor does his burial in Kairouan have a place in the program for Don Garzia's golden necklace⁴⁰.

Although Pedro de Salazar also mentions the gold collar described by Tansillo in his *History of the War and Conquest of Africa*, it has never been traced:

And, taking into account the fact that Don Garzia had been the main reason for the victory at Africa [Mahdia], because he encouraged the Prince to take it, some of them thought about giving him 3,000 ducats; but others didn't want to do that, and they contradicted them, saying that they would rather give him a golden necklace of the same weight, with pieces worked subtly and beautifully representing the siege of Africa. And, once they agreed [on the necklace], they decided how it should be made and they ordered the work. And once it was made they presented it to him with great solemnity⁴¹.

Celebrations of the conquest of Mahdia in Naples were rivaled by those held in vice-regal Palermo. When Charles V entered the Sicilian city in triumph after the victory in Tunis in 1535, he came from the direction of Trapani, through the Porta Austriaca or Porta Nuova. In contrast, Viceroy Juan de Vega's triumphal entry into Palermo in 1550 took place from the sea between the eastern walls and the port. Nucula notes that Vega was led through triumphal arches like those once erected for the ancient Roman victor, Scipio Aemilianus [Africanus]⁴²:

Yet when Palermo settled down [after the defeat of Dragut] the Viceroy went back to that place from which he had departed. And when he had returned, Palermo experienced incredible happiness, on account of such a great victory, and the return of the man [Vega] himself, and it made a promise to that man when he was present, [and] ordered triumphal arches to be built, through which it assessed [Vega] as he passed, as well as multiple statues to be placed within these [arches]. Among these [sculptures], though I shall omit some (lest I go on too long), was one of Scipio Aemilianus, who seemed to receive the victorious Vega as he was returning, and

⁴⁰ The omission is surprising since Don Garzia knew Muley Hassan from the visits he made to Naples in 1543 and 1547. See Varriale 2014, pp. 120-126.

⁴¹ Salazar 1552, p. 294: «Y considerando entre ellos que don García avía sido principal causa que Africa se ganasse, por aver movido y puesto al príncipe a que tomase la en presa della, uvo pareceres de algunos se le presentassen tres mil ducados; y pareciéndoles a otros no los estimaría lo contradixerón, mas antes le presentassen un collar de oro del mesmo peso, labrado en las piezas dél por muy sutil arte y lindo primor la tomada de Africa. Y resolutos en ello, dieron la orden de cómo se avía de hazer y mandaron ponerlo por la obra; y hecho con gran solemnidad se le presentaron».

⁴² Nucula 1552, pp. 312-313.

who seemed to call him the fourth Africanus in a beautiful poem. He seemed to assign the cognomen [Africanus] first to his grandfather Scipio, who set a tax upon Carthage; to himself he assigned the cognomen second Africanus, he who destroyed [Carthage] from its very foundations; Caesar Carolus the 5th, the third Africanus, commander of the Roman people, who wrestled the kingdom of Tunisia from the hands of the great pirate captain Barbarossa, and restored it to king Hassan; moreover, he assigned the cognomen fourth Africanus to Juan de Vega, viceroy of Sicily, who, with a modest force, subdued [the port city of] Aphrodisium, highly fortified by nature and by design, and protected by a robust Turkish guard, and [who] subjected that entire region, which was properly called Africa, to Caesar's command.

In addition to describing Scipio as a speaking statue hailing Vega the «African», Nucula also lists the booty from Mahdia that the viceroy sent to Pope Julius III in Rome: «Two lions and their caretakers, six African horses with livery, six African captives to lead the horses, six African dogs, six banners taken in the victory, twelve bows and arrows, twelve shields, and chains with locks that once held Christian captives – all to be kept at the seat of the Apostle in perpetual memory [of the victory]»⁴³. In making this donation, Vega was self-consciously emulating Charles V who gave the bars and locks of the gates of Tunis to Pope Paul III in 1536.

Another Vega apologist, the poet Vincenzo Colocasio wrote the *Quattro belli punici*, or *Fourth Punic War*, a lengthy poem of 3,333 Latin hexameters celebrating the Viceroy's victory in Mahdia⁴⁴. In the fifth book, the poet gives a moving account of Juan de Vega bringing Muley al-Hassan's body to the tent of the King of Kairouan to be prepared for burial:

He bears the dead Hassan himself to the king's tent. Three hundred servants convey the cold limbs, dressed in burial clothing, to the royal bed, and they wail with shrill voices in the manner of mourners. They pour dirt around him on either side, and they press limb upon limb, and on either side, they lace their fingers together, moving their heads here and there. In turns, they sing out sad songs in Libyan tongue. When the sky turns dark with the night, many crowds come together in song, as it is the typical practice throughout the city to mourn at the crossroads... while the great, outstanding leader Vega entered the flaxen-roofed shrine of the gods, with the whole line of men after him. Suddenly a brother entered on either side, and the one born of their uncle; they embraced the bloodless body of the king, and washed it with the tears upon their cheeks. «Heuheu I am wretched» Buccharis [Bakr] cries aloud, uttering it in Spanish, Latin, and Libyan. Thence follows Machometis [Ahmet], then the cousin, and then the whole Libyan crowd repeats, «Heuheu, I am wretched, wretched I am!» And they sing this three-part lament in alternate turns... Afterwards, at the sight of Vega, they shouted the funeral chants together, and again to the brothers even more loudly. Thus it was done⁴⁵.

⁴³ Nucula 1552, pp. 361-362; Merkle 1965, vol. 2, Diary 6, p. 214. Julius III celebrated the victory of Mahdia with a mass in St. Peter's basilica; see Sutton 1984, pp. 535-536.

⁴⁴ Colocasio 1552. He was originally from Marsala but active in Messina, see Beccaria 1900, pp. 1-52; Scalabrino 1936; Solís de los Santos 2009a, p. 1333.

⁴⁵ Colocasio 1552, pp. 53v-54r.

Colocasio presents the *mori amici* of Kairouan uniting with Vega to mourn the exiled king. Bakr, who, like his brother and cousin demonstrates filial piety as well as an impressive command of European and African languages, embodies the ideal North African ally.

Viceroy Vega would outdo Tansillo's poetic conceit in gold by commissioning a monumental stone gate to commemorate his military victory in North Africa. When he expanded the eastern bulwark and defensive walls of Palermo in the mid 1550's, he renamed the Porta dei Greci, the «Porta d'Africa»⁴⁶. A set of iron gates from the spoils of Mahdia was presented to the city, and a converted Muslim called Giovanni Monteagut received payment for attaching them to the portal⁴⁷. An eighteenth-century print shows some elements that were once featured on the gate, including Plus Ultra columns, a Habsburg double-headed eagle, and a cartouche (fig. 8)⁴⁸. The Senate of Palermo commissioned Antonio Veneziano, a lawyer and poet from Monreale, to compose the Latin text once found in the lost cartouche:

[Dedicated] To the Emperor Charles V, King and Commander at Sicily, in the year 1556, by the foremost general Vega, with the city of Africa conquered in the Fourth Punic War, and its foundations destroyed, with the gates of the entire, overpowered region of Africa carried away by one outstanding Roman citizen, he [Vega] decreed, to the shame of the enemies, the glory of virtue, and to the memory that must be passed down through the ages, that they be set in this public place, as a collective representation of service.

Vega, after the Punic battles, bore these doorposts, having carried them as victor from the captured city⁴⁹.

In this text, Veneziano makes a double reference to the gates and doorposts of Mahdia that at one time would have been physically present below the Latin inscription. The poet then imagines two polarized viewers of the gate – a Turk who would experience the shame of defeat and a Christian who would remember a virtuous triumph. But given the date of these textual additions, after the mutiny, retreat, and destruction of Mahdia in 1554, the Porta d'Africa must have been a bittersweet reminder of fleeting victory.

Further sculptural reliefs were added to the spandrels of the Porta d'Africa, consisting of two European soldiers wearing armor; at left a younger beardless man holds a helmet and at right an older bearded man cradles a round shield. The bust of an Ottoman Turk appears at the apex of the figural group, located just under the corbel in the center of the entablature; he wears a turban, has a

⁴⁶ *Orazione latina* 1556; Mongitore 1988, pp. 56-62; Vesco 2013, pp. 47-65.

⁴⁷ Vesco 2013, p. 62 also gives the names of the sculptors who worked on the gate: Matteo and Antonino de Arculeo, Giovanni and Tommaso Gianguzzo, Giovanni Vitale, Matteo de Marco, Carlo Maneri, and Pinuccio de Marco. Fazio Gagini carved the Plus Ultra device and the Habsburg eagle.

⁴⁸ Mongitore 1988, p. 61.

⁴⁹ See Mongitore 1988, pp. 57-58.

beard and long mustache, and a long-sleeved robe but he bears no weapons⁵⁰. If this is Dragut Rais, the admiral who led the Ottoman fleet at Mahdia, he now appears incapacitated, captive between the two soldiers who flank him on either side. This radically foreshortened figure folds his arms tightly and twists his face to the right, as if he is being crushed under the weight of the Habsburg eagle that once rested on the corbel. If the identities of the «*mori amici*» in the 1562 Forlani map were soon forgotten, so too this Turk eventually lost his original identity as Dragut, to become a generic Muslim foe outnumbered by Christian soldiers. Such polarized representations require a strategic amnesia about alliances with local Arabs in North Africa; in addition, they divert attention away from the internal divisions among the European forces. During the siege of Mahdia, for example, Andrea Doria opposed Garzia de Toledo who also clashed with Juan de Vega. And Naples and Palermo, the cities they represented, were each embroiled in factions and opposition to vice-regal rule that resulted in harsh suppression and civil strife.

In sum, Habsburg claims to victory at Mahdia were compromised despite the best efforts of chroniclers, historians, poets, and artists. While memories of the heroic struggle between Scipio and Hannibal, Europe and Africa, continued to captivate audiences, that ancient conflict did not align easily with the complicated and rapidly shifting relations between Habsburgs, Hafsid, and Ottomans in contemporary North Africa. Moreover, the conquest of 1550 would always be overshadowed by the triumph of Tunis in 1535. While the restoration of Muley al-Hassan to power had been the goal of the earlier campaign, his presence at Mahdia was the product of chance. He went from being the star of the show to a bit player whose death removed him from the stage of history.

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⁵⁰ Nobile 2015, p. 18.

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Appendix



Fig. 1. Enea Vico, *The Triumph of Emperor Charles V*, engraving, Venice, 1550



Fig. 2. Paolo Forlani, *Africa olim Aphrodisium*, engraving, Venice, 1562



Fig. 3. Tobias Stimmer, *Muleasses Tuneti Rex*, woodcut in Paolo Giovio, *Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium*, Basel: Pietro Perna, 1575, p. 359

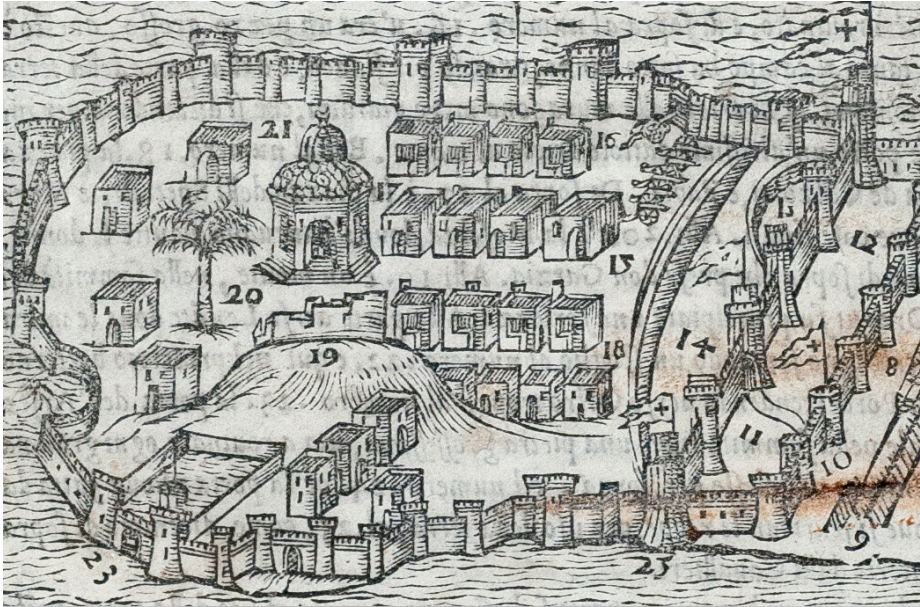


Fig. 4. Anon, *Mahdia*, woodcut in Anon, *Il vero et ultimo aviso della presa d'Africa*, 1550, f. 2v



Fig. 5. Hieronymus Cock, *Mahdia*, etching, Antwerp, 1550

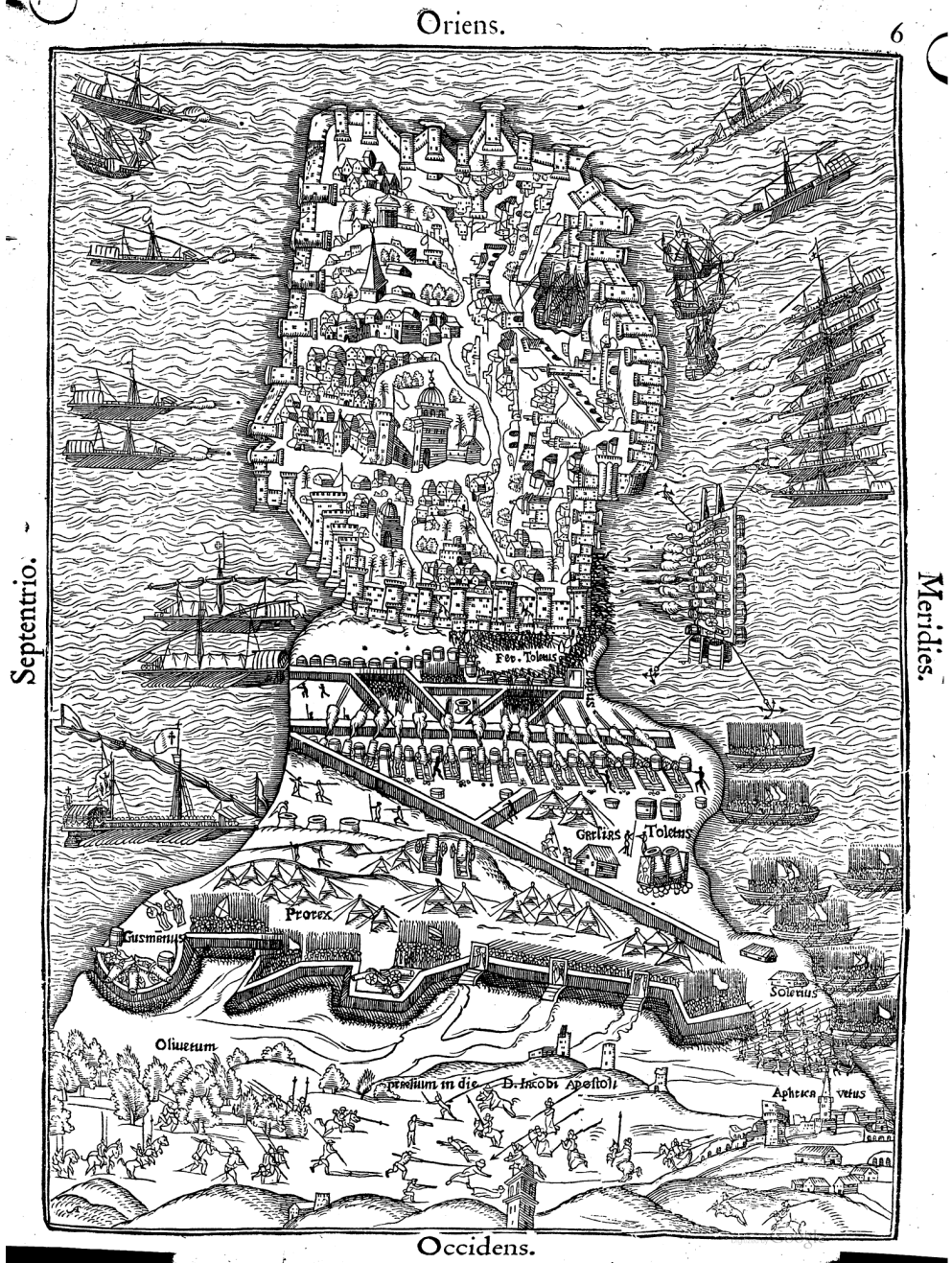


Fig. 6. Anon, *Aphrodisium*, woodcut in Juan Calvete de Estrella, *De Aphrodisio expugnato*, Antwerp: Martin Nutius, 1551, p. 6r



Fig. 7. Anon, *Siege of Mahdia*, woodcut in Pedro de Salazar, *Hystoria de la Guerra y presa de Africa*, Naples: Mattia Cancer, 1552, p. 78

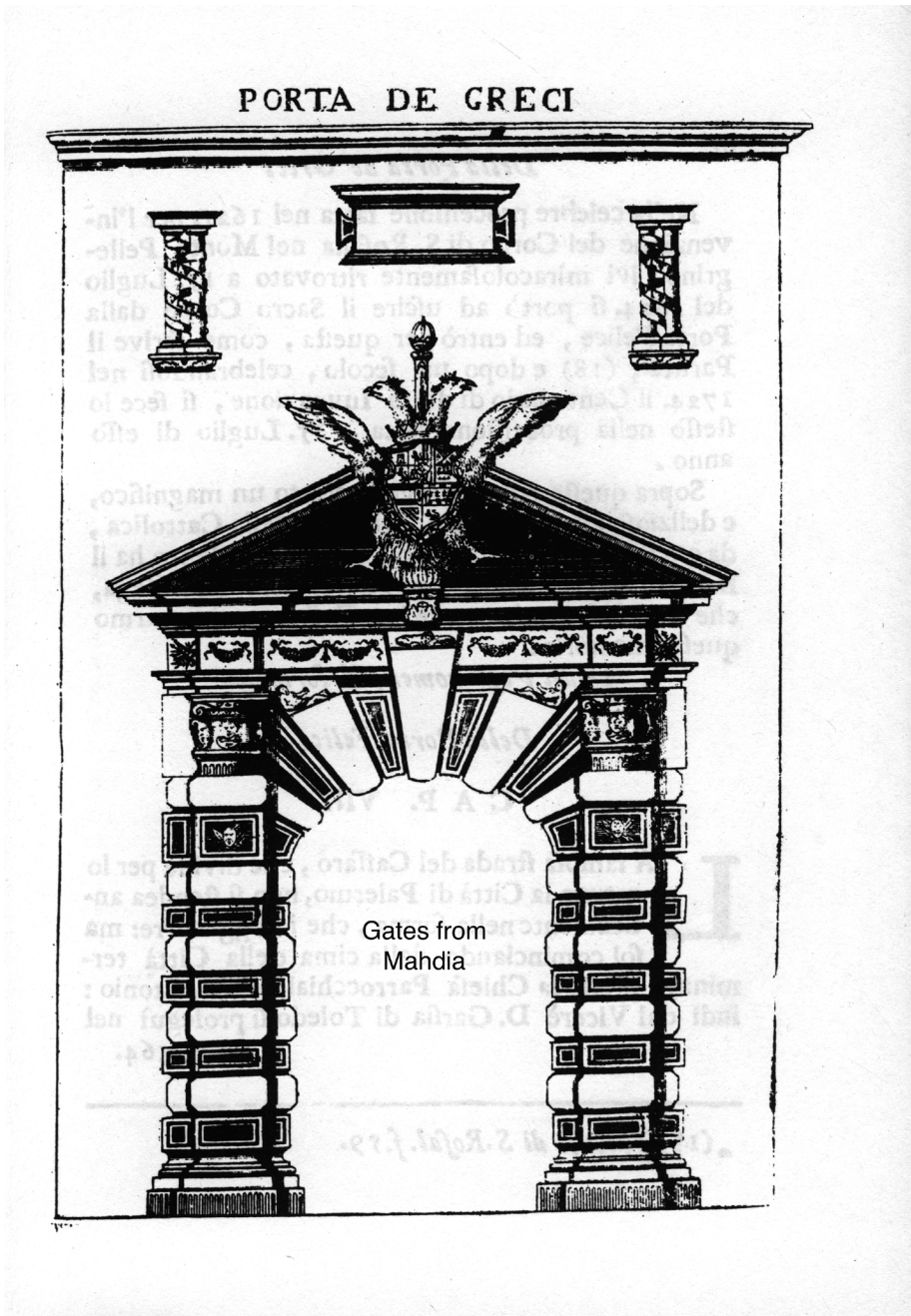


Fig. 8. Anon, *Porta dei Greci*, etching, in Mongitore, 1732, p. 59

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